

of the slaves upon our Southern plantations was not half so bad as that of the land monopoly slaves of England. Legrees there may have been in plenty, but I have yet to hear of the Legree who worked children to physical and moral death in his fields, or ground them, body and soul, in his mills.

There is in nature no such thing as a fee simple in land. The Almighty, who created the earth for man and man for the earth, has entailed it upon all the generations of the children of men by a decree written upon the constitution of all things—a decree which no human action can bar and no prescription determine. Let the parchments be ever so many, or possession ever so long, in the Courts of Natural Justice there can be but one title to land recognized—the using of it to satisfy reasonable wants.

Now, from this, it by no means follows that there should be no such thing as property in land, but merely that there should be no monopolization—no standing between the man who is willing to work and the field which nature offers for his labor. For while it is true that the land of a country is a free gift of the Creator to all the people of that country, to the enjoyment of which each has an equal natural right, it is also true that the recognition of private ownership in land is necessary to its proper use—is, in fact, a condition of civilization. When the millennium comes, and the old savage, selfish instincts have died out of men, land may perhaps be held in common; but not till then. In our present state, at least, the "magic of property which turns even sand into gold" must be applied to our lands if we would reap the largest benefits they are capable of yielding—must be retained if we would keep from relapsing into barbarism.

And a full appreciation of the value of land ownership tends to the same practical conclusion as the considerations I have been presenting. If the worker upon land is a better worker and a better man because he owns the land, it should be our effort to make this stimulus felt by all—to make, as far as possible, all land-users also land-owners.

Nor is there any difficulty in combining a full recognition of private property in land with a recognition of the right of all to the benefits conferred by the Creator, as I will hereafter attempt to show.

We are not called upon to guarantee to all men equal conditions, and could not if we would, any more than we could guarantee to them equal intelligence, equal industry or equal prudence; but we are called upon to give to all men an equal chance. If we do not, our republicanism is a snare and a delusion, our clatter about the rights of man the veriest luncombe in which a people ever indulged.

#### IV.

### THE TENDENCY OF OUR PRESENT LAND POLICY.

#### What Our Land Policy is.

Is our land policy calculated to give to all men an equal chance? We have seen what it is—how we are enabling speculators to rob settlers; how we are by every means enhancing the tax which the many must pay to the few; how we are making away with the heritage of our children, and putting in immense bodies into the hands of a few individuals the soil from which the coming millions of our people *must* draw their support. If we continue this policy a few years, the public domain will all be gone; the homestead law and the pre-emption law will remain upon the statute books but to remind the poor man of the good time past, and we shall find ourselves embarrassed by all the difficulties which beset the statesmen of Europe—the social disease of England; the seething discontent of France.

Was there ever national blunder so great—ever national crime so tremendous as ours in dealing with our land? It is not in the heat and flush of conquest that we are thus doing what has been done in every country under the sun where a ruling class has been built up and the masses condemned to hopeless toil; it is not in ignorance of true political principles and in the conscientious belief that the God-appointed order of things is that the many should serve the few. We are monopolizing our land *deliberately—our land, not the land of a conquered nation, and we are doing it while prating of the equal rights of the citizen and of the brotherhood of men.*

### The Value of Our Public Domain.

This public domain that we are getting rid of as recklessly as though we esteemed its possession a curse, can never be replaced, nor are there other limitless bodies of land which we may subdue. Of the whole continent, we now occupy nearly the whole of the zone in which all the real progressive life of the world has been lived. North of us are the cold high latitudes, south of us the tropical heats. The table lands of Mexico and the valleys of the Saskatchewan and Red rivers, which comprise almost all of the temperate portions of the continent yet unoccupied by our race, are of very small extent when compared with the vast country we have already overrun, and when our emigration is compelled to set upon them will be filled as we now populate a new State.

It is not pleasant to think of the time when the public domain will all be gone. "This will be a great country," we say, "when it is all fenced in." Great it will be—great it must be, in arts and arms, in population and in wealth. But will it be as great in all that constitutes true greatness? Will it be such a good country for the poor man? Will there be such an average of comfort and independence and virtue among the masses. And which to me is the important fact—that I am one of a nation of so many more millions, or that I can buy my children shoes when they need them? "The greatest glory of America," says Carlyle, "is that there every bootblack may have a turkey in his pot." We shall be credited with no such glory when the country is all "fenced in" as we are now rapidly fencing it.

From this public domain of ours have sprung and still spring subtle influences which strengthen our national character and tinge all our thought. This vast background of unfenced land has given a consciousness of freedom even to the dweller in crowded cities, and has been a well-spring of hope even to those who never thought of taking refuge upon it. The child of the people as he grows to manhood in Europe finds every seat at the banquet of life marked "taken," and must struggle with his fellows for the crumbs that fall, without one chance in a thousand of forcing or sneaking his way to a seat. In America, whatever be his condition, there is always more or less clearly and vividly, the consciousness that the public domain is behind him; that there is a new country where all the places are not yet taken, where opportunities are still open, and the knowledge of this fact, acting and reacting, penetrates our whole national life, giving to it generosity and independence, elasticity and ambition.

Why should we seek so diligently to get rid of this public domain as if for the mere pleasure of getting rid of it? What have the buffaloes done to us that we should sacrifice the heritage of our children to see the last of them extirpated before we die? Are the operatives of New England, the farmers of Ohio, the mechanics of San Francisco better off for the progress of this thing which we call national development—this scattering of a thousand people over the land which would suffice for a million; this fencing in for a dozen of the soil to which tens of millions must before long look for subsistence?

All that we are proud of in the American, character all that makes our condition and institutions better than those of the older countries, we may trace to the fact that land has been cheap in the United States; and yet we are doing our utmost to make it dear, and actually seem pleased to see it become dear, looking upon the lien which the few are taking upon the labor of the many as an actual increase in the wealth of all.

### No Tendency to Equalization.

Nor can we flatter ourselves that the inequality in condition which we are creating will right itself by easy and peaceful means. It is not merely present inequality which we are creating, but a tendency to further inequality. When we allow one man to take the land which should belong to a hundred, and give to a corporation the soil from which a million must shortly draw their subsistence, we are not only giving in the present wealth to the few by taking it from the many, but we are putting it in the power of the few to levy a constant and an increasing tax upon the many, and we are increasing the tendency to the concentration of wealth not merely upon the land which is thus monopolized, but all over the United States.

Even if the large bodies of land which we are giving away for nothing, or selling to speculators for a nominal price, are subdivided and sold for small farms, the mischief we have done is not at an end. The capital of the settlers has been taken from them, and put in large masses into the hands of the speculators or railroad kings.

The many are thereafter the poorer; the few thereafter the richer. We have concentrated wealth; that is, we have concentrated the power of getting wealth. We have set in operation the law of attraction—the law that “unto him that hath shall it be given,” and never in any age of the world has this law worked so powerfully as now.

It must not be thought that because we have no laws of entail and primogeniture the vast estates which we are creating will in time break up of themselves. There were no laws of entail and primogeniture in ancient Rome where the monopolization of land and the concentration of wealth went so far that the empire, and even civilization itself, perished of the social diseases engendered. It is not the laws of entail and primogeniture that have produced the concentration of wealth in England which makes the richest country in the world the abode of the most hopeless poverty. In spite of entail and primogeniture, wealth is constantly changing from hand to hand, but always in large masses. The richest families of a few centuries back are extinct, the blood of the noblest of a comparatively recent time flows in the veins of people who live in garrets and toil in the chens. And the same causes which have reduced the 374,000 landholders of England in the middle of the last century to 30,000 now are working in this country as powerfully as they are working there. Wealth is concentrating in a few hands as rapidly in New York as in London; the condition of the laboring classes of New England is steadily approximating to that of Old England.

Nor, if we are to have a very rich class and a very poor class, is there any particular advantage in the fact that one is constantly being recruited from the other, though there are people who seem to think that the fact that most of our millionaires were poor boys is a sufficient answer to anything that may be said of the evils of a concentration of wealth. As wealth concentrates, the chances for any particular individual to escape from one class to another becomes less and less, until practically worth nothing, while there is nothing in human nature to cause us to believe, and nothing in history to show that members of a privileged class are less grasping because they once belonged to an unprivileged class. Nor, after wealth has become concentrated, is there any tendency in this changing of the individuals who hold it to diffuse it again. The social structure is like the flame of a gas-burner, which retains its form though the particles which compose it are constantly changing.

#### The Tendency to Concentration.

There is no tendency yet to the breaking up of large landholdings in the United States; but the reverse is rather the case. The railroad lands are not being sold anything like as fast as they are being granted, and large private estates are increasing instead of diminishing. It is true that tracts bought for speculation are frequently cut up and sold, but it will generally be found that others are at the same time secured further ahead, though not always by the same parties. And as wealth concentrates, population becomes denser, and the advantages of land ownership greater, the tendency on the part of the rich to invest in land increases, and the same cause which has so largely reduced the number of land-owners in Great Britain is put in operation. Already the custom of renting land is unmistakably gaining ground, and the concentration of land-ownership seems to be going on in our older States almost as fast as the monopolization of new land goes on in the younger ones.\* And at last the steam plow and the steam wagon have appeared—to develop, perhaps, in agriculture the same tendencies to concentration which the power loom and the trip hammer have developed in manufacturing.

\* “Our farms in older States instead of being divided and subdivided as they ought to be, are growing larger and more unwieldy. The tendency of the times is unquestionably towards immense estates, each with a manorial mansion in the center and a dependent tenantry crouching in the shadow.”—*North American Review*, 1859.

“A non-resident proprietary like that of Ireland is getting to be the characteristic of large farming districts in New England, adding yearly to the nominal value of leasehold farms, advancing yearly the rent demanded, and steadily degrading the character of the tenantry, until, in the place of the boasted intelligence of rural New England, a competent authority can to-day write: ‘The general educational condition of the farm laborer is very low, even below that of the factory operative; a large percentage of them can neither read nor write.’”—*New York World*, May, 1871, in an article on the returns for New England of the Census of 1870.

“The part of the report, [Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics] however, which of all is, in our opinion, the most remarkable, is that relating to agriculture in Massachusetts. It may be summed up in two words: rapid decay. Increased nominal value of land, higher rents, fewer farms occupied by owners; diminished product, general decline of prosperity, lower wages; a more ignorant population, increasing number of women employed at hard outdoor labor (surest sign of a declining civilization), and steady deterioration in the style of farming—these are the conditions described by a cumulative mass of evidence that is perfectly irresistible, and that is unfortunately only too strongly confirmed by such details of census statistics as have been so far made public.”—*New York Nation*, June, 1871.

We are not only putting large bodies of our new lands in the hands of the few ; but we are doing our best to keep them there, and to cause the absorption of small farms into large estates. The whole pressure of our revenue system, National and State, tends to the concentration of wealth and the monopolization of land. A hundred thousand dollars in the hands of one man pays but a slight proportion of the taxes which are paid by the same sum in the hands of fifty ; a hundred thousand acres owned by a single landholder is assessed but for a fraction of the amount assessed upon the hundred thousand acres of six hundred farms. Especially is this true of the State of California, where the large handholders are frequently assessed at the rate of one dollar per acre on land for which they are charging settlers twenty or thirty, and where the small farmer sometimes pays taxes at a rate one hundred fold greater than his neighbor of the eleven league ranch. Our whole policy is of a piece—everything is tending with irresistible force to make us a nation of landlords and tenants—of great capitalists and their poverty-stricken employés.

The life of all the older nations shows the bitterness of the curse of land monopolization ; we cannot turn a page of their history without finding the blood stains and the tear marks it has left. But never since commerce and manufactures grew up, and men began to engage largely in other occupations than those connected directly with the soil, has it been so important to prevent land monopolization as now. The tendency of all the improved means and forms of production and exchange—of the greater and greater subdivision of labor, of the enslavement of steam, of the utilization of electricity, of the ten thousand great labor-saving appliances which modern invention has brought forth, is strongly and more strongly to extend the dominion of capital and to make of labor its abject slave. Once to set up in the business of making cloth required only the purchase of a hand-loom and a little yarn, the means for which any journeyman could soon save from his earnings ; now it requires a great factory, costly machinery, large stocks and credits, and to go into business on his own account one must be a millionaire. So it is in all branches of manufacture ; so, too, it is in trade. Concentration is the law of the time. The great city is swallowing up the little towns ; the great merchant is driving his poorer rivals out of business ; a thousand little dealers become the clerks and shopmen of the proprietor of the marble-fronted palace ; a thousand master workmen, the employés of one rich manufacturer, and the gigantic corporations, the alarming product of the new social forces which Watt and Stephenson introduced to the world, are themselves being welded into still more titanic corporations. From present appearances, ten years from now we will have but three, possibly but one railroad company in the United States, yet our young men remember the time when these giants were such feeble infants that we deemed it charity to shelter them from the cold, and feed them, as it were, with a spoon. In the new condition of things what chance will there be for a poor man if our land also is monopolized ?

Of the political tendency of our land policy, it is hardly necessary to speak. To say that the land of a country shall be owned by a small class, is to say that that class shall rule it ; to say—which is the same thing—that the people of a country shall consist of the very rich and the very poor, is to say that republicanism is impossible. Its forms may be preserved ; but the real government which clothes itself with these forms, as if in mockery, will be many degrees worse than an avowed and intelligent despotism.

## V.

### WHAT OUR LAND POLICY SHOULD BE.

#### How We Should Dispose of Our New Land.

When we reflect what land is ; when we consider the relations between it and labor ; when we remember that to own the land upon which a man *must* gain his subsistence is to all intents and purposes to own the man himself, we cannot remain in doubt as to what should be our policy in disposing of our public lands.

We have no right to dispose of them except to *actual settlers*—to the men who really want to use them ; no right to sell them to speculators, to give them to railroad companies or to grant them for agricultural colleges ; no more right to do so than we have to sell or to grant the labor of the people who must some day live upon them.