THE LAND BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE

When They Take It

By Clarence Darrow

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If we could imagine some wise being somewhere in the clouds, looking down upon the earth and seeing men with their manner of life and their devious activities, we could imagine that such a being would not look upon man with the same reverence and respect with which man looks upon himself. Such a being would see great spaces of vacant land, hundreds of miles, without any population, miles and miles of fertile land with no people living on it, and would look into great huddles of men in our big cities and find a busy hive of men and women working, fighting, toiling, stealing, living five, six, ten, twenty stories up in the air, because there is not room enough on earth! He would look at man with all his goings and his comings and wonder what sort of brain he has; he would look at him and consider him far inferior to the ant who organizes his hill with system and plan and purpose so that all may live. He would think man did not understand the science of social life as well as the bee who builds his home so that all the bees may live and all have substantially the same chance for life. And such a being would doubtless wonder whether man was really worth while to bother with or to save, and would probably respect that portion of the apes who refuse to evolve into men. He certainly could not understand how man, with his method of life, his warfare upon his fellows, his ill adjustments, could claim to be the wisest and the best and the greatest and the most worth while of all the animals that live upon the earth.

This earth is a little raft moving in the endless sea of space, and the mass of its human inhabitants are hanging on as best they can. It is as if some raft filled with shipwrecked sailors should be floating on the ocean, and a few of the strongest and most powerful would take all the raft they could get and leave the most of the people, especially the ones who did the work, hanging to the edges by their eyebrows. These men who have taken possession of this raft, this little planet in this endless space, are not even content with taking all there is and leaving the rest barely enough to hold onto, but they think so much of themselves and their brief day that while they live they must make rules and laws and regulations that parcel out the earth for thousands of years after they are dead and gone, so that their descendents and others of their kind may do in the tenth generation exactly what they are doing today—keeping the earth and all the good things of the earth and compelling the great mass of mankind to toil for them.

Now, the question is, how are you going to get it back? Everybody who thinks knows that private ownership of the land is wrong. If ten thousand men can own America, then one man can own it, and if one man may own it he may take all that the rest produce or he may kill them if he sees fit. It is inconsistent with the spirit of manhood. No person who thinks can doubt but what he was born upon this planet with the same birthright that came to every man born like him. And it is for him to defend that birthright. And the man who will not defend it, whatever the cost, is fitted only to be a slave. The earth belongs to the people—if they can get it back. Everybody who thinks knows that private ownership of the land is wrong. If ten thousand men can own America, then one man can own it, and if one man may own it he may take all that the rest produce or he may kill them if he sees fit. It is inconsistent with the spirit of manhood. No person who thinks can doubt but what he was born upon this planet with the same birthright that came to every man born like him. And it is for him to defend that birthright. And the man who will not defend it, whatever the cost, is fitted only to be a slave. The earth belongs to the people—if they can get it back. Everybody who thinks knows that private ownership of the land is wrong. If ten thousand men can own America, then one man can own it, and if one man may own it he may take all that the rest produce or he may kill them if he sees fit. It is inconsistent with the spirit of manhood. No person who thinks can doubt but what he was born upon this planet with the same birthright that came to every man born like him. And it is for him to defend that birthright. And the man who will not defend it, whatever the cost, is fitted only to be a slave. The earth belongs to the people—if they can get it back.