THE CRIME OF POVERTY

Private Ownership in Land the Root of all Poverty.

THE LABOR QUESTION A LAND QUESTION.

Tax the Land Instead of Industry and Enterprise, and

WAGES AND WORK WOULD BE PLENTIFUL.

Mr. Henry George, who was received with loud applause, said:

Ladies and gentlemen,—I am to lecture to you to-night on "The Crime of Poverty." I hold that poverty is a crime. Not that it is a crime to be poor necessarily. There may be cases in which even that is true—cases in which a man is poor from his own fault. But the greater portion of the poverty that exists all over the civilized world to-day I hold to be a crime, not of the individuals who suffer, but of society at large. Two or three weeks ago there was started at a great meeting in New York an Anti-Poverty Society; and the Chairman of that meeting is a priest who, during a long life in the ministry in that city, has been known for his charitable deeds and good works—Rev. Dr. McGlynn. (Applause,) That society proclaims its desire to abolish poverty. That man, like many other men who have done what they could to alleviate poverty by charity, has become satisfied that charity—the mere giving of alms—could do practically nothing to meet the case. It is necessary to go to the root of the evil, and for that reason he has lifted up

THE CROSS OF THE NEW CRUSADE

against crime—the social crime of poverty—and called together a great body of earnest men and women who, like him, believe that it springs from a wrong, and the only way to successfully deal with it is to abolish that wrong. (Applause.) In commenting upon this society and the part taken in it by Dr. McGlynn, a prominent Catholic clergyman of New England in a recent sermon declared that the very attempt to abolish poverty was wicked—that poverty was ordained by God, that Christ came upon the earth and blessed poverty and did nothing whatever to remove it. If this preacher is right, if poverty is caused by the laws of God, if poverty is in the scheme of the Creator, then all efforts to abolish it are futile. If it is not, if it exists in defiance of God's laws, if it exists because we don't observe those laws, then poverty is a crime, and the crime must meet its punishment. (Applause.) I contend that there is in the laws and in the providence of the Creator nothing to produce the widespread poverty that exists to-day even in the very centres of the world. On the contrary, it is due to the injustice of man—to the fact that we have ignored and do ignore the laws of God. Look over the civilized world to-day. Everywhere there is looming up what we speak of as the labor question. Everywhere men who earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brows are becoming dissatisfied with the existing order of things. Everywhere there is complaint of men willing to work with difficulty finding the opportunity to work. Everywhere there are those who even with the hardest toil can only make the barest living. I read to-day in Mr. Goldwin Smith's paper, the *Week*, an item stating that a Durham engineer had made a discovery by which the same amount of steam could be produced as now with 70 per cent. less coal, and the article went on to say how this invention would enable steamships to cross the ocean at a speed of thirty miles an hour, without increase of running expenses—how it would decrease railway expenses, and at the same time effect a sufficient saving to

CLOTHE EVERY NAKED BACK

and fill every hungry stomach. That was the dream of men some decades ago, when the grand era of modern discovery and improvement was first entered upon. It is a dream which has not been realized. Invention upon invention and modern improvement upon modern improvement have been made, yet where our inventions provide the world with the greatest abundance there seems to be the most poverty. In spite of all the powers which human ingenuity has called to the aid of human muscles in their produce of wealth, the struggle for existence becomes more intense as time passes by. In civilized lands insanity is steadily on the increase, and while we have on the one hand fortunes being amassed that seem monstrous, we have on the other the pauper and the tramp. What can we hope for from future inventions if this is the case? Before we can hope that mere invention will do away with poverty we must find out why it is that all the great powers which have come already have not sufficed to do so. All over the world the labor question is arising. There are combinations of capital, strikes, boycotts on all sides. This labor question is the great matter to be settled in the future. What is at the bottom of the labor question? Simply this: that there are now, in the best of times, among us a certain number of men who find it difficult to get employment. They are constantly met with the statement that there is either a surplus of products of labor or too little work to furnish employment for all. Even in our newest States to-day there are men idly tramping about looking for employment. Our great cities are full of them. An advertisement in the New York *Herald*—and the *Herald* is in the habit of boasting about it—asking for help will meet with 200 or 300 responses. Thousands of people are landing upon our shores every week, driven from Europe by the harder conditions of older settled countries, and trying to improve their fortunes here, and yet all over our country there

SEEMS TO BE TOO MANY PEOPLE.

Great combinations of labor are formed to keep down these conditions, and it has gone so far into our every day life that we are accustomed to regard work as a boon. Our newspapers talk of the man who furnishes work as a benefactor, and our public policy, in important respects, is based on this idea. We maintain tariffs to keep work in our country—to, in our idea, keep foreigners from doing work that we think should be done here. It is not natural for a man to want to work; on the contrary, the natural impulse of a man is to allow others to do work for him. You may make work for a housewife by dropping grease on her kitchen floor or spilling coffee on her carpet, but she will not thank you for it. (Laughter.) Yet vast expenditures have popular support, because it is said they are going to furnish work—to make employment, to give people something to do. Now, when you come to think of it, there is no natural surplus of labor. The relations between the demand and the supply of labor are fixed. What is the demand? It is the satisfying of human wants. And the supply of labor are those powers which a man brings into the world with him. So long as for every mouth that is brought into existence there come two hands, the relations between demand and supply must be the same, no matter how the population increases. And if it seems, as it does seem to-day, that there is a discrepancy, it is simply that there is something that prevents the supply from satisfying the demand. (Applause.) This notion that there is a surplus of labor—too many people in the world—has been developed into a philosophical theory, and it has been attempted to throw upon the Creator the responsibility for the want and suffering which prevail among men. It has been held by certain philosophers that there is a tendency to multiply population faster than subsistence. That is

THE MALTHUSIAN THEORY.

There are in reality no facts anywhere in the civilized world that can support that contention. There are certainly none in a new country like this. Yet we are asked to look on the phenomena in this new land that these theorists have attempted to account for—too many people. The thing is preposterous! And to-day if there is one theory more than another that is believed in, that theory is over-production. The thing is transcendently preposterous! There can be no such thing as over-production in any general sense until all human wants are satisfied. Over-production! Too many new clothes! And women who would like a new dress have to turn their old ones! Too many shoes! And children have to go barefoot! It cannot be over-production. It must be unjust distribution. (Applause.) Over-production? I read in a newspaper when the last spasm of hard times was coming on, an item about a cotton manufacturer in an Eastern State, who called his work girls together and explained to them that in consequence of over-production he would have to do something. He said he was aware they were only getting enough wages to enable them to live in comfort; he would not reduce these, but would allow them to come to his assistance by working two hours more a day for the same pay. And that little thing is typical of larger things. Talk of over-production! While all over the world there are millions of men who would work if they could find anything to do, great numbers of children are sent to work when they ought to be at school. (Applause.) Women who ought to be at home are forced to toil all day in our factories. Over-production! when we are pressing men, women and children into the workshops to toil for something to save them from starvation. Over-production! when parents are forced to overstate the ages of their children to get them employment despite the laws of the State, so that they may be enabled to get food and raiment. It is not over-production. The whole question of this industrial problem comes down

TO THE UNEMPLOYED MAN.

It is he who forces all this competition in the avocations of all civilized communities. This competition, which runs through all branches of business, originates with the unemployed man. A number of men are working together in a common, unorganized trade. Along comes an unemployed man asking for work. The employer tells him he hasn't any work for him. The man says, "I am tired and hungry and must get work. What wages do you pay?" "Three dollars a day," responds the boss. To this the seeker after labor says, "Well, I must have work. I will work for $2.50 a day." The employer says "All right." He then goes to one of his employees and says he must discharge him. "Why," asks the man, "don't I do my work all right? What have you against me?" "Nothing," replies the boss, "only I can get a man who will do the work for less wages." The employee thinks he might as well work for the $2.50 as be discharged, and the boss goes around his men in the shop and finds all would rather accept the reduction than make way for the unemployed man. And this one unemployed man may under free conditions lower the price of labor of twenty men. It was cases like this which caused the inauguration of labor unions. Still this competition grows, and though unions may fight it out now and then they can never destroy it as long as large numbers of the community are out of employment. It is like rowing against the tide. Get rid of the idle man and

POVERTY WILL BE ABOLISHED.

There will then only remain the poverty which results from vice. The Bible says: "He that will not work, neither shall he eat." But the curse of the present state of society is that the men who are anxious to work so that they may eat are unable to find the opportunity to do so. No man has the right to compel another to employ him; but every man does have a natural right to employ himself. Now what is the natural opportunity for employment? How did the first man who settled in this new country get employment? There was simply the land waiting for him to labor on for it to produce all human desires, and he went to work. That was all. Where men can find access to land there men can always find employment. That is why in new countries labor is easier to find than in older ones. Over on our side of the line a delusion has been fostered that a protective tariff raises wages in the United States. Why, wages in the States were higher in old colonial days, before a tariff was raised at all, than they are now. Adam Smith declared that when land was easy to get a man would not work long for small wages. But as these opportunities for self employment have been curtailed we find that fringe of unemployed labor increasing, and competition becoming more and more bitter? They talk about labor being the creator of all wealth. Labor can create nothing. God Almighty alone can create. Man is not a creator, he is a producer only. The whole human race could not create the tiniest spot on the surface of the sun. Man produces fish by taking them out of the water. He produces coal by digging it out of the bowels of the earth. He produces houses by getting together the brick and mortar and wood, and produces cloth by weaving the material, etc. All our productions are simply the changing in place or in form

OF THE RAW MATERIAL

which nature produces. Labor alone can accomplish nothing. Without the land it is helpless. It can only be of service in working up the raw material already in existence. So it is that the man who has only his labor at command is absolutely helpless, and cannot use his labor until he can attain access to the raw material. Man is a land animal. We are just as much children of the soil as are the flowers or grass. The man who has only the power to work under conditions in which material for work is owned by somebody else is a mere dependent. The man who owns the land is virtually his master and he his slave. You may call them free men, but they are not so. The owner has the power of life and death over them. In a community where one class of people own the land and the other has no legal right to any portion of the earth, there must serfs be found. The landlord! That is a title the Bible gives to Deity. Tennyson says:

The God Almighty of the country side,

He having power over the elements furnished by God can compel them virtually to do his will. They are his slaves. What is slavery? It is compelling a man to labor without giving him in return an adequate reward for that labor. Is not this industrial slavery just as much slavery as that which was abolished at the end of the great war? The slaves had to be fed and clothed to keep them alive, and the children had to be reared to be healthy men and women. Now, you take the older countries, and there are great populations there who get no more than the wages of the slave. Even in our country men and women are working in our factories among machinery that has produced untold wealth, yet they are miserably poor. Is not the reason that we have made

LAND THE PRIVATE PROPERTY OF A FEW.

That we have enabled men, by virtue of their ownership of slices of this planet, to live in idleness, while others have to buy permission from them before they can go to work. We talk about there not being work enough. Take the great city of New York. Go there and you will see the great mass of the people crowded so close together that the very decencies cannot be observed. So close that the children die by the thousands in their infancy. So close that only about 4 per cent. of the people live in separate houses. Yet there are lots of people there who have too little work. Is there no opportunity there for building operations? Why are there not more houses built? Bricklayers and carpenters and material could be had at any moment. But you must get part of the surface of the land there to build upon. You cannot build houses in the sky. And there is plenty of land. About one-half of the area of New York is yet vacant. Why don't they build more houses then, when they are so much needed? Simply for this reason: that the land is held at enormous prices by speculators. Go into Pennsylvania and you will find coal miners who are in a condition little better than serfdom, working for poor wages and only able to get work about two-thirds time in the year. Work, too, is often shut off entirely on account, the mine owners say, of over production of coal, while at that very time thousands of people in New York, Boston and Chicago want more coal and are not able to get it. If enough coal is not produced to supply these people it is not because there is not sufficient coal land. The reason is that the lands are held by a few men, some of them residing in New York, some in Chicago, or perhaps in England, and the miners are not allowed to work. The owners shut down just when they like and up go the prices of coal. If the men could dig down and bring out the coal that God planted there they would have plenty, and having plenty they would make work for others—they would buy more dry goods and groceries, and the whole community would be benefited. (Hear, hear.) Go into agriculture and you see the same thing. People are coming over the seas to our country and the population is streaming across the continent. From the east they are pushing west looking for land. It is a good deal like swimming a river to get a drink. You go out from New York and see

GREAT TRACTS OF UNOCCUPIED LAND,

but you must go a very long way before you see any that is unclaimed, or that you dare set a foot upon without paying some speculator or mortgaging your labor for years. Thus the cities are crowded. Open the natural opportunities for labor and none need lack employment. The primary occupations are those on which all others are built and the remuneration on primary occupations regulate that on all others. No wonder wages are low and are only kept up to about half what they should be by combinations, strikes and fighting when you see farmers in the Western States being obliged to give one-half of their crops in order to get at the land. When men can get only one-half of the product of their labor on farms how must it be in all other classes of labor? Then look at the booms you have all over the country. You have had some in Canada and some pretty respectable ones, I believe, in the Northwest. (Laughter.) In New York land is continually going up in price and in Kansas City to-day, or ten miles out of the city, you will see them making streets by running a plough along the land, dividing the property off into lots and selling the lots at $250 each. A great deal of that is wild-cat speculation, but as population increases land goes up in value, and the man who gets the land, though he does nothing, can grow rich by compelling others to pay high prices before they can use it. When any man can thus get rich on the product of labor, the man who does the laboring must get less in proportion. This is the

FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE OF THE DEPRESSION,

over production and poverty that fester in every centre of population, and it is a cause that is a crime. Take the coal of which I spoke. Before man came upon this earth the forces of nature were at work producing this coal. For what? Evidently to furnish a store of heat and light and power for the dwellers that were to dwell upon the earth; for the beings that differ from all others in their ability to use what has been placed upon and in the earth. What, then, was coal made for? For this corporation or that body of men? Or was it for all men? Is it not a manifest truth of natural as well as of revealed religion that it was made for all the people of the earth? (Applause.) God is no respector of persons, and that which denies to any his right is an injury and a crime. Just think of it! Little children to-day toiling in the factories in New York, Glasgow, London and all big cities, and growing up in such a way that it is little less than a miracle to keep them pure. Are they not the children of God? Are they not entitled to an equal share in His bounty, and are they not robbed when disinherited of their right? When the English went to New Zealand and bought the land from the natives the women would come back to them and ask for more money. They replied, "Why, we bought this land from you and paid you for it, and why do you come back wanting more?" Then the women replied, "Yes, yes, but you didn't pay this baby its share; this baby was not born then." Isn't the New Zealander's system a truer one than ours? Why should a father be allowed to

SELL THE RIGHTS OF HIS CHILDREN?

Take England, Ireland and Scotland, for instance, and there you find that the vast part of the population come into life with no right to live and no right to use the land except they purchase it from another. Where one comes into the world the possessor of vast lands one thousand are born with no right except what they get by paying the one. Is not this preposterous and absurd? (Hearty applause.) Where can any man get the right to deed away slices of this earth? There certainly is a right of property recognized, and a right which is absolutely indispensable. That which a man makes is his. It is his against all the world so long as by the use of it he does not injure any one. That is clear, and rests upon the right of every man to enjoy the fruits which his labor produces. But who can have the right to the possession of any acre of land? Man takes a fish from the ocean and it is his, being the product of his own labor. No man has the right to come up and lay claim to or take that fish; but that is different from the right of ownership of the ocean, whereby any man should say no one else shall take out fish without permission from me. If you will go to Londonderry and stand on any of the bridges there you can see the salmon in the streams, but you can't touch them—they all belong to a man who lives in London. (Laughter.) In all the places over there it is the same. All the salmon and the trout and the catfish, if there are any, are owned by men, just as if they were produced by some man who lives and enjoys himself in London or Paris. As for a common man, he would no more think of catching one of these fish than he would of catching a hornet. (Laughter.) Where did that man in London get the right to those salmon, you ask, and he replies that he got it from his father, who is now dead. Where did his father get it? Why, from some other person who is dead. And where did he get it? Why, it has come from some king who died hundreds of years ago. Now, how did any man who is dead get the right to give away all the salmon that are in these streams now?

THIS IS NOT A WORLD FOR DEAD MEN,

it is for the living, and what rights have the dead in this world? When men die they go to another world and have no rights here. Then, you ask, how did the owner of this land on which this building stands get the right to it and if you look back you will find it came from some dead man. A week or two ago there was some land sold in New York for $4,500,000 an acre, and when it was traced back it was found that it came from some dead Dutchman who died about 300 years ago. On Long Island two or three years ago all the fishermen paid rent in a percentage of all the fish they caught, to some one who called himself owner of the right to fish on the island. At last some one questioned his right and looked through the records for a trace of it. The man claimed that he had got a right from James the Second, but the fishermen could not find any papers and would not pay any more. If they had found the papers they would have gone on paying—men in the nineteenth century paying the descendants of another man who had died years before for the right to catch fish. Isn't that absurd? It is like getting on a train and finding all the seats vacant but claimed. You ask how they are claimed and a man tells you he holds the right to the seats, having got it from a man who got off at the last station. Why should any man now hold rights to lands, which rights were got from a man who got off this world a good many stations back. It is absurd, and no one can in justice dare to defend the system of private proprietorship in land. All they can do is to say that that is the only way that land can be put in use—that we must have private proprietorship in order to have it well used. What does that statement mean? It means that the law of right cannot be carried out. Don't believe anything of the sort. What is

RIGHT CAN ALWAYS BE CARRIED OUT.

You need not ask what is expedient or what is wise if you ask what is right. Do justice; and there must be a way of doing justice to every one that comes into this world. What is necessary in order to secure a full and proper use for the land is secure possession, but not the right of ownership. You want it to be so arranged that he who sows the seed shall have the right to reap the crop, and that he who works in the mine shall have the fruits of his labor, but not the right of absolute possession that gives one man the power to be a dog-in-the-manger, and that makes vacant places in land and cities crowded with men who can't find employment, though all around them are the opportunities of plenty of work. Go to London, or Chicago, or New York, and you will find corporations and individuals who can hold any amount of land, and if they can why cannot the community be the possessors of the soil? The rights of ownership are not necessarily to the improvement and use of the land. Men plant that they may reap a crop. Secure to them the right to reap the crop and that is all that is necessary. By that means land becomes a thing in which all have an equal share during their life. Equal rights will thus be secured, and an opportunity given to all men to get ample employment. It will

OPEN TO ALL MEN THE LAND,

and a vast fund can thus be raised from a tax upon the land which can be used for the good of the community. It is not necessary that we should call the land our own. It is not necessary that we should rent it out. The easier way is simply to increase taxes on land and abolish all other taxes. Remove the taxes on everything that bears on capital and labor, and put the burden on the value of the land, and the fund can be used in ways immensely beneficial to the country. It is to my mind the clearest evidence of design of creation that such a system should prevail—that land values should increase with the growth of society; that the one thing which should increase is the value of land. And what does this mean? That as men come closer together they can use the increasing funds for common purposes. It would have the effect of bringing them to an equality, and do away with differences between the strong and the weak. Here is a vast field that could be entered upon. A poor, struggling widow needing help—an old man, crippled, needing assistance—could be relieved without recourse to what is called charity. A painter falls from his ladder and is seriously hurt, a miner is crushed by falling mineral, a fisherman goes out and never returns. In the present state of society their widows and children are left to get along as best they can. Such a state of things is a

DISGRACE TO CHRISTIANITY,

for every man should feel assured that in a Christian country his wife and children would not need if he were called suddenly away. (Applause.) In the city of New York, in the city of Glasgow, in other large centres of population there are immortal souls growing up in worse savagry than the world knows. All this might be obviated if the land reform I urge was brought about In the city of New York alone the fund would amount to $100,000,000 per year. What vast improvements, what stately buildings, what magnificent avenues, what comfortable dwellings for the poor would not this procure. Why, even your own delightful city could be vastly beautified by the amount which would accure therefrom. (Hear, hear.) Now is it not a stupid thing the way the taxes are imposed? A man spends a lot of money in building a house which adorns the thoroughfare and increases the value of adjacent property, and a tax is immediately imposed on him. The lazy, good-for-nothing fellow who left his lot lie idle, reaps the advantage. It looks like a tax on thrift and encouragement of the spendthrift. Surely it was a good thing to make two blades of grass to grow where one grew before. No sooner does the farmer, however, build new buildings, put his fences in repair and generally improve his place, than down comes the tax gatherer and

FINES HIM FOR MAKING IMPROVEMENTS.

(Applause.) The custom in too many instances was to tax the farmer's bare land that he is trying to make an honest living from up to a figure very much higher than that paid on exactly similar land held for speculative purposes. Would it not be wise to take off these taxes? However, these would be light benefits in a community in comparison to the choking off of these "dogs-in-the-manger" individuals who hold property for speculation. In the new state of things, which I hope to see come to pass, there will be a thinning out of dense populations, no one need be idle who want work, leisure could be taken advantage of, the hell of greed would be extinguished and God would be worshipped instead of the golden calf. (Applause.) It is not the human muscles that are the great producing power. It is the brain of man that makes him the master of the beasts and products of nature. If the new land system were in vogue all might be rich. Not that we will be richer than our neighbors, but there will be no more of that degrading poverty which prevents many from enjoying the advantages of civilization. (Applause.) It was a fact that now men cannot find time to enjoy the privilege of self-development. There is no necessity for there being any poverty. We might be rich—I mean have leisure and all the ordinary luxuries of life and comfortable homes—if we would but

DO SIMPLE JUSTICE.

(Applause.) Christ struck right at the root of poverty when He said "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you." If this golden rule was carried out in our institutions and laws poverty would be abolished. (Cheers.) What was the prayer he taught: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, ON EARTH, as it is done in heaven." All we have to do to make this a heaven in earth is to carry out the principle of doing unto others as we would that they should do unto us. (Applause.)

After referring to the new Anti-Poverty Society in New York, and appealing to the audience to give heed to the arguments he had used, if not for their own sake for the sake of others, Mr. George took his seat amidst applause.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

The Chairman then rose and stated that if any one desired to ask any questions they might do so.

A gentleman in the audience, who said he had come from Toronto and was a stranger in the city, said: "Is it any sin or crime on my part in saving part of the wages I earn, or was it wrong for me to purchase the house I own in Toronto, that when I go hence I may know that my wife and family are provided for?"

Mr. George—It is certainly no crime or sin for you to buy a home if you can, but you should also do something to make it easier for others to buy homes, too.

The gentleman said he thought the evil was caused by the abuse of the rights of property owners more than by anything else.

Mr. George replied that under the present system a great majority of the people have no homes. In New York probably not 2 per cent. of the population own their homes, while a great majority of them were living in rack-rented tenements. Under the system he proposed others would be enabled to get homes. By making the land unprofitable to speculators, it would pass into the hands of those who would use it and all would have some spot they could call home.