

The Wisdom of Henry George

EXCERPTS FROM SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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"Progress and Poverty," "A Perplexed Philosopher,"
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There is growing unrest and bitterness among the masses, whatever be the form of government, a blind groping for escape from conditions becoming intolerable. To attribute all this to the teaching of demagogues is like attributing the fever to the quickened pulse. It is the new wine beginning to ferment in old bottles.

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Industrial changes imply social changes and necessitate political changes. Progressive societies outgrow institutions as children outgrow clothes.

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And that the rapid changes now going on are bringing up problems that demand most earnest attention may be seen on every hand. Symptoms of danger, premonitions of violence, are appearing all over the civilized world. Creeds are dying, beliefs are changing; the old forces of conservatism are melting away.

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To adjust our institutions to growing needs and changing conditions is the task which devolves upon us. Prudence, patriotism, human sympathy, and religious sentiment, alike call upon us to undertake it. There is danger in reckless change; but greater danger in blind conservatism. The problems beginning to confront us are grave—so grave that there is fear they may not be solved in time to prevent great catastrophes. But their gravity comes from indisposition to recognize frankly and grapple boldly

with them. These dangers, which menace not one country alone, but modern civilization itself, do but show that a higher civilization is struggling to be born—that the needs and the aspirations of men have outgrown conditions and institutions that before sufficed.

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The evils that begin to appear spring from the fact that the application of intelligence to social affairs has not kept pace with the application of intelligence to individual needs and material ends. Natural science strides forward, but political science lags.

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The progress of civilization requires that more and more intelligence be devoted to social affairs, and this not the intelligence of the few, but that of the many. We cannot safely leave politics to politicians, or political economy to college professors. The people themselves must think, because the people alone can act.

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He who observes the law and the proprieties, and cares for his family, yet takes no interest in the general weal, and gives no thought to those who are trodden under foot, save now and then to bestow alms, is not a true Christian. Nor is he a good citizen. The duty of the citizen is more and harder than this.

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Of this, at least, we may be certain: the rapidity of our develop-

ment brings dangers that can be guarded against only by alert intelligence and earnest patriotism.

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The freedom to earn, without fear or favor, a comfortable living, ought to go with the freedom to vote. Thus alone can a sound basis for republican institutions be secured. How can a man be said to have a country where he has no right to a square inch of soil; where he has nothing but his hands, and, urged by starvation, must bid against his fellows for the privilege of using them?

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There is a lack of that intelligent interest necessary to adapt political organization to changing conditions. The popular idea of reform seems to be merely a change of men or a change of parties, not a change of system. Political children, we attribute to bad men or wicked parties what really springs from deep general causes.

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All this shows want of grasp and timidity of thought. It is not by accident that government grows corrupt and passes out of the hands of the people. If we would really make and continue this a government of the people, for the people and by the people, we must give to our politics earnest attention; we must be prepared to review our opinions, to give up old ideas and to accept new ones. We must abandon prejudice, and make our reckoning with free minds. The sailor, who, no matter how the wind might change, should persist in keeping his vessel under the same sail and on the same tack, would never reach his haven.

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In whatever lies beyond common experience we assume the beliefs of those about us, and it is only the

strongest intellects that can in a little raise themselves above the accepted opinions of their times.

No theory is too false, no fable too absurd, no superstition too degrading for acceptance when it has become embedded in common belief. Men will submit themselves to tortures and to death, mothers will immolate their children, at the bidding of beliefs they thus accept. What more unnatural than polygamy? Yet see how long and how widely polygamy has existed! *

In this tendency to accept what we find, to believe what we are told, is at once good and evil. It is this which makes social advance possible; it is this which makes it so slow and painful.

It is thus that tyranny is maintained and superstition perpetuated. Polygamy is unnatural. Obvious facts of universal experience prove this. The uniform proportion in which the sexes are brought into the world; the exclusiveness of the feeling with which in healthy conditions they attract each other; the necessities imposed by the slow growth and development of children, point to the union of one man with one woman as the intent of Nature. Yet, although it is repugnant to the most obvious facts and to the strongest instincts, polygamy seems a perfectly natural thing to those educated in a society where it has become an accepted institution, and it is only by long effort and much struggling that this idea can be eradicated. So with slavery. Even to such minds as those of Plato and Aristotle, to own a man seemed as natural as to own a horse. Even this "land of liberty," how long has it been since those who denied the right of property in human flesh

* [Polygamy was outlawed in 1890; 7 years after this was written.]

and blood were denounced as "communists," as "infidels," as "incendiaries," bent on uprooting social order and destroying all property rights? So with monarchy, so with aristocracy, so with many other things as unnatural that are still unquestionably accepted. Can anything be more unnatural—that is to say, more repugnant to right reason and to the facts and laws of nature—than that those who work least should get most of the things that work produces?

But mental habits which made this state of things seem natural are breaking up; superstitions which prevented its being questioned are melting away.

All over the world the masses of men are becoming more and more dissatisfied with conditions under which their fathers would have been contented. It is in vain that they are told that their situation has been much improved; it is in vain that it is pointed out to them that comforts, amusements, opportunities, are within their reach that their fathers would not have dreamed of. The having got so much, only leads them to ask why they should not have more. Desire grows by what it feeds on. Man is not like the ox. He has no fixed standard of satisfaction. To arouse his ambition, to educate him to new wants, is as certain to make him discontented with his lot as to make that lot harder. We resign ourselves to what we think cannot be bettered; but when we realize that improvement is possible, then we become restive.

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A large class of people, including many professed public teachers, are constantly talking as though energy, industry and economy were alone necessary to business success—are constantly pointing to the

fact that men who began with nothing are now rich, as proof that any one can begin with nothing and get rich.

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When a new country is rapidly settling, those who come while land is cheap and industry and trade are in process of organization have opportunities that those who start from the same plane when land has become valuable and society has formed cannot have.

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The comfortable theory that it is in the nature of things that some should be poor and some should be rich, and that the gross and constantly increasing inequalities in the distribution of wealth imply no fault in our institutions, pervades our literature, and is taught in the press, in the church, in school and in college.

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An acquaintance of mine died in San Francisco recently, leaving \$4,000,000, which will go to heirs to be looked up in England. I have known many men more industrious, more skillful, more temperate than he—men who did not leave a cent. This man did not get his wealth by his industry, skill or temperance. He no more produced it than did those lucky relations in England who may now do nothing for the rest of their lives. He became rich by getting hold of a piece of land in the early days, which, as San Francisco grew, became very valuable. His wealth represented not what he had earned, but what the monopoly of this bit of the earth's surface enabled him to appropriate of the earnings of others.

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The great fortune of the Duke of Westminster, the richest of the rich men of England, is purely the result

of appropriation. It does not spring from the earnings of the present Duke of Westminster or any of his ancestors. An English king, long since dead, gave to an ancestor of the present Duke of Westminster a piece of land over which the city of London has now extended—that is to say, he gave him the privilege, still recognized by the stupid English people, which enables the present duke to appropriate so much of the earnings of so many thousands of the present generation of Englishmen.

Or, turning again to the United States, take the great fortune of the Astors. It represents for the most part a similar appropriation of the earnings of others, as does the income of the Duke of Westminster and other English landlords. The first Astor made an arrangement with certain people living in his time by virtue of which his children are now allowed to tax other people's children—to demand a very large part of their earnings from many thousands of the present population of New York. Its main element is not production or saving. No human being can produce land or lay up land. If the Astors had remained in Germany, or if there had never been any Astors, the land of Manhattan Island would have been here all the same.

Consider the important part in building up fortunes which the increase of land values has had, and is having, in the United States. When land increases in value it does not mean that its holder has added to the general wealth. The holder may never have seen the land or done aught to improve it. He may, and often does, live in a distant city or in another country. Increase of land values simply means that the holders, by virtue of their ap-

propriation of something that existed before man was, have the power of taking a larger share of the wealth produced by other people's labor.

I am not denouncing the rich, nor seeking, by speaking of these things, to excite envy and hatred; but if we would get a clear understanding of social problems, we must recognize the fact that it is due to advantages which we give one man over another, to methods of extortion sanctioned by law and by public opinion, that some men are enabled to get so enormously rich while others remain so miserably poor. If we look around us and note the elements of monopoly, extortion and spoliation which go to the building up of all, or nearly all, fortunes, we see on the one hand how disingenuous are those who preach to us that there is nothing wrong in social relations and that inequalities in the distribution of wealth spring from the inequalities of human nature; and on the other hand, we see how wild are those who talk as though capital were a public enemy, and propose plans for arbitrarily restricting the acquisition of wealth. Capital is a good; the capitalist is a helper, if he is not also a monopolist. We can safely let any one get as rich as he can if he will not despoil others in doing so.

There are deep wrongs in the present constitution of society, but they are not wrongs inherent in the constitution of man nor in those social laws which are as truly the laws of the Creator as are the laws of the physical universe. They are wrongs resulting from bad adjustments which it is within our power to amend. The ideal social state is not that in which each gets an equal amount of wealth, but in

which each gets in proportion to his contribution to the general stock. And in such a social state there would not be less incentive to exertion than now; there would be far more incentive.

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As I turn down the street an acquaintance greets me. His rent was raised two dollars. His wife remonstrated with the agent, said they were making no more, and it cost them more to live. The agent said that the land had increased in value, and the rents must be raised; that people could live, and keep strong and fat on nothing but oatmeal. If they would do that they would find it easy enough to pay their rent.

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Men of the sort who, a little while ago, derided the idea that steam-carriages might be driven over the land and steam-vessels across the sea, would not now refuse to believe in the most startling mechanical invention. But he who thinks society may be improved, he who thinks that poverty and greed may be driven from the world, is still looked upon in circles that pride themselves on their culture and rationalism as a dreamer, if not as a dangerous lunatic.

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The old idea that everything in the social world is ordered by the Divine Will—that it is the mysterious dispensations of Providence that give wealth to the few and order poverty as the lot of the many, make some rulers and the others serfs—is losing power; but another idea that serves the same purpose is taking its place, and we are told, in the same name of science, that the only social improvement that is possible is by a slow race-evolution, of which the

fierce struggle for existence is the impelling force.

Behind all this is social disease. Criminals, paupers, prostitutes, women who abandon their children, men who kill themselves in despair of making a living, the existence of great armies of beggars and thieves, prove that there are large classes who find it difficult with the hardest toil to make an honest and sufficient livelihood. So it is.

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I join issue with those who declare that in human society the poor must always exist.

Does this seem an utopian dream? What would people of some years ago have thought of one who would have told them that it was possible to sew by steam-power; to cross the Atlantic in six days, or the continent in three; to have a message sent from London at noon delivered in Boston three hours before noon; to hear in New York the voice of a man in Chicago?

We are so accustomed to poverty that even in the most advanced countries we regard it as the natural lot of the great masses of the people; that we take it as a matter of course that even in our highest civilization large classes should want the necessaries of healthful life, and the vast majority should only get a poor and pinched living by the hardest toil. There are professors of political economy who teach that this condition of things is the result of social laws of which it is idle to complain! There are ministers of religion who preach that this is the condition which an all-wise, all-powerful Creator intended for his children! Yet so accustomed are we to poverty, that even the preachers of what passes for Christianity tell us that the great Architect of the Universe, to whose

infinite skill all nature testifies, has made such a botch job of this world that the vast majority of the human creatures whom he has called into it are condemned by the conditions he has imposed to want, suffering, and brutalizing toil that gives no opportunity for the development of mental powers—must pass their lives in a hard struggle to merely live!

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Who can look about him without seeing that to whatever cause poverty may be due, it is not due to the niggardliness of nature.

If the people in New York are jammed into the fever-breeding rooms of tenement-houses, it is not because there are not vacant lots enough in and around New York to give each family space for a separate home. If settlers are going into Montana and Dakota and Manitoba, it is not because there are not vast areas of untilled land much nearer the centers of population. If farmers are paying one-fourth, one-third, or even one-half their crops for the privilege of getting land to cultivate, it is not because there are not, even in our oldest States, great quantities of land which no one is cultivating.

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"The poor ye have always with you." If ever a scripture has been wrested to the devil's service, this is that scripture. How often have these words been distorted from their obvious meaning to soothe the conscience into acquiescence in human misery and degradation—to bolster that blasphemy, the very negation and denial of Christ's teachings, that the All-Wise and Most Merciful, the Infinite Father, has decreed that so many of his creatures must be poor in order that others of his creatures to whom he

wills the good things of life should enjoy the pleasure and virtue of doling out alms! "The poor ye have always with you," said Christ; but all his teachings supply the limitation, "until the coming of the Kingdom." In that kingdom of God *on earth*, that kingdom of justice and love for which he taught his followers to strive and pray, there will be no poor. But though the faith and the hope and the striving for this kingdom are of the very essence of Christ's teaching, the staunchest disbelievers and revilers of its possibility are found among those who call themselves Christians. Queer ideas of the Divinity have some of these Christians who hold themselves orthodox and contribute to the conversion of the heathen.

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For every social wrong there must be a remedy. But the remedy can be nothing less than the abolition of the wrong. Half-way measures, mere ameliorations and secondary reforms, can at any time accomplish little, and can in the long run avail nothing. Our charities, our penal laws, our restrictions and prohibitions, by which, with so little avail, we endeavor to assuage poverty and check crime, what are they, at the very best, but the device of the clown who, having put the whole burden of his ass into one pannier, sought to enable the poor animal to walk straight by loading up the other pannier with stones?

In New York, as I write, the newspapers and the churches are calling for subscriptions to their "fresh-air funds," that little children may be taken for a day or for a week from the deadly heat of stifling tenement rooms and given a breath of the fresh breeze of sea-shore or mountain; but how little does it avail, when we take such children only to

return them to their previous conditions—conditions which to many mean ever worse than death of the body; conditions which make it certain that of the lives that may thus be saved, some are saved for the brothel and the almshouse, and some for the penitentiary. We may go on forever merely raising fresh-air funds, and how great soever be the funds we raise, the need will only grow so long as poverty compels fathers and mothers to the life of the squalid tenement room. How vainly shall we endeavor to repress crime by our barbarous punishment of the poorer class of criminals so long as children are reared in the brutalizing influences of poverty, so long as the bite of want drives men to crime!

Nor yet could we accomplish any permanent equalization in the distribution of wealth were we forcibly to take from those who have and give to those who have not. We would do great injustice; we would work great harm; but, from the very moment of such a forced equalization, the tendencies which show themselves in the present unjust inequalities would begin to assert themselves again, and we would in a little while have as gross inequalities as before.

What we must do if we would cure social disease and avert social danger is to remove the causes which prevent the just distribution of wealth.

This work is only one of removal. It is not necessary for us to frame elaborate and skillful plans for securing the just distribution of wealth. For the just distribution of wealth is manifestly the natural distribution of wealth, and injustice in the distribution of wealth must, therefore, result from artificial ob-

struction to this natural distribution.

As to what is the just distribution of wealth there can be no dispute. It is that which gives wealth to him who makes it, and secures wealth to him who saves it.

And that this just distribution of wealth is the natural distribution of wealth can be plainly seen. Nature gives wealth to labor, and to nothing but labor. There is, and there can be, no article of wealth but such as labor has got by making it, or searching for it, out of the raw material. If there were but one man in the world it is manifest that he could have no more wealth than he was able to make and to save. This is the natural order. And, no matter how great be the population, or how elaborate the society, no one can have more wealth than he produces and saves, unless he gets it as a free gift from some one else, or by appropriating the earnings of some one else.

An English writer has divided all men into three classes—workers, beggars and thieves. The classification is not complimentary to the “upper classes” and the “better classes,” as they are accustomed to esteem themselves, yet it is economically true. There are only three ways by which any individual can get wealth—by work, by gift or by theft. And, clearly, the reason why the workers get so little is that the beggars and thieves get so much. When a man gets wealth that he does not produce, he necessarily gets it at the expense of those who produce it.

All we need do to secure a just distribution of wealth, is to do that which all theories agree to be the primary function of government—to secure to each the free use of his own powers, limited only by the

equal freedom of all others; to secure to each the full enjoyment of his own earnings, limited only by such contributions as he may be fairly called upon to make for purposes of common benefit. When we have done this we shall have done all that we can do to make social institutions conform to the sense of justice and to the natural order.

I wish to emphasize this point, for there are those who constantly talk and write as though whoever finds fault with the present distribution of wealth were demanding that the rich should be spoiled for the benefit of the poor; that the idle should be taken care of at the expense of the industrious, and that a false and impossible equality should be created, which, by reducing every one to the same dead level, would destroy all incentive to excel and bring progress to a halt.

In the reaction from the glaring injustice of present social conditions, such wild schemes have been proposed, and still find advocates.

This, and this alone, is what I contend for—that our social institutions be conformed to justice; to those natural and eternal principles of right that are so obvious that no one can deny or dispute them—so obvious that by a law of the human mind even those who try to defend social injustice must invoke them. This, and this alone, I contend for—that he who makes should have; that he who saves should enjoy. I ask in behalf of the poor nothing whatever that properly belongs to the rich. Instead of weakening and confusing the idea of property, I would surround it with stronger sanctions. Instead of lessening the incentive to the production of wealth, I would make it more powerful by making the reward more certain. Whatever any man has

added to the general stock of wealth, or has received of the free will of him who did produce it, let that be his as against all the world—his to use or to give, to do with it whatever he may please, so long as such use does not interfere with the equal freedom of others. I would put no limit on acquisition. No matter how many millions any man can get by methods which do not involve the robbery of others—they are his: let him have them. I would not even ask him for charity, or have it dinned into his ears that it is his duty to help the poor. That is his affair. Let him do as he pleases with his own, without restrictions and without suggestion. If he gets without taking from others, and uses without hurting others, what he does with his wealth is his business and his responsibility.

I reverence the spirit that, in such cities as London and New York, organizes such great charities and gives to them such magnificent endowments, but that there is need for such charities proves to me that it is a slander upon Christ to call such cities Christian cities. I honor the Astors for having provided for New York the Astor Library, and Peter Cooper for having given it the Cooper Institute; but it is a shame and a disgrace to the people of New York that such things should be left to private beneficence. And he who struggles for that recognition of justice which, by securing to each his own, will make it needless to beg for alms from one for another, is doing a greater and a higher work than he who builds churches, or endows hospitals, or founds colleges and libraries.

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Let us first ask what are the natural rights of men, and endeavor

or to secure them, before we propose either to beg or to pillage.

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I believe that sympathy is a stronger social force than selfishness. I believe that any great social improvement must spring from, and be animated by, that spirit which seeks to make life better, nobler, happier for others, rather than by that spirit which only seeks more enjoyment for itself. For the Mammon of Injustice can always buy the selfish whenever it may think it worth while to pay enough; but unselfishness it cannot buy.

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As it was a Moses, learned in all the lore of the Egyptians, and free to the Court of Pharaoh, and not a tasked slave, forced to make bricks without straw, who led the Children of Israel from the House of Bondage; as it was the Gracchi, of patrician blood and fortune, who struggled to the death against the land-grabbing system which finally destroyed Rome, as it must, should it go on, in time destroy this republic, so has it always been that the oppressed, the degraded, the downtrodden have been freed and elevated rather by the efforts and the sacrifices of those to whom fortune had been more kind than by their own strength. For the more fully men have been deprived of their natural rights, the less their power to regain them. The more men need help, the less can they help themselves.

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When we find that a machine will not work, we infer that in its construction some law of physics has been ignored or defied, so when we find social disease and political evils may we infer that in the organization of society moral law has

been defied and the natural rights of man have been ignored.

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The common belief of Americans of today is that among us the equal and unalienable rights of man are now all acknowledged, while as for property, crime, "over-production," and so on, they are to be referred to the nature of things—that is to say, if any one presses for a more definite answer, they exist because it is the will of God that they should exist. Yet I believe that these evils are demonstrably due to our failure fully to acknowledge the equal and unalienable rights with which, as asserted as a self-evident truth by the Declaration of Independence, all men have been endowed by God, their Creator. I believe the National Assembly of France were right when, inspired by the same spirit that gave us political freedom, they declared that the great cause of public misfortunes and corruptions of government is ignorance, neglect or contempt of human rights. And just as the famine which was then decimating France, the bankruptcy and corruption of her government, the brutish degradation of her working-classes, and the demoralization of her aristocracy, were directly traceable to the denial of the equal, natural and imprescriptible rights of men, so now the social and political problems which menace the American Republic, in common with the whole civilized world, spring from the same cause.

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Our so-called recognition of the equal and natural rights of man is to large classes of our people nothing but a mockery, and as social pressure increases, is becoming a more bitter mockery to larger classes, because our institutions fail to secure the rights of men to their

labor and the fruits of their labor.

That this denial of a primary human right is the cause of poverty on the one side and of overgrown fortunes on the other, and of all the waste and demoralization and corruption that flow from the grossly unequal distribution of wealth, may be easily seen.

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Nature tells us that if we will not work we must starve; but at the same time supplies us with everything necessary to work. Food, clothing, shelter, all the articles that minister to desire and that we call wealth, can be produced by labor, but only when the raw material of which they must be composed is drawn from the land.

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That, as declared by the French Assembly, public misfortunes and corruptions of government spring from ignorance, neglect or contempt of human rights may be seen from whatever point we look.

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We, in fact, treat the man who produces wealth, or accumulates wealth, as though he had done something which public policy calls upon us to discourage. If a house is erected, or a steamship or a factory is built, down comes the tax-gatherer to fine the men who have done such things.

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In our cities they find people packed together so closely that they live over one another in tiers; in the country they see people separated so widely that they lose all the advantages of neighborhood. They see buildings going up in the outskirts of our towns, while much more available lots remain vacant. They see men going great distances to cultivate land while there is yet plenty of land to cultivate in the

localities from which they come and through which they pass.

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How is it, they may well speculate, that the pressure of population which piles families, tier on tier, above each other, and raises such towering warehouses and workshops, does not cover this vacant land with buildings and with homes? Some restraining cause there must be; but what, it might well puzzle them to tell.

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HIGH PRICE OF LAND

The invisible barrier but for which buildings would rise and the city would spread, is the high price of land, a price that increases the more certainly it is seen that a growing population needs the land. Thus the stronger the incentive to the use of land, the higher the barrier that arises against its use. Tenement-houses are built among vacant lots because the price that must be paid for land is so great that people who have not large means must economize their use of land by living one family above another.

While in all of our cities *the value of land*, which increases not merely with their growth, but with the expectation of growth, thus operates to check building and improvement, its effect is manifested through the country in a somewhat different way. Instead of unduly crowding people together it unduly separates them. The expectation of profit from the rise in the value of land leads those who take up new land, not to content themselves with what they may most profitably use, but to get all the land they can, even though they must let a great part of it lie idle; and large tracts are seized upon by those who make no

pretence of using any part of it, but merely calculate to make a profit out of others who in time will be driven to use it. Thus population is scattered, not only to loss of all the comforts, refinements, pleasures and stimulations that come from neighborhood, but to the great loss of productive power. The extra cost of constructing and maintaining roads and railways, the greater distances over which produce and goods must be transported, the difficulties which separation interposes to that commerce between men which is necessary even to the ruder forms of modern production, all retard and lessen production. While just as the high value of land in and about a great city makes more difficult the erection of buildings, so does increase in the value of agricultural land make improvement difficult. The higher the value of land the more capital does the farmer require if he buys outright; or, if he buys on instalments, or rents, the more of his earnings must he give up every year. Men who would eagerly improve and cultivate land could it be had for the using are thus turned away—to wander long distances and waste their means in looking for better opportunities; to swell the ranks of those seeking for employment as wage-workers; to go back to the cities or manufacturing villages in the endeavor to make a living; or to remain idle, frequently for long periods, and sometimes until they become utterly demoralized and worse than useless tramps.

Thus is production checked in those vocations which form the foundation for all others. This check to the production of some forms of wealth lessens demand for other forms of wealth, and so the effect is propagated from one

branch of industry to another, begetting the phenomena that are spoken of as over-production, but which are primarily due to restricted production.

And as land values tend to rise, not merely with the growth of population and wealth, but with the expectation of that growth, thus enlisting in pushing on the upward movement, the powerful and illusive sentiment of hope, there is a constant tendency, especially strong in rapidly growing countries, to carry up the price of land beyond the point at which labor and capital can profitably engage in production, and the only check to this is the refusal of labor and capital so to engage. This tendency becomes peculiarly strong in recurring periods, when the fever of speculation runs high, and leads at length to a correspondingly general and sudden check to production, which propagating itself (by checking demand) through all branches of industry, is the main cause of those paroxysms known as commercial or industrial depressions, and which are marked by wasting capital, idle labor, stocks of goods that cannot be sold without loss, and wide-spread want and suffering. It is true that other restrictions upon the free play of productive forces operate to promote, intensify and continue these dislocations of the industrial system, but that here is the main and primary cause I think there can be no doubt.

And this, perhaps, is even more clear: That from whatever cause disturbance of industrial and commercial relations may originally come, these periodical depressions in which demand and supply seem unable to meet and satisfy each other could not become wide-spread and persistent did productive forces

have free access to land. Nothing like general and protracted congestion of capital and labor could take place were this natural vent open. The moment symptoms of relative over-production manifested themselves in any derivative branch of industry, the turning of capital and labor toward those occupations which extract wealth from the soil would give relief.

Thus may we see that those public misfortunes which we speak of as "business stagnation" and "hard times," those public misfortunes that in periods of intensity cause more loss and suffering than great wars, spring truly from our ignorance and contempt of human rights; from our disregard of the equal and unalienable right of all men freely to apply to nature for the satisfaction of their needs, and to retain for their own uses the full fruits of their labor.

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The difficulty which so many men who would gladly work to satisfy their needs find in obtaining opportunity of doing so, is so common as to occasion no surprise, nor, save when it becomes particularly intensified, to arouse any inquiry. We are so used to it, that although we all know that work is in itself distasteful, and that there never yet was a human being who wanted work for the sake of work, we have got into the habit of thinking and talking as though work were in itself a boon. So deeply is this idea implanted in the common mind that we maintain a policy based on the notion that the more work we do for foreign nations and the less we allow them to do for us, the better off we shall be; and in public and in private we hear men lauded and enterprises advocated because they "furnish employment;" while

there are many who, with more or less definiteness, hold the idea that labor-saving inventions have operated injuriously by lessening the amount of work to be done.

Manifestly, work is not an end, but a means; manifestly, there can be no real scarcity of work, which is but the means of satisfying material wants, until human wants are all satisfied. How, then, shall we explain the obvious facts which lead men to think and speak as though work were in itself desirable?

When we consider that labor is the producer of all wealth, the creator of all wealth, the creator of all values, is it not strange that labor should experience difficulty in finding employment?

This being the case, why is not the competition of employers to obtain workmen as great as the competition of workmen to find employment? Why is it that we do not consider the man who does work as the obliging party, rather than the man who, as we say, furnishes work?

So it necessarily would be, if in saying that labor is the producer of wealth, we stated the whole case. But labor is only the producer of wealth in the sense of being the active factor of production. For the production of wealth, labor must have access to preexisting substance and natural forces. Man has no power to bring something out of nothing. He cannot create an atom of matter or initiate the slightest motion. Vast as are his powers of modifying matter and utilizing force, they are merely powers of adapting, changing, recombining, what previously exists.

* * *

Without access to external nature, without the power of availing himself of her substance and forces,

man is not merely powerless to produce anything, he ceases to exist in the material world.

* * *

Without either of the three elements, land, air and water, man could not exist; but he is peculiarly a land animal, living on its surface, and drawing from it his supplies. Though he is able to navigate the ocean, he can only do so by availing himself of materials drawn from land. Land is to him the great storehouse of materials and reservoir of forces upon which he must draw for his needs. And as wealth consists of materials and products of nature which have been secured, or modified by human exertion so as to fit them for the satisfaction of human desires, labor is the active factor in the production of wealth, but land is the passive factor, without which labor can neither produce nor exist.

All this is so obvious that it may seem like wasting space to state it. Yet, in this obvious fact lies the explanation of that enigma that to so many seems a hopeless puzzle—the labor question. What is inexplicable, if we lose sight of man's absolute and constant dependence upon land, is clear when we recognize it.

* * *

It may be said, as I have often heard it said, "We do not all want land! We cannot all become farmers!"

To this I reply that we *do* all want land, though it may be in different ways and in varying degrees. Without land no human being can live; without land no human occupation can be carried on. Agriculture is not the only use of land. It is only one of many. And just as the uppermost story of the tallest building rests upon land as truly as the low-

est, so is the operative as truly a user of land as is the farmer. As all wealth is in the last analysis the resultant of land and labor, so is all production in the last analysis the expenditure of labor upon land.

Nor is it true that we could not all become farmers. That is the one thing that we might all become. If all men were merchants, or tailors, or mechanics, all men would soon starve. But there have been, and still exist, societies in which all get their living directly from nature. The occupations that resort directly to nature are the primitive occupations, from which, as society progresses, all others are differentiated. No matter how complex the industrial organization, these must always remain the fundamental occupations, upon which all other occupations rest, just as the upper stories of a building rest upon the foundation. Where there is a great demand for labor in agriculture, and wages are high, there must soon be a great demand for labor, and high wages, in all occupations. Where it is difficult to get employment in agriculture, and wages are low, there must soon be a difficulty of obtaining employment, and low wages, in all occupations. Now, what determines the demand for labor and the rate of wages in agriculture is manifestly the ability of labor to employ itself—that is to say, the ease with which land can be obtained. This is the reason that in new countries, where land is easily had, wages, not merely in agriculture, but in all occupations, are higher than in older countries, where land is hard to get. *And thus it is that, as the value of land increases, the cost of living increases, and the difficulty in finding employment arises.*

This whoever will may see by

merely looking around him. Clearly the difficulty of finding employment, the fact that in all vocations, as a rule, the supply of labor seems to exceed the demand for labor, springs from difficulties that prevent labor finding employment for itself—from the barriers that fence labor off from land. Not that every unemployed mechanic, or operative, or clerk, could or would get himself a farm; but that from all the various occupations enough would betake themselves to the land to relieve any pressure for employment.

* * *

LABOR AND LARD

While labor-saving improvements increase the power of labor, no improvement or invention can release labor from its dependence upon land. Labor-saving improvements only increase the power of producing wealth from land. And land being the private property of certain persons, who can thus prevent others from using it, all these gains, which accrue primarily to labor, can be demanded from labor by the land holders, in higher rents and higher prices. Thus, as we see it, the march of improvement and invention has everywhere been to increase the value of land. Where increase of wages has been won, it has been by combination, or the concurrence of special causes; but the great bulk has increased ground-rents and raised the value of land.

* * *

As the productiveness of labor is increased, or even as there is a promise of its increase, so does the value of land increase, and labor, having to pay proportionately more for land, is shorn of all the benefit. Taught by experience, when a railroad opens a new district we do not expect wages to increase; what we

expect to increase is the value of land.

The elevated railroad [and subways] of New York have greatly reduced the time and labor necessary to take people from one end of the city to the other. They have made accessible to the overcrowded population of the lower part of the island, the vacant spaces at the upper. The reduction in the time and cost of transportation has made much vacant land accessible to an overcrowded population, but as this land has been made accessible, so has its value risen, and the tenement-house population is as crowded as ever. What the working-classes of New York gain in improved transportation they must pay in increased rent.

* * *

In spite of the progress of civilization the energies of the most advanced portion of mankind are every where taxed heavily to pay for preparations for war or the costs of war. This is due to two great inventions, that of direct taxation and that of public debt.

* * *

Under the feudal system the greater part of public expenses was defrayed from the rent of land, and the landholders had to do the fighting or bear its cost. Had this system been continued, England, for instance, would today have had no public debt. And it is safe to say that her people and the world would have been saved those unnecessary and cruel wars in which in modern times English blood and treasure have been wasted. But by the institution of indirect taxes and public debts the great landlords were enabled to throw off on the people at large the burdens which constituted the condition on which they held their lands, and to throw them

off in such a way that those on whom they rested, though they might feel the pressure, could not tell from whence it came. Thus it was that the holding of land was insidiously changed from a trust into an individual possession, and the masses stripped of the first and most important of the rights of man.

The institution of public debts, like the institution of private property in land, rests upon the preposterous assumption that one generation may bind another generation. If a man were to come to me and say, "Here is a promissory note which your great-grandfather gave to my great-grandfather, and which you will oblige me by paying," I would laugh at him, and tell him that if he wanted to collect his note he had better hunt up the man who made it; that I had nothing to do with my great-grandfather's promises. And if he were to insist upon payment and to call my attention to the terms of the bond in which my great-grandfather expressly stipulated with his great-grandfather that I should pay him, I would only laugh the more, and be the more certain that he was a lunatic. To such a demand any one of us would reply in effect, "My great-grandfather was evidently a knave or a joker, and your great-grandfather was certainly a fool, which quality you surely have inherited if you expect me to pay you money because my great-grandfather promised that I should do so. He might as well have given your great-grandfather a draft upon Adam or a check upon the First National Bank of the Moon."

Yet upon this assumption that ascendants may bind descendants, that one generation may legislate for another generation, rests the as-

sumed validity of our land titles and public debts.

If it were possible for the present to borrow of the future, for those now living to draw upon wealth to be created by those who are yet to come, there could be no more dangerous power, none more certain to be abused; and none that would involve in its exercise a more flagrant contempt for the natural and unalienable rights of man. But we have no such power, and there is no possible invention by which we can obtain it. When we talk about calling upon future generations to bear their part in the costs and burdens of the present, about imposing upon them a share in expenditures we take the liberty of assuming they will consider to have been made for their benefit as well as for ours, we are carrying metaphor into absurdity. Public debts are not a device for borrowing from the future, for compelling those yet to be to bear a share in expenses which a present generation may choose to incur. That is, of course, a physical impossibility. They are merely a device for obtaining control of wealth in the present by promising that a certain distribution of wealth in the future shall be made—a device by which the owners of existing wealth are induced to give it up under promise, not merely that other people shall be taxed to pay them, but that other people's children shall be taxed for the benefit of their children or the children of their assigns.

The public debts for which most can be said are those contracted for the purpose of making public improvements, yet what extravagance and corruption the power of contracting such debts has engendered in the United States is too well known to require illustration, and

has led, in a number of the States, to constitutional restrictions.

Thomas Jefferson was right when, as a deduction from "the self-evident truth that the land belongs in usufruct to the living," he declared that one generation should not hold itself bound by the laws or the debts of its predecessors, and as this widest-minded of American patriots and greatest of American statesmen said, measures which would give practical effect to this principle will appear the more salutary the more they are considered.

INDIRECT TAXATION

Indirect taxation, the other device by which the people are bled without realizing it, and those who could make the most effective resistance to extravagance and corruption are bribed into acquiescence, is an invention whereby taxes are so levied that those who directly pay are enabled to collect them again from others, and generally to collect them with a profit, in higher prices. Those who directly pay the taxes and, still more important, those who desire high prices, are thus interested in the imposition and maintenance of taxation, while those on whom the burden ultimately falls do not realize it.

The corrupting effects of indirect taxation are obvious wherever it has been resorted to, but nowhere more obvious than in the United States. Clamor of special interests for the continuance of indirect taxation may give us some idea of how much greater are the sums these taxes take from the people than those they put in the treasury. But it is only a faint idea, for besides what goes to the government and what is intercepted by private interests, there are the loss and waste caused by the artificial restrictions and

difficulties which indirect taxation places in the way of production and exchange.

To recount in detail the public misfortunes which arise from this vicious system of taxation would take more space than I can here devote to the subject. But what I wish specially to point out is, that, like the evils arising from public debts, they are in the last analysis due to "ignorance, neglect or contempt of human rights." While every citizen may properly be called upon to bear his fair share in all proper expenses of government, it is manifestly an infringement of natural rights to use the taxing power so as to give one citizen an advantage over another, to take from some the proceeds of their labor in order to swell the profit of others.

* * *

As the earth must be the foundation of every material structure, so institutions which regulate the use of land constitute the foundation of every social organization, and must affect the whole character and development of that organization.

* * *

But in a community where the soil is treated as the property of but a portion of the people, some of these people from the very day of their birth must be at a disadvantage, and some will have an enormous advantage. Those who have no rights in the land will be forced to sell their labor to the landholders for what they can get.

* * *

Our fundamental mistake is in treating land as private property. On this false basis modern civilization everywhere rests, and hence, as material progress goes on, is everywhere developing such mon-

strous inequalities in condition as must ultimately destroy it. Without land man cannot exist; as his very physical substance, and all that he can acquire or make, must be drawn from the land. No labor-saving inventions can enable us to make something out of nothing, or in any wise lessen our dependence upon land. They can merely add to the efficiency of labor in working up the raw materials drawn from land. Therefore, wherever land has been subjected to private ownership, the ultimate effect of labor-saving inventions, and of all improved processes and discoveries, is to enable landholders to demand, and labor to pay, more for the use of land. Land becomes more valuable.

Let me not be misunderstood. I do not say that in the recognition of the equal and unalienable right of each human being to the land from which life must be supported and wants satisfied, lies the solution of all social problems. I fully recognize the fact that even after we do this, much will remain to do. But whatever else we do, so long as we fail to recognize the equal right to the land, nothing will avail to remedy that unnatural inequality in the distribution of wealth which is fraught with so much evil and danger. Reform as we may, until we make this fundamental reform our material progress can but tend to differentiate our people into the monstrously rich and the frightfully poor. Whatever be the increase of wealth, the masses will still be ground toward the point of bare subsistence—we must still have our great criminal classes, our paupers and our tramps, men and women driven to degradation and desperation from inability to make an honest living.

* * *

Do what we may, we can accom-

plish nothing real and lasting until we secure to all the first of those equal and unalienable rights with which, as our Declaration of Independence has it, man is endowed by his Creator—the equal and unalienable right to the use and benefit of natural opportunities.

There are people who are always trying to find some mean between right and wrong—people who, if they were to see a man about to be unjustly beheaded, might insist that the proper thing to do would be to chop off his feet. These are the people who, beginning to recognize the importance of the land question, propose the limitation of estates.

Nothing whatever can be accomplished by such timid, illogical measures. If we would cure social disease we must go to the root.

There is no use in talking about restricting the amount of land any one man may hold. That, even if it were practicable, were idle, and would not meet the difficulty. The ownership of an acre in a city may give more command of the labor of others than the ownership of a hundred thousand acres in a sparsely settled district, and it is utterly impossible by any legal device to prevent the concentration of land so long as the general causes which irresistibly tend to the concentration of land remain untouched.

* * *

If there seems anything strange in the idea that all men have equal and unalienable rights to the use of the earth, it is merely that habit can blind us to the most obvious truths. Slavery, polygamy, cannibalism, the flattening of children's heads, or the squeezing of their feet, seem perfectly natural to those brought up where such institutions or customs exist. But, as a matter of fact, nothing is more repugnant

to the natural perceptions of men than that land should be treated as subject to individual ownership; like things produced by labor; nor has it ever obtained save as the result of a long course of usurpation, tyranny and fraud. This idea reached development among the Romans, whom it corrupted and destroyed. It took many generations for it to make its way among our ancestors; and it did not, in fact, reach full recognition until two centuries ago, when, in the time of Charles II, the feudal dues were shaken off by the landholders' parliament. We accepted many other things, in which we have servilely followed European custom. Land being plenty and population sparse, we did not realize what it would mean when in two or three cities we should have the population of the thirteen colonies. But it is time that we should begin to think of it now, when we see ourselves confronted, in spite of our free political institutions, with all the problems that menace Europe, we have a "working-class," a "criminal class" and a "pauper class;" when there are already thousands of so-called *free* citizens of the Republic who cannot by the hardest toil make a living for their families, and when we are, on the other hand, developing such monstrous fortunes as the world has not seen since great estates were eating out the heart of Rome.

WHAT MORE PREPOSTEROUS

What more preposterous than the treatment of land as individual property? In every essential land differs from those things which being the product of human labor are rightfully property. It is the creation of God; they are produced by man. It is fixed in quantity; they may be increased illimitably. It exists, though generations

come and go; they in a little while decay and pass again into the elements. What more preposterous than that one tenant for a day of this rolling sphere should collect land rent for it from his co-tenants, or sell to them for a price what was here ages before him and will be here ages after him? What more preposterous than that we should be working for a lot of landlords who got the authority to live on our labor from some English king, dead and gone these centuries? What more preposterous than that we, the present population of the United States, should presume to grant to our own people or to foreign capitalists the right to strip of their earnings American citizens of the next generation? What more utterly preposterous than these titles to land? *Although the whole people of the earth in one generation were to unite, they could no more sell title to land against the next generation than they could sell that generation.* It is a self-evident truth, as Thomas Jefferson said, that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living.

Nor can any defense of private property in land be made on the ground of expediency. On the contrary, look where you will, and it is evident that the private ownership of land keeps land out of use; that the speculation it engenders crowds population where it ought to be more diffused, diffuses it where it ought to be closer together; compels those who wish to improve to pay away a large part of their capital, or mortgage their labor for years, before they are permitted to improve; prevents men from going to work for themselves who would gladly do so, crowding them into deadly competition with each other for the wages of employers; and

enormously restricts the production of wealth while causing the grossest inequality in its distribution.

No assumption can be more gratuitous than that constantly made that absolute ownership of land is necessary to the improvement and proper use of land. What is necessary to the best use of land is the security of improvements—the assurance that the labor and capital expended upon it shall enjoy their reward. This is a very different thing from the absolute ownership of land. Some of the finest buildings in New York are erected upon leased ground. Nearly the whole of London and other English cities, and great parts of Philadelphia and Baltimore, are so built. All sorts of mines are opened and operated on leases. In California and Nevada the most costly mining operations, involving the expenditure of immense amounts of capital, were undertaken upon no better security than the mining regulations, which gave no ownership of the land, but only guaranteed possession as long as the mines were worked.

If shafts can be sunk and tunnels can be run, and the most costly machinery can be put up on public land on mere security of possession, why could not improvements of all kinds be made on that security? If individuals will use and improve land belonging to other individuals, why would they not use and improve land belonging to the whole people? What is to prevent land owned by Trinity Church, by the Sailors' Snug Harbor, by the Astors or Rhinelanders, or any other corporate or individual owners, from being as well improved and used as now, if the *ground-rents*, instead of going to corporations or individuals, went into the public treasury?

In point of fact, if land were treated as the common property of the whole people, it would be far more readily improved than now, for then the improver would get the whole benefit of his improvements. Under the present system, the price that must be paid for land operates as a powerful deterrent to improvement. And when the improver has secured land either by purchase or by lease, he is taxed upon his improvements, and heavily taxed in various ways upon all that he uses. Were land treated as the property of the whole people, the ground-rents would accrue to the community.

To secure to all citizens their equal right to the land on which they live, does not mean, as some of the ignorant seem to suppose, that every one must be given a farm, and city land be cut up into little pieces. It would be impossible to secure the equal rights of all in that way, even if such division were not in itself impossible. In a small and primitive community of simple industries and habits, such as that Moses legislated for, substantial equality may be secured by allotting to each family an equal share of the land and making it unalienable. But among a highly civilized and rapidly growing population, with changing centers, with great cities and minute division of industry, and a complex system of production and exchange, such rude devices become ineffective and impossible.

Must we therefore consent to inequality—must we therefore consent that some shall monopolize what is the common heritage of all? If two men find a diamond, they do not march to a lapidary to have it cut in two. If three sons inherit a ship, they do not proceed to saw her into three pieces; nor yet do they agree that if this cannot be

done equal division is impossible. And so it is not necessary, in order to secure equal rights to land, to make an equal division of land. All that it is necessary to do is to *collect the ground-rents for the common benefit.*

Nor, to take *ground-rents* for the common benefit, is it necessary that the state should actually take possession of the land and rent it out from year to year, or from term to term, as some ignorant people suppose. It can be done in a much more simple and easy manner by means of the existing machinery of taxation. All it is necessary to do is to rest taxation upon the value of land irrespective of improvements, and take the *ground-rent* for the public benefit.

In this simple way, without increasing governmental machinery, but, on the contrary, greatly simplifying it, we could make land common property. And in doing this we could have a great and steadily increasing surplus—a growing common fund, in the benefits of which all might share. Under this system no one could afford to hold land he was not using, and land not in use would be thrown open to those who wished to use it, at once relieving the labor market and giving an enormous stimulus to production and improvement.

In a book such as this, intended for the casual reader, who lacks inclination to follow the close reasoning necessary to show the full relation of this seemingly simple reform to economic laws, I cannot exhibit its full force, but I may point to some of the more obvious of its effects.

To appropriate ground-rent* to public uses by means of taxation would enormously increase the production of wealth by throwing open

natural opportunities. It would make the holding of land unprofitable to any but the user. There would be no temptation to any one to hold land in expectation of future increase in its value when that increase was certain to be demanded in taxes. No one could afford to hold valuable land idle when the taxes upon it would be as heavy as they would be were it put to the fullest use.

The enormous increase in production which would result from thus throwing open the natural means and opportunities of production would enormously augment the annual fund from which all incomes are drawn. It would at the same time make the distribution of wealth much more equal. That great part of this fund which is now taken by the holders of land, not as a return for anything by which they add to production, but because they have appropriated as their own the natural means and opportunities of production, and which as material progress goes on, and the value of land rises, is constantly becoming larger and larger, would be virtually divided among all, by being utilized for common purposes. The removal of restrictions upon labor, and the opening of natural opportunities to labor, would make labor free to employ itself. Labor, the producer of all wealth, could never become "a drug in the market" while desire for any form of wealth was unsatisfied. With the natural opportunities of employment thrown open to all, the spectacle of willing men seeking vainly for employment could not be

* I use the term ground-rent because the proper economic term, rent, might not be understood by those who are in the habit of using it in its common sense, which applies to the income from buildings and improvements, as well as land.

witnessed; there could be no surplus of unemployed labor to beget that cutthroat competition of laborers for employment.

The equalization in the distribution of wealth that would thus result would effect immense economies and greatly add to productive power. The cost of the idleness, pauperism and crime that spring from poverty would be saved to the community; the increased mobility of labor, the increased intelligence of the masses, that would result from this equalized distribution of wealth, the greater incentive to invention and to the use of improved processes that would result from the increase in wages, would enormously increase production.

* * *

"Land lies out of doors." It cannot be hid or carried off. Its value can be ascertained with greater ease and exactness than the value of anything else, and taxes upon that value can be collected with absolute certainty and at the minimum of expense.

* * *

It is no mere fiscal reform that I propose; it is a conforming of the most important social adjustments to natural laws. To those who have never given thought to the matter, it may seem irreverently presumptuous to say that it is the evident intent of the Creator that land values should be the subject of taxation; that land rent should be utilized for the benefit of the entire community.

* * *

We may know that the natural or right way of raising the public revenues which are required by the needs of society is by the taxation of land values. The value of land is in its nature and relations adapted to purposes of taxation, just as

the feet in their nature and relations are adapted to the purposes of walking. The value of land increases as the development of society goes on. Taxation upon land values does not lessen the individual incentive to production and accumulation, as do other methods of taxation; on the contrary, it leaves perfect freedom to productive forces, and prevents restrictions upon production from arising. It does not foster monopolies, and cause unjust inequalities in the distribution of wealth, as do other taxes; on the contrary, it has the effect of breaking down monopoly and equalizing the distribution of wealth. It can be collected with great certainty and economy: it does not beget the evasion, corruption and dishonesty that flow from other taxes. In short, it conforms to every economic and moral requirement. What can be more in accordance with justice than that the value of land, which is not created by individual effort, but arises from the existence and growth of society, should be taken by society for social needs?

* * *

This is the law of [land] rent: As individuals come together in communities, and society grows, there arises, over and above the value which individuals can create for themselves, a value which is created by the community as a whole, and which, attaching to land, becomes tangible, definite and capable of computation and appropriation. As society grows, so grows this value, distinguished from what is contributed by individual exertion—all social advance necessarily contributes to the increase of this common value; to the growth of this common fund.

Here is a provision made by natural law for the increasing needs of social growth. Here is a fund belonging to society as a whole from which, without the degradation of alms, private or public, provision can be made for the weak, the helpless, the aged.

* * *

By making land private property, by permitting individuals to appropriate this fund which nature plainly intended for the use of all, we throw the children's bread to the dogs of Greed and Lust; we produce a primary inequality which gives rise in every direction to other tendencies to inequality; and from this ignoring and defying social laws, there arise in the very heart of our civilization those horrible and monstrous things that betoken social putrefaction.

* * *

FARMERS

It is not true that such measures as I have suggested are opposed to the interests of the great body of farmers. On the contrary, these measures would be as clearly to their advantage as to the advantage of wageworkers. Those who are trying to persuade him that to put taxation upon the value of land would be to put all taxation upon him, have as little chance of success as the slaveholders had of persuading their Negroes that the Northern armies were bent on kidnaping and selling them in Cuba.

* * *

The farmer who cultivates his own farm with his own hands is a landholder, it is true, but he is in greater degree a laborer, and in his ownership of stock, improvements, tools, etc., a capitalist. It is from his labor, aided by this capital, rather than from any advantage represented by the value of his land, that he derives his living. His main in-

terest is that of a producer, not that of a landholder.

* * *

It requires no grasp of abstractions for the working farmer to see that to abolish taxation, save upon the value of land, would be really to his interest. Let the working farmer consider how the weight of indirect taxation falls upon him without his having power to shift it off upon any one else; how it adds to the price of nearly everything he has to buy, without adding to the price of what he has to sell; how it compels him to contribute to the support of government in far greater proportion to what he possesses than it does those who are much richer, and he will see that by the substitution of direct for indirect taxation, he would be largely the gainer. Let him consider further, and he will see that he would be still more largely the gainer if direct taxation were confined to the value of land. A tax upon the naked value of land, irrespective of improvements, would be manifestly to the advantage of the holder of improved land, and especially of small holders.

The working farmer has only to look about him to realize this.

In the villages he will find acre, half-acre, and quarter-acre lots, unimproved or slightly improved, which are more valuable than his whole farm. If he looks further, he will see tracts of mineral land, or land with other superior natural advantages, having immense value, yet on which the taxable improvements amount to little or nothing; while, when he looks to the great cities, he will find vacant lots worth more than a whole section of agricultural land such as his; and as he goes toward their centers he will find most magnificent buildings less valuable than the ground on which

they stand, and block after block where the land would sell for more per front foot than his whole farm. Manifestly to put taxes on the value of land would be to lessen relatively and absolutely the taxes the working farmer has to pay.

So far from the effect of placing all taxes upon the value of land being to the advantage of the towns at the expense of the agricultural districts, the very reverse of this is obviously true. The great increase of land values is in the cities, and with the present tendencies of growth this must continue to be the case. To place all taxes on the value of land would be to reduce the taxation of agricultural districts relatively to the taxation of towns and cities. And this would be only just; for it is not alone the presence of their own populations which gives value to the land of towns and cities, but the presence of the more scattered agricultural population, for whom they constitute industrial, commercial and financial centers.

* * *

The truth is, that the working farmer would be an immense gainer. Where he would have to pay more taxes on the value of his land, he would be released from the taxes now levied on his stock and improvements, and from all the indirect taxes that now weigh so heavily upon him.

* * *

All the tendencies of the time are to the extinction of the typical American farmer—the man who cultivates his own acres with his own hands. This movement has only recently begun, but it is going on, and must go on, under present conditions, with increasing rapidity.

* * *

This tendency means the extirpation of the typical American farm-

er, who with his own hands and the aid of his boys cultivates his own farm.

* * *

I ask no one who may read this book to accept my views. I ask him to think for himself.

Whoever, laying aside prejudice and self-interest, will honestly and carefully make up his own mind as to the causes and the cure of the social evils that are so apparent, does, in that, the most important thing in his power toward their removal. This primary obligation devolves upon us individually, as citizens. Whatever else we may do, this must come first. Until there be correct thought, there cannot be right action; and when there is correct thought, right action *will* follow. Power is always in the hands of the masses. What oppresses the masses is their own ignorance, their own short-sighted selfishness.

* * *

The great work of the present for every man, and every organization of men, who would improve social conditions, is the work of education—the propagation of ideas. It is only as it aids this that anything else can avail. And in this work every one who can think may aid—first by forming clear ideas himself, and then by endeavoring to arouse the thought of those with whom he comes in contact.

Many there are, too depressed, too embruted with hard toil and the struggle for animal existence, to think for themselves. Therefore the obligation devolves with all the more force on those who can. If thinking men are few, they are for that reason all the more powerful. Let no man imagine that he has no influence. Whoever he may be, and wherever he may be placed, *the man who thinks* becomes a light

and a power. Whoever becomes imbued with a noble idea kindles a flame from which other torches are lit, and influences those with whom he comes in contact, be they few or many.

* * *

And I am firmly convinced that to effect any great social improvement, it is sympathy rather than self-interest, the sense of duty rather than the desire for self-advancement, that must be appealed to.

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