

IMMIGRATION AND THE LAND QUESTION.

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I. THE RIGHT TO MIGRATE.

THE last two or three years have brought forth a flood of literature on the question of immigration. Very little attempt has been made to discover fundamental principles; restrictive nostrums have been freely recommended, each writer appearing to believe that the millennium only awaited the adoption of his panacea. It has seemed to me that these discussions have overlooked or ignored the very first and most vital principle. That principle is involved in the question, "Have men a right to migrate?" Is the right to move about from place to place on the surface of the earth a natural right that belongs to all men equally, or is it a privilege with which nature has endowed a few favored ones, leaving it to them to grant or withhold?

The mere statement of this question brings out its own answer. Whatever degree of freedom may justly be claimed for one must necessarily be conceded to all. There can be no freedom greater than equal freedom. Whatever right I claim for myself, that must I concede to my brother. Have you, my reader, a right to change your habitation from St. Paul to California? Most certainly. Then that same right you must accord to every other one of your fellow-men. Have you a right to expatriate yourself and become a citizen of England, China or Afghanistan? With equal emphasis you reply, "Of course I have." Then you must accord that right to every other person on earth. All rights must be equal. In short, each person must be free to choose for himself his place of abode; and so long as he encroacheth not on the equal freedom of his fellows, no one may deny him.

The favorite reply of the restrictionist is somewhat as follows: "Of course no one man may justly deny his fellows their equal right with himself to migrate from place to place; but all the people, through the regular channel of legislation, may make regulations and restrictions." If this is true, then the principle of equal freedom is a fallacy, and that part of our Declaration of Independence which asserts that all governments derive every just power from the consent of the governed is nothing but an iridescent dream.

No, the immortal Declaration is right. Governments can have no powers except such as rest originally and equally in each individual citizen. Consider, what is a just government? Simply an agent of the people, chosen by the people, to do certain things

for the people. What are these things that the people may delegate to their agent, the government? Only such things as each citizen would have a right to do for himself in the absence of government; and of these only such things as the citizens *choose* to delegate. You can't delegate to your agent a power you don't possess. Your right to interfere with other people's migrations is just nothing. No other citizen has any more right than you. Sixty-five million times nothing equals nothing. A creature can never have rights its creator does" not possess; so governments can never possess powers which do not inhere in each individual citizen before they come together to create their government.

I am aware that there are certain classes of socialists who claim that the powers of governments are limited only by the will of the majority; but such claims rest upon investigations so shallow, and are so plainly at variance with the principles of equal freedom upon which our democratic republic is founded, that they should be regarded as curiosities instead of being seriously considered.

It is also claimed that, because the members of a family may justly resent encroachments on the sacred precincts of the home, therefore the people of any country may with equal justice drive away peaceable immigrants. The cases are not parallel. The peaceable immigrant enters no man's home unbidden. He simply comes here to make a home of his own, in his own way, and this he has the same right to do as had the Pilgrim fathers who planted their habitations on Plymouth Rock. The only limitation that may justly be applied to the peaceable immigrant, is the same that applies to every other citizen—simply this: he must not encroach upon the equal freedom of his fellows.

True, our Congress attempts to enact laws to prevent people from coming to this country; but all such laws are simply tyrannical usurpations of power, without the slightest shadow of right behind them. Public sentiment may sustain them, just as it sustained the superstition of the divine right of kings to rule and rob the people; just as it sustained for centuries the laws for the burning of heretics; just as it sustains to-day all sorts of laws that interfere with the divine right of every man to free thought, free speech, free labor, free land and free trade; but in the very nature of things all such laws are void for want of authority — void because there is no power on earth that has any *right*, or ever can have any right, to enact them.

II. BENEFITS OF IMMIGRATION.

Having shown that no people can possibly have the *right* to prevent peaceable immigration, I now desire to show that the coming of others not only does no harm to those already here, but really benefits them.

Imagine yourself alone on an island; or, if you please, alone on a world. How poor, how weak, how insignificant you are! You must supply for yourself all your own wants. You must plow and sow and reap and thresh and grind and bake, before you can eat bread. Your clothing, in every part and in every detail, must be of your own make. Whatever shelter you have, you alone must construct. You have no one to aid you, no one with whom to divide the cares and the joys of life! How gladly would you welcome the distant sail; with what heart-throbs of hope would you watch its nearing; with what ecstasy of delight would you note the fact that an immigrant was coming! Even one would make you glad, but many would bring greater gladness. And how doubly joyous would you consider it, if, among the many strangers coming, you could but note the happy smile of some sweet maid of your former acquaintance!

Attempt to restrict immigration! No, 'twould be the last thought to rise within you. Think of the blessings those immigrants would bring. Now the subdivision of labor is possible. Now each can devote his energy to the production of such things as he knows most about, and then exchange with all the others. Now the joys of home and fireside cast about you their holy influences, and soon the patter of little feet reminds you that immigrants from out the great unknown are doubly blest in coming.

Stop immigration? Never! Each one of the ten or one hundred now occupying the island can enjoy many times more of the comforts and blessings of life than before they came together to cooperate among themselves. How anxious you all would be to open up communication with the outside world, that you might exchange the surplus products of your labor with men beyond the sea, and thus get such comforts and luxuries of life as on your own little island you could not produce. With what scorn and contempt would you look upon the person who should seriously suggest that you ought to build a row of custom houses around your island and fill them with politicians whose duty it should be to protect you from the evil effects of swapping goods when you wanted to!

Isn't it always true that ten men working together can produce far more than ten times as much as any one of them working alone? So, also, a thousand, under conditions of freedom, can produce far more than a thousand times as much as one. This principle is universal. The greater the number of the people, the more completely the labor is divided, each doing the work he knows best — provided only they are left free to exchange their surplus products — the greater the wealth of each and the more each can have to enjoy.

Some one may here suggest that if all were permitted to come freely, the island might get too full of people. Nonsense— before the island got too full the people would stop coming.

III. WHY RESTRICTION SEEMS NECESSARY.

Why, then, does restriction of immigration seem necessary? Why does the incoming of our cousins from over the water seem to do harm? Why does it in reality intensify the competition among the workmen, and make immigration seem a curse when in reality it ought to be a blessing?

These questions can all be answered in one word — monopoly. All the good things for which men labor and strive and think and plan, must of necessity be brought forth from the earth by the exertion of man. In the language of political economy, "Labor produces all wealth." But labor can produce not one single particle of wealth unless it can have land to work upon. The food we eat, the clothes we wear, the houses that shelter us, even our very bodies — all are derived from the earth; all are the result of labor applied to land. Without the earth to use, human life is impossible.

What sort of a welcome does the immigrant receive who comes to this boasted "land of the free," seeking a place where he can use his energy and skill for the betterment of himself and all those who were here before him? Is he permitted to use the earth to satisfy his needs? Yes, if he can pay the price monopoly has placed upon land. May he not travel from place to place in search of cheaper land, or that he may find an employer to hire him? Yes, if he can pay the price that law-favored highway monopolists charge for a ride. Can't he go afoot and thus escape excessive transportation charges? No, he will be arrested as a tramp and put in jail, his only consolation being that some of those who helped make the laws that caused him to become a tramp will have to pay taxes to support him while he is there. Suppose he *can* pay the price demanded for transportation and for land, is he allowed to keep and enjoy the products of his labor, that he may thus become a good and self-reliant citizen? No, the tax gatherer is bound by law to fine him for every good thing he does, in order that some land speculator may the more readily blackmail his fellow-men.

Suppose, by hard work, he overcomes all these unnatural obstacles that stupid laws have put in his way, and has a surplus of wheat or other product, is he permitted to exchange that surplus in order to get the things he needs for the maintenance and comfort of himself and family? Yes, but oh condition; if he exchange with his brothers who live outside the imaginary line that separates this "great free country" from the rest of the world, then he must give up from one fourth to three fourths of all he gets to a legalized robber called a customs collector before he may go home with the remainder. Or if he choose to exchange with some one on this side the line, he must pay the monopoly price that our tariff was designed to enable the home producer to extort. Suppose he submits to all these robberies and finally gets home with the fragment that remains, is he let alone to enjoy it in peace? Oh, no; the tax assessor comes around and fines him every year for having it.

What a "grand and glorious free country" this of ours is, to be sure! Is it any wonder that immigrants coming here compete with "our own laborers" for a chance to work? How could they do otherwise, when we shut away the earth from them and compel them to beg employment of the favored few upon whom our system confers the privilege of owning the planet on which we live!

This is just as true of those immigrants who come through the natural channel of birth, as of those who come from distant lands in ships; and to restrict or keep out one class is no more logical or just than to pass laws to prevent the coming of the other.

Why, then, do the citizens of foreign lands come here, and why do so many of them come in spite of all these evils that await them? Simply because they are compelled to suffer more evils where they are. But the tyranny of old world despotisms is no excuse for ours. Because in one country a man is robbed of ninety per cent of all he produces is no reason why in another he should thank God for the robbers who take only seventy-five.

Thus it appears that the problem of immigration does not stand alone. Freedom of migration is as clearly the right, of every human being as is freedom to breathe the air. Monopoly alone is the cause of the evil.

IV. THE REMEDY.

What, then, is the remedy? Again the answer comes clear and plain: Abolish monopoly and restore freedom. These evils have been brought about by laws that restrict and interfere with the rights of man. The remedy must come through the repeal of those laws and the restoration to man of his natural right to be free. Not more laws added, but many existing laws repealed, is the kind of legislation we now need. Our watchword must be "*More liberty.*"

We must erase from our statute books all laws that tax men in proportion to their industry. No man should be taxed more because he has made a piece of land useful, than another is taxed for holding an equally valuable piece of land idle.

The great iron highways of the country must cease to be the private property of such as the Goulds and the Vanderbilts, the Hills and the Huntingtons. They must be made *real free public* highways, and all must have equal rights to use them, just as they now use the lakes and rivers, the bays and oceans, the country roads and the city streets.

All existing laws that tend to currency monopoly must be repealed. The money of the country must not be made to favor either state or national banks, nor to give the

owners of mines a greater price for their products than they will command in the free markets of the world.

But most important of all and *first* of all, land monopoly must be destroyed. We must recognize again nature's only title to land — the title that rests upon possession and use; and the value of land — that value which is produced by the presence of population and the evolution of society — the value of land must be taken for public use; not allowed to swell the private fortunes of mere title holders.

Look over this fair America of ours to-day, and see how few and how scattering are its people. More than all the inhabitants of the United States could live in peace and comfort east of the Alleghany Mountains were it not for the curse of land monopoly. Less than half the land even in New York City is really occupied and used. More than half is only partially used or is held idle by speculators who expect to reap large profits from the increase of value which always comes with increase of population.

Why do men hold land idle? For no other reason than to pocket the difference between the yearly *value* which the public *gives* and the yearly *taxes* which the public *takes*.

How can land monopoly be abolished? By making the yearly *taxes* which the public *takes* equal to the yearly *value* which the public *gives*. When the public takes what it produces, it won't have to rob individuals of the product of their labor under the pretence of taxation. Adopt the single tax, and the vacant-lot industry is a thing of the past.

All laws that pretend to grant to corporations or individuals any special favors must be abolished.

All men must be restored to their rightful condition of freedom, and then let alone to work out each one his own career, unaided by government bounties or favors, unhindered by repressive or restrictive legislation.

Democratic government is possible only under conditions of equal freedom; and that equal freedom must not be the variety proposed by restrictionists and paternalists, where all are equally oppressed by a governing class, but that broad and genuine freedom, where each person has perfect liberty to do whatsoever best doth please himself, so long as he does not interfere with the equal freedom of his fellows.

All men must have equal rights to be on the earth, to move about on its surface, and to use its materials to satisfy their needs. Each one must be the owner of his own powers

and capacities. All that his labor of hand or brain can produce is his own; and he must never be compelled to yield to individual or state any part of the product.

The value of land, which is not in any sense a product of individual labor, properly belongs to the community that has produced it. When this value is put into the public treasury where it may meet all public requirements, taxes on labor will be unnecessary, and can be abolished.

This simple, practical change in our system of taxation on the one hand destroys land monopoly and restores to labor its natural right freely to use the earth; while on the other hand it takes the burden from labor's back and leaves it free from the crushing weight of indirect taxation.

Thus again we reach the same conclusion—that only in freedom for the individual man we shall find the cure for all our social evils; freedom to think, freedom to speak, freedom to act; freedom to use the earth to produce the things that are necessary to life, comfort and happiness; freedom, absolute freedom, to exchange the products of his labor with his fellow-men the wide world over, with never a custom house nor a collector to interfere with his trading; freedom to cooperate with his fellows in all things, and never to know that government exists, except when he pays for the value of the land he uses, or when he attempts to encroach upon the equal freedom of his fellows.

With freedom established and monopoly, especially land monopoly, destroyed, the problem of immigration is solved; its terrors have vanished. The innocent comer from over the sea is no longer an enemy to take our work away and reduce us to a meaner standard of living; but a friend who comes to help us, while we all rise to better conditions and heights of nobler manhood.