

At the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle

CONDUCTED BY E. WYE

THEY say that forgotten are the snows of yester-year, and probably by this time the sap of spring is rising in your veins. In April, sang Chaucer, folk long to go on pilgrimages. Very good, but we in this country antedate our wanderlust period from December to March inclusive, that is, if one lives in the frigid belt, anywhere north of the Gulf of Mexico. To that favored section known as the Far South the piercing North Wind sometimes finds his way, but as a general rule the rigors of winter are there softened by the warm winds from the Gulf. Hence the increasing number of pilgrims who wend their way thither. This one of our American rivieras is doubtless destined to a great future. Florida has been exploited largely in the interest of the rich. But that considerable stretch of coast line extending from Pensacola to New Orleans beckons to the masses to buy their railroad tickets and "come on in, for the water's fine!" Of all the attractive "resorts" in this locality none is more distinguished for all round advantages than our Fairhope, the Single Tax colony, now in its 29th year. It is the most southerly of our Signs of the Cat and the Fiddle, and for liberal combined entertainment for the body and the spirit it is easily first, with a second nowhere. They say in Fairhope that one has to rise early and retire late to keep up with the list of functions crowding on hour after hour—baseball, football, basket ball, folk dancing, movies, little theatre, out-of-door pageants, boat racing, boxing, golfing, a Civic Club, a Forum, public dinners, oyster roasts, swimming and fairs. Whoever visits Fairhope expects to return, and on departing he brushes the tears from his eyes and like a veritable sentimental Tommy joins in singing:

"There's a verdant shore by the waters blue
Where we dearly love to stay;
There's a village fair and I long to be there,
On the banks of Mobile Bay.

Fairhope, Fairhope, down on Mobile Bay,
Fairhope, Fairhope, there's where I long to stay;
Down where the roses are blooming, down by the waters blue,
Fairhope, Fairhope—I love you!"

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But enough of the sentimental. The pungent odor of the Southern "fat pine" fire seems to remind me that the question of heating our houses and bodies is every year becoming a more serious one. And talking of pilgrimages, I should like to see another governmental junketing tour, made by a select committee, into the Pennsylvania coal regions, for the sole purpose of ferreting out the names and addresses of the owners of the Coal Mines. Would Gov. Pinchot stand for this? The other night while I was dilating upon this idea, which is a favorite one with me,

I turned to Lord Emblem and asked him if he remembered a small book printed in London some thirty years ago giving a detailed list, with descriptive maps, of the great Ground Landlords of London?

His lordship did not remember. But I did, and I want to say that this little book was an eye-opener. Well, we need a handbook of American Mine Owners. As for the so-called "operators" and the trade unions, who are framed up into harrowing pictures of tragic conflict, they may all go fish! The coal mines, minus a directory of their royalty-consuming owners, are like the play of Hamlet with Hamlet left out. I should like the aforementioned select committee to make an intensive investigation of the personnel of these Owners, employing as many Lupins and Sherlock Holmes' as are necessary to smoke them out of their hiding places. For verily they are Artful Dodgers. The Conductor of this Department having this very idea in mind wrote the following lines, printed a few years ago in *Reedy's Mirror* and called

THE NIGGER IN THE COAL PILE

"There's a nigger in the coal pile,
He's hidin', I opine;
These quarrels they are naught to him—
He merely owns the mine.
He puts in nary capital,
He puts no labor in—
He just consents to let 'em work
And then rakes off the tin.

This gem'man doesn't print long ads.
So touchin' that you weep;
He has no economic fads,
He just goes off to sleep.
He owns entire the coal-fields an'
His place is in the sun—
His graft it is the fairest
That e'er the sun shone on.

But Nigger in the Coal Pile,
How long do you suppose
Your very unaccustomed smell
Will fool our searching nose?
We've traced at last your devious way,
We know what you're about—
Old Voodoo, say, some blessed day
We're going to tax you out!"

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Recurring to the Sunny South, word has been brought to the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle that try-out of the Fairhope Moving Picture took place, as announced, in the

presence of a large and interested audience. Comings Hall was in gala array and expectation ran high. The general feeling after the show was over was one of disappointment. The mechanical technique was not up to the mark, to begin with—but that might be excused and indeed has since been corrected. The trouble, so a capable critic writes us, was one of underlying weakness in the scenario itself—which in this case was almost to be looked for, inasmuch as the work of composition was undertaken by one who had had absolutely no experience in the difficult art of the moving picture. The author of the scenario contented himself with an endeavor, as part of his design, to show the attractions of Fairhope, in which he fairly well succeeded—though it must be confessed, says our critic, that the various local scenes lacked the life and movement which one looks for on the screen. The other half of the film was designed to advertise the Single Tax itself; and this turned out more or less a failure. Proof positive was here exemplified that people do not go to the theatre, least of all to a picture show, to be made to study or read or think—but to look, to see, to be entertained, to feel.

It is the emotions versus the mind, with the mind nowhere in the running. If instead of tiresome economic definitions and explanations the author of the film had had the wit or the experience to put over a few scenes and episodes from life, revealing through a story (given in the usual "sure fire" way) one or two of the cardinal points of our Single Tax philosophy, he would probably have sent the audience home well satisfied. As it was, although most of those present were more than anxious to be pleased they were not willing, in spite of being Single Taxers, to be bored. Is there not herein a lesson for us all? A great weakness in our propaganda is our lack of the uses and the support of Art. We need to apply the fine arts to the popularizing of our philosophy. It is time, high time, to make another start in this direction. Why not more stories as good as or better than "The Lost Island," "The Broken Lance," "Under the Lion's Paw?" Who is writing songs as good as the Anti-Poverty songs? Who is continuing the pictorial humor and satire of Dan Beard and Bengough? Who is writing Single Tax plays? Isn't there enough Single Tax money in the country to pay for and put on a play or manufacture a moving picture? Have we no gumption? Cannot we offer a prize as well as *The Nation* for a poem, the theme of which, in our case, we reserve the liberty of ourselves laying down? The Cat and the Fiddle believes in this idea of propaganda through Art, and this Department wants to hear from our readers on this important subject.

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Horace Wenzel, who knows something about such things, says that while there used to be honor among thieves the modern shibboleth of A Gentlemen's Agreement has received a knock-out blow through the perfidy of French big-business in this mess in the Ruhr. That their brother industrialists in Germany should, four years after the armistice, be treated by French industrialists (both sides

to the controversy being thinly disguised as "the government"—) in the unprecedented manner we have been witnessing in the Ruhr would seem to pass understanding. Even under stress of war there are underground roads with international connections, and Privilege always has its protectors and confidential representatives in the enemy's country to guard its innermost secret shrines from attack.

If the German industrialists finally find that they have indeed been betrayed to their ruin (i. e., if they are finally compelled, through taxation or otherwise, to pay their fair share of the Reparations) then there may ensue such a hullabaloo in the German pigsties, such a grunting of the heavy, Westphalian porkers, such a squawking of the plump geese of the Rhineland (the squawks indicating that their feathers are being plucked) that every big-business barnyard in Christendom will hear the noise and may be thrown into confusion. "I ask," continued Wenzel, "could insensate malice go farther in destroying the family harmony of inner class interests? What may be the end of this portentous drama? The ancient feuds celebrated in myth and fable may seem as child's play if the German industrialists, finding that The Game is broken up and that they have been made the victims of traitors, turn in their fury and give the word to their "Robots" to rise and raise the flag of international communism!" "Good gracious, Mr. Wenzel," exclaimed Adèle Bonnyclabber, who was listening in, "do you mean that after Us the deluge? I must go tell Lord Emblem."

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"Emasculated Single Tax" was the name given by Antonio Bastida to the shadowy body of doctrine preached by the Limited Single Taxers of two decades ago. Similar statements of principles, in no wise more virile, are periodically and authoritatively published at this time by the successors of the Limited. Read for example the "Message to Single Taxers," issued lately by the Executive Committee of the Los Angeles Single Tax League. Here is the aftermath, the residuum, the reductio ad nauseam of last year's effort in California to keep the Single Tax off the ballot. It openly declares war between the two factions. Listen to the pronouncement: "We therefore deem it necessary to serve notice to the Single Taxers of the world of this insurmountable difference of opinion between the two groups and the impossibility of working together without disaster to the movement itself" (sic). Not very cheerful this, to be sure. Then they proceed to tell the world what they "stand for," first alleging that "both groups wish the Single Tax at the earliest possible moment." What they stand for is stated as the following:

"A full recognition of private property rights."

"The unimproved speculative value of land is the natural subject for taxation."

"As rapidly as possible—consistent with the stability of business—all taxes for revenue should be shifted from wealth, capital and the processes and products of industry,

business and agriculture, and placed upon the unimproved speculative value of land."

"This change should be made by exempting one labor product after another."

"The exemption method of approach is the only one that has any hope of success."

"This method will bring us to a full realization of our ideals, without injury to legitimate business and without disturbing the elaborate system of credits upon which the social structure rests."

We asked old Michael O'Shea what he thought of the foregoing? After a moment's reflection, "I am reminded," said he, "of that fine auld song:

'Mither, may I go out to swim?
'Oh yis, my darling daughter—
Hang your clothes on a hickory limb,
But don't go near the water.'

"I am an auld man and I haven't long to live," he continued, "but I thank God I have lived in better days than these, in days when a Single Taxer meant a man with red fighting blood in his veins and not such a lily-livered phantom as must be the Single Taxer who wrote those words ye've read, lines of apology and backsliding, traitorous words. 'The speculative value of land,' says he, when damn well he knows or should know that we have a right to the whole of land rent, no exceptions. And thin he says, 'exempt one labor product after another.' A revision of the tariff does he mean, each year for the next two thousand years?"

At this point Larry Wiggins broke in, being unable to restrain himself. "The Dervish is right, and I call the attention of this company to the following years as Red Letter Years: '1947—The prolonged efforts of the Los Angeles Tax Exemption League (formerly known as the Los Angeles Single Tax League) to exempt high bred, pedigreed canines from the common dog tax have at last been crowned with success.' '1973—which might be called the Year of Jubilee in Southern California, forever famous as the year in which the Los Angeles Limited Exemption League (formerly known as the Tax Exemption League) succeeded after two generations of effort in getting the Congress to exempt admission to moving picture shows from any tax whatever. The patriarchal President of the League stated that if the League had accomplished nothing more than this its existence would have been justified.'"

Old Michael, who did not relish Wiggins' interruption, now continued: "Where does he say that we all have equal rights in the use of the Earth? Or that the Lord has provided a bounteous Table for the use of all of His children? Please all the Saints, let me be still a Howling Dervish, even though I do be thinking I'm the last of that tribe. Thank God, the Party men have lifted again the Cross of the New Crusade and breathe the breath of life again into the movement, as we did in the Anti-poverty days!"

He trembled as he spoke, and we noticed tears falling from the old man's eyes, for he was greatly stirred. And lo, as if to justify his words we saw lying there before us on the table a copy of *The Commonwealth*, the organ of The Commonwealth League of England. "Object: The foundation of a Commonwealth based on the assertion of the common right to the land. *To assert the Common Right* The Commonwealth League demands that on the Appointed Day the land shall be declared to have been Restored to the People, and thereafter its economic rent shall be collected by and for the People."

A Message to Single Taxers

UNDER the above heading there was recently broadcast to the Single Tax world by the Executive Committee of the Los Angeles Single Tax League a statement that there could be no possible agreement in thought or harmony in action between themselves and those of us who supported the California campaign. This recognition of an evident condition receives our hearty approval, and we believe its acceptance will be a great benefit to the movement.

On what basis could an agreement be possible between groups of such divergent purposes and views? Harmony can exist only between those who agree on the end in view and the methods by which it can be attained.

Shall we then at the behest of the Los Angeles Single Tax League refrain from public expression of the principles we learned from the writings of our great teacher?

"What I therefore propose as the simple yet sovereign remedy, which will raise wages, increase the earnings of capital, extirpate pauperism, abolish poverty, give remunerative employment to whoever wishes it, afford free scope to human powers, lessen crime, elevate morals, and taste, and intelligence, purify government, and carry civilization to yet nobler heights, is to appropriate rent by taxation."

And for giving expression to that belief Henry George was denounced in his day as an extremist, a theorist, a doctrinaire who delighted in announcing strange social proposals, and in flouting conventionalities even as the Los Angeles Single Tax League are now denouncing us.

For in what does the bill presented to the voters of California at the recent election differ from or enlarge upon this culminating thought of Henry George's teachings?

What strange social doctrine did the bill introduce?

All the virility and power of the movement centers around the belief that "Neither on the ground of equity or expediency is there anything to deter us from making land common property by confiscating rent." "Progress and Poverty," Book 8, Chap. 2.

Yet when a bill is presented which does no more than put this principle into effect, the inevitable happens and objections immediately proceed from the landed interests and their friends.

It is well to remember that the first general notice of the intention of the Los Angeles Single Tax League to quit