

# BENGOUGH'SCHALK-TALKS

**A Series of Platform Addresses  
on various topics, with reproductions  
of the impromptu Drawings with  
which they were  
illustrated.**

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**TORONTO  
THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY  
LIMITED**

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PUBLISHERS TORONTO**

## THE SOCIAL QUESTION

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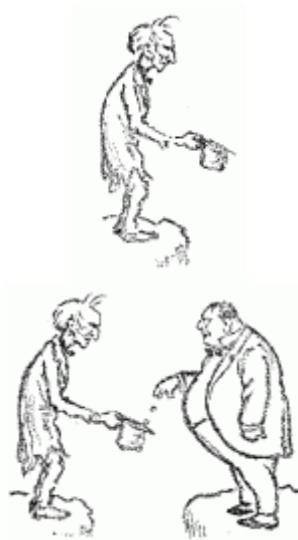
Though I am announced to deal on this occasion with the "Single Tax", I am not going to devote my time to a discussion of taxation. You will no doubt be relieved to hear this, for to most people it is a dry and uninteresting subject. My reason, however, for avoiding it is that I do not believe in Taxation. I regard it as a waste of time to spend an hour in discussing a thing I don't believe in. I have two good reasons for disbelieving in Taxation; first, it is a very vexatious thing; and second, it is an entirely unnecessary thing.

I am going to discuss a subject that is not dry but juicy, and one that is of universal interest, namely, the subject of Human Society.



We are all familiar with the word Society—with a capital S., and it happens to represent a thing which can be presented in picture form. I accordingly begin by making a picture of Society. You know all our enterprising newspapers have a society column or page; a

very absorbing department of special interest, it is said, to lady readers, containing paragraphs about pink<sup>[117]</sup> teas in the upper circles; and recherché functions in the form of banquets given without regard to expense to select companies of pet poodle dogs. My main criticism of the society editor is that he has only a partial view of his department. He seems only to be aware of one end of Society—the fat and comfortable end—represented in such a figure as Fig. 1. But there is another end to Society as it has developed in the Old World, and is developing on this new continent.



At one end the multi-millionaire (by which familiar word we mean the human being who has more wealth than any human being ever earned) and at the other end a figure like this—the fellowman who doesn't know where his next meal is coming from, and who pleads for the favor of a job of work by which he may be able to keep body and soul together—the pauper, the tramp. When we have these two figures confronting each other across a great chasm<sup>[118]</sup> that is constantly growing wider and deeper, we have the complete view of Society. We have in the concrete the "Condition-of-the-people Question", and surely in a "Government of the people, by the people for the people" there can be no problem of deeper or more vital interest. And in my view there is no question in any of the political platforms more important than this, the Social question, which I may state in the phrase of Artemus Ward—"Why is this thus?" What causes this cleavage between the rich and the poor, not merely in the effete nations of Europe but here in America, on a continent capable of supporting ten times its present population in comfort or even luxury? What is the cause of this paradox—in the matter of stomachs, for example—for in the one case, though the stomach is obvious, nay prominent, it never gives its owner a thought, while in the other case, though it is invisible or apparently non-existent, the man can't think of anything else. How came to pass this travesty of Christianity; this satire on the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man? For these are brothers. You would scarcely believe it; the family likeness has been lost. That is the great question—what causes this split in

human Society, and how is it to be radically remedied? For, my friends, it is inevitable that if we do not find a means of closing up this chasm, if it continues to grow wider and wider, there is certain to be a calamity, a catyclism of ruin.<sup>[119]</sup>

This is the spectacle which struck the eye and the heart of Henry George, and set him upon his quest to find the cause and the cure. The outcome of his prolonged study was a book which is now known throughout the world. It is called "Progress and Poverty" because the question to be answered was, why does Poverty accompany Progress? Why are the great masses of the people as poor as ever notwithstanding that progress in labor-saving inventions enables us to produce a hundred-fold or a thousand-fold more of the things we want? George's answer was in one word, *monopoly*.

That is the monkey-wrench which has been thrown into the machinery of Society—only it hasn't been thrown in by wicked design, but has been legislated in by shortsighted and stupid statesmanship. Listen: I want you to mark my words—We have enacted laws under which the natural public revenue does not go to the public, but into the private coffers of a special class of the citizens. This is what makes it necessary to have taxes—which, I repeat, are really unnecessary as well as vexations.

I asked you to mark my words, and I suppose you noted my use of the phrase "*natural public revenue*". This means that nature has provided for public revenue in every community, be it city, township, county, province or Dominion—by a law as sure and unailing as that of gravitation. Such is my conviction, but it is not shared at present<sup>[120]</sup> by our practical statesmen. They apparently hold that nature has nothing to do with the matter; that public revenue must be raised by tariffs and other methods devised by the Ways and Means Committee, and that therefore taxation is and must continue to be "as sure as death". I presume, however, that if I can prove my point, and demonstrate this law of nature, all statesmen will agree that it will be the part of wisdom to put ourselves in harmony with it. It does not pay to fight against nature. So I will proceed to my proof.

In the first place, let us understand what is meant by *revenue*. You say it means the public income, the funds which are needed to pay for the upkeep of the public institutions. Everybody recognizes that this is an absolute necessity; the country must have sufficient revenue or it cannot go on.

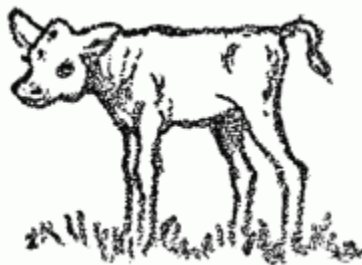
We may say that literally revenue is the food on which the community lives. In the case of an individual man, food is the first thing that must come first. He must keep body and soul together by eating. That is the condition he is under on this planet, because man is an animal. In this primary matter he is on a par with every other animal, however humble. If you think it seems humiliating to say man is an animal I hasten to add—so is woman. Eating must precede everything else; science, art, literature, philosophy, music—all these are secondary things. The<sup>[121]</sup> economic comes first—the man must

keep alive, and so he must eat. As the Irishman asked, "What's the good of a man if his wife is a widdy?"



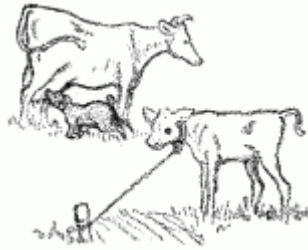
Now, nobody questions that Nature has something to say as to what a man shall eat and drink. Personal liberty is strictly limited. If he eats poison the question is at once closed. If he eats unwholesome food or drinks unfit beverages, he violates Nature's law of diet and must bear the penalty. When you see a man with a face like this—you don't require to be a great medical expert to be able to *diagnose* the case. You say, here is a chap who ignores or defies Nature's law; and you may see cases of the opposite kind, where dyspepsia is the punishment for an unwise indulgence in pickles. We all recognize this law of Nature—if you would enjoy good health you must eat wholesome food.

My contention simply is that this law applies also to the community—to the Nation and all its subdivisions, and dictates that the public revenue, which is its food, must be wholesome.



Why should anybody doubt that Nature has as<sup>[122]</sup> much to say about what a Nation consumes for revenue as what a man eats for food? A Nation is just a gigantic man, and is subject to all the laws of life which apply to an individual. A Nation is as distinct a form of life as is a raven a sparrow or a lily, and if, as the Divine Teacher assured us, Providence has a care for these, we may well ask, is not a Nation of human beings of more value than many sparrows? The ravens and the sparrows are fed—that is, they receive their needed revenue. They are placed in a suitable environment and endowed with the instinct to avail themselves of the abundance provided. Let me picture a calf. It is a harmless animal, not distinguished for sagacity, and yet Nature never fails to provide for its sustenance, which is only another word for revenue. I would not say that the average statesman knows less than a calf, but I have never heard of a calf that did not know where to go for revenue. And where does it go? To Nature's unfailing supply.

There is always a mother cow in the case. Now, if I brand the calf "comm", meaning community, and the cow "Val.", meaning values, we have an allegory which illustrates the idea. The community should subsist upon revenue in the form of natural values.



That would be obeying the law I have referred to. Why is it not done? Because, as I have already indicated,<sup>[123]</sup> we have foolishly legislated the natural values into the possession of private monopolists, and by law we compel the calf to subsist on an artificial diet of corn-shucks and shavings painted green; that is, on revenue obtained by the taxation of labor-values. Meanwhile a stray goat is permitted to butt in, and absorb the natural revenue. You observe that I am merely contending for the fair and reasonable principle enunciated by the Great Teacher—"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's". If you do this, you can then afford to render to the private citizen the things that are his, and the outcome will be peace, because it is justice. In a free country like ours Caesar means the community, and the values which exist in any country fall into two classes, viz. public and private. These are easily distinguished, and all I ask is that public values shall be reserved for the public, and private values for the private individuals who justly own them. To make this idea clear let us present two spheres, which, as you see, stand quite distinct and apart.



The one represents public values, the<sup>[124]</sup> other private, and the line which divides them is the line which separates the works of nature from the works of man. That is surely an obvious distinction, though it is not recognized by our laws, unfortunately. In the category of public values I place all those values, translatable into terms of money, which arise by reason of natural law; and in the other category those values which are the result of human labor. On the one hand, land values, franchise values and the value of natural resources; and on the other hand, houses, furniture, machinery and all the multitudinous things that man creates by work of hand and head. These values are

utterly different both in character and origin. Public values are, in short, another word for population; private values are the fruit of conscious individual effort. What excuse can there be for confusing these values? I might enforce the point by referring to our situation at this moment. We are gathered in a building which stands upon land, and both building and land have value. There was a time when this plot of land had no value; it is now worth a great sum of money. How is this accounted for? Clearly by the growth of population, and the consequent competition for opportunities. Did the house arise because population came? No, it represents a labor-value. Now it seems obvious to me that the free gifts of nature<sup>[125]</sup> to the community ought to belong to the community, and the fruits of human labor to those who do the work or give a full equivalent for it. That is really the whole contention of Henry George and those who think with him. But it is repudiated by the existing system, which taxes labor values for public revenue, and permits public values to go into private coffers. If I transform these spheres into a pair of spectacles and work out a face, I may get a composite portrait of this audience "seeing the point". That point is the fundamental thing in the social question—the existence of legalized monopoly as the basis of our social system.



This is, however, a digression. I have asserted that there is a natural law of revenue, and although it is implied in the illustration I have just given—the taking of community values for community use—I wish to set it forth in another form, in a picture which might be entitled "Public revenue and how to get it for the public". I ignore for the moment franchise values, water powers, forests and mines, which are sources of natural revenue, and take what is called land<sup>[126]</sup>-value as the subject of this illustration. Here is a horizontal line which represents a stretch of land, let us say a prairie, at a point remote from settlement, with the tent of a squatter upon it.



The only value this land has is its inherent power of growth. It is good for crops, and will respond to labor, but this is not what we mean by land-value in economic discussion. Now, let us suppose that a population of 100,000 people suddenly arrives at

this spot, intending to establish a city. Two things simultaneously occur, viz. 1. There is a need for revenue, and 2. there is a rise of land-value. There is no exception to this law; it is as certain, I repeat, as the law of gravitation. Each lot in the proposed city has an opportunity value, and the aggregate of these values is a fund sufficient to supply the needed revenue.



It is as though the weight of the population transforms the settler's tent into a fountain of value, translatable into dollars in the form of land-rent. The revenue problem is solved by placing the public till under the fountain—or, in other words, the opportunity-value of each lot is taken (under forms of taxation) as the sole<sup>[127]</sup> revenue, all improvements being exempted. The cost of public service is only another term for the opportunity-value of the lots. This holds true in every community, large or small. The city has an ample revenue without any taxation whatever, properly so called. Each lot-holder merely "pays his footing"; the use he makes of his opportunity is his own affair. Here, then, we have a community established on the basis of the natural law of revenue; and it is only necessary for human society to be in harmony with natural law to enjoy justice and prosperity. Here is a city in which the community and the individual citizen enjoy their mutual rights; it is the condition which should prevail everywhere, and would, but for the selfish perversity of man-made laws.



Observe what might and probably would happen in this case. After the city has been flourishing, say ten years, along comes a sleek-looking stranger—possibly Mr. J. Rufus Wallingford—who displays a title-deed to the land on which the city has been built, and calls attention to the fact that the law provides that "the man who owns the land accordingly<sup>[128]</sup> owns all the value which comes to the land regardless of its source". The natural revenue becomes his private perquisite, and he interjects his private hat just above the public till. The whole fountain belongs to him henceforth; and he may

demand a cheque for all the community has collected in the past. Literally in any situation like this as things are, the owner of this title to the land could "get away with it". But if this community continued its policy of obtaining revenue only from land values, it could make no real difference to this supposition city, as Wallingford would simply take the place of the lot owners in supplying the public revenue. His would be the only name on the "tax" list, and what he collected in rent would be precisely the measure of what he would pay in "taxes"—the community value would still go where it belonged, into the public till. There would be a "rent" of another kind at the other end of his hat. As a monopolist, he would be effectually thwarted, and justice would be vindicated.



This process of vindicating justice is usually<sup>[129]</sup> described as the "taxation of land-values". I object to the phrase on two grounds. First, it is not taxation, as it does not take anything for the public to which a private citizen has a moral right. It is a case of the community simply taking its own. And second, the values in question are not "land" values. They do not attach to land. They attach to people, and for that reason justly belong to the public. They should be called people-values. To show the relation between land and land-values (which many suppose to be identical) allow me to make a little study of human nature here—a picture let us say of a "Dude".



It is alleged that a dude has not energy enough to cast a shadow, but this is a libel. He can, when he has a fair chance, and his shadow is quite an uncommon one, too. In this case let us suppose it falls on a hill in the back-ground; and let us suppose further that shadows were mercantile commodities, bought and sold on the stock exchange; and that this one was worth a considerable sum. Of course, the moment the shadow appeared we would hear from the old gentleman<sup>[130]</sup> who owned the hill. He would display his title

deed to the land and claim the value of the shadow now attaching to it, as by law provided. This is an allegory in which the Dude represents population, the hill land, and the shadow value. But it is not land-value, as becomes clear when the Dude moves on. It is not attached to the land, but to the living human element. That is manifest where there is movement of population. What we call land-value is the demand for opportunities, and bears the same relation to land as a shadow does. The relation might also be illustrated by the reflection in a mirror which is not attached to the mirror but to the living person whose presence and movements are reflected. When we speak of the value of a city lot, therefore, what is it we mean? Not the land itself, because an equally good piece of land of the same size could be bought in the country for a hundredth of the price. The value consists of the site, and that means its access to good streets, lights, schools, churches, theatres, etc., in short, public services. To have possession of that site is to be able to enjoy these things. The value of the lot is just its proportion of what these services cost. The vacant land dealer is not selling land, but public services, which are people-value.

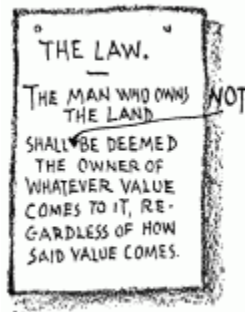
To put this same idea in other words is to say that every citizen should contribute to the public revenue in proportion to the public services he enjoys; and he does this only and exactly when he<sup>[131]</sup> renders up to the public till the annual value of his land, for that is the true and accurate register of the service he receives. He should pay the public for what the public does for him, not, as at present, for what he does for himself.



Payment for service is, in fact, the principle underlying all honest business, and it ought to be made the foundation of the system of obtaining public revenue. Compare the present method of obtaining revenue by all sorts of taxation with that by which the owner of an office building secures his revenue from the property. He simply charges his tenant a straight sum for the space occupied in accordance with its size and location. It is a business opportunity worth so much, and this the tenant is charged. What he makes out of the opportunity is his own concern. What do you think the owner of such a building would say to a crank like this, who would come in and propose that this simple business-like plan should be abolished, and a plan substituted under which the tenants should be taxed on their imports, exports, furniture, volume of business and an

infinity of other<sup>[132]</sup> things? That is, the national system of getting revenue suggested. He would probably telephone for the police—or the officials of the asylum.

Now, a community—city, county, province or Dominion—is nothing but an office building on the horizontal, with its spaces on the ground.



The natural law of revenue I have endeavored to set forth is superior to the artificial law made by legislators in every respect, but chief of all in that it respects and protects the right of property, both public and private. The prevailing system invades both. By confiscating private property through taxation of labor values it stands condemned before the ancient statute—"thou shalt not steal". It not only robs the private citizen of that which is justly his own, but it aids the monopolist in appropriating that which justly belongs to the community. And so it must continue to do, until we have secured the radical reform of our social system by the amendment of the existing law. And that amendment need be but a small one—not more than the insertion of the little word NOT—the land owner shall NOT be the value-owner also.

That little word makes all the difference between justice and monopoly; be<sup>[133]</sup>tween society as it might have been and society as it is.

It is because the law has down to the present given the owner of land the right to own also the value that may come to it through growth of population that I lament the ill-luck of poor Robinson Crusoe, in that he was shipwrecked on Juan Fernandez instead of Manhattan Island. Oh! what a difference it would have made to his heirs and assigns forever, by virtue of this Christian law of land-tenure.



He knew that the man who owns land  
Owns the value attaching thereto;  
And to pick out a good business stand,  
Was the thing you'd have thought he would do.

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Just suppose he'd shown real enterprise  
And had the disaster take place  
Let us say where the Battery now lies—  
Things would wear such a different face!  
On a height with a fine Jersey view  
He then could have taken his stand,  
And recited with eloquence true  
Those verses of Cowper's so grand—  
"I'm monarch of all I survey,  
My right there is none to dispute;  
From the center all 'round to the sea  
I am lord of the fowl and the brute!"  
Then when, in the course of the week,  
He saw on the seashore just there  
The print of a man's naked foot,  
He wouldn't have got such a scare.  
On the contrary, he would have danced  
A hilarious jig of delight,  
And the words of his poem he'd change  
To interpret the symbol aright—  
"A footprint? Why, what does it mean?  
It means population is coming!  
Soon thousands will crowd on the scene,  
And rent for the lots will be humming!

[135]

"I'm monarch of all I survey,  
Gee! I'll have the whole island surveyed;  
And to me and my heirs from to-day  
Shall the whole of the land-rent be paid!  
"I'm lord of the fowl and the brute,  
I'll be lord, too, of each human soul;  
No mortal shall here set his foot  
Without paying perpetual toll!  
"My conditions will not be severe,  
For my nature, I trust, is not stern;  
I will simply collect every year  
The big end of all that they earn!

"The law of this glorious land,  
This home of the brave and the free,  
Puts this boodle right into the hand  
Of the landlord—R. Crusoe, you see!  
"A vision of millions and fame,  
My wealth will grow faster and faster;  
I'll change this old Robinson name,  
And call myself Vanderbilt-Astor!"