

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

SENATOR SMOOT has been thinking of how people live in our large cities. He has been thinking of the terrible congestion of people huddled in tenements. He has thought of that condition, he tells us, "a dozen times or more." As a legislator he should have thought of it more than a "dozen times." That is too infrequent a reflection. He says that he is "not able to figure out how we are going to rectify these conditions under our civilization, so-called." Yet it is a duty he owes to himself and to his constituents to figure it out.

THAT phrase "so-called" is significant that he has begun to reflect. He may have dropped it unthinkingly. Yet it is true that a civilization which permits these conditions is called civilization only by courtesy. It is something at least that Senator Smoot recognizes the anomaly. Others too have recognized it. One man observing what Senator Smoot has observed, and feeling that such conditions could not be in accord with an All-wise Providence, set himself to discover the reason. His name was Henry George, and the book in which he set forth the answer to the problem that troubles the Senator is "Progress and Poverty." We commend that book to his attention.

WHY is it we have made progress everywhere save in the distribution of wealth? Why are so many minds directed to problems of production, invention and discovery and so few to the graver problems of poverty and the making of a living? If but an infinitesimal part of the exercise of intelligent thought directed to other problems had been brought to bear on this one—how to assure to every man the opportunity to make a living—with what celerity and certainty the question had been solved!

FOR, despite the learned disputes, the flood of innumerable books, the profound theorizing over problems that need only to be stated to be understood, the thing is really very simple. The problem of making a living might be successfully taught in the lower grades of our primary schools. He would be a dull pupil indeed who, with the factors named and their relations explained,

could not portray it on the blackboard. It is a lesson for the elementary classes, simple as geography, more simple than astronomy or chemistry. Yet it seems so difficult for persons of vast learning to understand it!

LET us suppose trade reduced to the lower form of barter, where a man brings a pair of shoes to the grocer for a barrel of potatoes, or the farmer drives to the country store his garden truck for so many pounds of sugar. Now the landlord has nothing that he can place in his wagon or in his car to be exchanged for shoes or farm products. Not a thing has he fashioned with his hands that he can offer the shoemaker or farmer. He has no exchangeable commodities—as a landlord he does not work; he creates no wealth; he is poor and helpless indeed, dependent on the sufferance of those who work. Explained in terms of barter the problem becomes crystal clear.

HE has something, of course. That is a bit of legal paper conferring a taxing power on the maker of shoes and the grower of farm products. This power is almost unlimited, or limited only by the value of land created by others on which farmer and shoemaker must work. So he takes so many shoes or so many bushels of potatoes. This in terms of barter, if barter it can be called. Something the landlord has. That is a power granting *permission to work*. For this permission labor and capital make terms with him. The landlord of course is master of the situation. So bartering nothing he has created, for the landlord per se creates nothing and has nothing but this bit of paper to compel the acceptance of his terms, he determines the conditions on which men must work. The invention and use of money do not change the transaction. The shoes and potatoes take the form of dollars, but they are still shoes and potatoes. Nor in our complex system of production and exchange are the essentials of the transaction altered. It is still barter between a number of individuals now greatly multiplied, and a more extended cooperation among producers, with this silent partner in production, who continues to contribute nothing and takes all he can—the Owner of the Land.

AND the overcrowding evil which Senator Smoot is worried about. It is another phase of the same disease caused by the unrestricted power of landlordism. Does

he doubt it? Then let him reflect upon the statement of Lord Loreburn (Lord Chancellor) who says:

"Overcrowding is simply caused because land values are so high that the rents become necessarily high, though the land is not fully made use of for commercial purposes, and the people cannot afford to pay these rents. They are thus driven into these hovels and wretched slums from which so many evil consequences arise. On one side you have the population swept up from the country to London: on the other side, you have these great land values confronting them there and driving them into the slums. There is no question whatever that this is one of the chief causes of this overcrowding evil."

EVERYBODY has a suggestion to make on how to solve the unemployment problem. The ministers of churches throughout the country are especially vocal in proposing remedies for the existing distress. Most of these suggestions are fantastic enough. The Rev. Herbert D. Hudnut, pastor of the Windermere Presbyterian Church in East Cleveland, Ohio, proposes the following: "If 2,000 shops, stores and factories would re-employ five men or women tomorrow morning and pay each \$5. a day for three months the unemployment situation would be relieved and we would be attempting to solve a serious problem in the light of Christ's teachings."

THE owners of shops, stores and factories are not responsible for the present situation. They do not lay off men and women in their employ because they want to, but because they have to. They are not the real employers of labor—those who can make an effective demand for the goods offered for sale are the real employers. What the Rev. Doctor is proposing is charity—he is asking 2,000 employers of labor to give up something, to employ labor unprofitable to them, to sacrifice \$25. a day. It does not seem to occur to him that few of these proprietors of shops stores and factories could do this; it would reduce the larger number of them to bankruptcy. And would it solve the question of unemployment? It would not. For at the end of three months the same condition would be restored, intensified now by a further amount of goods for which there is no effective demand. The Reverend pastor means well but he will have to try again.

SOLVING the question in the light of Christ's teaching!" We do not believe Christ would go about in that way. Confronted by the problem he would first ask if there was not some deep underlying injustice that should be done away with. Surely his appeal would have been first to justice rather than to charity. And he would have seen that it was not a question of justice between employer and employee, between capital and labor, but a question of fundamental justice in the organization of society. Unemployment is but a symptom of its denial.

CLEVELAND has another pastor who is righteously indignant at conditions. Rev. John Taylor Alton, D.D., pastor of the Windermere Methodist Church in East Cleveland, has this to say:

"No industry should be allowed to operate in such a manner that it can ruthlessly and without warning dump an army of unemployed out on the street. If there is a slack in sales let the work that remains be divided among the workmen."

BUT Dr. Alton makes the same mistake as his Presbyterian brother. He, too, regards the question as one between employer and hired man. Consequently he gets no further than his fellow pastor. Both seem to have little concern as to what becomes of the owners of shops, stores and factories. Indeed if they cannot find employment for everybody, out with them! "They must not drop their workmen out in the street," cries the pastor. These employers are to divide up the work with the employees when times are slack. Communism goes not much further than this. And of course government must compel them to do it. Government must see that it is done—always government, more and more of it. And yet these ministers are kindly and well-disposed. Perhaps all they need is a friendly guide to point the way, and just a little knowledge.

THE *San Francisco Chronicle* is a great newspaper. We say this advisedly. It must be a great newspaper to get off anything like this. It says: "The shade of Henry George must chuckle as he looks at the scheme adopted by the city of Pittsburgh." Then says the *Chronicle*: "Single Tax or 50 per cent. of it, to be exact. And the thing is all there. * * * * He was going to abolish idle land by making it pay all the taxes." Now is not that a wonderful statement of what George proposed? Where do you suppose the writer found it? Out of his head, of course, and not in George. And of course the Pittsburgh half rate tax on improvements is not even 50 per cent. of the Single Tax. We wish it were.

THEN the writer proceeds to make it worse. "A fine theory, no doubt if it had been inaugurated in the days of Adam and Eve, but hardly practicable at the late day when Henry George arrived on earth." Now can you beat that? Is there any hope for journalism in California, or is there any hope for a man intelligent enough to write at all who can write anything like that? He has admitted that 50 per cent. of the theory is in operation in Pittsburgh; he is in error even in that statement. Indeed it is impossible for him to state anything in accordance with the facts.

WE have heard it before—*viz*, that Henry George's theory would have been all right if it had been started at the beginning of the world. It seems not to have occurred