

A Word With You

A FEW bands of delinquents roam the streets, crack a few skulls and steal a few purses. This is enough to change the entire living patterns of a city.

People become wary of going out at night. This affects theaters, restaurants, hotels, transportation. People change their residence from here to there, and from there to somewhere else. The entire map gets changed.

It might be interesting to say to one of these hoodlums: "You thought you were unimportant; you only wanted a thrill, or a few bucks for marijuana — but see how influential you are? You are causing big changes. You may not be able to write your name, but you are writing a page of history." Would it matter to him?

And would any history be changed if people could see the consequences of their deeds? About 300 years ago, some clever persons thought it would be a bright idea to go fetch some Negroes from Africa as slaves and so bask in comfort in the New World. If the next 300 years were unrolled before them, might they have changed their minds? If they could see the growing tensions, a nation rent by civil war, the decline of an economy dependent on slavery, a continuing struggle, and all sorts of ugly incidents — would they have stopped? Or would they have said, "I've got mine here and now; let the future worry about itself"?

The trouble is that individuals don't always reap as individuals the results of their social misdeeds. But the results do come and often have far reaching repercussions. The robber barons may die contented, but the next generation castigates them, passes new laws, and their descendants spend their ill-gotten gains philanthropically on the people whom they despised.

Man is a social animal, and it is only human to want to leave a good name behind. At the end of their wasted lives, many find out too late that this is really what they wanted and cannot now have. And so a diligent propagation of the Law of Consequences might not be entirely in vain.

Of course the law also works, even more satisfactorily, for good deeds. Bronson Cowan relates how, when he was in Australia studying land value taxation, he reported his findings to a group of Georgists there — some of them old-timers who had worked to get the tax in effect. Mr. Cowan told them about the current workings of the system, with which all present were not familiar, when one old-timer cried out rapturously, "We builded better than we knew!"

Even though "we do not see it all" (as Henry George put it), we may know as surely as though the scene were unfolded before us, that what we do now is what the future will hold.

—Robert Clancy

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The Henry George News, published monthly by the Henry George School of Social Science, 50 E. 69th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021, supports the following principle:

The community, by its presence and activity, gives rental value to land, therefore the rent of land belongs to the community and not to the landowners. Labor and capital, by their combined efforts, produce the goods of the community — known as wealth. This wealth belongs to the producers. Justice requires that the government, representing the community, collect the rent of land for community purposes and abolish the taxation of wealth.

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