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The Crime of Poverty

by **Henry George**

An address delivered in the Opera House, Burlington, Iowa, April 1, 1885, under the auspices of Burlington Assembly No. 3135, Knights of Labour.

The ROBERT SCHALKENBACH FOUNDATION
41 EAST 72nd STREET **NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021**

Notes on Henry George

Born in Philadelphia, Pa., September 2, 1839. Father a publisher of religious books. Left home at sixteen to sail as foremast boy to Calcutta. Moved to California in 1859, settling in San Francisco. Married Annie Corsina Fox. Victim of depression of the Seventies and often unable to find work. Learned printing trade and began to write articles on social problems in spare time. Got job as editor of a local paper. Gained national attention when his article on Chinese immigration was published in *New York Tribune*. The question, why poverty exists in the midst of abundance tormented him. Assigned to New York in 1868, he was confronted with the monstrous wealth of that city, side byside with debasing want. This convinced him that an economic relationship existed between these two extremes. Returned to California and wrote "Our Land and Land Policy," and then his master work, "Progress and Poverty," which was an international success. Moved to New York and wrote other books including a book on free trade. Ran twice for mayor of New York. A coalition of the major political parties defeated his first attempt. Died October 29, 1897 before the second election was held. His funeral occasioned one of the greatest outpourings of popular feeling and respect ever given to a private citizen.

THE CRIME OF POVERTY.

[An address delivered in the Opera House, Burlington, Iowa, April 1, 1885, under the auspices of Burlington Assembly, No. 3135, Knights of Labour, which afterwards distributed fifty thousand copies in tract form.]

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I PROPOSE to talk to you to-night of the Crime of Poverty. I cannot, in a short time, hope to convince you of much; but the thing of things I should like to show you is that poverty is a crime. I do not mean that it is a crime to be poor. Murder is a crime; but it is not a crime to be murdered; and a man who is in poverty, I look upon, not as a criminal in himself, so much as the victim of a crime for which others, as well perhaps as himself, are responsible. That poverty is a curse, the bitterest of curses, we all know. Carlyle was right when he said that the hell of which Englishmen are most afraid is the hell of poverty; and this is true, not of Englishmen alone, but of people all over the civilised world, no matter what their nationality. It is to escape this hell that we strive and strain and struggle; and work on oftentimes in blind habit long after the necessity for work is gone.

The curse born of poverty is not confined to the poor alone; it runs through all classes, even to the very rich. They, too, suffer; they must suffer; for there cannot be suffering in a community from which any class can totally escape. The vice, the crime, the ignorance, the meanness

born of poverty, poison, so to speak, the very air which rich and poor alike must breathe.

Poverty is the mother of ignorance, the breeder of crime. I walked down one of your streets this morning, and I saw three men going along with their hands chained together. I knew for certain that those men were not rich men; and, although I do not know the offence for which they were carried in chains through your streets, this I think I can safely say, that, if you trace it up you will find it in some way to spring from poverty. Nine tenths of human misery, I think you will find, if you look, to be due to poverty. If a man chooses to be poor, he commits no crime in being poor, provided his poverty hurts no one but himself. If a man has others dependent upon him; if there are a wife and children whom it is his duty to support, then, if he voluntarily chooses poverty, it is a crime—aye, and I think that, in most cases, the men who have no one to support but themselves are men that are shirking their duty. A woman comes into the world for every man; and for every man who lives a single life, caring only for himself, there is some woman who is deprived of her natural supporter. But while a man who chooses to be poor cannot be charged with crime, it is certainly a crime to force poverty on others. And it seems to me clear that the great majority of those who suffer from poverty are poor not from their own particular faults, but because of conditions imposed by society at large. Therefore I hold that poverty is a crime—not an individual crime, but a social crime, a crime for which we all, poor as well as rich, are responsible.

Two or three weeks ago I went one Sunday evening to the church of a famous Brooklyn preacher. Mr. Sankey was singing and something like a revival was going on there. The clergyman told some anecdotes connected with

the revival, and recounted some of the reasons why men failed to become Christians. One case he mentioned struck me. He said that he had noticed on the outskirts of the congregation, night after night, a man who listened intently and who gradually moved forward. One night, the clergyman said, he went to him, saying: "My brother, are you not ready to become a Christian?" The man said, no, he was not. He said it, not in a defiant tone, but in a sorrowful tone; the clergyman asked him why, whether he did not believe in the truths he had been hearing? Yes, he believed them all. Why, then, wouldn't he become a Christian? "Well," he said, "I can't join the church without giving up my business; and it is necessary for the support of my wife and children. If I give that up, I don't know how in the world I can get along. I had a hard time before I found my present business, and I cannot afford to give it up. Yet I can't become a Christian without giving it up." The clergyman asked, "are you a rum-seller?" No, he was not a rum-seller. Well, the clergyman said, he didn't know what in the world the man could be; it seemed to him that a rum-seller was the only man who does a business that would prevent his becoming a Christian; and he finally said: "What is your business?" The man said, "I sell soap." "Soap!" exclaimed the clergyman, "you sell soap? How in the world does that prevent your becoming a Christian?" "Well," the man said, "it is this way; the soap I sell is one of these patent soaps that are extensively advertised as enabling you to clean clothes very quickly, as containing no deleterious compound whatever. Every cake of the soap that I sell is wrapped in a paper on which is printed a statement that it contains no injurious chemicals, whereas the truth of the matter is that it does, and that though it will take the dirt out of clothes pretty quickly, it will, in a

little while, rot them completely. I have to make my living in this way; and I cannot feel that I can become a Christian if I sell that soap." The minister went on, describing how he laboured unsuccessfully with that man, and finally wound up by saying: "He stuck to his soap and lost his soul."

But, if that man lost his soul, was it his fault alone? Whose fault is it that social conditions are such that men have to make that terrible choice between what conscience tells them is right, and the necessity of earning a living? I hold that it is the fault of society; that it is the fault of us all. Pestilence is a curse. The man who would bring cholera to this country, or the man who, having the power to prevent its coming here, would make no effort to do so, would be guilty of a crime. Poverty is worse than cholera; poverty kills more people than pestilence, even in the best of times. Look at the death statistics of our cities; see where the deaths come quickest; see where it is that the little children die like flies—it is in the poorer quarters. And the man who looks with careless eyes upon the ravages of this pestilence, the man who does not set himself to stay and eradicate it, he, I say, is guilty of a crime.

If poverty is appointed by the power which is above us all, then it is no crime; but if poverty is unnecessary, then it is a crime for which society is responsible and for which society must suffer.

I hold, and I think no one who looks at the facts can fail to see, that poverty is utterly unnecessary. It is not by the decree of the Almighty, but it is because of our own injustice, our own selfishness, our own ignorance, that this scourge, worse than any pestilence, ravages our civilisation, bringing want and suffering and degradation, destroying souls as well as bodies. Look over the world, in

this heyday of nineteenth century civilisation. In every civilised country under the sun you will find men and women whose condition is worse than that of the savage: men and women and little children with whom the veriest savage could not afford to exchange. Even in this new city of yours with virgin soil around you, you have had this winter to institute a relief society. Your roads have been filled with tramps, fifteen, I am told, at one time taking shelter in a round-house here. As here, so everywhere; and poverty is deepest where wealth most abounds.

What more unnatural than this? There is nothing in nature like this poverty which to-day curses us. We see rapine in nature; we see one species destroying another; but as a general thing animals do not feed on their own kind; and, wherever we see one kind enjoying plenty, all creatures of that kind share it. No man, I think, ever saw a herd of buffalo, of which a few were fat and the great majority lean. No man ever saw a flock of birds, of which two or three were swimming in grease and the others all skin and bone. Nor in savage life is there anything like the poverty that festers in our civilisation.

In a rude state of society there are seasons of want, seasons when people starve; but they are seasons when the earth has refused to yield her increase, when the rain has not fallen from the heavens, or when the land has been swept by some foe—not when there is plenty. And yet the peculiar characteristic of this modern poverty of ours is that it is deepest where wealth most abounds.

Why, to-day, while over the civilised world there is so much distress, so much want, what is the cry that goes up? What is the current explanation of the hard times? Overproduction! There are so many clothes that men must go ragged, so much coal that in the bitter winters people have to shiver, such over-filled granaries that people actu-

ally die by starvation! Want due to over-production! Was a greater absurdity ever uttered? How can there be over-production till all have enough? It is not over-production; it is unjust distribution.

Poverty necessary! Why, think of the enormous powers that are latent in the human brain! Think how invention enables us to do with the power of one man what not long ago could not be done by the power of a thousand. Think that in England alone the steam machinery in operation is said to exert a productive force greater than the physical force of the population of the world, were they all adults. And yet we have only begun to invent and discover. We have not yet utilised all that has already been invented and discovered. And look at the powers of the earth. They have hardly been touched. In every direction as we look new resources seem to open. Man's ability to produce wealth seems almost infinite—we can set no bounds to it. Look at the power that is flowing by your city in the current of the Mississippi that might be set at work for you. So in every direction energy that we might utilise goes to waste; resources that we might draw upon are untouched. Yet men are delving and straining to satisfy mere animal wants; women are working, working, working their lives away, and too frequently turning in despair from that hard struggle to cast away all that makes the charm of woman.

If the animals can reason what must they think of us? Look at one of those great ocean steamers ploughing her way across the Atlantic, against wind, against wave, absolutely setting at defiance the utmost power of the elements. If the gulls that hover over her were thinking beings could they imagine that the animal that could create such a structure as that could actually want for enough to eat? Yet, so it is. How many even of those of us who find life

easiest are there who really live a rational life? Think of it, you who believe that there is only one life for man—what a fool at the very best is a man to pass his life in this struggle to merely live? And you who believe, as I believe, that this is not the last of man, that this is a life that opens but another life, think how nine tenths, aye, I do not know but ninety-nine-hundredths of all our vital powers are spent in a mere effort to get a living; or to heap together that which we cannot by any possibility take away. Take the life of the average workingman. Is that the life for which the human brain was intended and the human heart was made? Look at the factories scattered through our country. They are little better than penitentiaries.

I read in the New York papers a while ago that the girls at the Yonkers factories had struck. The papers said that the girls did not seem to know why they had struck, and intimated that it must be just for the fun of striking. Then came out the girls' side of the story and it appeared that they had struck against the rules in force. They were fined if they spoke to one another, and they were fined still more heavily if they laughed. There was a heavy fine for being a minute late. I visited a lady in Philadelphia who had been a forewoman in various factories, and I asked her, "Is it possible that such rules are enforced?" She said it was so in Philadelphia. There is a fine for speaking to your next neighbour, a fine for laughing; and she told me that the girls in one place where she was employed were fined ten cents a minute for being late, though many of them had to come for miles in winter storms. She told me of one poor girl who really worked hard one week and made $3.50; but the fines against her were $5.25. That seems ridiculous; it is ridiculous, but it is pathetic and it is shameful.

But take the cases of those even who are comparatively independent and well off. Here is a man working hour after hour, day after day, week after week, in doing one thing over and over again, and for what? Just to live. He is working ten hours a day in order that he may sleep eight and may have two or three hours for himself when he is tired out and all his faculties are exhausted. That is not a reasonable life; that is not a life for a being possessed of the powers that are in man, and I think every man must have felt it for himself. I know that when I first went to my trade I thought to myself that it was incredible that a man was created to work all day long just to live. I used to read the "Scientific American," and as invention after invention was heralded in that paper I used to think to myself that when I became a man it would not be necessary to work so hard. But on the contrary, the struggle for existence has become more and more intense. People who want to prove the contrary get up masses of statistics to show that the condition of the working classes is improving. Improvement that you have to take a statistical microscope to discover does not amount to anything. But there is not improvement.

Improvement! Why, according to the last report of the Michigan Bureau of Labour Statistics, as I read yesterday in a Detroit paper, taking all the trades, including some of the very high priced ones, where the wages are from $6 to $7 a day, the average earnings amount to $1.77, and, taking out waste time, to $1.40. Now, when you consider how a man can live and bring up a family on $1.40 a day, even in Michigan, I do not think you will conclude that the condition of the working classes can have very much improved.

Here is a broad general fact that is asserted by all who have investigated the question, by such men as Hallam,

the historian, and Professor Thorold Rogers, who has made a study of the history of prices as they were five centuries ago. When all the productive arts were in the most primitive state, when the most prolific of our modern vegetables had not been introduced, when the breeds of cattle were small and poor, when there were hardly any roads and transportation was exceedingly difficult, when all manufacturing was done by hand—in that rude time the condition of the labourers of England was far better than it is to-day. In those rude times no man need fear want save when actual famine came, and owing to the difficulties of transportation the plenty of one district could not relieve the scarcity of another. Save in such times, no man need fear want. Pauperism, such as exists in modern times, was absolutely unknown. Everyone, save the physically disabled, could make a living, and the poorest lived in rude plenty. But perhaps the most astonishing fact brought to light by this investigation is that at that time, under those conditions in those "dark ages," as we call them, the working day was only eight hours. While with all our modern inventions and improvements, our working classes have been agitating and struggling in vain to get the working day reduced to eight hours.

Do these facts show improvement? Why, in the rudest state of society in the most primitive state of the arts the labour of the natural bread-winner will suffice to provide a living for himself and for those who are dependent upon him. Amid all our inventions there are large bodies of men who cannot do this. What is the most astonishing thing in our civilisation? Why, the most astonishing thing to those Sioux chiefs who were recently brought from the Far West and taken through our manufacturing cities in the East, was not the marvelous inventions that enabled machinery to act almost as if it had intellect; it was not the

growth of our cities; it was not the speed with which the railway car whirled along; it was not the telegraph or the telephone that most astonished them; but the fact that amid this marvelous development of productive power they found little children at work. And astonishing that ought to be to us; a most astounding thing!

Talk about improvement in the condition of the working classes, when the facts are that a larger and larger proportion of women and children are forced to toil. Why, I am told that, even here in your own city, there are children of thirteen and fourteen working in factories. In Detroit, according to the report of the Michigan Bureau of Labour Statistics, one half of the children of school age do not go to school. In New Jersey, the report made to the legislature discloses an amount of misery and ignorance that is appalling. Children are growing up there, compelled to monotonous toil when they ought to be at play, children who do not know how to play; children who have been so long accustomed to work that they have become used to it; children growing up in such ignorance that they do not know what country New Jersey is in, that they never heard of George Washington, that some of them think Europe is in New York. Such facts are appalling; they mean that the very foundations of the Republic are being sapped. The dangerous man is not the man who tries to excite discontent; the dangerous man is the man who says that all is as it ought to be. Such a state of things cannot continue; such tendencies as we see at work here cannot go on without bringing at last an overwhelming crash.

I say that all this poverty and the ignorance that flows from it is unnecessary; I say that there is no natural reason why we should not all be rich, in the sense, not of having more than each other, but in the sense of all having enough to completely satisfy all physical wants; of all having enough to get such an easy living that we could develop the better part of humanity. There is no reason why wealth should not be so abundant, that no one should think of such a thing as little children at work, or a woman compelled to a toil that nature never intended her to perform; wealth so abundant that there would be no cause for that harassing fear that sometimes paralyses even those who are not considered "the poor," the fear that every man of us has probably felt, that if sickness should smite him, or if he should be taken away, those whom he loves better than his life would become charges upon charity. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin." I believe that in a really Christian community, in a society that honoured not with the lips but with the act, the doctrines of Jesus, no one would have occasion to worry about physical needs any more than do the lilies of the field. There is enough and to spare. The trouble is that, in this mad struggle, we trample in the mire what has been provided in sufficiency for us all; trample it in the mire while we tear and rend each other.

There is a cause for this poverty; and, if you trace it down, you will find its root in a primary injustice. Look over the world to-day—poverty everywhere. The cause must be a common one. You cannot attribute it to the tariff, or to the form of government, or to this thing or to that in which nations differ; because, as deep poverty is common to them all the cause that produces it must be a common cause. What is that common cause? There is one sufficient cause that is common to all nations; and that is the appropriation as the property of some of that natural element on which and from which all must live.

Take that fact I have spoken of, that appalling fact

that, even now, it is harder to live than it was in the ages dark and rude five centuries ago—how do you explain it? There is no difficulty in finding the cause. Whoever reads the history of England, or the history of any other civilised nation (but I speak of the history of England because that is the history with which we are best acquainted) will see the reason. For century after century a parliament composed of aristocrats and employers passed laws endeavouring to reduce wages, but in vain. Men could not be crowded down to wages that gave a mere living because the bounty of nature was not wholly shut up from them; because some remains of the recognition of the truth that all men have equal rights on the earth still existed; because the land of that country, that which was held in private possession, was only held on a tenure derived from the nation, and for a rent payable back to the nation. The church lands supported the expenses of public worship, of the maintenance of seminaries and the care of the poor; the crown lands defrayed the expenses of the civil list; and from a third portion of the lands, those held under the military tenures, the army was provided for. There was no national debt in England at that time. They carried on wars for hundreds of years, but at the charge of the landowners. And more important still, there remained everywhere, and you can see in every old English town their traces to this day, the common lands to which any of the neighbourhood was free. It was as those lands were inclosed; it was as the commons were gradually monopolised, as the church lands were made the prey of greedy courtiers, as the crown lands were given away as absolute property to the favourites of the king, as the military tenants shirked their rents and laid the expenses they had agreed to defray, upon the nation, in taxation that bore upon industry and upon thrift

—it was then that poverty began to deepen, and the tramp appeared in England; just as to-day he is appearing in our new States.

Now, think of it—is not land monopolisation a sufficient reason for poverty? What is man? In the first place, he is an animal, a land animal who cannot live without land. All that man produces comes from land; all productive labour, in the final analysis, consists in working up land; or materials drawn from land, into such forms as fit them for the satisfaction of human wants and desires. Why, man's very body is drawn from the land. Children of the soil, we come from the land, and to the land we must return. Take away from man all that belongs to the land, and what have you but a disembodied spirit? Therefore he who holds the land on which and from which another man must live, is that man's master; and the man is his slave. The man who holds the land on which I must live can command me to life or to death just as absolutely as though I were his chattel. Talk about abolishing slavery—we have not abolished slavery; we have only abolished one rude form of it, chattel slavery. There is a deeper and a more insidious form, a more cursed form yet before us to abolish, in this industrial slavery that makes a man a virtual slave, while taunting him and mocking him with the name of freedom. Poverty! want! they will sting as much as the lash. Slavery! God knows there are horrors enough in slavery; but there are deeper horrors in our civilised society to-day. Bad as chattel slavery was, it did not drive slave mothers to kill their children, yet you may read in official reports that the system of child insurance which has taken root so strongly in England, and which is now spreading over our Eastern States, has perceptibly and largely increased the rate of child mortality!—What does that mean?

Robinson Crusoe, as you know, when he rescued Friday from the cannibals, made him his slave. Friday had to serve Crusoe. But, supposing Crusoe had said, "O man and brother, I am very glad to see you, and I welcome you to this island, and you shall be a free and independent citizen, with just as much to say as I have—except that this island is mine, and of course, as I can do as I please with my own property, you must not use it save upon my terms." Friday would have been just as much Crusoe's slave as though he had called him one. Friday was not a fish, he could not swim off through the sea; he was not a bird, and could not fly off through the air; if he lived at all, he had to live on that island. And if that island was Crusoe's, Crusoe was his master through life to death.

A friend of mine, who believes as I do upon this question, was talking a while ago with another friend of mine who is a greenbacker, but who had not paid much attention to the land question. Our greenback friend said, "Yes, yes, the land question is an important question; oh, I admit the land question is a very important question; but then there are other important questions. There is this question and that question, and the other question; and there is the money question. The money question is a very important question; it is a more important question than the land question. You give me all the money, and you can take all the land." My friend said, "Well, suppose you had all the money in the world and I had all the land in the world. What would you do if I were to give you notice to quit?"

Do you know that I do not think that the average man realises what land is? I know a little girl who has been going to school for some time, studying geography, and all that sort of thing; and one day she said to me: "Here is something about the surface of the earth. I wonder

what the surface of the earth looks like?" "Well," I said, "look out into the yard there. That is the surface of the earth." She said, "That the surface of the earth? Our yard the surface of the earth? Why, I never thought of it!" That is very much the case not only with grown men, but with such wise beings as newspaper editors. They seem to think, when you talk of land, that you always refer to farms; to think that the land question is a question that relates entirely to farmers, as though land had no other use than growing crops. Now, I should like to know how a man could even edit a newspaper without having the use of some land. He might swing himself by straps and go up in a balloon, but he could not even then get along without land. What supports the balloon in the air? Land; the surface of the earth. Let the earth drop, and what would become of the balloon? The air that supports the balloon is supported in turn by land. So it is with everything else men can do. Whether a man is working away three thousand feet under the surface of the earth, or whether he is working up in the top of one of those immense buildings that they have in New York; whether he is ploughing the soil or sailing across the ocean, he is still using land.

Land! Why, in owning a piece of ground, what do you own? The lawyers will tell you that you own from the centre of the earth right up to heaven; and, so far as all human purposes go, you do. In New York they are building houses thirteen and fourteen stories high. What are men, living in those upper stories, paying for? There is a friend of mine who has an office in one of them, and he estimates that he pays by the cubic foot for air. Well, the man who owns the surface of the land has the renting of the air up there, and would have if the buildings were carried up for miles.

This land question is the bottom question. Man is a land animal. Suppose you want to build a house; can you build it without a place to put it? What is it built of? Stone, or mortar, or wood, or iron—they all come from the earth. Think of any article of wealth you choose, any of those things which men struggle for, where do they come from? From the land. It is the bottom question. The land question is simply the labour question; and when some men own that element from which all wealth must be drawn, and upon which all must live, then they have the power of living without work, and, therefore, those who do work get less of the products of work.

Did you ever think of the utter absurdity and strangeness of the fact that, all over the civilised world, the working classes are the poor classes? Go into any city in the world, and get into a cab and ask the man to drive you where the working people live. He won't take you to where the fine houses are. He will take you, on the contrary, into the squalid quarters, the poorer quarters. Did you ever think how curious that is? Think for a moment how it would strike a rational being who had never been on the earth before, if such an intelligence could come down, and you were to explain to him how we live on earth, how houses and food and clothing, and all the many things we need were all produced by work, would he not think that the working people would be the people who lived in the finest houses and had most of everything that work produces? Yet, whether you took him to London or Paris or New York, or even to Burlington, he would find that those called the working people were the people who live in the poorest houses.

All this is strange—just think of it. We naturally despise poverty; and it is reasonable that we should. I do

not say—I distinctly repudiate it—that the people who are poor are poor always from their own fault, or even in most cases; but it ought to be so. If any good man or woman could create a world, it would be a sort of a world in which no one would be poor unless he was lazy or vicious. But that is just precisely the kind of a world this is; that is just precisely the kind of a world the Creator has made. Nature gives to labour, and to labour alone; there must be human work before any article of wealth can be produced; and in the natural state of things the man who toiled honestly and well would be the rich man, and he who did not work would be poor. We have so reversed the order of nature that we are accustomed to think of the workingman as a poor man.

And if you trace it out I believe you will see that the primary cause of this is that we compel those who work to pay others for permission to do so. You may buy a coat, a horse, a house; there you are paying the seller for labour exerted, for something that he has produced, or that he has got from the man who did produce it; but when you pay a man for land, what are you paying him for? You are paying for something that no man has produced; you pay him for something that was here before man was, or for a value that was created, not by him individually, but by the community of which you are a part. What is the reason that the land here, where we stand tonight, is worth more than it was twenty-five years ago? What is the reason that land in the centre of New York, that once could be bought by the mile for a jug of whiskey, is now worth so much that, though you were to cover it with gold, you would not have its value? Is it not because of the increase of population? Take away that population, and where would the value of the land be? Look at it in any way you please.

We talk about over-production. How can there be such a thing as over-production while people want? All these things that are said to be over-produced are desired by many people. Why do they not get them? They do not get them because they have not the means to buy them; not that they do not want them. Why have not they the means to buy them? They earn too little. When the great masses of men have to work for an average of $1.40 a day, it is no wonder that great quantities of goods cannot be sold.

Now why is it that men have to work for such low wages? Because if they were to demand higher wages there are plenty of unemployed men ready to step into their places. It is this mass of unemployed men who compel that fierce competition that drives wages down to the point of bare subsistence. Why is it that there are men who cannot get employment? Did you ever think what a strange thing it is that men cannot find employment? Adam had no difficulty in finding employment; neither had Robinson Crusoe; the finding of employment was the last thing that troubled them.

If men cannot find an employer, why cannot they employ themselves? Simply because they are shut out from the element on which human labour can alone be exerted. Men are compelled to compete with each other for the wages of an employer, because they have been robbed of the natural opportunities of employing themselves; because they cannot find a piece of God's world on which to work without paying some other human creature for the privilege.

I do not mean to say that even after you had set right this fundamental injustice, there would not be many things to do; but this I do mean to say, that our treatment of land lies at the bottom of all social questions. This I do

mean to say, that, do what you please, reform as you may, you never can get rid of wide-spread poverty so long as the element on which and from which all men must live is made the private property of some men. It is utterly impossible. Reform government—get taxes down to the minimum—build railroads; institute co-operative stores; divide profits, if you choose, between employers and employed—and what will be the result? The result will be that the land will increase in value—that will be the result—that and nothing else. Experience shows this. Do not all improvements simply increase the value of land—the price that some must pay others for the privilege of living?

Consider the matter, I say it with all reverence, and I merely say it because I wish to impress a truth upon your minds—it is utterly impossible, so long as His laws are what they are, that God himself could relieve poverty—utterly impossible. Think of it and you will see. Men pray to the Almighty to relieve poverty. But poverty comes not from God's laws—it is blasphemy of the worst kind to say that; it comes from man's injustice to his fellows. Supposing the Almighty were to hear the prayer, how could He carry out the request so long as His laws are what they are? Consider—the Almighty gives us nothing of the things that constitute wealth; He merely gives us the raw material, which must be utilised by man to produce wealth. Does He not give us enough of that now? How could He relieve poverty even if He were to give us more? Supposing in answer to these prayers He were to increase the power of the sun; or the virtue of the soil? Supposing He were to make plants more prolific, or animals to produce after their kind more abundantly? Who would get the benefit of it? Take a country where land is completely monopolised, as it is in most of the

civilised countries—who would get the benefit of it? Simply the landowners. And even if God in answer to prayer were to send down out of the heavens those things that men require, who would get the benefit?

In the Old Testament we are told that when the Israelites journeyed through the desert, they were hungered, and that God sent manna down out of the heavens. There was enough for all of them, and they all took it and were relieved. But supposing that desert had been held as private property, as the soil of Great Britain is held, as the soil even of our new States is being held; suppose that one of the Israelites had a square mile, and another one had twenty square miles, and another one had a hundred square miles, and the great majority of the Israelites did not have enough to set the soles of their feet upon, which they could call their own—what would become of the manna? What good would it have done to the majority? Not a whit. Though God had sent down manna enough for all, that manna would have been the property of the landholders; they would have employed some of the others perhaps, to gather it up into heaps for them, and would have sold it to their hungry brethren. Consider it; this purchase and sale of manna might have gone on until the majority of Israelites had given all they had, even to the clothes off their backs. What then? Then they would not have had anything left to buy manna with, and the consequences would have been that while they went hungry the manna would have lain in great heaps, and the landowners would have been complaining of the over-production of manna. There would have been a great harvest of manna and hungry people, just precisely the phenomenon that we see to-day.

I cannot go over all the points I would like to try, but I wish to call your attention to the utter absurdity of private property in land! Why, consider it, the idea of a man's selling the earth—the earth, our common mother. A man selling that which no man produced—a man passing title from one generation to another. Why, it is the most absurd thing in the world. Why, did you ever think of it? What right has a dead man to land? For whom was this earth created? It was created for the living, certainly, not for the dead. Well, now we treat it as though it was created for the dead. Where do our land titles come from? They come from men who for the most part are past and gone. Here in this new country you get a little nearer the original source; but go to the Eastern States and go back over the Atlantic. There you may clearly see the power that comes from landownership.

As I say, the man that owns the land is the master of those who must live on it. Here is a modern instance: you who are familiar with the history of the Scottish Church know that in the forties there was a disruption in the church. You who have read Hugh Miller's work on "The Cruise of the *Betsey*" know something about it; how a great body, led by Dr. Chalmers, came out from the Established Church and said they would set up a Free Church. In the Established Church were a great many of the landowners. Some of them, like the Duke of Buccleugh, owning miles and miles of land on which no common Scotsman had a right to put his foot, save by the Duke of Buccleugh's permission. These landowners refused not only to allow these Free Churchmen to have ground upon which to erect a church, but they would not let them stand on their land and worship God. You who have read "The Cruise of the *Betsey*" know that it is the story of a clergyman who was obliged to make his home in a boat on that wild sea because he was not allowed to have land enough to live on. In many places the people

had to take the sacrament with the tide coming to their knees—many a man lost his life worshipping on the roads in rain and snow. They were not permitted to go on Mr. Landlord's land and worship God, and had to take to the roads. The Duke of Buccleugh stood out for seven years compelling people to worship in the roads, until finally relenting a little, he allowed them to worship God in a gravel pit; whereupon they passed a resolution of thanks to His Grace.

But that is not what I wanted to tell you. The thing that struck me was this significant fact: As soon as the disruption occurred, the Free Church, composed of a great many able men, at once sent a delegation to the landlords to ask permission for Scotsmen to worship God in Scotland and in their own way. This delegation set out for London—they had to go to London, England, to get permission for Scotsmen to worship God in Scotland, and in their own native home!

But that is not the most absurd thing. In one place where they were refused land upon which to stand and worship God, the late landowner had died and his estate was in the hands of the trustees, and the answer of the trustees was, that so far as they were concerned they would exceedingly like to allow them to have a place to put up a church to worship God, but they could not conscientiously do it because they knew that such a course would be very displeasing to the late Mr. Monaltie! Now this dead man had gone to heaven, let us hope; at any rate he had gone away from this world, but lest it might displease him men yet living could not worship God. Is it possible for absurdity to go any further?

You may say that those Scotch people are very absurd people, but they are not a whit more so than we are. I read only a little while ago of some Long Island fishermen who had been paying as rent for the privilege of fishing there, a certain part of the catch. They paid it because they believed that James II., a dead man centuries ago, a man who never put his foot in America, a king who was kicked off the English throne, had said they had to pay it, and they got up a committee, went to the county town and searched the records. They could not find anything in the records to show that James II. had ever ordered that they should give any of their fish to anybody, and so they refused to pay any longer. But if they had found that James II. had really said they should they would have gone on paying. Can anything be more absurd?

There is a square in New York—Stuyvesant Square—that is locked up at six o'clock every evening, even on the long summer evenings. Why is it locked up? Why are the children not allowed to play there? Why because old Mr. Stuyvesant, dead and gone I don't know how many years ago, so willed it. Now can anything be more absurd?[1]

Yet that is not any more absurd than our land titles. From whom do they come? Dead man after dead man. Suppose you get on the cars here going to Council Bluffs or Chicago. You find a passenger with his baggage strewn over the seats. You say: "Will you give me a seat, if you please, sir?" He replies: "No; I bought this seat." "Bought this seat? From whom did you buy it?" "I bought it from the man who got out at the last station." That is the way we manage this earth of ours.

Is it not a self-evident truth, as Thomas Jefferson said, that "the land belongs in usufruct to the living," and

[1] After a popular agitation, the park authorities since decided to leave the gates open later than six o'clock.

that they who have died have left it, and have no power to say how it shall be disposed of? Title to land! Where can a man get any title which makes the earth his property? There is a sacred right to property—sacred because ordained by the laws of nature, that is to say, by the laws of God, and necessary to social order and civilisation. That is the right of property in things produced by labour; it rests on the right of a man to himself. That which a man produces, that is his against all the world, to give or to keep, to lend, to sell or to bequeath; but how can he get such a right to land when it was here before he came? Individual claims to land rest only on appropriation. I read in a recent number of the "Nineteenth Century," possibly some of you may have read it, an article by an ex-prime minister of Australia in which there was a little story that attracted my attention. It was of a man named Galahard, who in the early days got up to the top of a high hill in one of the finest parts of western Australia. He got up there, looked all around, and made this proclamation: "All the land that is in my sight from the top of this hill I claim for myself; and all the land that is out of sight I claim for my son John."

That story is of universal application. Land titles everywhere come from just such appropriations. Now, under certain circumstances, appropriation can give a right. You invite a company of gentlemen to dinner and you say to them: "Be seated, gentlemen," and I get into this chair. Well, that seat for the time being is mine by the right of appropriation. It would be very ungentlemanly, it would be very wrong for any one of the other guests to come up and say: "Get out of that chair; I want to sit there!" But that right of possession, which is good so far as the chair is concerned, for the time, does not

give me a right to appropriate all there is on the table before me. Grant that a man has a right to appropriate such natural elements as he can use, has he any right to appropriate more than he can use? Has a guest in such a case as I have supposed a right to appropriate more than he needs and make other people stand up? That is what is done.

Why, look all over this country—look at this town or any other town. If men only took what they wanted to use we should all have enough; but they take what they do not want to use at all. Here are a lot of Englishmen coming over here and getting titles to our land in vast tracts; what do they want with our land? They do not want it at all; it is not the land they want; they have no use for American land. What they want is the income that they know they can in a little while get from it. Where does that income come from? It comes from labour, from the labour of American citizens. What we are selling to these people is our children, not land.

Poverty! Can there be any doubt of its cause? Go into the old countries—go into western Ireland, into the highlands of Scotland—these are purely primitive communities. There you will find people as poor as poor can be—living year after year on oatmeal or on potatoes, and often going hungry. I could tell you many a pathetic story. Speaking to a Scottish physician who was telling me how this diet was inducing among these people a disease similar to that which from the same cause is ravaging Italy (the Pellagra), I said to him: "There is plenty of fish; why don't they catch fish? There is plenty of game; I know the laws are against it, but cannot they take it on the sly?" "That," he said, "never enters their heads. Why, if a man was even suspected of having a taste for trout or grouse he would have to leave at once."

There is no difficulty in discovering what makes those people poor. They have no right to anything that nature gives them. All they can make above a living they must pay to the landlord. They not only have to pay for the land that they use, but they have to pay for the seaweed that comes ashore and for the turf they dig from the bogs. They dare not improve, for any improvements they make are made an excuse for putting up the rent. These people who work hard live in hovels, and the landlords, who do not work at all—oh! they live in luxury in London or Paris. If they have hunting boxes there, why they are magnificent castles as compared with the hovels in which the men live who do the work. Is there any question as to the cause of poverty there?

Now go into the cities and what do you see! Why, you see even a lower depth of poverty; aye, if I would point out the worst of the evils of land monopoly I would not take you to Connemara; I would not take you to Skye or Kintire—I would take you to Dublin or Glasgow or London. There is something worse than physical deprivation, something worse than starvation; and that is the degradation of the mind, the death of the soul. That is what you will find in those cities.

Now, what is the cause of that? Why, it is plainly to be seen; the people driven off the land in the country are driven into the slums of the cities. For every man that is driven off the land the demand for the produce of the workmen of the cities is lessened; and the man himself with his wife and children, is forced among those workmen to compete upon any terms for a bare living and force wages down. Get work he must or starve—get work he must or do that which those people, so long as they maintain their manly feelings, dread more than death, go to the alms-houses. That is the reason, here as in Great

Britain, that the cities are overcrowded. Open the land that is locked up, that is held by dogs in the manger, who will not use it themselves and will not allow anybody else to use it, and you would see no more of tramps and hear no more of over-production.

The utter absurdity of this thing of private property in land! I defy any one to show me any good from it, look where you please. Go out in the new lands, where my attention was first called to it, or go to the heart of the capital of the world—London. Everywhere, when your eyes are once opened, you will see its inequality and you will see its absurdity. You do not have to go farther than Burlington. You have here a most beautiful site for a city, but the city itself as compared with what it might be is a miserable, straggling town. A gentleman showed me to-day a big hole alongside one of your streets. The place has been filled up all around it and this hole is left. It is neither pretty nor useful. Why does that hole stay there? Well, it stays there because somebody claims it as his private property. There is a man, this gentleman told me, who wished to grade another lot and wanted somewhere to put the dirt he took off it, and he offered to buy this hole so that he might fill it up. Now it would have been a good thing for Burlington to have it filled up, a good thing for you all—your town would look better, and you yourself would be in no danger of tumbling into it some dark night. Why, my friend pointed out to me another similar hole in which water had collected and told me that two children had been drowned there. And he likewise told me that a drunken man some years ago had fallen into such a hole and had brought suit against the city which cost you taxpayers some $11,000. Clearly it is to the interest of you all to have that particular hole I am talking of filled up. The man who wanted to fill it

up offered the hole owner $300. But the hole owner refused the offer and declared that he would hold out until he could get $1000; and in the meanwhile that unsightly and dangerous hole must remain. This is but an illustration of private property in land.

You may see the same thing all over this country. See how injuriously in the agricultural districts this thing of private property in land affects the roads and the distances between the people. A man does not take what land he wants, what he can use, but he takes all he can get, and the consequence is that his next neighbour has to go further along, people are separated from each other further than they ought to be, to the increased difficulty of production, to the loss of neighbourhood and companionship. They have more roads to maintain than they can decently maintain; they must do more work to get the same result, and life is in every way harder and drearier.

When you come to the cities it is just the other way. In the country the people are too much scattered; in the great cities they are too crowded. Go to a city like New York and there they are jammed together like sardines in a box, living family upon family, one above the other. It is an unnatural and unwholesome life. How can you have anything like a home in a tenement room, or two or three rooms? How can children be brought up healthily with no place to play? Two or three weeks ago I read of a New York judge who fined two little boys five dollars for playing hop-scotch on the street—where else could they play? Private property in land had robbed them of all place to play. Even a temperance man, who had investigated the subject, said that in his opinion the gin palaces of London were a positive good in this, that they enabled the people whose abodes were dark and squalid rooms to see a little brightness and thus prevent them from going wholly mad.

What is the reason for this overcrowding of cities? There is no natural reason. Take New York, one half its area is not built upon. Why, then, must people crowd together as they do there? Simply because of private ownership of land. There is plenty of room to build houses and plenty of people who want to build houses, but before anybody can build a house a blackmail price must be paid to some dog in the manger. It costs in many cases more to get vacant ground upon which to build a house than it does to build the house. And then what happens to the man who pays this blackmail and builds a house? Down comes the tax-gatherer and fines him for building the house.

It is so all over the United States—the men who improve, the men who turn the prairie into farms and the desert into gardens, the men who beautify your cities, are taxed and fined for having done these things. Now, nothing is clearer than that the people of New York want more houses; and I think that even here in Burlington you could get along with more houses. Why, then, should you fine a man who builds one? Look all over this country—the bulk of the taxation rests upon the improver; the man who puts up a building, or establishes a factory, or cultivates a farm, he is taxed for it; and not merely taxed for it, but I think in nine cases out of ten the land which he uses, the bare land, is taxed more than the adjoining lot or the adjoining 160 acres that some speculator is holding as a mere dog in the manger, not using it himself and not allowing anybody else to use it.

I am talking too long; but let me in a few words point out the way of getting rid of land monopoly, securing the right of all to the elements which are necessary for life. We could not divide the land. In a rude state of society, as among the ancient Hebrews, giving each family its lot

and making it inalienable we might secure something like equality. But in a complex civilisation that will not suffice. It is not, however, necessary to divide up the land. All that is necessary is to divide up the income that comes from the land. In that way we can secure absolute equality; nor could the adoption of this principle involve any rude shock or violent change. It can be brought about gradually and easily by abolishing taxes that now rest upon capital, labour and improvements, and raising all our public revenues by the taxation of land values; and the longer you think of it the clearer you will see that in every possible way will it be a benefit.

Now, supposing we should abolish all other taxes direct and indirect, substituting for them a tax upon land values, what would be the effect? In the first place it would be to kill speculative values. It would be to remove from the newer parts of the country the bulk of the taxation and put it on the richer parts. It would be to exempt the pioneer from taxation and make the larger cities pay more of it. It would be to relieve energy and enterprise, capital and labour, from all those burdens that now bear upon them. What a start that would give to production! In the second place we could, from the value of the land, not merely pay all the present expenses of the government, but we could do infinitely more. In the city of San Francisco James Lick left a few blocks of ground to be used for public purposes there, and the rent amounts to so much, that out of it will be built the largest telescope in the world, large public baths and other public buildings, and various costly works. If, instead of these few blocks, the whole value of the land upon which the city is built had accrued to San Francisco what could she not do?

So in this little town, where land values are very low as compared with such cities as Chicago and San Francisco, you could do many things for mutual benefit and public improvement did you appropriate to public purposes the land values that now go to individuals. You could have a great free library; you could have an art gallery; you could get yourselves a public park, a magnificent public park, too. You have here one of the finest natural sites for a beautiful town I know of, and I have travelled much. You might make on this site a city that it would be a pleasure to live in. You will not as you go now—oh, no! Why, the very fact that you have a magnificent view here will cause somebody to hold on all the more tightly to the land that commands this view and charge higher prices for it. The State of New York wants to buy a strip of land so as to enable the people to see Niagara, but what a price she must pay for it! Look at all the great cities; in Philadelphia, for instance, in order to build their great city hall they had to block up the only two wide streets they had in the city. Everywhere you go you may see how private property in land prevents public as well as private improvement.

But I have not time to enter into further details. I can only ask you to think upon this thing, and the more you will see its desirability. As an English friend of mine puts it: "No taxes and a pension for everybody;" and why should it not be? To take land values for public purposes is not really to impose a tax, but to take for public purposes a value created by the community. And out of the fund which would thus accrue from the common property, we might, without degradation to anybody, provide enough to actually secure from want all who were deprived of their natural protectors or met with accident, or any man who should grow so old that he could not work. All prating that is heard from some quarters about its hurting the common people to give them what they do not

work for is humbug. The truth is, that anything that injures self-respect, degrades, does harm; but if you give it as a right, as something to which every citizen is entitled to, it does not degrade. Charity schools do degrade children that are sent to them, but public schools do not.

But all such benefits as these, while great, would be incidental. The great thing would be that the reform I propose would tend to open opportunities to labour and enable men to provide employment for themselves. That is the great advantage. We should gain the enormous productive power that is going to waste all over the country, the power of idle hands that would gladly be at work. And that removed, then you would see wages begin to mount. It is not that everyone would turn farmer, or everyone would build himself a house if he had an opportunity for doing so, but so many could and would, as to relieve the pressure on the labour market and provide employment for all others. And as wages mounted to the higher levels, then you would see the productive power increased. The country where wages are high is the country of greatest productive powers. Where wages are highest, there will invention be most active; there will labour be most intelligent; there will be the greatest yield for the expenditure of exertion. The more you think of it the more clearly you will see that what I say is true. I cannot hope to convince you in an hour or two, but I shall be content if I shall put you upon inquiry. Think for yourselves; ask yourselves whether this wide-spread fact of poverty is not a crime, and a crime for which every one of us, man and woman, who does not do what he or she can do to call attention to it and do away with it, is responsible.