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## THE NEW ABOLITION.

A SPEECH DELIVERED BY WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON BEFORE  
THE CHICAGO (ILL.) SINGLE TAX CLUB, SEPTEMBER 8, 1891.

I find myself unexpectedly a brief sojourner in your great city, and yet without the feelings of a stranger. And, as in the German song, "Where is the German's Fatherland?" the answer is, "wherever there is freedom," so geography matters not, where there are common sympathies and common aims; and by the great lake, I am made to feel as much at home as by the Atlantic, where my lot is cast. The kinship of humanity transcends that of birth, and association in the pursuit of an unselfish ideal makes the true brotherhood.

I bring you cheer from your fellow workers in the East. The principles of the Single Tax are winning their slow but certain way. Slow, only in the sense of our impatience. Taking a retrospect of the movement, dating from the publication of "Progress and Poverty," marvelous and rapid has been our stride.

The subject of taxation, wrested from theorists and statisticians, commands the thought and conversation of the community. Labor, too long insensible to the conditions which have crushed it, begins to ask the reason for its burdens and to perceive that they are possible only so long as passive ignorance prevails. For poverty comes not of the gods, but is self-imposed, and instead of calling upon Hercules to lift the wagon out of the mire, the driver must put his own shoulder to the wheel. The tax-gatherers of all nations, obscure as far as possible the workings of their systems, purposely intricate and involved. They throw the common understanding off the scent, and the toiler, who has little time for thought or reading, concludes that government is an inscrutable muddle and that the higher power is responsible for the hopeless degradations of its victims.

We preach a new evangel of reason and of life, and repel as blasphemous this aspersion of divine goodness. The fault is in ourselves, not in our stars. Self-government is not intricate, taxation is as simple as the daily trade of the citizen with his grocer, but as an instrument of spoliation and exaction it has to be disguised. Personal interests underlie the public weal, and individuals grow rich because the masses are defrauded.

"My Lords and Gentlemen," said the great English finance minister in the House of Lords during the Napoleonic wars, "to levy a direct

tax of seven per cent. is a dangerous experiment in a free country, and may invite revolt, but there is a method by which you can tax the last rag from the back and the last bite from the mouth without causing a murmur against high taxes, and that is to tax a great many articles of daily use and necessity so indirectly that people will pay them and not know it; their grumbling then will be of hard times, but they will not know that the hard times are caused by taxation."

That the people are beginning to realize the true cause of suffering, the great awakening on the tariff question shows, and as the system of slavery was doomed when the nation was forced to discuss it, so the kindred system of protection is as surely tottering to its fall. Neither can stand the light.

I mention this because it is at the threshold of our cause and bars our way, and while the temporizers and the timid, who never trust a principle or understand that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, are solicitous that the tariff shall be reformed just enough to be imperceptible, we echo the cry of Cato: "Carthage must be destroyed," and from the ruins a fairer civilization will spring. It is to us a question of principle and not of percentage.

In our anxiety to win converts to our reform, to make them see what seems so plain to us, we sometimes show a lack of patience which is born of zeal but not of philosophy. When the pioneer of the anti-slavery movement first realized the atrocity of slavery, he thought that he had simply to bring it to the attention of his church and his good fellow-citizens to command instant co-operation. Little did he dream that thirty years of agitation and bitter persecution lay before him, and that the ministers and the merchants would join hands to crush the Abolitionists. Yet it was natural and could not have been otherwise, because vested interests were intertwined with slavery, and the kind neighbor grows savage when his pocket nerve is touched.

So we find it hard to secure the convert to whom our argument entitles us, and reasons, though as thick as blackberries, have no weight, if he thinks his personal interest is to be affected by our plan. That is human nature and it takes a long time for men to see that what is injurious to the body politic cannot be good for the individual; but by and by the logic of events, as it is called, forces them to side with right and they see that true material prosperity cannot be divorced from moral methods.

In speaking to audiences unfamiliar with our doctrine and unread in our literature, I am always puzzled to know how to present the question intelligibly. If the ethical side is dwelt upon, then many go away saying: "That is a very pretty and plausible theory, but how will it work in practice?" and they imagine one case where hardship would seem to follow, and conclude that the scheme is chimerical. If the economic side is emphasized and figures and facts adduced—as comparatively few are students of political economy, the listener is often bewildered, and naturally thinks that the

other side can offset these statements if it had a chance.

Personal experiences are always interesting, and sometimes an experience meeting is more enlightening than a sermon or a logical argument, and as I have neither one nor the other to give you to-night, suppose I tell you as simply as I can how I came to be an advocate of the Single Tax and to see in it the most fundamental and far-reaching reform of the century. Not the only one, for progress advances on many lines, and there is no single panacea for human ills.

I have a profound interest in the enfranchisement of women, a great question concerning half the race directly, and indirectly all the rest, and I am sure laws will be better when the people who are governed have a voice in making them. The drink problem concerns all nations where intemperance abounds, and I cannot help my interest in its discussion. The wrongs of labor also arouse my sympathy, but prior to the discussion of any social or governmental reform, it is necessary to have an independent place to stand upon, and the land question forces itself to the front.

Archimedes wanted only a fulcrum in order to move the world, and, with the land question upon which to rest our lever, we hope to succeed better than the ancient mathematician. We can have universal suffrage, but with monopoly in land women will be ground down by enforced poverty, and starving children will still cry for bread. We may pass restrictive laws regarding the sale of alcoholic drink, but while the present land system obtains, the crowded condition of cities will continue to breed drunkards. Labor may in its desperation organize to revenge its wrongs by strikes and boycotts, but they are powerless while the usurpation of landlords extracts the product of their industry through rent.

The great truth that binds us together dawned upon me gradually, for it did not come to me as to some of you, in an intuitional flash. The "cat" revealed itself in a very fragmentary way. I had heard of Henry George, and having had some acquaintance with professional labor reformers of an uninspiring kind, I put him down in my mind as one of that fluent but work-shunning brotherhood. I remember one day in the shoe manufacturing town of Brockton, in my State, I passed the doorway of a hall where a notice announced a lecture by Henry George, and I wondered who would waste time in listening to that demagogue—in exactly the same unenlightened spirit that made men pass the door where an Abolitionist was holding forth, in the slavery days. I date my new birth from the memorable evening when I picked up by chance the Nineteenth Century with Mr. George's reply to the Duke of Argyle. I had a great respect for the duke. He had married a daughter of that truly noble Duchess of Sutherland who was a steadfast friend of the American Abolitionists, and the duke himself had stood by the cause of the North, in the Civil War, with John Bright and our other brave defenders in that dark hour. The idea of Henry George coping with him! But my curiosity to see what he could

say at once gave way to the fascination of that inimitable style. While the eloquence of the appeal moved me, the reasoning touched my conscience and my heart.

The native dignity of the humble printer was in marked contrast to the scarcely veiled contempt of his Grace, and the true nobleman stood revealed. The derided "Prophet of San Francisco" dwarfed the English Peer. The scales fell from my eyes, new emotions thrilled within me, and I had no rest until I had absorbed "Protection or Free Trade?" "Social Problems," and last of all "Progress and Poverty." While in general sympathy with the Single Tax movement, many doubts still remained, but every week as THE STANDARD came to me, one by one, as other doubters were answered, my own objections were met and satisfied, and I was compelled to write to Mr. George my sympathy and regard, and ask to be enrolled among the faithful. I did not need to be convinced of the iniquity of protective tariffs, and had been for many years a Free Trader on principle. But I did not see beyond, and imagined that with untrammelled international exchange the conditions of the poor would speedily improve. Yet, here was Great Britain, with approximate Free Trade, still in the chains of poverty, and the "Bitter Cry of Outcast London" startled mankind "wherever Christianity softens the heart or soothes the sorrows of men."

The primal cause was yet to be made apparent, and although many minds had discussed it and played about the theme, and in the case of Herbert Spencer formulated its highest ethical grounds, the remedy still seemed as far off as the millennium. Then came the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "There must be some reason for this; there must be some remedy for this; and I will not rest until I have found the one and discovered the other. At last it came, clear as the stars of a bright midnight. I saw what was the cause, I saw what was the cure. I saw nothing that was new. Truth is never new."

The revelation came in "Progress and Poverty," and in it its author met the rare qualities of the seer and statesman. The Single Tax, that intensely practical name for a great moral reform, fails to suggest the uplifting power of the movement, but it makes plain our method of procedure and saves endless explanations. Edward Bellamy excites the imagination, and, recreating human nature, moulds it into his ideal condition, and asks us to admire the dish from which all relish has been extracted. Our programme is sharply defined. It does not wait for the year 2000. It concerns itself with the practical politics of to-day, and its influence guides the hand that drafts the better legislation.

We are the new Abolitionists, because our object is to be attained purely by the abolition of vicious taxes, taking off one by one, until land values alone supply government with revenue. While working for the ideal society where justice shall make charity obsolete, we strike directly at the obstacles which lie nearest our hand. We do not question the result.

" We may not live to see the day,  
But earth shall glisten in the ray  
Of the good time coming."

I have time only to suggest a few of the points wherein Single Tax puzzled me, hoping that the reasons which dissipated my objections may remove similar ones from some hearer's mind.

I had no hesitation in accepting the basic proposition of our creed, that man has a right to the use of the earth so long as all wealth is drawn from that source by the application of labor, and to deny a human being access to this great storehouse of nature is, of course, wrong. The simple statement carries with it conviction, and for the bounty of the Creator to be controlled or monopolized by individuals for their own aggrandizement, at the expense of their fellow creatures, is manifestly unjust and indefensible, and needs no demonstration.

That this is our strong fortress is manifest by the disinclination of our opponents to debate it. I never yet met one who tried to controvert our principle. It is about details and methods and results that the controversy always rages.

Among thinking people the protective system is soon disposed of. The creation of privileged classes by special laws, permitting them to levy tribute from the masses, is easily recognized as a feudal relic, and an anachronism in this nineteenth century. It has strayed out of the dark ages.

The tariff for revenue then comes up for examination, and is found wanting. Based as it is upon consumption it is partial and unequal and much more costly than direct taxation. The failure of all attempts to reach personal property is widely recognized, the rich escaping and the poor and conscientious making up the deficit. The tax on incomes leads to false returns and is a premium on deception. So students of long experience, like David A. Wells and Edward Atkinson, contend that real estate should bear the burden, because it lies open to the sun and cannot be hidden, and the tax will distribute itself most fairly. Strange that these men, with whom we are so nearly in agreement should range themselves among our opponents.

Now the Single Tax would lift every burden from the product of labor, not taxing the houses and improvements put upon the land, as the economists I have mentioned propose to do. We are the defenders of property and insist upon the sacredness of men's just earnings and their inalienable right to exchange their products or services to the best advantage.

Our difference arises in our definition of property, under which head we deny that land properly comes. It is the element from which property is evolved by labor, but in equity is no more property than the air or the sunshine. It has been treated as such, because, unlike air and sunshine, it is possible to monopolize it, but the genesis of every title deed rests on "force, fraud, or cunning,"—to borrow Mr. Spencer's words. We do not deny that the law con-

siders land property, but thirty years ago it also recognized the ownership of human flesh. We say with regard to land, as the righteous Vermont Judge said to the slaveholder claiming his fugitive, "Show me a bill of sale from the Almighty and I will deliver him to you."

I was puzzled at first about land bearing the sole burden of taxation, because I thought the farmer would suffer most. But when I learned that land values only were to be taxed, not land, I saw that farmers would pay less instead of more, because the value of farms, irrespective of all improvements would be small, while under the present system the more industrious and self-denying a farmer is, the more the tax gatherer takes from him. Two farms, side by side, having the same site value, are taxed to-day in proportion to their working, and the thrifty farmer is made to pay heavily because of his industry, and his shiftless neighbor is let off with a small contribution. Thrift is punished and neglect rewarded. The Single Tax would leave to labor its entire earnings. The real land values are to be found in cities. What enormous farms the little lot under this building would buy!

The hardest thing for me to understand was the fact that land taxes cannot be shifted by the landlord, and to this day neither Mr. Wells nor Mr. Atkinson can see it, thereby differing with the recognized authorities on political economy.

I thought if I leased a lot of land, I could make my tenant pay the tax back to me in added rent. It seems as if I might do so. But it takes two to make a bargain and it is not what I ask that I get, but as near that as my customer will give. I get all that I can, and he gives the least that he can and the rent is fixed at the line where neither will advance or recede. The taxes I must pay, because he has given me all he will, and if I should insist that they go with the rent, he would seek other lots. I noted also that the city lots most heavily taxed contained stores where the lowest priced goods are sold. This convinced me that the landlord was not recovering his taxes from the public, but that the advantage of situation more than offset them. In other words, he simply paid for a privilege worth the price, and to call such payment a tax, when value is fully returned, is truly a misnomer. So, although we use the term Single Tax to give a distinct idea of our method, it is in no sense a burden, does not partake of the nature of a tax, and cannot enter into the cost of production. This is an important point, because our claim for the justice of the Single Tax rests upon the impossibility of shifting it upon labor, and the trouble with the present system is, that taxes are made to be shifted and eventually are unloaded upon the shoulders of the people least able to bear them. Hence, unequal conditions of living, low wages and poverty.

The question of compensation is the last ditch we have to encounter. Is it right, our critics ask, that a man who has put his honest earnings into land, should have it confiscated? What better than robbery is that?—and the virtuous critic gives us a wither-

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ing look of outraged honesty, which in the eyes of the unthinking is equivalent to annihilation. President Walker and Professor Clarke, of Smith College, are prominent in this role. As truth crushed to earth will rise again, we come up smiling, to ask who is doing the confiscation? What does the Single Tax propose to take? Simply the economic rent or annual value which the growth of the community has given to the land. Taking for the benefit of the people a value which they alone have made, is justice, not confiscation.

Our proposition is to put a stop to the present confiscation, and to rescue from private appropriation what belongs to the public. If compensation is to be made, it should be from him who appropriates to him who is despoiled, not the reverse. And one would think that even presidents and professors of colleges, observing the crowded and unwholesome conditions of city life—the slums wherein the workingmen and women are forced to dwell, where anguish drives thousands to the oblivion of drink, and prostitution claims its subjects from a starving class—would sometimes ask themselves what compensation is possible for these victims which a society that arrogates to itself the name of Christian, offers up on the altar of land monopoly.

Emerson understood the true method, when the slaveholder called for compensation—

“Pay ransom to the owner  
And fill the bag to the brim.  
Who is the owner? The Slave is owner,  
And ever was. Pay him.”

To me, as well as to many others, the lessening of poverty and the raising of wages, which the Single Tax promises, was an unwarrantable prophecy, and in my letter of sympathy to Mr. George I said, “I do not believe that your plan is the panacea of poverty.” “Nor I,” he replied, “but I am sure freedom is.” Since then my faith has grown and is growing in the efficacy of this measure with the fiscal name. It is the handmaid of freedom and must unlock the bars and bolts.

Voluntary poverty which results from willful disobedience we have no concern with, although with altered conditions and higher standards of living that too must wane. But self-degradation, sad as it is, is not the sight that wrings our souls. The sensualist and idler may be safely left to the natural punishment which accompanies transgression. “As close as sin and suffering joined,” is the descriptive line of Whittier. It is the involuntary and enforced misery that is so dreadful, man suffering at the hands of his brother.

The wonderful increase of material wealth, which fairly distributed would make want almost disappear, the swollen and stolen fortunes, side by side with the sweat-shops and beggars, the carnival of luxury and the discontent of labor, all indicate the dangers which threaten the Republic and which we would avert.

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We urge no arbitrary remedy, but make the safe and moderate demand conveyed in Emerson's wise words, "Give no bounties, make equal laws, secure life and property, and you need not give alms. Open the doors of opportunity to talent and virtue and they will do themselves justice, and property will not be in bad hands."

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