

An Early Georgist Remembered: Dan Beard

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Throughout its long history the Georgist movement has attracted a variety of reform minded people of diverse backgrounds and talents. One might say that this sort of diversity is itself implied in George's philosophy; one can certainly say it has greatly enriched the movement throughout its more than one hundred years, providing many streams flowing into a common source.

One early Georgist with an unusually diverse background was Dan Beard, social reformer, illustrator, naturalist and cofounder



of the Boy Scouts of America. Born in Cincinnati 1850, the son of the popular painter James Beard, Dan later became a prominent New York illustrator, his illustrations appearing in many reform-oriented periodicals and books of the late 19th century.

His move to New York was prompted by an offer of a job as a building surveyor with the East Coast-based Sanborn Map and Publishing Company. Working for the company for five years, he made the rounds of the factories and large mills that dotted New

England at the time, coming in close contact with the working classes and hearing of their troubles. But Dan also came in contact with the owners of factories and other forms of capital and began seeing their side of the problem also.

Most social reformers of the time framed their theories around only two factors of production: labor and capital, ignoring the all important factor of land. Dan sought a deeper and more wide-ranging solution to the problem. An early biographer summed up Dan's search for an all-encompassing solution in this way: "After Mr. Beard had come to know intimately the relations between employer and employee, after he had, studied exhaustively the rapidly growing struggle between the masters of the bread and the bread winning classes, he became profoundly desirous of finding some solution in harmony with the fundamental principles of justice...and democracy. At this juncture he read *Progress and Poverty*. Here he found the same passion for justice and human rights which he felt; the same devotion to the high ideals of free institutions; the same insistence on viewing social problems in a fundamental manner which he felt ever must be a cardinal point in any solution that offered permanency. This book enthralled his imagination, convinced his reason and awakened his enthusiasm... henceforth he was a convert to the land theories of Henry George."

Dan Beard carried over that enthusiasm into his work. In 1889, Beard's work came to the attention of Mark Twain, who was then finishing his novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Twain's book examined the injustices in a feudal society ruled by monopolies in power and land; Dan's illustrations went so far as to suggest a land-value tax as a solution. The illustrations were abandoned in later editions of the novel for being too radical.

Dan himself published a novel, *Moonblight*, about the monopolization of natural resources. In 1898, Dan produced four illustrations that amounted to a mini-lesson in the Single Tax. As

George Orwell would later do in *Animal Farm*, Dan used animals as allegorical figures in many of his illustrations. In one, *As It Is Today in America*, a monopolist, portrayed as a hog, rides on the backs of both labor and capital, all the while consuming the product of labor. *How Monopoly Oppresses Labor* shows laborers, in the guise of monkeys, being denied access to land (the landowner is portrayed as a

large ape sitting behind a fence on his privately owned land surrounded by signs that say Keep Out and No Admittance). The illustrations later appeared in Bolton Hall's popular exposition of the Single Tax, *Free America*, published in 1904.

Dan lived to the ripe age of 91, dying in 1941. Perhaps the best tribute to his art was given by Mark Twain when he was vice-president of the Anti-Imperialist League of New York. Twain, writing to Dan in 1902 in praise of his illustrations to Ernest Crosby's anti-imperialist novel *Captain Jinks*, said: "I

cannot tell you how much I like the pictures. I think you have not made better ones, nor any that were redder with the bloody truth."

