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THE ABOLITION OF POVERTY.  
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In a social organization based on justice there would be only one class of people requiring charitable support; that is, those who are physically or mentally incapable of providing for their own needs. In society, however, as organized at the present time, there is another class claiming the sympathy of the charitably disposed. This is the class of people who, while able and willing to provide for themselves, are prevented from doing so by statutory enactment.

Can poverty be abolished? The second type of poverty can be abolished as sure as God is the author of this universe, and that as soon as men are willing to follow the light of easily accessible truth. And, as to the first type of poverty, it can be reduced to an insignificant minimum. The remedy for the obliteration of the second and the reduction of the first is not sentiment, but truth; not charity, but justice. The problem of poverty is thought by many to be incapable of solution. This is a great mistake. Looked at in the rough, I admit it does seem formidable; but, when reduced to its true proportions, it is vastly simplified. You will all agree to the following concessions; and, by doing so, we cut the problem down to the comprehension of a school-boy.

(1) It will be readily conceded by every intelligent person in this audience that existing poverty is not attributable to the "niggardliness of nature," to use the expression of J. S. Mill. Malthusianism is a back number. This concession brings the problem out of chaos into cosmos.

(2) It will be granted that the poverty of to-day is not resultant from the inability of labor to produce wealth, provided it only is permitted to do so.

(3) It will be conceded that the poverty of to-day is not the result of a lack of industry on the part of those who are suffering. Labor is not refusing to go to work. It is clamoring, beseeching, praying God and man for an opportunity to work.

(4) It must also be conceded that, if the laboring classes as a whole got their rights in existing wealth, there would be little or no poverty among them; but there would be considerable poverty among millionaires, bankers, money-lenders, legislators, political economists, lawyers, and conventional ecclesiastics.

(5) In seeking for a solution of the problem of poverty, it must be conceded that all men have an equal right to life. Mere sentiment, unsupported by hard facts, must be set aside as irrelevant. We must follow the path of enlightened reason, of eternal truth, and of unflinching justice. This means that, when legal rights come into conflict with moral rights, the former must go.

You see now to what small proportions our problem is actually reduced. We have granted God's provision and man's ability. How to bring God's provision and man's ability together is our simple task. God's provision is in the land. How can this provision for man's material wants be made accessible to labor? The first obstacle we meet here is the existing system of land tenure which permits private property in land. This is the devil's Gibraltar. That this iniquitous system keeps God's children from his rich provision for them is a fact clear to every observer. Sometimes the legal owner of land sees fit to keep his land entirely out of use, holding it for speculative purposes. At other times he will allow labor the use of his land on condition that it give him a share of the product, as when the Duke of Hamilton in Scotland gets a royalty of thirty-five cents on every ton of coal mined on his estate, while labor only gets eighteen cents. This system of absolute exclusion and of conditional use, as the landlord may please, is in direct violation of the purpose of God and of the moral law which embodies that purpose. I want to propose to-night a system of land tenure which will make it impossible for any man to hold land out of use which society requires, and which will make it impossible for any man to charge his fellows for the privilege of access to natural opportunities. We claim that all this and much more would be accomplished by the simple act of taking land values from year to year for public uses. In other words, we propose to put economic rent in the public till, by taxing land values apart from improvements and remitting all other taxes. This system of taxation commends itself to every thinking man for the following reasons : —

(1) Because it provides a method of meeting the expenses of government which will not require one dollar to be taken from labor or capital. The present method of taxation not only takes all the expenses of government from labor and capital, but a great deal more besides. Canadian labor and capital, and especially labor, in order to provide the late government with a revenue of \$38,000,000, was obliged to pay into

the hands of monopolists \$60,000,000; and the burden will be very little lighter under the present government. Land value is not produced by labor, but by the organization of society and increase of population. It is highest where population is densest,— that is, in cities,— and lowest where population is thinnest,— that is, in the country. This would greatly reduce the taxes paid by farmers as users of land, while as laborers and capitalists they would not pay a dollar.

(2) By giving to each man the full product of his labor and putting land values in the public till, we would preserve the balance between production and consumption which is the condition of the normal stability of prices and wages, and would place each of these in its proper category. Here lies a distinction which the current political economy does not properly recognize, as it reduces labor to a marketable commodity. Right here lies the immediate cause of "hard times," and consequently of involuntary idleness and poverty. By letting rent go to landlords and then raising a revenue by indirect taxes, you strike two fatal blows at the consumptive power of the masses; and this reacts on production, curtailing it in every direction. If twenty-five per cent<sup>1</sup> of the product of labor is confiscated by government for revenue and other purposes, this means that the consumptive power of labor is going to be reduced twenty-five per cent.; that is, that we shall have overproduction. The masses would like to wipe out the surplus, and thus keep up the demand for fresh goods; but they have been robbed by the government of the only means they had of making their desire effective. Thus, owing to so-called overproduction, which is really under-consumption, manufacturers begin to compete for orders, with the result that there is a fall in prices; and on the heels of this comes a fall in wages, still further reducing the consumptive power of labor. Hard times become chronic, and poverty becomes prevalent. The cure is simple and infallible, the confiscation of rent. To neglect the restoration of the economic equilibrium by taxing rent to the full, and go on building tariff walls, bonusing railways, and subsidizing fast steamships, is simply to deceive the people and aggravate the disease.

(3) This method of raising a revenue conforms to all the requirements of the canons of taxation, while the present system violates every one of them.

(4) The remission of all taxes but that on land values would give far greater security of possession to the user of land than the present system. Under the present system, which professes to give private property and land, the farmers of Ontario are losing their farms. Under the system I propose it would be impossible for an industrious and intelligent man to lose possession of his land except through some calamity.

(5) This system of land tenure conditioned on the payment of rent into the public till is eminently just. This is the very heart of the whole problem, not only of economics, but of ethics. It is the impregnable stronghold of the new school of political economy. Let us not be sentimental here. Let us not be any longer bound by the fetters of traditionalism. Remember that to-day civilization is being weighed in the balances, and is found horribly wanting. To sentimentalize, to equivocate, or to delay is to invite destruction. We cannot afford to give any weight, if we would be scientific, to the plea of private property in land, which the law of God forbids. Let me here call your attention to a distinction which every man is supposed to make, but which, as a matter of fact, very few make. It is the distinction between legality and morality, between man's decree and God's decree, between that which is mutable and that which is immutable. We use the word "right" very loosely. A given act may be legally right, while it is morally wrong; or it may be morally right, when it is legally wrong. Private property in land illustrates this antagonism. Look at the facts in the light of this syllogism, and see if I am not right. All men have an equal right to life. All men derive their subsistence from land. Therefore, every man has an equal right to access to land. When you give a man private property in land, you give him the right to collect the unearned increment,—that is, the rent; and, when you do this, the equal right to life of the man who must use that land is infringed. And, when he is not allowed to produce a dollar's worth of wealth without paying some land-owner for the privilege, his freedom is gone, he is a slave. Free land is the condition of free men. The right of ownership in land is a legal right which violates an inalienable moral right, and he who denies this moral right is not a truly moral man. Such a man ignores the very soul of the moral law. You see we stand on a rock basis of eternal truth, which neither criticism nor legislation can ever destroy; and on that basis we would build the social structure broad and high, while orthodox political economy and orthodox theology insist, to their own shame, that the social structure shall be built on the sands of mere conventionalism. Well, depend upon it, the winds of cyclonic revolution are beginning to blow, the fountains of the great deep are beginning to break up, and the windows of heaven are opening; and, where the destructive powers of the infuriated Demos will rest, God only knows. I am not surer of anything in existence than I am of the ethical soundness and immutability of the principle which requires the exclusive taxation of land values for public uses.

Let us now come more distinctly to the economic side of the problem. How would the taxation of land values affect the production and distribution of wealth? I reply, Beneficently. It would open the way for greatly increased production; and, inasmuch

as neither the capitalists nor the government could appropriate or confiscate the product of labor, and as there would no longer be any landlord to appropriate it, there would result an equitable distribution of wealth, so that supply and demand would always balance, thus preserving the equilibrium of economic forces and conditioning the free play of moral and religious forces.

(1) The taking of land values for public uses would exterminate thousands upon thousands of economic and social parasites.

(2) It would throw open to use millions of acres of land now held out of use for purposes of speculation or which are only partially used at the present time. The effect of this on production is quite apparent.

(3) It would raise both prices and wages. The normal tendency is for prices to fall and wages to rise relatively, but under existing conditions the laws of nature are not allowed to operate.

(4) It would break up inequalities in wealth and social position which are ruinous to the organic unity of the social body. Why should thirty-one thousand people own more than one-half the wealth of the United States? Why should ten per cent, of the people of Great Britain get more of the wealth annually produced than the other ninety per cent.?

(5) It would simplify government, reduce its cost, increase its efficiency, and emancipate it from the galling shackles of the money power. Every one of these benefits would contribute to the abolition of involuntary poverty.

In conclusion, how would the taking of land values for public uses affect those who are in poverty because of physical inability? It would so affect this class as to reduce their number, both absolutely and relatively, in a few years to an insignificant minimum. In this connection let us remember that we are not to count simply on the economic advantages to be derived from the system, but on the assertion of that principle of eternal right which lies behind it, and to which the system gives potential and actual expression. Thus, while considering the beneficent effect of the principle on the production and distribution of wealth, we must not overlook the extent to which it would regenerate the morals of society and rejuvenate the dead theology of the churches. It is particularly for the latter reasons that I am a single taxer. The following points in connection with the abolition of poverty among the physically

incapable are worthy of attention : —

(1) Thousands of people who are now dependent on public charity because of inability to work would not have been so dependent, had they not in the past been overworked and underfed, and compelled to live in unsanitary conditions which would ruin the health of the strongest. These causes of physical break-down being removed, the consequent poverty will disappear.

(2) If many of those who are now physically incapable and dependent had received their dues, they might now have enough to keep them in tolerable comfort the rest of their days.

(3) Under the improved conditions of society resulting from the adoption of the system we propose, the moral tone of the masses would be so elevated, and Christianity rendered so much more effective, that the people would become more industrious as a whole, more cleanly in their habits, more intelligent, and consequently more healthful in body and soul, thus warding off the danger of premature physical break-down.

(4) With the economic and moral improvement of society the relatives of the physically incapable would not only be more able, but more desirous, of attending to the needs of their loved ones in their homes or by paying for it in public institutions, thus still further lessening the number dependent on public charity.

(5) The resultant development of the altruistic spirit would make it a matter of public pleasure for society to interest itself in the welfare of the few unfortunate cases that might occur. A system which can present such strong economic and moral claims as the above is surely deserving of the support of every right-thinking man. What will you do with it?