

The Land of Plenty

A Playlet in Six Acts

By HENRY J. FOLEY
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Prologue

OUR play will show you happy times
In lands of joy and plenty,
And lands where times are hard, and men
Are coarse, and comforts scanty.
Our actors are—a burly giant,
Labor is his name,
And Capital, a beauteous belle,
More gracious than her fame;
A pompous hired man who slips
Into the master's place
And gives the master's wealth away
With more than kingly grace.
And there's a villain in the play,
A man who never works,
But seizes everything in sight,
And shirks, and shirks, and shirks.

LOCALE

On the left side is a stony hill on which the Giant and the Beauteous Belle have been working hard to make a living. On the right is a Land of Plenty, with fertile fields and mines of gold, and shady woods, and rivers teeming with fish.

Act I

On the Barren Hillside.

The Giant and the Beauteous Belle attired in rags, have finished the work of a year. They have sold their scanty crops, and they are counting their money.

BEAUTEOUS BELLE. There it is, two thousand dollars, and I can't make it any more.
GIANT. I've counted it, too, and that's all I can make of it.
B. B. I don't see how I'm going to get through the coming year. I need that much for food to keep me beautiful, and I'll have to wear calico, when I look so stunning in silks.
GIANT. That's not enough to buy my meals if I have to work on this barren hillside. I'll be the champion thin man in another year. (*Viewing the scene to the right.*) But what we could do with that Land of Plenty, if we could only get into it!

B. B. Let's risk it next year.
GIANT. Not a chance. If you look closely you'll see lurking Indians among those trees. We couldn't bend over a spade without having arrows sticking out all over us. We'll get along on the barren hillside.

Enter a Steward, dressed in evening clothes.

STEWARD. Good day. I'm looking for work.
GIANT. We're trying to get away from it. But who are you, and what can you do?
STEWARD. I'm a Steward, an Agent, a Government. I get things done for my principal.
B. B. Why can't you work for yourself? Why do you have to be an Agent, or a Government?
STEWARD. I can't work. No Government that ever lived has been able to work. It couldn't stick a spade into the ground nor plant a turnip. I am only an abstraction, if you know what I mean. And still I could be very useful.
B. B. Well, Mr. Steward, how could you be useful to us if we hired you.
STEWARD. I wish you would call me "Government". Of course it means the same thing, but I like it a lot better, and it sounds more dignified.
B. B. Of course we'll call you "Government" if it makes you feel better. But tell us what you can do for us.
GOVERNMENT. Suppose I could arrange it so that you could get into the Land of Plenty. Wouldn't that be a service?
GIANT. It certainly would. But we wouldn't dare go in there. Those Indians would murder us.
GOV'T. Let me explain. For Two thousand dollars a year I could keep the place clear of Indians, and you could work there in peace.
B. B. That sounds well, but where could we get Two thousand dollars. That's all the money we have, and if we give it to you we'll starve before we get into the Land of Plenty.
GOV'T. That can be easily fixed. You can make five times as much in the Land of Plenty, and you can pay my bill out of the earnings. Just give me your note for Two thousand dollars.
GIANT AND B. B. You're hired. And don't lose a minute. Let's sign the note.

Act II

In the Land of Plenty.

Labor and Capital have been in the new place for a year. They have sold their wheat and gold and fish and fruits and are counting their money.

GIANT. (*Counting the last of the money*) \$9,800, \$9,900, \$10,000. Hurrah! What a year we've had! We're rich.

B. B. And what a difference from the barren hillside.

GIANT. And to think that we owe it all to that Government lad. We'll have to go and tell him how much we appreciate him.

The Giant seats himself on a log and looks admiringly at the Beauteous Belle.

GIANT. Come here and sit by me. (*She sits beside him.*) Did any one ever tell you you're beautiful?

B. B. (*Coyly*) I think you ask that of all the girls.

GIANT. I had mighty little time on the barren hillside to look at pretty girls. It's so easy to make a living here that I had a chance to see how pretty you are.

B. B. You're not so bad to look at yourself now. The Land of Plenty is certainly agreeing with you.

GIANT. (*Holding her hand.*) Do you think you could—
Enter a well-dressed Stranger

STRANGER. Good morning. A splendid place you have here. I hope you like it.

B. B. Like it? We love it. It's the finest spot on earth.

STRANGER. I'm glad to hear you say that. I'm the Landlord, and I've come for my rent.

GIANT. What do you mean — rent?

LANDLORD. The rent is what you pay for living here.

GIANT. Do you mean that we have to pay you for living here? Why?

LANDLORD. I'm the owner of the place. Your agent, Government, gave me title to it. You're welcome to live here, and all I want is the rent.

B. B. And how much is the rent?

LANDLORD. Let me see. Your agent told me you could make Two thousand dollars on the barren hillside. You made Ten thousand here. I only want the difference, Eight thousand. That's what my land has made. You see I'm reasonable.

B. B. We don't understand why you want Eight thousand dollars from us. What did you do for us? What do we get for our money?

LANDLORD. You got a fine place to work, where you made Ten thousand dollars instead of Two thousand.

But I'm getting tired of talk. I came for the rent, and you'll either have to give it to me or get out. My time is valuable.

GIANT. (*Advancing with clenched fists.*) You had better not waste any more of it around here.

LANDLORD. Help! Help Government!

Enter Government with a huge club, and with knives stuck in his belt.

Gov'T. What's the matter here?

LANDLORD. These people refuse to pay my rent, and they won't even get out and leave me in peaceable possession.

Gov'T. (*To Giant and B. B.*) You can't act that way. Why don't you give him his rent and move out quietly if you don't want the place?

B. B. We heard all the words you said, but they don't make sense to us. We can't see why we have to pay Eight thousand dollars to this fellow.

Gov'T. Now listen to me. This man is the legal owner of the place. He has a title which gives him possession, and I have guaranteed him his rent. If you refuse to pay, it will be my painful duty to throw you out, even if I have to use a club. You have armed me thoroughly, and I must uphold the law. And if necessary I shall have to seize your Ten thousand dollars to get the rent.

The Giant and the B. B. whisper together. The B. B. grudgingly hands over Eight thousand dollars and they take their way to the barren hillside.

Act III

The Giant and the B. B. on the Barren Hillside, sitting on the ground with their heads in their hands. They raise their heads.

B. B. I had a dreadful nightmare. I dreamed we were back on the barren hillside.

GIANT. We are. Look around you.

B. B. What happened to us?

GIANT. I don't quite know. I'm still trying to find out.
Enter Government.

Gov'T. Good morning.

GIANT. What?

Gov'T. I said "Good morning".

GIANT. Yes, that's what I thought you said.

Gov'T. I've come to make arrangements for next year. I hope you found the Land of Plenty a pleasant place, and safe to work in. You made plenty of money there.

B. B. Yes. But we don't seem to have any of it.

Gov't. But you made money there, Ten thousand dollars, and it only cost Two thousand dollars to make the place safe. And that reminds me, my note for Two thousand dollars is due, and I'll have to ask you for the money. (*The Giant and the B. B. rise, holding their heads.*)

B. B. Do you mean that you want us to pay for work you did on a place you gave away to somebody else?

Gov't. You mustn't put it as crudely as that. I only want to collect the taxes. If you had studied law and government you would know that taxes are the only way to support a government. And now I shall have to take the taxes.

Government snatches at the money bag, and the money is spilled. The three scramble for it. Government makes off with as much as he can pick up hastily, and with his clothes badly torn. The Giant and the B. B. count what is left.

B. B. \$1300, \$1400, \$1500. There goes my dream of silks and perfumes and carriages. I can't get those things on \$750.

GIANT. You'd better forget your dream of silks and carriages and \$750. The \$1500 wouldn't buy what I need to eat, and the most I can spare you is \$500.

B. B. You brute! You don't need anything but some coarse food and some cheap clothes, and I need delicate food and pretty dresses. \$500 wouldn't even cover me decently.

GIANT. Well, \$500 is all you're going to get.

The B. B. snatches at the money bag, and the Giant takes it from her. She scratches his face and pulls his hair. He throws her into a bramble bush. The money has been scattered, and they scramble for it.

Act IV

The Land of Plenty.

The Landlord, richly dressed and loaded with jewelry, is sitting at a well-stocked table under the shade of a tree. Enter Government, in torn clothes.

LANDLORD. Good morning. What's happened to you?

GOV'T. I've been trying to collect taxes from the Giant and the Beauteous Belle, and they almost pulled the clothes from my back. I got only \$500.

LANDLORD. Pull out a chair and make yourself comfortable. There's plenty to eat, and you'll find this wine excellent. You'll need something to brace you up before you go after the other \$1500. (*They eat and drink, and the Landlord hands out cigars.*)

LANDLORD. Do they want the place next year?

GOV'T. I didn't get that far. I was lucky to get away when I did.

LANDLORD. The Giant and the Beauteous Belle were always like that. No regard for law, and begrudging the taxes they owe their government.

GOV'T. Yes, indeed. Collecting taxes is a terrible job. I hope you will make up the other \$1500. My note is overdue, and I have a reputation to keep up.

LANDLORD. My dear Government, you're fooling. You know that I have a deed to the property, because you gave it to me yourself, and the rent is mine. You are the last person in the world I should expect to hear such things from. Let's hear no more of it. You have only to raise the taxes higher next year. Have another glass of wine.

GOV'T. I don't think I'll have another glass of wine, but I will have \$1500. The \$2000 note I signed was all for your benefit. Nobody but you got any good of it, and you are the one who ought to pay it all.

LANDLORD. (*Angrily*) I want to hear no more of that.

GOV'T. You're going to hear a lot more of it just now. And you're going to move out, if I have to help the Giant and the Beauteous Belle to move you. In fact, the Giant would be glad to do the job alone. And what fingernails that Beauteous Belle has!

LANDLORD. Can't you see that there's no sense in my staying here if the Giant and the Beauteous Belle can refuse to pay my bills? What is a Government for except to collect taxes?

GOV'T. I've had all I want of collecting taxes. Hereafter I collect my bills from you.

LANDLORD. I can do better somewhere else. Good-bye.

Act V

The Barren Hillside.

The Giant and the B. B., still in rags, are hard at work digging and hoeing. Government enters. The Giant advances brandishing a shovel, and the B. B. flourishes a hoe.

GIANT. Get out.

GOV'T. Please listen.

GIANT. (*Louder*) Get out!

GOV'T. Please listen to me. I've found a better way of doing things.

B. B. Let's hear what he has to say. Maybe he has something good.

GIANT. All right. But it had better be good.

- Gov't. I told the Landlord he would have to pay my bill, and that I would have nothing more to do with taxes.
- GIANT. What did he say to that?
- Gov't. He left the place in disgust, and he has gone to work somewhere. The Land of Plenty is waiting for you again, and you'll have nothing to pay except my bill for expenses.
- GIANT. You're hired again. Get going. But this time, don't forget who is hiring you.

Act VI

The Giant and the Beauteous Belle, wearing expensive and fashionable clothing, have finished another year's work in the Land of Plenty, and are counting their money.

- B. B. \$9800, \$9900, \$10,000. Isn't that fine?
- GIANT. It begins to look as if our troubles are over, and you'll be able to get your silks and perfumes and carriages. And how I will eat!

Enter, Government.

- B. B. Good morning! I hope there isn't a landlord coming in behind you.
- Gov't. No fear of that. He's working somewhere now for himself.
- GIANT. I hope you brought your bill with you.
- Gov't. Here it is, for \$2,000.
- GIANT. (*Counting*) \$1800, \$1900, \$2,000. There it is, and we never paid a bill more gladly. We have \$8000 left for ourselves. This Land of Plenty is a grand place, and you're not so bad yourself.

The Giant and the Beauteous Belle and Government join hands and dance to this refrain:

Oh this is the Land of Plenty, and we have no taxes here,
 We plant and harvest, sing and dance, we're happy all the year.
 We pay for everything we get, and we keep all we earn,
 We've lots to eat, and lots to wear, and money left to burn.

Government stands aside while the Giant and the B. B. continue the dance.

- GIANT AND B. B. And this is now our wedding day, our quarrels are forgot.
- GIANT. And I'll love you—
- B. B. And I'll love you—
- GIANT AND B. B. Till water is no longer wet, and fire's no longer hot.

A Tilt at Blackstone

That so early an American as Robert Coram should perceive clearly the injustices of our inherited land laws, at a time when land was still a glut in our young country, is noteworthy. In his little book, "A Plan for the General Establishment of Schools in the United States," first published in 1791, his clear reasoning on the befogged reasoning of the renowned jurist, Dr. Blackstone, constitutes an important contribution to Georgeist literature. Coram writes as follows:

"The only question remaining," says the Doctor, "is, how this property became actually vested, or what is it that gave a man an exclusive right to retain in a permanent manner that specific land which before belonged generally to everybody, but particularly to nobody. And as we before observed, that occupancy gave a right to the temporary use of the soil, so it is agreed upon all hands, that occupancy gave also the original right to the permanent property in substance of the earth itself, which excludes every one else but the owner from the use of it. . . . However, both sides agree in this, that occupancy is the thing by which the title was in fact originally gained, every man seizing to his own continued use such spots of ground as he found most agreeable to his own convenience, provided he found them unoccupied by any man."

But the act of occupancy is a degree of bodily labor; that is, the occupancy extends as far as the labor; or in other words, a man has a right to as much land as he cultivates, and no more; which is Mr. Locke's doctrine. This distinction is therefore absolutely necessary to determine the quantum of lands any individual could possess under the laws of nature. For shall we say, a man can possess only the ground in immediate contact with his feet; or if he climbs to the top of a mountain, and exclaims, Behold, I possess as far as I can see! shall there be any magic in the words, or in the expression, which shall convey the right of all that land, in fee simple, to him and his heirs forever? No; as labor constitutes the right, so it sensibly defines the boundaries of possession. How then shall we detest the empty sophist, who in order to establish his system of monopoly, would fain persuade us that the Almighty did not know what he was about when he made man. That he made him an animal of prey, and intended him for a polished citizen; that he gave us bounties in common to all, and yet suffered a necessity to exist by which they could be enjoyed only by a few. Had Dr. Blackstone been disposed to give his readers a true account of the origin of landed property in Europe he might have said, exclusive property in lands originated with government; but most of the governments that we have any knowledge of, were founded by conquest; property therefore in its origin, seems to have been arbitrary.