

CHAPTER I

DESPOILMENT OF THE MASSES

WHAT makes privileges springing from governmental enactment or sanction a double evil is that while they exalt the few to superabundant, intoxicating riches, they sink the many into hope-killing, brutalizing poverty. For, as we have seen, these privileges are in effect nothing less than private laws enabling some to appropriate from others. Privilege is essentially a power of appropriation, which robs some into riches and others into poverty. We have considered riches. Let us consider the other side — poverty.

A few generations ago there was such abundance of unappropriated land that any who wanted it could sooner or later have a farm. The wages of those who preferred to work in one way or another in the villages, towns and cities were high, depending, as the rate of wages must always depend, upon what such men could earn at the margin of cultivation; that is, from the best land which could be had without the payment of rent. If for a time more could be earned by laborers in selling their services to another than by going upon free land and employing themselves, then the flow of laborers would tend toward the selling of their services. When the greater gain was to be had by working for themselves, then the tendency was to take up land and work it. Hence there was and always must be a close relationship between the wages for which a laborer will part with his services to another and the wages he can earn by applying his powers directly to

nature without intervention of another; that is, without payment of rent.

If the land free to him is fertile and accessible for agriculture, his efforts will bring him large results. If it is rich with desirable minerals, easy to work and accessible, his efforts will be rewarded still more largely. If these free natural opportunities are plentiful, wages generally must be high; for, with everything else equal, no one will take less for his labor than he can obtain by it on the best free land open to him.

As long as there seemed to be a large supply of free land in the United States few thought it of moment to consider what might happen when the supply gave out. At the time of the establishment of the Republic a sparse population scattered along the Atlantic seaboard. Westward lay the vast, unexplored continent. To populate that seemed to Thomas Jefferson a matter of centuries.¹ At first efforts were made to restrict appropriations to small quantities, and those to actual settlers. And so easy was it for the man of little means to get land that there was no practice of renting as late as 1850, De Tocqueville testifying, "In America there are, properly speaking, no farming tenants; every one owns the ground he tills."²

But behold the startling state of things that now confronts us. Estimates based upon Federal census statistics indicate that in 1900 only thirty-one per cent. of the families of the United States owned homes or farms free and clear of debt. Another fifteen per cent. owned homes and farms that were encumbered; while fifty-four per cent., or more than half the families, were paying rent. Indeed, it is considered that two thirds of the mortgagees are really tenants, so that practically only seven twentieths are really owners of homes and farms. Professor J. G. Collins, engaged in the 1890 census work, computed that

¹ See Letter to Madison, written from Paris Dec. 20, 1787; *Jefferson's Writings*, Ford Edition, Vol. IV, pp. 479-480.

² "Democracy in America," Chap. VI (Vol. II, p. 226).

about ten per cent. of the total population owned or controlled approximately ninety per cent. of the total land values of the nation.¹

That is to say, the great "open West" has been appropriated, save the Indian reservations, for which there are mad "sooner" and "boomer" rushes whenever the General Government, removing the Indians, opens parts to homestead entry and settlement.

Not that all this vast territory is settled and in use. Far from it. There are thousands upon thousands of square miles of productive, accessible land that would yield bountifully to labor.² But it is not used. It is preëmpted and belongs to this or that individual, who chooses to hold it, not for use, but for what it will bring its owners when the increasing population has made a greater demand for it. The owners ask for its present use a price based upon their expectation of its value for the future. Vast quantities of unused land can be had, but not from the Government, and free, as of yore. It is to be had only from private owners and on the payment of a price—a price that the growing needs of the community and the monopoly power of speculation is constantly augmenting.

Since the lowest wages that laborers in the United States will accept rest upon what they can earn from land at the margin of cultivation, and if all the land here is appropri-

¹ Statistics relating to this and kindred subjects are compiled in condensed and very suggestive form in a little indexed work entitled "Free America," by Bolton Hall. Also see "Abstract of the Twelfth Census," pp. 30-31.

² What may be done with a patch of ground and the new life that this may awaken is to be witnessed in the operations of the vacant lot cultivation charitable societies in any of our large cities. Men, women and children from the densest of the poor quarters are, under supervision, permitted to earn what they may by the cultivation of a few square feet of accessible land, otherwise kept idle by speculation. The anecdotes related in reports of these associations are most pathetic. The Philadelphia association report for 1904 says: "One of the best gardens from the standpoint of value of produce, as well as for the many varieties of product it contains and the artistic arrangement, was worked by a man who had but one arm."

ated and bears a price, the basis of wages must be what such laborers could draw by their labor from free land in some other country that is most easily accessible.¹ If such other country containing free land be far removed, the rate of wages in the United States must to that degree fall.

The simple remedy for this speculation in land is taxation — the removal of all taxes from production and its fruits, and the concentration of the whole tax burden in a single tax on the value of land, irrespective of improvements. This would compel the payment of taxes on the value of land whether such land were used or not. It would cut the heart out of land speculation. Monopolized tracts would be thrown open to users. The speculative value of land would be destroyed. Much good land would become free again. The general rate of wages, depending upon what laborers can earn from free land, would advance.

I shall treat of this more fully later on. I briefly refer to it here in order to relieve the reader from any thought that, because I present a somber picture of social and political conditions in the United States, I am wrapped in pessimism.

Jefferson said that our people would continue “independent and moral . . . so long as there are vacant lands [meaning unappropriated lands] for them to resort to”; because whenever it should be attempted by the other classes to reduce them to the minimum of subsistence they would “quit their trade and go to laboring the earth.”² In another place he declared it his belief that “our Governments” [meaning State as well as Federal] would remain virtuous as long as there were “vacant [unappropriated] lands in any part of America.” And looking forward to what appeared to him to be the remote future, he said:

¹ I am not here considering the united action of laborers. Trade unions can and do force advances in wages, which in the end must be deducted from speculative rent.

² Letter to J. Lithgow, Jefferson's Writings, Ford Edition, Vol. III, p. 269, note.

“When our people get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become corrupt, as in Europe.”¹

Have we not now reached that state of things which Jefferson thought so remote?

The effect of the appropriation of all the free land and of the general advancement in the price of land by speculation has been to slacken the growth and in some places actually lessen the population of the rural districts, and, on the other hand, to quicken the growth of the cities.²

Census figures appear on their face to show that the large agricultural holdings are being subdivided and that there is a pretty steady decrease in the size of the farms. This is against common observation, one of the clearest of facts being the absorption of great areas in the West and Middle West through foreclosure by mortgage companies. The truth is that, in respect to the size of farms, each census has been conducted on different lines. Marked variations have been made relative to the things included and excluded from the classifications. This makes comparisons of the several censuses on the size of farms of little value.³

All this means, obviously, that so far as the farming population is concerned, the tenant class is rapidly increasing, and that many of that tenant class is being forced into the cities.

¹ Letter to James Madison, from Paris, Jefferson's Writings, Ford Edition, Vol. IV, p. 479.

² According to the “Abstract of the Twelfth Census” (p. 100), while the general population increased eighteen per cent. from 1890 to 1900, that of 160 cities of the United States having 25,000 or more inhabitants within the same decade increased thirty-two per cent. Indeed, while during the eleven decades from 1790 to 1900 the rural population increased thirteen fold, the urban population increased two hundred and twenty fold.

³ My father, as early as 1883, drew attention to the absurdity of the census comparisons respecting the average size of farms. See Chap. V, “The March of Concentration,” of Henry George's “Social Problems,” in which is also published an appendix correspondence on the subject with General Francis A. Walker, Superintendent of the Ninth and Tenth Censuses. Somewhat similar examinations of the Eleventh and Twelfth Censuses have been made by Mr. Henry L. Bliss. See signed articles in *The Public*, Chicago, April 16 and May 7, 1904.

And below the tenant class is the class of hired laborers — the “hands.” More and more of these hired laborers are being fixed to that condition for life, which President Lincoln, in one of his messages to Congress, asserted was not the case at the Civil War period.¹

Not only this. It also means the creation in increasing numbers of those who, tramping about for a chance to work and finding nowhere fixed employment, lose the fire of ambition, then hope, and are reduced at last to a state of vagabondage. The Western country, whose broad, fertile, idle acres call for men, contains thousands upon thousands of tramps. A dog-in-the-manger monopolization keeps acres and laborers apart, putting more and more roving pariahs on the public highways.

It calls to mind the biting words of John Moore in the seventeenth century, when describing a similar tyranny of conditions in his day: —

Shame it is for any Christian society, city or town, to take no more care for the poor than they be forced to beg. But how great a shame is it for a gospel magistracy not to suppress make-beggars, which make such swarms of beggars in counties, cities and towns. I cannot but lift up my voice like a trumpet, and tell these make-beggars their sins, and these greedy gripes their transgressions. They care not how many beggars they make so themselves may be gentlemen, nor how many poor they make so themselves may be rich. I mean the unsociable, covetous, greedy broods of those wretches who, by their inclosures, do un-people towns and un-corn fields. Question many of our beggars that go about from door to

¹ Lincoln indignantly denied this assumption of the proslavery advocates. See his First Annual Message to Congress, dated Dec 3, 1861, “Messages and Papers of the Presidents,” Vol. VI, pp. 57-58. Alabama and Georgia have recently revealed an extensive condition of negro peonage systematically practiced by irresponsible justices of the peace, who, for the most trivial debts and often on trumped-up charges of debt, have been selling negro men and women into protracted service that amounted to a kind of slavery. This was done in defiance of the spirit of the Thirteenth Amendment of the Federal Constitution against servitude and against the express letter of Secs. 5526 and 5527 of the Revised Statutes of the United States against every condition of peonage. The Federal authorities and courts have recently been laying a heavy hand on the practice. See “Peonage in America,” by Herbert D. Ward, *Cosmopolitan*, August, 1905.

door, where they dwell, and why they go a-begging. "Alas, Master," say they, "we were forced out of such a town when it was inclosed, and since we have continued a generation of beggars."

Nor is this state of things confined to the agricultural regions of the country. If different in some of its forms, it is true in the great timber regions, where the lumber and wood-pulp paper combinations are forming closer and closer monopolies. It is true in the grazing districts, where for the old-time rate of wages a very much higher class of laborer is now to be had.¹ It is true in our mining fields. The wages of miners, taking the country as a whole, are to-day notoriously lower than they were a few generations ago. If there have been advances in wages and reductions in hours in some fields relatively to those existing ten or fifteen years ago, the betterment has been wrought by the strengthening of the trade unions, who, more nearly controlling the supply of labor there, have forced better terms in its sale.

But, on the whole, working conditions in America have hardened. If we are to take as conclusive the testimony of President John Mitchell of the coal miners' organization, the United Mine Workers of America, we must decide that the very great majority of workmen can, as social conditions exist, have no hope of rising above that condition of life. In the preface of his book, "Organized Labor," Mr. Mitchell says: "The average wage-earner has made up his mind that he must remain a wage-earner. He has given up a hope of a kingdom to come, where he himself will be a capitalist; and he asks that the reward for his work be given to him as a workingman."

¹ Conversing recently with a large cattle raiser in the "Panhandle" of Texas, I learned that the rate of wages was about "\$25 and found," that this had been the rate of wages for some years, but that, whereas only Mexican greasers could years ago be had, now a lot of bright young Eastern men, some of them college-bred, were coming into the country and were glad to get the employment on those terms. My informant also testified to the fact that, notwithstanding this infusion of better laborers, there was no lowering of the rate of insanity that the solitary life generates among the sheep herders.

Little wonder that Mr. Mitchell says this. Mr. Thomas G. Shearman sixteen years ago called public attention to the census showing that "more than four fifths of the working people of this country had incomes of less than \$300 a year." He supported this with Ohio State Reports, showing that agricultural laborers in that State were paid wages that would average \$250 a year if the men worked the whole year round, which they did not.¹

Much more recently Professor Robert Erskine Ely of New York, analyzing the census returns, made the still more startling announcement that fifteen million wage-earners in this country — men, women, boys and girls of ten or more engaged in manufacturing and mechanical industries — obtain, on an average, \$400 a year; and that since each of these is presumed to have an average of two dependants, the average income of the forty-five million persons is \$133.33 a year.²

I do not pretend to rest the case of the condition of the masses of the people of the United States on figures, appreciating fully how figures are twisted to the defense of all manner of positions. I use these statistics merely because they express in concrete form what is to be easily observed by any who will look for himself. The share of the earnings of their labor received by the general population of the country is really very small, and on the whole is diminishing not only relatively to the increasing

¹ Speech on "The Menace of Plutocracy," Portland, Ore., June 17, 1889.

² Address on "The Savings of the Self-supporting Poor," before the League for Political Education, New York, February 4, 1902. Bulletin 55 of the United States Labor Bureau (dated November, 1904) reports that 48,225 employees of various kinds in the State of Indiana received in wages \$8.77 a week; 8494 carriage workers, an average of \$6.98 a week; 8056 furniture makers, an average of \$6.88 a week. Similar investigations in Illinois indicate that 80,881 employees averaged in weekly wages \$9.69; that in Missouri of 109,137 men and women investigated, the wages averaged was \$8.81; that the operatives in the New Jersey woolen mills averaged \$6.43 a week; and in the cotton mills, \$5.23; that factory "hands" in Pennsylvania got \$9.28, and anthracite coal miners, meaning the expert workers, \$9.53 a week, while the helpers and other workers got only \$6.44, and the average of skilled and unskilled mine workers, \$7.47.

production of wealth, but actually as compared with wages formerly paid in this country and the cost of living now and then. Rents have obviously increased. Taxes have enormously increased.¹ The cost of the great number of commodities directly or indirectly controlled by monopolies has increased.

Thus, while the natural factor in production, land, has been made in effect scarce and is being made scarcer and scarcer by speculation, and while taxes are growing more burdensome and monopoly-controlled commodities higher in price, the ranks of the laboring masses are being sensibly increased by immigration. And these immigrants, instead of spreading out over the general country, are in the main swelling the city and town populations.

In generations past the abundance of unappropriated or very cheap accessible land welcomed the tide of immigration, which was largely agricultural.² But of all the once wide public domains there is now not a free acre that is readily accessible, while the price of land generally has greatly advanced. The stream of poor immigrants is therefore diverted from its natural channel — the rural districts — and is sent into the centers of population.³

¹ Dr. Charles B. Spahr, in "The Present Distribution of Wealth in the United States," after a lengthy examination, concludes (p. 143) that "the wealthy class pay less than one tenth of the indirect taxes, the well-to-do class less than one quarter, and the relatively poorer classes more than two thirds." Mr. T. G. Shearman, in "Natural Taxation" (p. 8), contends that the tendency of present taxation is to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

² Even in my father's time the song was still popular that bade immigrants "come along from every land and nation," since "Uncle Sam is rich enough to give you all a farm."

³ It is generally taken for granted that the Hebrews who have composed such an important part of the immigrants from Russia and other parts of Europe would go to our cities, even if land generally were far cheaper, since in Europe they are not given to agriculture. But in Europe, at least in that part of Europe whence most of our Jewish immigrants come, land owning has been for long generations and continues to be forbidden to that race. In Biblical and Roman times the Jews tilled the earth, and the Mosaic code was an adaptation to an agricultural country of the principle of equal rights in the soil. Some of the Jews coming to

There it enters into competition with the laborers already struggling hard for the employment that means a scant living.

This has aroused a militant opposition to the flow of immigrants that in the earlier years of the nation we were so glad to have. We now often hear it said, and our Government acts accordingly: "Penniless immigrants are undesirable. If they cannot come with some little means in their hands, they should be excluded."

The Fathers of the Republic did not say this. They asked nothing of riches. They wanted men. As has been seen (Chap. I), so far from requiring immigrants to have any means whatever, the Fathers were glad to encourage the practice of advancing passage money for such as would come. Nor was there any general disposition even to inquire into the antecedents of those who wished of themselves to come, or were, like many a felon, shipped to America by foreign Governments to be rid of their care and expense. The main essential that was thought to be necessary for the harmony and progress of the country was assimilability, and this quality the men and women coming appeared to have.

For a time Franklin had some fear of the ill effects of large numbers of Germans closely settling together, lest they should thereby "Germanize" a country given to English speech and American ideas and customs.¹ He

this country are voluntarily going to farming in the face of difficulties that are driving the native population from the farms to the cities. Mr. Cyrus L. Sulzberger of New York, in a report for 1904, as president of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society of that city, says that there have been placed by his society or have gone by their own initiative, and have subsequently been aided by loans from his society, 334 families on 31,388 acres of abandoned New England farms.

¹ "Yet I am not for refusing to admit them entirely into our colonies. All that seems to be necessary is to distribute them more equally, mix them with the English, establish English schools where they are now too thickly settled, and take some care to prevent the practice lately fallen into by some of the ship owners, of sweeping the German gaols to make up the number of their passengers. I say I am not against the admission of Germans in general, for they have their virtues. Their industry and

feared, not the Germans, but non-assimilation. The institution of the public school system for the time allayed the danger. But the pouring of immigrants into the growing centers of population is raising it again. Not only have we Ghettos, German, French and Italian quarters in our large cities, but we have Oriental quarters, some parts of which must under even favorable circumstances be difficult of complete admixture with the blood of our body social and politic; and part of which, namely, the Chinese, does not seem to be assimilable under any circumstances, and will never be so long as the people of that nation, retaining their national and racial clannishness and refusing to adapt themselves to changed conditions, remain Chinamen, with scarcely a modification, whether they be in New York, London, Berlin, Melbourne or South Africa.

Immigration is bringing us each year between a half and three quarters of a million of people who are not being distributed over the country. While this deepens the misery of the poor in city and town, it leaves a considerable number of the immigrants unemancipated from their Old-World ideas that all Governments are alike in that they oppress the masses of the people, and that the Government of the United States is different only in name and degree from that from which they fled across the ocean.

To what does this intensified hardship of the poor in the cities lead?

To putting the children to work: little boys in the mines, and little boys and girls in the mills, the factories and the stores. In all save four of the States — Georgia, Delaware, Idaho and Nevada — laws restrictive of the employment of child labor have been enacted; but so needed is the help of the children to the family support that these

frugality are exemplary. They are excellent husbandmen, and contribute greatly to the improvement of the country." Franklin's Works, Bigelow Edition, Vol. II, p. 299.

enactments are well-nigh dead letters.¹ In the larger cities the very toddlers thread needles and pull bastings in the slums.

There was no such working of young children in the colonial period, nor yet in the earlier days of the Republic. Adam Smith,² writing about the time of our Revolution, tells us that labor in North America was so well rewarded that a numerous family was a source of opulence and prosperity to the parents, the labor of each child being computed to be worth £100 (equal to far more than \$500 to-day) clear gain to them; and a young widow with four or five young children was then frequently courted as having a sort of fortune. But this does not mean that the children were worked in infancy, but when they had grown to reasonable age. And even if it did, where is our advantage, despite the multiplied power in the production of wealth? What is the value of our century and more of progress if it does not add to the material prosperity of the masses of the people?

¹ The census of 1880 shows that there were 1,118,556 children between the ages of ten and fifteen employed in the United States. The census of two decades later shows that this number had increased more than 50 per cent. In the South is the highest percentage of these minors. By the census figures as high as 59 per cent. of the boys of between ten and fifteen are at work in Alabama, and more than 38 per cent. of the girls of similar ages are at work in South Carolina. More than 125,000 of the boys and girls of this tender age are employed in Pennsylvania, and approximately 92,000 in the State of New York. The State Factory Inspector of Pennsylvania says that approximately 4000 young girls, of which 50 per cent. are under thirteen years, work all night. Many a time the Anthracite Coal Commission was roused to expressions of indignation or moved to the brink of tears by the shocking testimony of girls and boys, some of them even as young as eight, who worked in Pennsylvania silk mills and coal breakers ten and twelve hours a day for a pittance. Census Bulletin No. 215 on cotton manufacture declares that 25 per cent. of all the textile operatives in the South are under sixteen. From other sources comes the information that one of the largest mills in Alabama works children of six years or more from 5.30 A.M. to 6.30 P.M., with twenty minutes for dinner. In rush times these infants are compelled to prolong their hours at the looms until 9 or 10 P.M., as often as three and four nights in succession.

² "Wealth of Nations," Bk. I, Chap. VIII.