

GERRIT SMITH ON THE HOMESTEAD BILL.

Extracts from the Speech of Gerrit Smith on the Homestead Bill, delivered in Congress February 21, 1854. See editorial article by William Lloyd Garrison in this issue of The Public.

RESOLUTIONS BEFORE THE HOUSE.

Whereas, all the members of the human family, notwithstanding all contrary enactments and arrangements, have, at all times, and in all circumstances, as equal a right to the soil as to the light and air, because as equal a natural need of the one as of the other:

And whereas, this invariably equal right to the soil leaves no room to buy or sell, or give it away; Therefore,

1. Resolved, That no bill or propo-

land monopoly is the most efficient cause of inordinate and tyrannical riches on the one hand, and of dependent and abject poverty on the other; and that it is not because it is, therefore, the most efficient cause of that inequality of condition, so well-nigh fatal to the spread of Democracy and Christianity, that government is called upon to abolish it; but it is because the right, which this mighty agent of evil violates and tramples under foot, is among those clear, certain, essential, natural rights which it is the province of government to protect, at all hazards, and irrespective of all consequences.

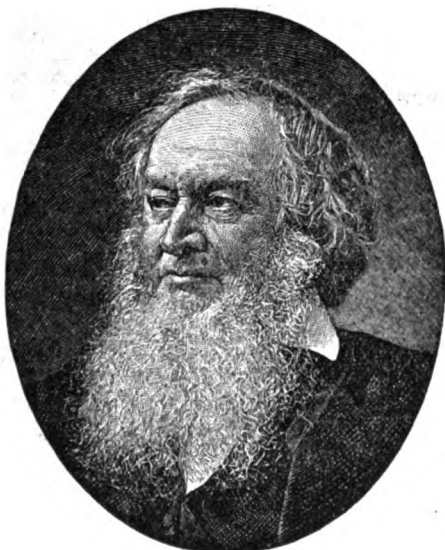
SPEECH OF GERRIT SMITH.

I am in favor of the bill because I am in favor of what I interpret the bill essentially to be—let others inter-

purchase a township or a county; and in connection with half a dozen other monopolists, he might come to obtain all the lands of a state or a nation. Their occupants might be compelled to leave them and to starve, and the lands might be converted into parks and hunting grounds for the enjoyment of the aristocracy. Moreover, if this could be done in the case of a state or a nation, why could it not be done in the case of the whole earth?

But it may be said that a man might monopolize the fruits of the soil, and thus become as injurious to his fellow men as by monopolizing the soil itself. It is true that he might in this wise produce a scarcity of food. But the calamity would be for a few months only, and it would serve to stimulate the sufferers to guard against its recurrence by a more faithful tillage, and by more caution in parting with their crops. Having the soil still in their hands, they would have the remedy still in their hands. But had they suffered the soil itself to be monopolized, had they suffered the soil itself, instead of the fruits of it, to pass out of their hands, then they would be without remedy. Then they would lie at the mercy of him who has it in his power to dictate the terms on which they may again have access to the soil, or who, in his heartless perverseness, might refuse its occupation on any terms whatever.

What I have here supposed in my argument is abundantly—alas! but too abundantly—justified by facts. Land monopoly has reduced no small share of the human family to abject and wretched dependence, for it has shut them out from the great source of subsistence, and frightfully increased the precariousness of life. Unhappy Ireland illustrates the great power of land monopoly for evil. The right to so much as a standing place on the earth is denied to the great mass of her people. Their great impartial Father has placed them on the earth, and in placing them on it has irresistibly implied their right to live of it. Nevertheless, land monopoly tells them that they are trespassers, and treats them as trespassers. Even when most indulgent, land monopoly allows them nothing better than to pick up the crumbs of the barest existence; and, when, in his most rigorous moods, the monster compels them to starve and die by millions. Ireland—poor, land-monopoly-cursed and famine-wasted Ireland—has still a population of some 6,000,000; and yet it is only 6,000 persons who have monopolized her soil.



GERRIT SMITH.

A Portrait taken in the latter part of his life.

sition should find any favor with Congress which implies the right of Congress to dispose of the public lands, or any part of them, either by sale or gift.

2. Resolved, That the duty of civil government in regard to public lands, and, indeed, to all lands, is but to regulate the occupation of them; and that this regulation should ever proceed upon the principle that the right of all persons to the soil—to the great source of human subsistence—is as equal, as inherent, and as sacred as the right to life itself.

3. Resolved, That government will have done but little toward securing the equal right to land, until it shall have made essential to the validity of every claim to land both the fact that it is actually possessed, and the fact that it does not exceed in quantity the maximum, which it is the duty of government to prescribe.

4. Resolved, That it is not because

pret it as they will. This bill, as I view it, is an acknowledgment that the public lands belong, not to the government, but to the landless.

And now to my argument, and to my endeavor to show that land monopoly is wrong, and that civil government should neither practice nor permit it; and that the duty of Congress is to yield up all the public land to actual settlers.

I admit that there are things in which a man can have absolute property, and which without qualification or restriction he can buy, or sell, or bequeath, at his pleasure. But I deny that the soil is among these things. What a man produces from the soil he has an absolute right to. He may abuse the right. It nevertheless remains. But no such right can he have in the soil itself. If he could he might monopolize it. If very rich he might

Scotland has some 3,000,000 of people, and 3,000 is the number of the monopolists of her soil. England and Wales contain some 18,000,000 of people, and the total number of those who claim exclusive right to the soil of England and Wales is 30,000. I may not be rightly informed as to the numbers of the land monopolists in those countries, but whether they are twice as great, or half as great as I have given them, is quite immaterial to the essence of my argument against land monopoly. I would say in this connection that land monopoly, or the accumulation of the land in the hands of the few, has increased very rapidly in England. A couple of centuries ago there were several times as many English land holders as there are now.

I need say no more to prove that land monopoly is a very high crime, and that it is the imperative duty of Government to put a stop to it. Were the monopoly of the light and air practicable, and were the monopolists of these elements (having armed themselves with title deeds to them) to sally forth and threaten the people of one town with a vacuum in case they are unwilling or unable to buy their supply of air, and threaten the people of another town with total darkness in case they will not or cannot buy their supply of light; there confessedly would be no higher duty on Government than to put an end to such wicked and death-dealing monopolies. But these monopolies would not differ in principle from land monopoly; and they would be no more fatal to the enjoyments of human existence itself than land monopoly has proved itself capable of being. Why land monopoly has not swept the earth of all good is not because it is unadapted and inadequate to that end, but because it has been only partially carried out.

The right of a man to the soil, the light, and the air, is to so much of each of them as he needs, and no more; and for so long as he lives, and no longer. In other words, this dear mother earth with her never-failing nutritious bosom and this life-preserving air which floats around it and this sweet light which visits it, are all owned by each present generation, and are equally owned by all the members of such generation. Hence, whatever the papers or parchments regarding the soil which we may pass between ourselves, they can have no legitimate power to impair the equal right to it, either of the persons who compose this generation, or of the persons who shall compose the next.

It is a very glaring assumption on the part of one generation, to control the distribution and enjoyment of natural rights for another generation. We of the present generation have no more liberty to provide that one person of the next generation shall have ten thousand acres, and another but ten acres, than we have to provide that one person of the next generation shall live a hundred years, and another but a hundred days; and no more liberty to provide that a person of the next generation shall be destitute of land than that he shall be destitute of light or air. They who compose a generation are, so far as natural rights are concerned, absolutely entitled to a free and equal start in life; and that equality is not to be disturbed and that freedom is not to be encumbered by any arrangements of the preceding generation.

I may be asked whether I would have the present acknowledged claims to land disturbed. I answer that I would where the needs of the people demand it. In Ireland, for instance, there is the most urgent necessity for overriding such claims, and subdividing the land anew. But in our own country there is an abundance of vacant and unappropriated land for the landless to go to. We ought not, however, to presume upon this abundance to delay abolishing land monopoly. The greediness of land monopolists might in a single generation convert this abundance into scarcity. Moreover, if we do not provide now for the peaceable equal distribution of the public lands, it may be too late to provide for it hereafter. Justice, so palpable and so necessary, cannot be withheld but at the risk of being grasped violently.

It is said that all talk of land monopoly in America is impertinent and idle. It is boasted that in escaping from primogeniture and entail we have escaped from the evils of land monopoly. But the boast is unfounded. These evils already press heavily upon us, and they will press more and more heavily upon us unless the root of them is extirpated—unless land monopoly is abolished. In the old portions of the country the poor are oppressed and defrauded of an essential natural right by the accumulation of farms in the hands of wealthy families. In the new, the way of the poor, and indeed of the whole population, to comfort and prosperity is blocked up by tracts of wild land, which speculators retain for the unjust purpose of having them increase in value out of the toil expended upon the contiguous land.

And why should we flatter ourselves that land monopoly, if suffered to live among us, will not in time get laws enacted for its extension and perpetuity as effective even as primogeniture and entail? To let alone any great wrong in the hope that it will never outgrow its present limits, is very unwise—very unsafe. But land monopoly is not only a great, but a mighty wrong; and if let alone it may stretch and fortify itself until it has become invincible.

A much happier world will this be when land monopoly shall cease; when his needed portion of the soil shall be accorded to every person; when it shall no more be bought and sold; when, like salvation, it, shall be "without money and without price;" when, in a word, it shall be free, even as God made it free. Then when the good time prophetically spoken of shall come, and "every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree," the world will be much happier, because, in the first place, wealth will then be so much more equally distributed, and the rich and the poor will then be so comparatively rare. Riches and poverty are both abnormal, false, unhappy states, and they will yet be declared to be sinful states. They beget each other. Over against the one is ever to be found a corresponding degree of the other. So long, then, as the masses are robbed by land monopoly, the world will be cursed with riches and poverty. But when the poor man is put in possession of his portion of the goodly green earth, and is secured by the strong arm of Government in the enjoyment of a home from which not he nor his wife nor his children can be driven, then is he raised above poverty, not only by the possession of the soil, but still more by the virtues which he cultivates in his heart whilst he cultivates the soil. Then, too, he no longer ministers to the undue accumulation of wealth by others, as he did when advantage was taken of his homeless condition, and he was compelled to serve for what he could get.

I would add in this place that inasmuch as land monopoly is the chief cause of beggary, comparatively little beggary will remain after land monopoly is abolished.

The world will be much happier when land monopoly shall cease, because manual labor will then be so honorable because so well-nigh universal.

It will be happier, too, because of the general equality there will then be, not in property only, but in education, and other essential respects also. How much fewer the instances then than now of a haughty spirit on the one hand, and of an abject spirit on the other! The pride

of superior circumstances, so common now, will then be rare. And rare, too, will be that abjectness of spirit, so common now (though, happily, far from universal) in the condition of dependent poverty, and the difficulty of overcoming which is so well compared to the difficulty of making an empty bag stand up straight!

Another gain to the world from abolishing land monopoly is that war would then be well-nigh impossible. It would be so if only because it would be difficult to enlist men into its ranks. For who would leave the comforts and endearments of home to enter upon the poorly-paid and unhonored services of a private soldier? It was not "young Fortinbras" only who in collecting his army,

Shark'd up a list of landless resolute, but in every age and country war has found its recruits among the homeless among vagabonds.

And still another benefit to flow from the abolition of land monopoly is its happy influence upon the cause of temperance—that precious cause which both the great and the small are in their folly and madness so wont to scorn, but which is, nevertheless, none the less essential to private happiness and prosperity, to national growth and glory. The ranks of intemperance, like those of war, are to a great extent recruited from the homeless and the vagrant.

How numerous and precious the blessings that would follow the abolition of land monopoly! By the number and preciousness of those blessings, I might entreat civil government the earth over to abolish it. But I will not. I prefer to demand this justice in the name of justice. In the name of justice I demand that civil government, wherever guilty of it, shall cease to sell and give away land—shall cease to sell and give away what is not its own. The vacant land belongs to all who need it. It belongs to the landless of every clime and condition: The extent of the legitimate concern of Government with it is but to regulate and protect its occupation. In the name of justice do I demand of Government, not only that it shall itself cease from the land traffic, but that it shall compel its subjects to cease from it. Government owes protection to its subjects. It owes them nothing else. But that people are emphatically unprotected who are left by their Government to be the prey of land monopoly.

The Federal Government has sinned greatly against human rights in usurping the ownership of a large share of the American soil. It can of course enact no laws and exert no influence

against land monopoly whilst it is itself the mammoth monopolist of land. This Government has presumed to sell millions of acres and to give away millions of acres. It has lavished land on States and corporations and individuals, as if it were itself the Great Maker of the land. Our State Governments also have been guilty of assuming to own the soil. They too need to repent. And they will repent if the Federal Government will lead the way. . . . And if the Governments of this great nation shall acknowledge the right of every man to a spot of earth for a home, may we not hope that the Governments of many other nations will speedily do likewise? Nay, may we not in that case regard the age as not distant when land monopoly, which numbers far more victims than any other evil, and which is, moreover, the most prolific parent of evil, shall disappear from the whole earth, and shall leave the whole earth to illustrate, as it never can whilst under the curse of land monopoly, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man?

Let this bill become a law and, if our Government shall be consistent with itself, land monopoly will surely cease within the limits of the exclusive jurisdiction of that Government. But let this bill be defeated, and let success attend the applications for scores of millions of acres for soldiers, and for hundreds of millions of acres for railroad and canal companies, and land monopoly will then be so strongly fastened upon this nation that violence alone will be able to throw it off. The best hope for the poor will then perish. The most cherished reliance for human progress will then be trodden under foot.

My reference to the speculator affords me an occasion for saying that, not only the lands which you let soldiers have, but also the lands which you let railroad companies and canal companies have, will get into the hands of land speculators. That is their sure and speedy destination; and it is in those hands that land monopoly works its mightiest mischief, and develops its guiltiest character.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH TOWARD SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

Address by Lawson Purdy at the yearly meeting of The Federation of Church Clubs in the City of New York at Cooper Union, Nov. 16, 1906.

For many years Church people thought that the Church had nothing to do with "Social Problems." They said that it was the mission of the Church to preach the gospel and the

gospel only, and that the pulpit was no place for politics. In these days sentiment has greatly changed, and from many pulpits our duties as citizens are expounded, and not infrequently we are advised that some political party or candidate for office stands for righteousness and that all good citizens should support the party or vote for the candidate.

Somewhat more faintly we still hear the old injunction, "The Church should preach the gospel and the gospel only," and under that plea there lies a truth, seldom clearly expressed and often entirely obscured. The difference of opinion is chiefly due to failure to distinguish the temporal from the eternal. Candidates for office, here to-day and gone to-morrow, details of administration, expediences of legislation—these are unmoral, transitory, temporal. The laws of God are eternal. It is man's duty to discover and obey them. To fail brings punishment, swift and sure, upon us and upon our children, unto the third and fourth generation.

The laws of God that govern the world of men are part of the gospel, part of the good news that this world is wide enough and rich enough for all mankind. If the Church preaches this gospel there will be wrath in the hearts of some who sit in high places and heap to themselves riches they have not earned, and of those who have the wish without the power. But those who have a sense, however vague, of social wrong will flock to hear the message.

WHAT ARE SOCIAL PROBLEMS?

We ask: "What are Social Problems?" The Lord's Prayer gives us the answer and at the same time points to their solution. "Our Father who art in Heaven. . . . Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." It is His will that His kingdom shall come to bless us all, that His will be done for the good of us all. Whatsoever holds back the coming of His kingdom and hinders the doing of His will, is a Social Problem. The foundation on which we must stand in every attempt to solve these problems is clearly put before us in this prayer, taught us by our Lord Himself. "Our Father," He bade us pray—"Our Father." God is our Father. All men are brothers, equal sharers in his spiritual gifts, equally entitled to his earthly bounty. There is here no title to privilege, no warrant for coercion. To justify a resort to force even in defense of life we are obliged to turn