

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

ONE of the earliest real estate booms of this country was that of John Law, and had for its territory what is now the State of Louisiana. The methods pursued were surprisingly like those of today. New Orleans was described as a land flowing with milk and honey. The first rude settlement was pictured as a magical city, a land of palm trees, of gold and silver mines, of rich vineyards. In Parisian cafes wholly imaginary pictures were exhibited of the newly found Eldorado, and Frenchmen parted with their holdings in France to invest their money in Louisiana lands.

THE ships that carried these unfortunate investors from France landed at Dauphin Island. They found neither food nor shelter and remained to starve, for, the ships having departed, there was no escape. The few that survived secured plantations that were granted out, and some prospered. Slaves were imported from Santo Domingo and the West Indies to work these plantations. The inevitable association of slavery and land monopoly was established, and today members of the land-owning aristocracy of New Orleans are drawing revenues based upon the titles whose origin dates from this wild episode of the land speculation of John Law which left a train of misery in its wake.

THE slavery following on the eve of land speculation resulted in the usual way. The Natchez Indians, having been treated with consideration by the first governor general of the colony, were friendly. But the attempt made to enslave them by his successor, Perier, who drove them from their lands, resulted in a wholesale massacre, in which nearly three hundred perished, and so land grabbing and slavery wrought their accustomed fruits.

THE force that has counted most in the industrial history of America is the vast unoccupied land that until a comparatively recent period offered unlimited opportunity for settlement. Those who were disposed to minimize the influence and importance of the land question will do well to consider that our entire civilization would have resulted differently, and our system of government altered to something quite the reverse of what it is today, had it not been for this vast unoccupied land which beckoned to the Eastern settler. Suppose the land had

been owned and occupied—that all these fertile lands lying westward on which towns and cities sprang up had been subject to land monopoly. Labor would have paid the blackmail long before it did. But development would have been immediately arrested and civilization halted this side of the Mississippi, perhaps even to the present day.

HOW the hearts of men must have thrilled to the prospect of these boundless and unappropriated acres! Their effects upon wages and labor conditions are hard to realize. In 1807 began the great Western trend which filled up the Northwest. The embargo and the war had interrupted American commerce with Great Britain and prosperity had slackened. The stream of emigration to the Ohio Valley and the Northwest continued from 1811 to 1817. American wages in the East responded to the impetus. The ideal conditions in the Lowell factories described by Dickens in the '40s, the higher wages prevailing here, and the greater independence of the American workingman as compared with his European brothers, are to be traced to the influence of the frontiers. Even before the Confederation Adam Smith had noted the fact of the higher wages prevailing here, and with his usual insight had assigned the true cause—Free Land Made America.

IT is obvious that where land is cheap free labor will be scarce and highly paid. It is sometimes asked how it was that slavery took root in the New World. *It was the creation of landlordism—a direct outgrowth, indeed.* Land being free and wages high, a substitute for free labor must be provided. The direct connection of free land with the growth of the institution of slavery is not generally recognized by political economists. But just as slavery ceased to exist because it became economically unprofitable to the masters of industry, so in the same way it originally arose out of landlordism. Slavery was a fruit of the same evil tree as the final degradation of free labor. It is interesting to note that in this emigration movement the South was scrupulously avoided. The reason is plain. In the South the land-cost to begin farming was greatly in excess of the same cost in the Northwest. Here again is the fruit of landlordism and its concomitant, slavery. The South was deprived of that healthy emigration which enriched the West and the Northwest, and it left the South with its homogeneous and unprogressive population. Landlordism



and its outgrowth, chattel slavery, have more than their direct evil results to answer for.

**H**ERE is a syllogism which we commend to professors of political economy and statesmen of all nations: The first law of civilization is cooperation. Ergo, anything that interferes with cooperation is an obstacle to the advancement of civilization. Among the things that interfere with cooperation, make it difficult or prevent it altogether, are (1) the private appropriation of the rent of land and private control of natural resources; (2), tariffs, whether for protection or merely for revenue, and (3), wars, which are wholly destructive of all cooperation.

**T**HIS is all any statesman needs to know, but it is just what all statesmen do not know. It will probably surprise most of the heads of government to learn how brief a programme founded on this syllogism will do for their purpose. It would also surprise them to learn how brief a programme would send their names thundering down to posterity as first among the world's emancipators!

**I**F cooperation is the law of civilization, how utterly futile are the machinations of cunning statesmen looking to national advantage or pre-eminence in power. Every such attempt must defeat itself, for it looks not to cooperation but to selfish rivalry. There is "a place in the sun" for every nation, and no nation can shut out the sunlight from another, or monopolize a greater amount of "sunlight" for itself, without injury to its own interests. But that is chiefly what the statesmen of various countries have been trying to do. All the arts of diplomacy have been bent in this direction; all the various devices to enrich themselves have seen nations impoverished by the very methods by which they sought to impoverish others.

**I**T follows that if cooperation is the law of civilization, its real field is the society of nations economically bound together, organized for mutual help and reciprocal exchange. Its field is as wide as the world. This does not mean any artificial union of states. Nations are bound together by economic alliance that natural law has declared from the beginning—an alliance that is not the creation of governments, and not even needing their sanction, but inherent in the nature of things and depending upon individual buyer and seller.

**T**HIS cooperation of society, of man as a trading animal looking for some one who may do the things needing to be done, or qualified to provide what he needs, lends enormous strength to the theory of human brotherhood. There is no room for enmity when it is realized that men of all nations are bound together in an economic alliance, one with another. It is only when governments seek to

ignore this natural alliance that they face disaster or come to grief.

**F**REE traders have written well and earnestly, but this larger aspect of the question has seldom been sufficiently emphasized. Indeed, to most people the vision has been denied. But it means more than the destruction of tariff barriers—it means living in accordance with the laws upon which the perpetuation of civilization depends. And indissolubly associated with it must go the common participation in that social fund which arises from the growth of civilization which economists call rent, and which is more popularly called land value. For the cooperation called civilization breaks down or is destroyed when the social fund is monopolized by the few, or is unequally distributed.

**M**UCH of this vision is clouded by the more obvious aspects of industrial life, which seem to distort the picture and dim the perspective. Chief of these is the apparent helplessness of the man who works for wage. Yet this is only one of the results of the failure of society to grant the right of access to natural opportunities. Mines, forests, building lots, agricultural areas, have been withdrawn from use save at prices that labor cannot afford to pay. For the wage worker the world has been made that much smaller. The field of cooperation has been circumscribed. The laborer finds fewer bidders for what he has to sell—his labor. The remedy is to throw the opportunities open to use and to increase the area over which cooperation resulting from the union of labor and land may start afresh. Think what the effect would be were it to be announced tomorrow that a new continent had been discovered! But here at home is news that should be even more welcome. For here lies a continent ready to our hands, a continent that needs not to be subdued or wrested from a state of nature, but beckons to us right at our doors with all its infinite riches. And all that is needed is the exercise of the power of taxation to sum up into use the vast unused portions of this outspread continent!

**T**HOSE who think they are thinking are prone to remind us nowadays that this is the machine age, and that this fact offers an explanation of the hard times and unemployment. It does not occur to them that during the prosperous times of two or three years ago—we may be as prosperous as these same men understand prosperity—we had nearly as many machines—we have not added much to the number. Wherefore this sudden dislocation between producer and consumer where machines lie idle and men beg for the privilege of working them? It is not the machines but the plight of the consumer—who, were his demand effective, that is if he were able to buy goods that were produced in response to a demand that would set the machine at work—that evidences a break in the economic