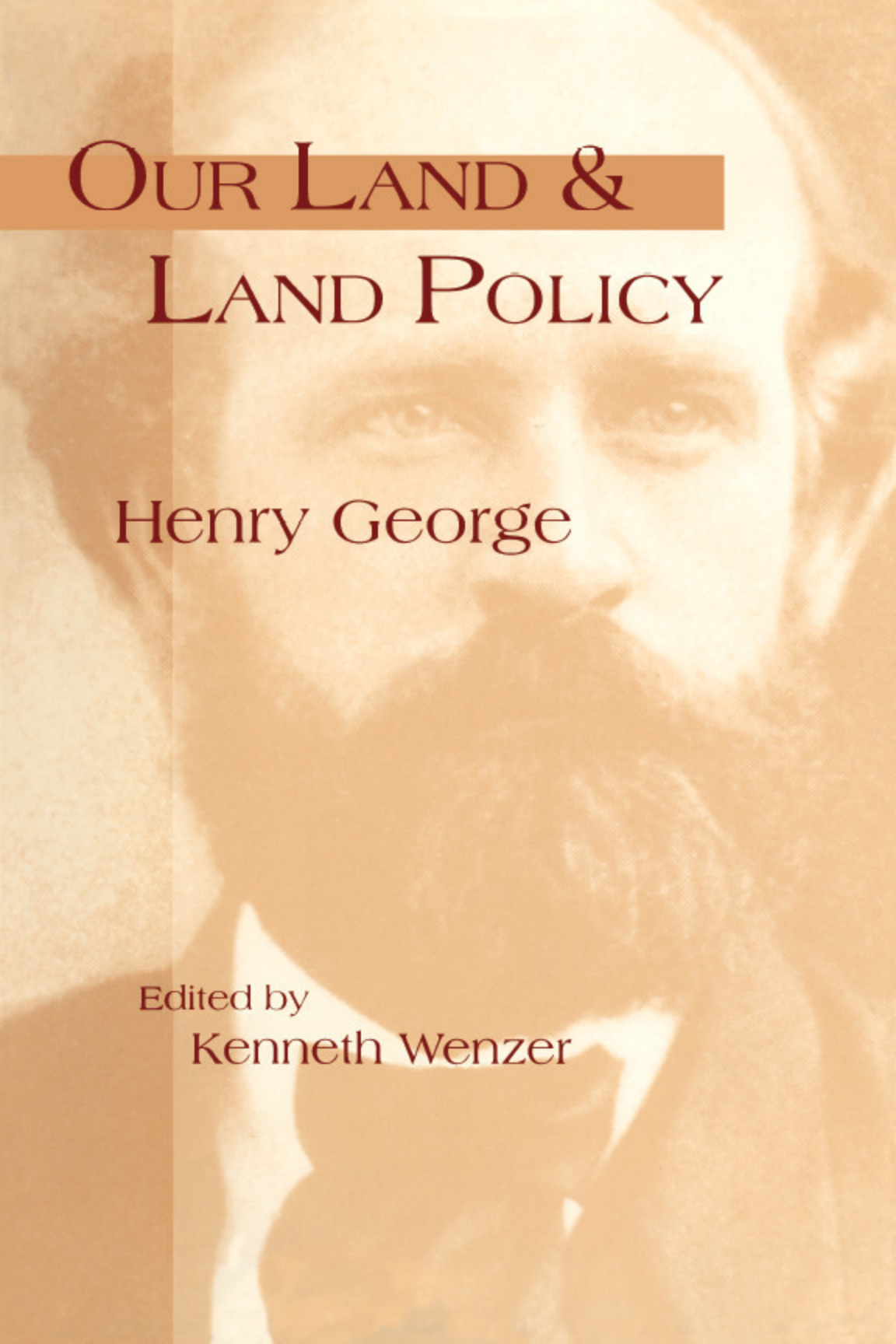
Our Land & Land Policy



Henry George

Edited by
Kenneth Wenzer

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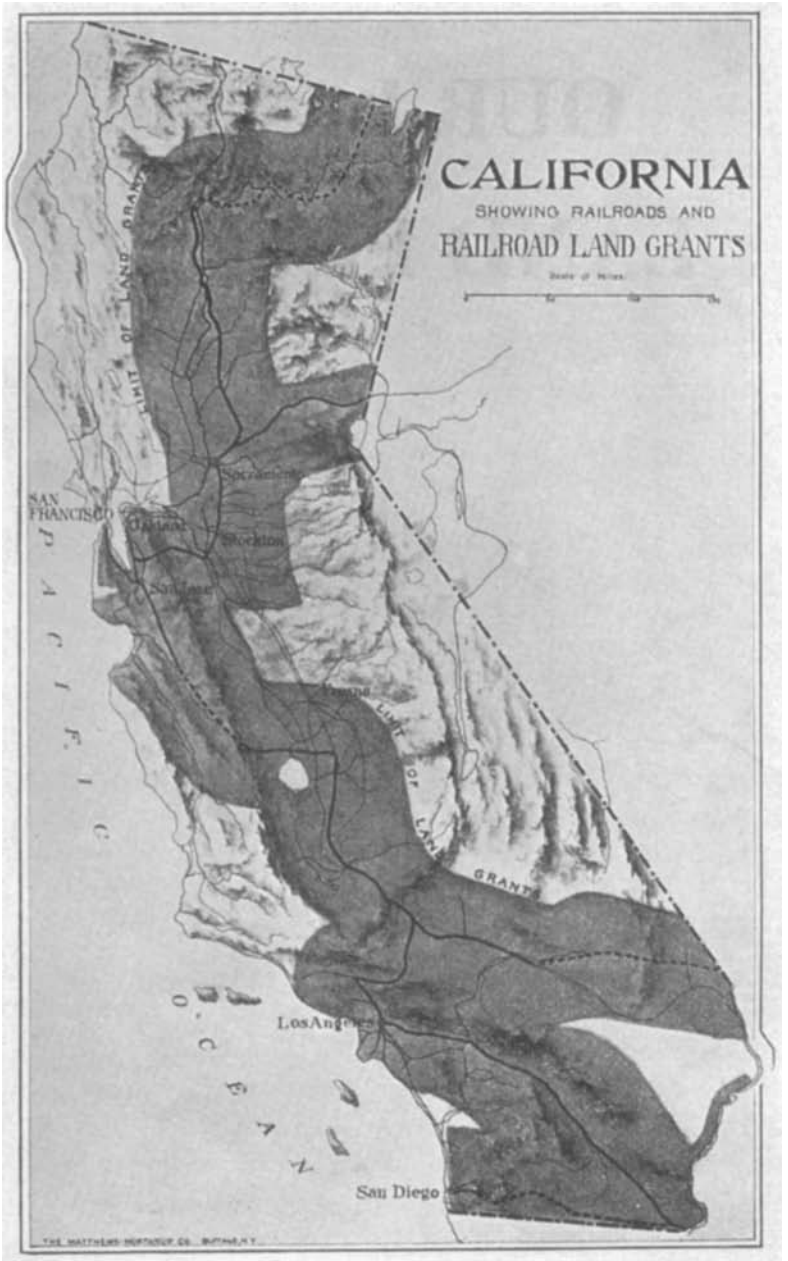
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GRANT

OUR LAND
AND
LAND POLICY

SPEECHES, LECTURES, AND MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS

By

Henry George

Edited by Kenneth C. Wenzer

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For

Evan and Jada

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Prefatory Note

This volume is made up of selections from the miscellaneous written and spoken utterances of Henry George not otherwise appearing in book form. It does not purport to contain all of this class of his productions. To make such a publication would require several volumes like this. The present volume is intended to contain only such speeches, lectures, sermons, essays and other writings as serve to exhibit Mr. George's varied powers of tongue and pen and set forth in many of its phases his philosophy of the natural order.

The most important matter in this collection is that with which it opens–"Our Land and Land Policy"–given to the public for the first time since its original limited publication in 1871, when its author was only locally known in San Francisco as a newspaper writer. It engaged, with other work, four months in the writing, and was Mr. George's first attempt to set forth the essentials of his philosophy. Of it he said long afterwards: "Something like a thousand copies were sold, but I saw that to command attention the work must be done more thoroughly." The work was done more thoroughly in "Progress and Poverty" eight years later. To that celebrated book "Our Land and Land Policy" bears the relation of acorn to oak. Mr. George towards the end of his life contemplated republishing the little work, believing that it might interest many whom the larger book would not at first reach. Death intervened between the plan and its carrying out. Mr. George thought of making such changes in "Our Land and Land Policy" as in his opinion would fit it more nearly to the present times, but as his was the only hand that could properly do this, it is here presented precisely as he published it in 1871.

Henry George, Jr.
New York, December, 1900.

Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy and Henry George, Jr. at Yasnaya Polyana on June 5, 1909. Courtesy of Michael Curtis (Director, Henry George School, Philadelphia extension). Photography by David Wolfson, Tokoma Park, Md.

PREFACE

1999 Edition

The untimely death of Henry George shocked his family. Correspondence from all corners of the globe expressed not only the predictable grief and commiseration, but also evinced a strong determination to continue the struggle for social justice by breaking up land and corporate monopolies. These monopolies strangled the better instincts of people, denied them opportunity for an equality ordained by natural laws, and mocked democracy. Henry George, Jr. (1862–1916), became his father's heir-apparent to the single-tax cause. Working under the strains of a personal loss and cherishing the memory of a loving parent, he carried on the fight, in part, by publishing his father's writings. The unfinished *The Science of Political Economy* of 1898 was the son's first tribute. The second was the biography *Henry George* two years later.

The third is this collection of essays and speeches collectively titled *Our Land and Land Policy* after its first piece. It was gathered together three years after his father's death and initially made its appearance in 1901, and then as part of George's collected works by Doubleday Page and Company in the first decade of the twentieth century. It has precipitously evaporated into virtual nonexistence: volumes are indeed a rare commodity.

The material in this book nearly spans the elder George's writing career and adds quite nicely to his published works extant. The speeches and articles merit consideration, for they reflect different aspects of this man's thinking for over two decades. *Our Land and Land Policy* was first put out in 1871 by White and Bauer of San Francisco. It should be carefully read, for it contains George's first known mention of what has come down as the single tax.[1] It is also his initial broadside against land monopolization and speculation as the sources of America's evils. *Our Land and Land Policy* is therefore a historically important document. At the time of the writing of this book, George was an apprentice economist. At this stage he accepted private property in land (in *Progress and Poverty* it is regarded as a common heritage) and taxes on luxury items. This first major endeavor bespeaks

of an understanding of Nature, a desire for the betterment of people, and a concern for future generations. It is the fruit of "one of those experiences that make those who have had them feel thereafter that they can vaguely appreciate what mystics and poets have called the 'ecstatic vision.'"[2] George would remember that after a long horse ride, he stopped for a breath and had

> asked a passing teamster, for want of something better to say, what land was worth there. He pointed to some cows grazing off so far that they looked like mice and said: "I don't know exactly, but there is a man over there who will sell some land for a thousand dollars an acre." Like a flash it came upon me that here was the reason of advancing poverty with advancing wealth. With the growth of population, land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege. I turned back, amidst quiet thought, to the perception that then came to me and has been with me ever since.[3]

The younger George, describing this incident thirty years later, wrote in his own words:

> Yet there have arisen those in the history of the world who dreamed of a reign of justice and of the prolonged, if not indeed continuous life of the community. Such a dreamer was this Californian–this small, erect young man; with full, sandy beard; fresh, alert face; shining blue eyes; who, careless of dress, and wrapped in thought, rode a mustang pony about San Francisco. In the streets of the great Eastern city [New York] he had seen the want and suffering that accompany civilization. It had made him who came "from the open West sick at heart." He knew nothing of the schools, but this that he saw he could not believe was the natural order. What was that order? He vowed that he would find it. And afterwards as he rode in the Oakland foothills came the flash-like revelation–the monopoly of the land, the locking up of the storehouse of nature! There was the seat of the evil. He asked no one if he was right: he *knew* he was right. . . . He did not need to go to books or to consult the sages. There the thing lay plainly to view for any who would see.[4]

The son's reprinting of this first lengthy essay and the ten others that span the years 1871 to 1894 had given him the mandate of preserving his father's writing without alteration. The new edition presented here

has continued this tradition. The notation by the two Georges appears at the end of each selection, and annotation for the present edition has been included at the end of the book.

No historian works in isolation, and a number of colleagues and close friends have been supportive. At the Henry George Foundation of America: Sharon Feinman. At the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation: Ted Gwartney, Nan Braman, Sonny Rivera, and Mark Sullivan. Besides their fine help, a timely grant from this organization enabled the completion of this work. Funding from the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy has also been of great assistance and so has Joan Youngman of this institution. Both Annette Tanner and Martha Bates of Michigan State University Press have been congenial coworkers. At McKeldin Library (University of Maryland, College Park): the two indispensable librarians Lily Griner and Patricia Heron. Dr. Thomas West of the history department of the Catholic University of America and Lorin Evans of Washington Apple Pi have also been helpful. My family, Oliver and Raisonique (my two cats), and Clio (my dog) cannot be done justice in type for their constant presence and love.

Neither can adequate words be expressed for the unceasing activity of Henry George, Jr. In June 1909 he set out for the Old World. A major object of his visit was to meet the greatest disciple of his father, Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy, the famed Russian novelist. While on a train headed west across Russia the younger George was surprised to learn that soon after he sent a telegram to Tolstoy expressing his wish to see him, the news had flashed through every car and everyone started to treat him with deference.[5] A simple response to a request for a visit, sent by wire to his beloved teacher's son, reads: "I will be very glad to see you, I am waiting."[6] So glad was Tolstoy at this prospect that very day he penned an article titled "Concerning the Arrival of Henry George's Son" which appeared in Russian newspapers. On June 5 the younger George did spend a memorable day at Yasnaya Polyana. His article, "Tolstoy in the Twilight" recalls the visit.[7] Tolstoy

> sat there in the chair, age seemed to have placed its hand heavily upon him; yet he appeared not so feeble as delicate. But the eyes revealed the keen, buoyant, spirit within. It was a life joyously spending itself to the very end, undaunted by the approach of death.
>
> Before he spoke, Tolstoy gave me a deliberate, searching gaze, mixed with a peculiarly kind expression; and then, as if not displeased, offered a

very cordial and personal welcome, during which I noticed my father's portrait holding a post of honour on the wall.

"Your father was my friend," he said with a singular sweetness and simplicity. . . .

I said I had heard that there was another book under way. Did it deal with political economy?

"No," he answered; "this is not on political economy. It treats of moral questions, which your father put first."

This led him to refer to an article on my father's teachings, for which my visit had served as text and which he had just sent off to a St. Petersburg newspaper. "Perhaps the paper will fear to print it, for we have little freedom here, and there is little discussion. But if that paper will not print it, then I hope to get it into another."

He handed me a copy of the article. It was in the Slavonic language [Russian]. When translated, I found the following passages which throw a strong light upon social, governmental, and revolutionary conditions in Russia today, as well as showing the vigour and hope of this wonderful old man's mind:

[I have just received a telegram from the son of Henry George expressing a desire to visit me. The thought of meeting the son of one of the most remarkable men of the 19th century keenly reminded me of everything done by him. But also of the stagnation which exists, not only in our Russian government but in every government of the so-called civilised world, in regard to the radical solution of all economic questions and which was already set forth so many years ago with such irresistible clearness and conviction by that great man.]

The land question revolves around the deliverance of mankind from slavery produced by its private ownership, which to my mind, is now in the same situation in which the questions of serfdom in Russia and slavery in America were in the days of my youth. The difference is only that while the injustice of private landownership is quite as flagrant as that of slave ownership, it is much more widely and deeply connected with all human relations. It extends to all parts of the world (slavery existed only in America and Russia) and is much more tormenting to the land slave than personal slavery. How strange, one might say how ridiculous, were they not so cruel, and did they not involve the suffering of the majority of the toiling masses, are those attempts at the reconstruction of society proposed and undertaken by the two inimical camps–the state and revolutionary.[8] Both do so through all kinds of measures, with the exception of that one which alone

can destroy that crying injustice from which the overwhelming majority of the people suffer, which when driven inwards is still more dangerous than when it outwardly appears. All these efforts for the solution of political questions by new enactments without the destruction of private landownership, reminds one of the splendid comparison by Henry George, of all such enactments to the action of the fool, who having placed the whole of the burden on one of the two baskets that hung upon the donkey's back, filled the other with an equal weight of stones. . . .

I rejoice at the thought that, no matter how far may be the governmental and revolutionary workers from the reasonable solution of the land question, it nevertheless will be (and very soon) solved especially in Russia. It will not be done by those strange, groundless, arbitrary, unfeasible and, above all, unjust theories of expropriation, and the still more foolish state measures for the destruction of village communes and the establishment of small landownerships, that is, the strengthening and confirming of that system against which the struggle is to be directed.[9] But it will and must be solved in one way alone–by the recognition of the equal right of every man to live upon and be nourished by the land on which he was born–that same principle which is so invincibly proved by all the teachings of Henry George. I think thus, because the thought of the equal right of all men to the soil, notwithstanding all the efforts of "educated" people to drive that thought by all kinds of schemes of expropriation and the destruction of the village communes from the minds of the Russian people, nevertheless lives in the minds of the Russian people of today, and sooner or later–and I believe sooner–will be fully realised. . . .

In connection with this unqualified espousal of what he was pleased to call the "teachings of Henry George," my host directed that the translations of the George books into the Slavonic tongue be brought to him. They proved to be all of the principal books except "The Open Letter to the Pope" (obviously inappropriate for Russia where the Greek Church holds sway),[10] and the unfinished "Science of Political Economy." He also showed me a large number of the translated pamphlets and lectures–all in cheap form for popular circulation. The translator and populariser of the works is his intimate friend and neighbour, Sergei D. Nikolaev, who, he said, would come to the house in the evening.[11]

Tolstoy talked with the utmost fervour and enthusiasm of the truth of these books as if the matter was impersonal to me, and he suddenly tossed the rug off his feet and got out of his chair to go over to a table and write his name in some of the copies. . . .

While we stood there in his workroom I asked him for a portrait of himself, with his autograph. He immediately produced a picture from a cupboard, and sat down at a table to write on it.

"Would it be good English to say, 'With best love?'" he asked.

"It would be the English that honours most," I replied.

"I loved your father," he rejoined simply. And then, after a pause, during which he wrote his name on the picture, he said: "They arrest men here in Russia for circulating my books. I have written them asking why they arrest such men, who are blameless. Why not arrest the man who wrote the books? But they did not reply, and they do not arrest me."

Then he said, rising: "If you will not stay and sleep with us, I must urge you to go at once to catch your train."

And at the head of the stairway he stopped and took my hand, saying simply, "This is the last time I shall meet you. I shall see your father soon. Is there any commission you would have me take to him?"

For a moment I was lost in wonder at his meaning. But his eyes were quietly waiting for an answer.

"Tell him the work is going on," I replied.

Our Land and Land Policy

I. The Lands of the United States

Extent of the Public Domain

According to the latest report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, the public domain not yet disposed of amounted on the 30th of June, 1870, to 1,387,732,209 acres.[1]

These figures are truly enormous, and paraded as they always are whenever land enough for a small empire is asked for by some new railroad company, or it is proposed to vote away a few million acres to encourage steamship building, it is no wonder that they have a dazzling effect, and that our public lands should really seem "practically inexhaustible." For this vast area is more than eleven times as large as the great State of California; more than six times as large as the united area of the thirteen original States; three times as large as all Europe outside of Russia. Thirteen hundred and eighty-seven millions of acres! Room for thirteen million good-sized American farms; for two hundred million such farms as the peasants of France and Belgium consider themselves rich to own; or for four hundred million such tracts as constituted the patrimony of an ancient Roman! Yet when we come to look closely at the homestead possibilities expressed by these figures, their grandeur begins to melt away. In the first place, in these 1,387,732,209 acres are included the lands which have been granted, but not yet patented, to railroad and other corporations, which, counting the grants made at the last session, amount to about 200,000,000 acres in round numbers; in the next place, we must deduct the 369,000,000 acres of Alaska, for in all human probability it will be some hundreds if not some thousands of years before that Territory will be of much avail for agricultural purposes; in the third place, we must deduct the water surface of all the land States and Territories (exclusive of Alaska), which, taking as a basis the 5,000,000 acres of water surface contained in California, cannot be less than 80,000,000 acres, and probably largely exceeds that amount. Still

further, we must deduct the amount which will be given under existing laws to the States yet to be erected, and which has been granted, or reserved for other purposes, which in the aggregate cannot fall short of 100,000,000 acres; leaving a net area of 650,000,000 acres–less than half the gross amount of public land as given by the Commissioner.

When we come to consider what this land is, the magnificence of our first conception is subject to still further curtailment. For it includes that portion of the United States which is of the least value for agricultural purposes. It includes the three greatest mountain chains of the continent, the dry elevated plains of the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains and the arid alkali-cursed stretches of the great interior basin; and it includes, too, a great deal of land in the older land States which has been passed by the settler as worthless. Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, and Arizona, though having an abundance of natural wealth of another kind, probably contain less good land in proportion to their area than any other States or Territories of the Union, excepting Alaska.[2] They contain numerous valleys which with irrigation will produce heavy crops, and vast areas of good grazing lands which will make this section the great stock range of the Union; but the proportion of available agricultural land which they contain is very small.

Taking everything into consideration, and remembering that by the necessities of their construction the railroads follow the water courses and pass through the lowest valleys, and therefore get the best land, and that it is fair to presume that other grants also take the best, it is not too high an estimate to assume that, out of the 650,000,000 acres which we have seen are left to the United States, there are at least 200,000,000 acres which for agricultural or even for grazing purposes are absolutely worthless, and which if ever reclaimed will not be reclaimed until the pressure of population upon our lands is greater than is the present pressure of population upon the lands of Great Britain.

And, thus, the 1,387,732,209 acres which make such a showing in the Land Office Reports come down in round numbers to but 450,000,000 acres out of which farms can be carved, and even of this a great proportion consists of land which can be cultivated only by means of irrigation, and of land which is only useful for grazing.

This estimate is a high one. Mr. E. T. Peters, of the Statistical Bureau, estimates the absolutely worthless land at 241,000,000 acres.[3] Senator Stewart, in a recent speech, puts the land fit for homes at one third of

the whole–332,000,000 acres by his figuring, as he makes no deductions except for Alaska and the Texas Pacific grant. Assuming his proportion to be correct, and admitting that the railroads, etc., take their proportion of the bad as well as of the good land, we would have, after making the proper deductions, but 216,000,000 acres of arable land yet left to the United States.

But taking it at 450,000,000 acres, our present population is in round numbers 40,000,000, and thus our "limitless domain," of which Congressmen talk so much when about to vote a few million acres of it away, after all amounts to but twelve acres per head of our present population.

OUR COMING POPULATION

But let us look at those who are coming. The amount of our public land is but one factor; the number of those for whose use it will be needed is the other. Our population, as shown by the census of last year, is 38,307,399. In 1860 it was 31,443,321, giving an increase for the decade of 6,864,078, or of a fraction less than twenty-two per cent. Previous to this, each decade had shown a steady increase at the rate of thirty-five per cent., and this may be considered the rate of our normal growth. The war, with its losses and burdens, and the political, financial and industrial perturbations to which it gave rise, checked our growth during the last decade, but in that on which we have now entered, there is little doubt that the growth of the nation will resume its normal rate, to go on without retardation, unless by some such disturbing influence as that of our great Civil War, until the pressure of population begins to approximate to the pressure of population in the older countries.

Taking, then, this normal rate as the basis of our calculation, let us see what the increase of our population for the next fifty years will be:

Our population will be in:	An increase in that decade of:
1880 51,714,989	 13,407,590
1890 69,815,235	 18,100,246
1900 94,250,567	 24,435,332
1910 127,238,267	 32,987,700
1920 171,771,610	 44,533,593