

# At the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle

CONDUCTED BY E. WYE

ONE day of late Horace Wenzel, Professor Dowdy and ourselves were passing by the old deserted farm off the Burlington turnpike when from the corner of the barnyard near the fence came again that strange murmuring complaint of which we have previously written. "Over yonder is an old Plow," we explained to Horace, "gifted with power of speech, like Esop's heroes. Let us go in and resume our friendly acquaintance with the old worthy." "Well, quite glad to see ye again," rasped the Plow, "I knew you'd turn up. I've had a whole winter to think over what we were discussing and I'm convinced that I have the laugh on the whole of ye." And we thought we could hear the electrons in the old fellow's iron-bound atoms jumping with cachinnatory delight. Explaining to Wenzel that the old mooted question of Henry George's defence of interest had been started up we said we had discovered in the old Plow a doughty antagonist *contra*. "What nonsense," put in the Professor, "as if words of wisdom could rise from the tongue of a Plow," and he laughed heartily at his joke. "Well, I myself am a good deal of a skeptic on this subject of the origin of interest and I should like to be shown," admitted Wenzel. "What does Mr. Plow say?" "I say," rumbled the Plow, "that I'm going the way of all wealth—from Earth I came, to Earth I am returning. But I always knew that my days were numbered. To keep me in repair cost more than my owner originally paid for me. And I'll bet that your new-fangled power-machines will be no better—your Fordson tractors and such like." (There was a note of jealousy in the old fellow's voice). "By Heck, as to this question of interest, if a neighbor had borrowed me of my master, he couldn't have prevented my disintegration if he had tried every preservative known to man. So I say that when you economists talk about me being entitled, as capital, to what you call interest you are mouthing a lot of twaddle." "See how like so many others he misses the point," put in the Professor. "My dear Mr. Plow, in my classes I counter your pessimistic argument by pointing out that in Nature there is a principle of life and betterment as well as one of decay. A principle of reproduction and increase, such as we find in the multiplication of grain grown from the seed, of flocks and herds bred from the single pair, of wine grown smoother after a period of years, of honey gathered after a season's passage. The element of Time enters into this matter. If your master, friend Plow, had exchanged you for ten bushels of grain and then sown you as grain in his field, at the end of the season you would have increased and multiplied and would have been the underlying and undoubted source of interest for him."

"Well," replied the old Plow, "I am no good any longer in thinking things out. I leave it to the gentleman over there to answer you, if he sees a way." Hereupon Horace Wenzel, who had been an interested listener, spoke up. "Of course, what the Plow would like to know is how much labor has been expended in planting, cultivating and gathering the grain when harvest comes round, and whether it isn't the energy of Nature, or what you call Land, that, in the special way peculiar to the action of grain in the ground, is responsible for the reproduction and increase and not the Time that the Professor has referred to? To the labor expended you allocate wages. What else besides the elements, processes and energy of Nature, which you call Land, can you think of as entering into the matter? Time? Why, time cannot be differentiated or regarded apart from the methods of nature. When we speak of Land we include the whole gamut of *natural* forces, the "process of the suns"—the laying down of the coal deposits which took ages, as well as the energy of electricity and radio-activity which do their work instantaneously. It seems to me that interest, far from being allied to the ways of Nature, finds its origin in adventitious circumstances and persists under altogether unnatural surroundings. It is all very well to say that capital is wealth used in the production of more wealth, but even so it takes labor to set the machine going, and the machine itself is but a combination of modes of energy and mechanical advantages. So that land and labor cover the case. If you say that wealth in course of exchange is, as capital, entitled to interest, remember that trade is but the exchange of goods for goods, and the greater production that accompanies more efficient labor and use of more suitable lands is inevitably reflected in higher wages and in higher ground rent. I think, indeed, that what is called Spurious capital is worthy of study, but I think also that I could write a treatise on political economy in which no mention would be made of either capital or interest, and I feel sure the terms would not be missed. What then is what we call interest and what is its origin? It is a convention of modern times springing from poverty (lack of wealth) on the one hand and speculation in land and immoderate profiteering on the other. The treatise of John Calvin on the advantages and good morals of "interest" is a fine bit of whitewashing for the gentlemen adventurers of his time. When in the New World jobbers began to buy and sell virgin land, a purchase for a shilling an acre and a sale for two shillings meant a gain of 100 per cent. on the transaction. Common trade ordinarily showed profits of many hundreds per cent. on each sale. The Indians were most unmercifully fleeced. According to

Washington Irving, the profits in the fur trade were ordinarily 600%. Now then, when borrowing was resorted to under these conditions did the borrower refuse or hesitate to pay a high "interest" for funds that would enable him to embark in "business" and do some fleecing himself? This is the reason why in new countries "interest" is high. Under private ownership of land periods of land speculation have always been accompanied by high interest, high profits and high wages—the last because at such times laborers throw down their tools, desert their farms and join in the general speculative jamboree, leaving something like a scarcity of labor to carry industry along. I suppose in this country we have had this thing illustrated often enough. The reason why, in my opinion, concluded Wenzel, there are still some obscure subjects in political economy, of which this one of "interest" is a most engaging one, is that the best writers, and Henry George among them, could not break away from the conventional terminology of previous authorities." By this time the old Plow was sound asleep.

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Some day, no doubt, the Land Question will loom up big in the minds of our "Alameda citizens," stirring them to historical investigations into curious old methods of land tenure, etc., etc. Such a procedure will seem natural enough to learned persons like our good friend Miss Bonnyclabber. In fact Adele recently told us that she is preparing notes running back to the earliest times, having in mind to produce something like Isaac Disraeli's "Curiosities of Literature," only of course devoted to her favorite Economics. Well, if not, why not? Celebrated land cases, involving crime and mystery, will be found, we feel sure, in countless records of courts of law, cases suited to the needs of our future novelists and playwrights looking for new complications, thrills and plots. Granted that the established number of possible "situations" may not be added to, Adele says that the original thirty-six can not be exceeded. But the environing situations at least may be enlarged. Imagine a play in which the dramatic conflict turns on the will to justice versus the will to power, involving the members of a family in a series of distressing feuds over land ownership and leading to a poignant crisis. Pinero in "The Thunderbolt" wrote a play in which the usual love motive gave way to sterner stuff about a will without lessening the interest. Adele says that down in Marblehead, Mass., where the President's yacht is to be anchored this summer (a few miles from Swampscott, you know,) she has unearthed the most delightful series of stories for her "Curiosities," all bearing directly on the Land Question. She says that if she were a Hawthorne she could construct a story equal to "The House of the Seven Gables"—and it should be called "The House of the Seven Owners." Down in Marblehead they had, and may still have, a way of doing with their houses and lots what the French peasants do with their farms, viz. indulg-

ing in the system of the *morcellement*, with the result that the ownership of real property in Marblehead has been reduced to the Curiosity class. The head of a family with several children would for example devise the parental home, not as a whole to one or to all of his children, but by rooms or sections. Four rooms or four corners might be left to as many children, with no mention made of the halls and stairways. A writer in the *The New Times* says that where an old house in Marblehead is shabby, neglected and falling to pieces the reason is often this divided ownership. When four different branches of a family own a house they are very likely to neglect paint and even the payment of taxes. The Probate Court records are doubtless full of curious details of the bizarre results of such family arrangements. And now that Marblehead is experiencing the familiar scramble for its land from wealthy and fashionable summer residents and suddenly these funny old owners are finding themselves to be the possessors of valuable sites and potentially well-to-do, if not rich, imagine the anguish that must ensue when they commune with their souls and put it up to themselves, to sell or not to sell, that is the question! Imagine the difficulties in getting a unanimity of action or in straightening out a line of title. Imagine the play and interplay of passions and emotions! Is there not here a suggestion of possibilities for future story makers and playwrights, as we said in the beginning? We extend our congratulations to Miss Bonnyclabber for her fine detective literary sense.

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If we personally were inclined to indulge in the formation of a philosophic system to express our economic ideas, something like the following might be the outcome. The universe we should consider under the categories of energy and value. Philosophy being a man-science, not indulged in by the lower orders of nature save in fables, energy and value should be considered solely in their relation and inter-relation to mankind. Thus considered, energy is the cosmic envelope in which man finds himself enmeshed. He is himself of energy compounded, his vital existence being but a state, a combination, an expression, of the universal energy, his body being a complicated minute system of transformations and conservations marvelously set to work. What next is value? Humanly speaking, it is that by virtue of which the labor, the toil, the irksomeness of living is saved to man for the benefit of his life and the increase of his happiness. Whatever saves laborious toil and adds to the sum total of man's pleasurable existence here on Earth may be said to possess value in his eyes. For by the law of life man seeks the satisfaction and the fulfilment of his desires with the least exertion. Energy and value should first be considered in their inter-relations to the planet on which we live or to what in the science of political economy we call Land. Secondly, they should be considered in their relations to man himself. And

thirdly, to society. First, as to land, we divide the expression land into two meanings, the first describing land as the sum total of all the energies of nature outside of man himself, and the second describing land as the superficies of the earth's surface, capable of location and measurement. Now energy itself is also capable of two descriptions. We have first energy in action or in the process of doing work. This, within the past century or two, has been discovered, studied, measured and used increasingly by man for the satisfaction of his desires. It is not created by man, but it is produced by him, drawn from the great reservoir of nature and when so produced in multiform ways and used it becomes what is known as wealth. The second kind of energy is what in physics is called potential energy or energy of position. It represents work already done and which is available for transformation into active energy. In our philosophy of political economy we term this energy of position land value, site value, location value. It represents under these terms work performed either cosmically or by man, manifesting itself either through growth of population and production and advance of the arts on the one hand or through the kinetic energy of nature focused on the location in question on the other. We say and say truly that increase of population, of production and of the arts increases site value. We say too that special location values are the results of purely cosmic energy, as for example are the coal deposits, oil wells, quarries, natural harbors, water-powers lifted by the sun from the sea and carried by wind and cloud to advantageous heights to descend finally at the will of man to turbines and be converted into kilo-watts of electrical energy for the production of wealth and the satisfaction of his desires. All this work previously done by men in the mass or in society on the one hand and by nature on the other constitutes an enormous saving of labor for man and for society which can be and is measured with great accuracy by the phenomenon which, accompanying human progress like a reflection or a shadow, is known as social land value or economic rent. Economic rent represents all the gains and advantages that mankind achieves in a state of civilization. It forms a superb foundation for the upbuilding of society in association and equality; it is the basis for the development of mankind's highest functions and aspirations, the spirit of just men made perfect, of peace, good will on earth. The communism of economic rent is the one and only communism that society happens to need. Finally there is to be considered man in his relation to value. His labor will always be necessary to keep him alive and enable him to propagate his kind. In the simplest of economic manifestations he applies his labor at the margin of society and what he produces from nature constitutes his wages. To his full wages he is in justice entitled, without any deductions therefrom by the exactions of the State in the form of taxes or any deduction therefrom by predatory "land owners" for the mere permission to go to work. What he produces at the margin

of society, on the best land free to him, becomes the norm of wages for the whole community—no one will be capable of producing more wages for himself in the long run than he, for the others who occupy locations of superior potential value must submit to forego from their turnover all the advantages accruing strictly from the location value aforesaid. Herein observe the law of rent, the touchstone and basis of economic science. A great communal rent fund, collected yearly for the common use of the community, is the heritage that nature and civilization have dowered upon mankind. What madness possesses mankind when it sanctions and legalizes the proprietorship of the eternal cosmos itself as the private property of a few! What blasphemy! What overreaching of pride! But with the coming of the new day and with the man at the margin a free man, every other man and woman will be made free as well. For with land restored to all who want it for use, subject only to the payment of the economic ground rent into the common rent fund, how can any one be enslaved? The marvel is that the human race continues its blind and ruinous adulation of false teachers and crafty overlords, who still cajole us into accepting the continuation of our bondage.

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We asked old Michael Shea if he had read Jerome O'Neil's "pessimistic" letter which appeared in the last number of LAND AND FREEDOM. "Sure, I read it, and I did not give over the reading of it till I'd exhausted it and exhausted meself, too. The trouble wid me old friend O'Neil is lack of youth. In his younger days he was a Howling Dervish as well as mesilf, but he has lost his voice, and look, he's after retiring to his cave in the desert and indulging himself in a study of historical post obits, wid an accompanying nice derangement of epitaphs, as Mrs. what d'ye call her would say. Take mesilf, on the other hand. You may look upon me as ye will, as ye like, but, by Hivens, I'm a fighting man till the end. I still howl in the desert so that even the likes of O'Neil may hear me. After all, the Sheas were ever better fighting men than the O'Neils. I once said to Bishop Nulty of Meath, 'Your Reverence,' says I, 'what will I do to save me soul?' 'It'll be hard work, Mike,' says he, 'but don't give up fighting for the Land for the People. *In hoc signo vincat*' says he learnedly. Well now, I say to me old friend O'Neil, come round more frequently to the Cat and the Fiddle and air your grievances before the young bloods there. Meet me frinds, Professor Dowdy and Larry Wiggins and Wenzel and Mrs. Livingston and Miss Bonnyclabber and don't be giving way so much to your emotions. Those people look forwards and not backwards. They believe in organization and a party—yes a party—an army wid banners! Come on, me old frind, be an O'Neil! Join the ranks agin!"

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We were saying the other night at the Sign of the Cat and the Fiddle that the year 1926, the 150th anniversary

of the American Declaration of Independence 'ought to do itself honor by witnessing a first genuine International Land Congress. Has not the land question sufficient vitality to bring together an assemblage of militant men and women from the growing number of countries in which agitation for the restoration of land to the people has been making headway? Surely. And if the shibboleth for such an assemblage were to be "No compensation to land-owners!" there can be no reasonable doubt that those who entered with this credential could accomplish very much indeed. Method of course—but Will first! And it seems to us that the time has come for a renewal of the "howling dervish" stage of land restoration insanity. The Commonwealth Land Parties of Great Britain and the United States, with the Partida Georgista in Argentina are, so far as we know, the only political organizations in existence which point the way to immediate land restoration. Taking the lead, what could be more logical than for these three groups to step forward at this juncture and issue a joint manifesto and appeal to friends of genuine land restoration to meet in conference sometime during the year 1926? We do not fail to remember that the United Committee's Conference at Oxford last year closed with a recommendation that Copenhagen be selected as the place for the continuation of its deliberations. But what we have in mind is a considerably more representative assemblage of adherents and decidedly a more militant spirit than were observed at the Oxford Conference. The admirers of Quesnay and Jefferson, the followers of Rivadavia and Henry George, yes, of Moses and of Jesus—ought they not to step forth at this time and by their eloquence and persuasiveness try to win the attention and the hearts of plain people? Is the idea too fantastic? If not, how can it be put into effect?

## Death of Herbert Quick

THE death of Herbert Quick robs the Henry George movement of one of its most earnest and devoted disciples. He died of heart disease on May 10th, while attending journalism week at the University of Missouri at Columbia.

Mr. Quick was born in 1861 on a farm in Grundy County, Iowa, and was educated in the county schools. He taught school from 1882 to 1890 and was the principal of a ward school in Mason City, Iowa. A martyr to infantile paralysis from youth, he battled with his infirmity and accomplished in a busy life a great quantity of work, large in volume and varied in kind.

Here is a brief but crowded list of his activities:

Admitted to the bar 1881.

Mayor of Sioux City 1898.

Editor *Farm and Fireside*, 1909-1916.

Member of the Federal Farm Loan Bureau, 1916-1921.

Went to Siberia as head of a Red Cross Commission to wind up its affairs in the Far East.

Author of several "best sellers," a dozen minor works of fiction and a number of non-fiction works dealing with economics and the farmer's problems. Of the latter, *The Real Trouble With the Farmer* is one of the best practical expositions of our philosophy as applied to the farmer.

In Vandermark's *Folly* and *The Hawkeye*, Mr. Quick has written the epic of the frontier. No one who wants to know something of the pioneering life of America can afford to neglect these books. Parkman is its historian and Quick its story teller. The latter's work is of the fibre that makes the glory of those old days.

He had an intimate knowledge of field and prairie. He was no mean naturalist and these touches give verisimilitude to the long journey of his hero to Monterey County. He was a scientific farmer, too, and knew soils. He approached the human problem as he did the study of soils and their qualities. And this is indeed the way to study the human problem for those who possess the necessary qualifications. Quick saw a human quality grow, and he knew that it grew because the soil was propitious; or he saw some desirable quality wither, and he knew it was because the ground was sterile. The lesson that is ever present in these novels of Mr. Quick's dealing with the elemental characteristics in human life is that of the relation of the kind and quality of soil to the development of all that is virile and best in man and woman.

The newspaper tributes to the dead writer were eloquent and discriminating. But in none of these was there any mention of the cause which had enlisted so great a part of his life and in the defence of which he had written so much. Commenting on this omission John J. Murphy sent the following letter to the *New York World*:

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *World*:

Your editorial appreciation of Herbert Quick will strike a sympathetic chord in the hearts of his friends, of whom he had a host. His kindly spirit endeared him to all fortunate enough to enjoy his acquaintance. The portrait might have been more lifelike were some reference made to the fact that the dominant passion of his life was his hunger for justice. He believed profoundly that the possible salvage of our civilization depends upon the public acceptance of some practical method of making the values in land created by population, invention and discovery bear the major if not the entire weight of public financial burdens—a method which would confer the triple benefit of lightening taxation on producer and consumer, of obviating the pretext for governmental intervention in our private lives and of making congestion of unwieldly and menacing fortunes less probable.

To those capable of reading between the lines of his numerous works this spirit was always obvious. Like the late Surgeon General Gorgas, who held similar views, his message to the world was that no civilization is safe which does not build upon the corner-stone of justice to human-