

Good P. E.

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Feb 26 1887

LAND AND LABOR.

Mr. George began his remarks in a low, conversational tone of voice, but before he had reached the end of the second sentence he warmed up to his subject, and his voice filled the great house. He is a pleasing speaker, clear, distinct and deliberate. As he spoke he paced the platform to and fro, sometimes with his hands clasped before him, sometimes with them folded behind his back. His gestures were few, but graceful.

He spoke as follows:

"Dr. DeBeck, in opening the meeting, addressed himself to ladies and fellow citizens. Let me say what I know he intended by addressing myself to my fellow citizens, whether they be women or whether they be men. (Applause.) As Dr. DeBeck has said, we do know what we want; we want the earth! (Great laughter and applause) We want the earth, not for ourselves alone, but we want the earth for all men. What this movement aims at is the assertion of the great truth that the earth was created for all the children of men. (Applause.) Our chairman is right; we are beginning a struggle greater and broader than those that went before, and I congratulate you, men of the land and labor clubs of Cincinnati, who, in the west, have been first to unfurl the banner of the new and greater struggle for human rights. (Applause.) When the last long bitter contest was over, and chattel slavery was gone in the United States forever, some one said to James Redpath: 'Now that you have abolished slavery, what next do you propose to abolish?' Quick as a flash Redpath answered: 'The next thing we propose to abolish is poverty.' (Applause.) 'I did not know then,' said Redpath, 'how poverty was to be abolished; but I did know that it ought to be

abolished.' But now James Redpath does know not only that poverty ought to be abolished, but how it can be abolished, and he stands with us on this platform of the land for the people, demanding with us that equality of human rights to the use of the earth that, once gained, will end poverty.

"In proclaiming this central truth we set our feet upon a rock. No matter what to-day or to-morrow may bring forth, no matter how the next campaign or the campaign after that goes, they who stand on the side of truth are sure of ultimate victory. The stars in their courses fight for them. (Applause.) All the high impulses of the human heart, all the great deeds and names of the past, all the throbbing aspirations for the future are on their side, and succeed they must. When a great truth fairly comes into discussion, that which is opposed to it is doomed. And the great truth which we assert is now so well to the front that it cannot be ignored. In the great campaign that we are beginning we clasp hands with our brethern of Ireland, of England, of Scotland, and of continental Europe, taking our part in a world-wide struggle that can end only in victory. (Applause.) Let politicians make platforms to catch votes. For us there is but one thing to do, and that is to proclaim the truth and to stand for the right never fearing that in God's own time the truth will triumph.

"All over the country, all over the world, there is a deep and deepening dissatisfaction with social conditions - a vague groping after something that will put an end to the injustice which the masses feel. This movement of ours must go on gathering strength, for we have set our faces in the right road. As our chairman has said, we know what we want and how to get it. We in New York and you here in Cincinnati, in proclaiming that the great end for which

the working masses must struggle is the resumption of natural rights in the land - strike at the heart of all the perplexing social difficulties of our day. Not that there are to-day in society ~~many~~ other things that are wrong besides the tenure of land, but that this is the fundamental wrong from which these minor wrongs proceed, which must be righted before those can be righted.

"Throughout the civilized world we see to-day phenomena of the same kind. In spite of the great advance in the power of producing wealth; in spite of a production of wealth unprecedented in all ages gone before, there is want and suffering, and the great mass of mankind, in spite of all that invention and discovery have done to increase the power of human hands to satisfy human wants, are compelled to work for a bare living, and to consider themselves, in many cases, favored when they get the opportunity to earn only that. What is the cause? It can not be anything peculiar to one country. It must be something common to them all. And in the great broad fact that in all our civilized countries the majority of men and women who come into the world are denied all rights whatever to the use of that world is a sufficient explanation. In the very kingdom of heaven such a system would produce the same phenomena that we see here. Man is a land animal. It is only on land and from land that he can live at all. All his production consists in working up the raw material that we call land. We often say that labor is the creator of wealth. When we say that, it is only true in a metaphorical sense. Labor creates nothing. Man is not a creator; he is a producer - that is, a bringer-forth. What labor does is to bring forth from the reservoirs of nature; and all

human production is but the change in form or in place of what we find already in existence - of the raw material that nature placed here. Man is a land animal. He is a product of land himself. Our very bodies are drawn from the earth. From the soil we come and to the soil we return again, children of the land just as much as the flower is of the tree. Labor is the producer of wealth in the sense of being the active factor that brings forth the wealth. But labor is perfectly helpless unless it has the raw material to act upon; and therefore, deprived of access to the land, no matter what his power to labor may be, a man is utterly helpless.

"This is the explanation of what we see today - great masses of men endowed with the power to labor, but utterly helpless to employ themselves, because they have nothing to employ that labor on, and thus driven to a cut-throat competition with each other to sell their power of labor to some one else.

"Here is the explanation of those perplexing questions of right and wrong that arise in our labor struggles. It is true that no man has a right to forbid others from seeking employment but each man has a God-given right to employ his own labor, and it is the denial of this right that leads to combinations, boycotts and strikes. When there exists in any community a great class of men who cannot employ themselves, then they have to ^{compete} with each other for the wages of some employer. They have to bid against each other. They have to beg and strain and even fight, for the consequence of that competition is that wages inevitably go down to the lowest point on which men will consent to live. And that is the minimum to which wages tend all over the civilized world to-day in spite of all our advances in labor-saving machinery, a minimum to

which wages in the organized trades are only prevented from falling by the efforts of labor associations.

"Take those great strikes in New York. What is it that the strikers have had to contend against? It is the rush of unemployed men anxious to go to work on any terms. So, it is with all strikes and devices by which organized workmen attempt to carry their point; they consist in the main of shoving back this competition, in keeping off the pressure of men who are ready to take any wages rather than starve.

"The weakness of organized labor, the difficulty of all attempts to increase wages arises from the fact that even the best of times there are many, and in what we call bad times there are a vast number of, men all over the country willing and anxious to work, ready to work hard for a poor pittance, and yet unable to find an opportunity to do so. And the cause of this fact is evidently that labor is denied access to the natural opportunities of employment; that the land, without which labor is helpless is monopolized.

"The workingmen of New York are beginning to realize that if they would improve the condition of the mechanic and artisan they must take into account somebody else; that if they would permanently raise the wages of skilled labor they must do something for the unskilled laborer. (Applause.) That if they would permanently improve the condition of the men of the city they must make a common fight with the farmers of the country. (Applause.) And seeing that, they have come to the land question, the fundamental question of all, and they propose to make opportunities for labor to obtain employment by opening to labor the natural opportunities that the Creator intended for the employment of men.

"Why, think of it! We are gradually getting to look upon the employment of any kind as a boon. We maintain a stupid tariff wall around our country - what for? The popular idea is to keep work in the country, to keep foreigners from doing our work. And we really look upon the fact that men imprisoned for crime are put to work as an injury to workingmen, in taking work from them. Imagine a bird that could think flying over this country! Do you think it could understand how it was, in a country like this that work was scarce? Ought there be any scarcity of work as long as people want the things that work produces? Ought there be any scarcity of work when the natural opportunities for work are so abundant?"

"How is it there is not work enough in a country with a vast extent of untilled land; in a country where mines are yet hardly opened; in a country where the natural resources are for our present population multiplied by tens and hundreds? If there is any scarcity of work, is it not an artificial scarcity, born of the monopoly of the natural elements necessary to productive work?"

"Consider the absurdity of the cry of over-production which we hear so often. To many of the things that thousands and millions of people want! An overproduction of dry goods, when certainly nine-tenths of the women in this country would like two or three new dresses? (Laughter.) An overproduction of food when people have to stint themselves! An overproduction of clothing when men have to wear their old clothes! There can be no over-production in the true sense of the word until everybody has enough. (Applause.) Overproduction! I remember reading a year or two ago in one of our eastern papers about a Massachusetts boot and shoe manufacturer. He called his girls together and said that owing to

an overproduction he must reduce the number of hands and wages; but he was a good, kind employer, and he knew they were good, deserving girls, and in order to make it up to them he would allow to work two hours overtime. (Great laughter.)

"So in this case the net result of what was called overproduction was that these poor girls had to work two hours longer for the same wages. And so it is generally. While we talk of overproduction ~~in~~ the streets of the cities and roads of the country are filled with men who cannot obtain employment, and our factories are filled with little children and young girls. In nearly all our states it has been found necessary to pass prohibitory laws to prevent parents putting their children to work when they ought to be at play. (Applause.) It is no overproduction; it is unjust distribution. (Applause.) There is not production enough. If the men who would like to be at work could be at work earning honest wages, how long do you think trade would be dull in this country? Let the artisans and the mechanics and the builders and other trades all be employed, and how long would the farmers have to complain of hard times? The cause of this disease is simply that men who would like to expend their labor in producing wealth for themselves find themselves deprived of the opportunity, and in our system of the division of labor, when one man who would like to be at work finds no opportunity, some other man is compelled to stand idle. So the stagnation runs all through, one industry after another.

"There are unquestionably many things that are wrong in our society today, but this great fundamental wrong is in itself sufficient to account for the existence of poverty in the midst of

abundant wealth. Under any state of things, in any condition of society where a great class of people were deprived of the natural opportunities for the exertion of labor, where they had no right whatever to the land on which they lived, where they were compelled from day to day and week to week to purchase the right of living, there must be poverty, there must be that unjust distribution of wealth which piles up wealth in the hands of men who do not labor and compels those who do labor to take the very smallest remuneration.

"If you have any difficulty as to what is the trouble in the United States with out railroads and complex machinery of production, go over into Ireland. Go into Connemara or the Scottish islands. There you will see society in the most primitive conditions; women using the spinning-wheel and the hand-loom, and men working yet with the same agricultural instruments that our forefathers used centuries ago. They work hard, yet why are they poor? There can be no question about the reason there. Those people are poor because all they can make, save a bare living in the best of times, is taken from them by the landlords. The workers live in hovels. And it is not because their neighbor won't produce more than enough to enable them to live in the hovels. Every once in a while you will come upon a magnificent mansion and splendid grounds. The man who lives in the house when he is in the country - for the best part of his time he lives in London or in Paris - does no work at all. He prides himself upon the fact that his ancestors for generations never did a stroke of work. The people who do the work have a bare living, having to pay to him all the surplus for the right to work on the land, for the right to make nature produce upon the call of labor.

"Yet he, the idler, lives in luxury, because as owner of the land he has power to compel the people who do the work to give up to him all their work produces, save the barest living, for the privilege of working on his land - for the privilege of living in his world.

"And this fundamental injustice, which in the simplest industrial conditions operates to divide men into the rich and the poor, to give wealth to those who do nothing to produce it, and to rob the producer of the just fruits of his toil, operates in the same way in more complex industrial conditions. No matter how complex those conditions, man is yet a land animal, who can only live on land and from land, and all his production is yet the changing in place or form of natural elements - the union of labor with land. And in the primary inequality resulting from the fact that some men are compelled to pay other men for the privilege of living and working is the source of that monstrous inequality which has already in our new country brought forth the millionaire on the one side and the tramp on the other, and which makes every addition to the power of production widen the gulf between rich and poor.

"Wealth is produced by work. When a man enjoys a great income, when he can get a fine house and clothes and carriages, and all that human labor can produce, without doing anything himself, it must be at the expense of those who do work. Look at the enormous incomes in New York that are drawn by the owners of the soil. Where do they come from? They come from the laborer. Look at these English dukes and lords that are coming over here and buying great tracts of our western land. Do you suppose they want that land? They don't want to come over here and till it, nor do they want to

carry it away. They do not really want the land. They want the revenue; that is the produce of labor, that the ownership of that land will give them when American citizens have to pay them a price for the privilege of using it. Merè land has no value. It is not land we are selling them. It is the power to appropriate the produce of American laborers yet to be. (Applause.)

"Look in which direction you may and you will see the evil effects of attaching to land the same individual rights of property that justly attach to things produced by human labor. Go into the city of New York, the greatest of American cities, and see how people are crowded together there under conditions which deny light and air sufficient to maintain bodily health, crowded together under conditions which inevitably degrade the health of the soul. And what is the reason of that? People are crowded so in New York, that little children die like flies in summer. It is not because there is not land enough. Half the area of New York is yet unbuilt upon. Why do people not go upon that vacant land and build houses? Simply because the land is held by dogs-in-the-manger, who have no use for it at the present time and are simply holding it in order to get a high price for it. There is plenty of land around New York on which men who cannot find employment from an employer might find work for themselves. But if they were to attempt to thus go to work for themselves, they would at once be warned off. And though they might travel a thousand miles, they would find the same difficulty. Everywhere unused natural opportunities for the employment of labor, but everywhere the dog-in-the-manger who will not let them use what he is making no use of, unless they can pay him a blackmail price or mortgage their labor for years. And so they

turn back to swell the crowds that fill the cities, competing with each other for opportunities to get the wages of some employer; so they became beggars, paupers, tramps.

"This is the cause that is bringing on this new republic, on this virgin continent, all the curses that afflict Europe. The canker that ate out the heart of Italy is beginning to eat out the heart of the great republic of the west. Labor saving machinery and all discoveries and inventions that have so increased the power of men to labor seem, instead of improving the condition of the mere laborer and raising wages, to have made these conditions harder; for labor saving machinery, no matter how far it can go, cannot do anything for the mere laborer in the country where the land is all monopolized. Take such a country as Ireland. Let the sun be more genial, the climate more favorable, who would reap the benefit? The landlord. Given a country in which one class of people own all the land, and you may imagine labor saving invention and discovery to go so far that labor would be entirely unnecessary - no matter if wealth could be produced without labor we can not imagine it possible, to be produced without land until we can imagine something to be produced out of nothing. Land would still be necessary, and the result would be that the owners of land could obtain all the wealth the land was able to produce without giving anything to the mere laborer, and the man who was simply a laborer would simply become a pauper. And under these conditions, no matter if wealth rained down from Heaven, it could not benefit the laborer.

"Our friend Dr. DeBeck has spoken of the torch that was lit in New York - no, not in New York. It is the old fire. It is the torch that was raised here in America in the Declaration of Independence! (Applause.) What we stand for is the equal and in-

alienable rights of men. The truth we proclaim is the truth proclaimed by our forefathers; the truth that God has created men free and equal, and has endowed them with certain inalienable rights. It is the equal right to live and the equal right to labor that we contend for. (Applause.)

"We contend that every child that comes into the world becomes seized with the right to an equal right to the use of this world while he lives. We contend, as Thomas Jefferson said, that the land belongs in usufruct to the living, and not to the dead.

"We hold in full to the right of property - ay, to the sacred right of property. That which a man makes, that which his labor produces, is his against all the world, to use and sell, to give, to bequeath, to do whatsoever he pleases with it, so long as with it he does no injury to any one else. And as necessary to secure this just right of property we contend that no one can secure such right to the earth that he shall be enabled to compel others to give up to him the produce of their labor for the privilege of living and working. (Applause.)

"Now, how do we propose to carry out this principle? If it is a moral truth - and I think no one will deny that it is a moral truth that all men are the creatures of the common Creator, and have an equal right to the materials of this earth during their continuance upon it - if that be a truth, then there must be a way to carry it out that will accord with every dictate of justice. That will injure no one, and that will be entirely practical. Don't believe them when anybody says to you a thing is right or just, but it is impracticable. This is not that kind of a world. That which is just, that which is right, always is practicable. (Applause.)

"Let me declare plainly and distinctly, for this is a point on which there is much misapprehension and misrepresentation, that we do not propose to have the state take the land from its present owners and divide it up or rent it out; we simple propose to make such a change in our fiscal system as will shift the burden of taxation from labor and the products of labor to land values - the value attaching to land; irrespective of the improvements upon it; the value attaching to land, not by reason of what the occupier has done, but by reason of the growth of the community. We propose to reach by this easy and gradual change the end at which we aim, and that end is that the man who enjoys the privilege of holding a piece of land that the growth of the community has made valuable, shall pay to the community what the special privilege is worth, and thus all citizens be placed upon an equal footing. When this is done, or even as we approach it, it will become unprofitable for anybody to hold land without using it, in the expectation of growing rich by the value which attaches to it from the growth of the community. Land will become profitable only to those who want to use it. Thus the dog-in-the-manger will be choked off, and from the vacant lots of our eastern cities to the great tracts held on speculation in the far west, opportunities for employment will be thrown open to labor and forestalling be prevented". (Great applause.)

Mr. George went on at length to show the stupidity of our present mode of taxation in repressing the production of wealth and putting a fine upon thrift and industry, and pointed out the fraud and corruption to which this inevitably leads. He showed that a tax on land values could be collected more easily, more certainly, and with less evasion and corruption than any other tax, and would in no wise

repress industry or lessen the value of land to the user. He ridiculed the idea that this was a scheme for exempting the rich from taxation, asking, if that were so, why the rich so bitterly opposed it, and why it was that when the organized workingmen of New York made this the main plank in their platform the cry went up from the rich that society was in danger, and nothing that money could do was left undone to beat them at the polls. The men who profited, or imagined they profited, by the present unjust distribution of wealth knew, he said, that this simple measure struck at the very heart of great fortunes, and that it was revolutionary in the best sense, since it would revolutionize the system that made labor a drug in the market and forced men to beg for employment.

He then went to some length into a discussion of the charge made that the concentration of all taxation upon land values would injure the farmers, declaring on the contrary that there was no class of the community that would profit more by it than the working farmers. "Is the condition of the American farmer now so good," asked Mr. George, "that he should fear to examine any proposition for a radical change in the present system? On the contrary, he is the man on whom under our system, taxation falls with unsparing severity. A farmer goes upon a piece of land, and by his labor makes himself a home. Although it may never have been used before, and there are around it thousands of acres still unused, he is forced to pay for it a price which involves the labor of years, and in many cases to give a mortgage upon his labor which it will take him years to pay off, if he ever does succeed in paying it off. In the mean time our system of indirect taxation adds to the cost of everything he consumes without adding to the price of anything he has to sell. He breaks up the

land and sows a crop; he builds a house and a barn, plants an orchard and produces wealth by his labor where none was produced before. Down comes a tax-gatherer and taxes him for all this, and not merely this, but as is universal throughout the United States, he is taxed on the value of his land far more than the mere speculator is taxed on land just as good in every respect but which he is holding unused. The man who tills his own fields is a laborer rather than a landowner, and it is to his interest that the burden of taxation should be taken off of labor and put upon land values. The effect of this would be to relieve farmers from taxation. It would be to take the weight of taxation off the country districts and to place it upon the great land values of the towns and of those mineral districts to which the demands of an increasing population give great value. And since the result would be to destroy the speculative value of land, where land of the same quality was yet unused, the farmer, under the system which we propose, would have no tax whatever to pay, whether direct or indirect.

"And the general effect upon the distribution of population would be most important and most beneficent. Our present system, which allows a man to grow rich by merely appropriating land and holding it, crowds people together in the cities and unduly separates them in the country. Men aim not at getting what land they want to use, but at getting all they can hold. Under a system of taxation which did away with all temptation to hold land idle for the sake of its increase in value there would be more elbow-room in the cities and better settled neighborhoods in the country. One of the terrible facts which show the direction in which we are drifting under our present system is the rapid increase

See "Incidence of S.T." that statement depends upon the incidence.

of insanity, and it is among the farming population that the increase in insanity is most marked. This is due to the hard and dreary life of the farmer and the farmer's wife, to the absence of the society and social enjoyments which a better distribution of population would secure. And, further, the fact is that the American farmer, of whom so much has been said, is, under the pressure of the present system, already beginning to disappear. The last census showed that one-quarter of the farmers were already tenants, and this proportion is steadily increasing. A great part of those who are the nominal owners of their farms were only the nominal owners. They are being eaten out with mortgages. The history of the world shows that where private property in land exists the ownership of soil must concentrate, and the farming class become mere tenants and laborers with a rapidity proportioned to the material progress of the country and the introduction of labor saving machinery. At the accession of James II, it is stated by Macaulay, the majority of English farmers were the owners of the acres they tilled; but for a long time past the farmer who owned his own farm has been a curiosity in England, and the degraded English agricultural laborer represents the class whom we have been accustomed to boast of as the independent American farmer. A movement to assert the rights of all men to their native soil cannot harm the working farmer. It can only benefit him, as it will all classes of laborers. The only men who can be injured by it are those whose interests as landowners pure and simple are greater than all their other interests; and while such men, and they are yet few in the United States, might relatively be losers, they, too, would absolutely gain; for the destruction of monopoly, which now prevents men from employing their own labor and brings

about the one-sided competition which constantly tends to force wages to the starvation point, would abolish poverty and the fear of poverty, and would so enormously increase the production of wealth and so equalize its distribution, that the humblest and poorest could feel sure of securing all that was necessary to a comfortable and independent existence, without hard toil, and would exempt them from the anxieties which now beset all classes. The men who are now striving and straining to heap up wealth in order to ward off the danger of poverty from themselves and their children, would be far more secure in a state of society in which no one need fear poverty, and could well afford to buy entrance to it, if that were necessary, by giving up all their present possessions."

Mr. George closed by declaring that while it was impossible in an hour or two to answer all the objections that would arise in the minds of those who had not thought much upon the subject, he was certain that, as they did think upon it, the proposition to concentrate all taxation upon land values would more and more commend itself, and he then invited questions from the audience.

The opportunity afforded was eagerly taken advantage of, and one question after another was promptly answered by Mr. George to the great satisfaction of the audience until the lateness of the hour compelled the chairman to bring the meeting to a close.

Dated. Feb. 26, 1887