

WHO ARE THE CRIMINALS
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WHO ARE THE CRIMINALS?

I. WHO ARE THE CRIMINALS?

In considering the problem of how to check or control vice and crime in New York the question at once raised is: Who are the criminals? Who are they who cause these dreadful evils in the community? For unless we know exactly where the disease lies how can we attempt a remedy?

II. FRENCH ARISTOCRACY OF PRIVILEGE.

When the French Revolution broke loose the people followed the lead of men who seemed no better than a pack of devils, for they maimed, they brutally tortured and they slew. Women, whose only offense was that they were members of an arrogant and grinding aristocracy, were stripped naked, treated with every indignity and killed with every mark of ferocity. Old men and young children belonging to the upper classes were butchered, and persons of blameless life and humane intention were trampled under foot when they attempted to stay the carnival of blood.

Who will dare say that these revolutionary leaders, these butchers, were not criminals — criminals whose bloody hands must shine down through history? They were men turned to monsters; brutes with human intelligence, striving for new ways to torture and kill.

But whence came they? Not from without. They sprang up within. They represented the spirit of retaliation — of fiendish retaliation for the centuries of wrong done them and theirs. They were

the progeny of poverty made by robbery. Their deeds were the deeds of monstrous criminals, but they themselves were the spawn of hideous injustice — an injustice that gave to the few riotous feasting and gorgeous raiment and to the many rags and black bread filled with maggots.

The aristocrats during centuries of power had appropriated the soil of France, and all other Frenchmen had to purchase the privilege of living in their native country. Not content with this, the upper classes had thrown upon the masses all those heavy taxes which it was the plain intent only the landowners should bear. They shifted upon the common people all the expenses of an extravagant, aristocratic government, and through ground rents sucked away all the people's remaining substance, save just enough to keep them alive and at work. Who were making the masses so poor and wretched was as plain as day. The masses themselves could see, and when they raised the sword against the aristocracy all hell seemed to break loose.

Who were the criminals? Why, of course *they* were criminals — horrible, revolting criminals — who did this guillotining, who committed these butcheries.

But who *made* these criminals? Clearly those who bore so heavily upon the people — the aristocrats, who kept the people in fearful poverty and ignorance which bred the spirit of bloodthirsty tigers.

The aristocracy, therefore, were the primary, the real criminals.

III. NEW YORK ARISTOCRACY OF PRIVILEGE.

I wish to proceed with greatest caution, with utmost conservatism. Yet candor compels me to ask: Have we not in our community an aristocracy of privilege — an aristocracy far more rich, far more powerful than was the aristocracy of old France? And have we not a corresponding poor class? Is it not true that half the population of Manhattan Island is living in what Ex-Mayor Hewitt rightly calls "those terrible tenements?"

That Prince of the Church, Bishop Potter, has proposed in the emergency that we have noonday prayer meetings. By all means, we all say. Let us bow ourselves before Almighty God and ask for relief from this social scourge. Yet what if, while we pray, we abate not the power of our aristocracy of privilege; what if we do nothing to mitigate the poverty of the million tenement dwellers?

The distinguished divine has also proposed a military police. If that were good, would not a local standing army be better? It would keep order, at least for a time. But would it cure the general poverty among the masses? Would it not rather act like a lid fastened down on a volcano — work well, until fire and molten stone and destruction belched forth? What then?

IV. ROBBERY OF MASSES BY CLASSES.

Assuming that we are sincerely trying to make civic conditions better, that we are seeking a cure

(if there be a cure) for the general vice and crime in the community, should we not ask ourselves some plain questions? Is it not the truth that we have an aristocracy? Is it not the truth that we have a poor class? Is it not certain that the rich are growing richer and the poor poorer and more numerous?

I believe that there can be but one answer — yes.

Yet I can see no reason for this state of things unless it be that the classes are robbing the masses.

V. NATURE AND EXTENT OF ROBBERIES.

LET us consider how the classes may be robbing the masses into poverty.

It is said that when the first Dutchmen came sailing into New York Bay they bought Manhattan Island for \$24. That was for the land alone, no houses or other improvements being here. Today the selling value of the bare land of this same Manhattan Island is at least \$3,000,000,000. Those who possess the land of this island, now get what is equivalent to a ground rental of \$150,000,000 a year, with this sum steadily swelling. The ground rental of Greater New York cannot be less than \$225,000,000 yearly.

This vast sum is paid over to the landlord aristocracy — for what? For doing nothing. The people multiplied from a ship's crew to several millions in and about the island and behold! the vast value of land which in the beginning sold for but \$24. The increment of value obviously has not been produced by individuals; it is entirely aside from and in addition to the value of improvements, which spring from human labor, which are produced by individuals. This increase in land value is a publicly-made value. It of right belongs to all the people. Do all the people get it? No, the few whom we recognize as the owners of this land claim that value and get it. The people at large in the community get nothing. Do not these landed aristocrats — of which the old French nobility were in many respects prototypes — rob the community? Do they not go far toward robbing a large part of the people into poverty?

Take another instance of robbery of the many by the few. Observe what we are doing about public franchises. A public franchise is a public right of way, a public highway. Modern civilization, with its intense centralization, its condensed population, and its interdependence of individuals, makes these highways of vital importance to the community. They are the arteries of the body-social, the channels of intercommunication and transportation, of heat, and water, and light, and power, and sewage. Were they suddenly destroyed, a large part of the population would die as quickly as a member of the human organism withers up and dies when the flow of blood is cut off from it.

Then if these public franchises, these public rights of way, these public highways, are so vital to the body-social, so necessary to the well-being of the people, what should be our policy toward them? What *is* our policy toward them? Why, in the case of water and sewage we treat them as public property, operating them publicly through public officials. But what do we do in respect to the other franchises? What do we do regarding street railroads, telephones and telegraphs,

electric lighting and heating and gas, and steam supply? All these public franchises are treated as if they were private franchises. Upon all these public highways we allow private individuals to set the claim of ownership; to make charge upon the people; make charge upon the body-social for its blood, as it were. And a conservative estimate of the annual value of these public franchises in Greater New York at this time is \$30,000,000.

Here, then, we have two forms of grand, constant, continuous robbery of the people — an aristocracy of privilege appropriating public ground rents and public franchise values, so that a few of the population are enabled to live in palaces while a million crowd into tenements.

VI. HOW TO STOP THE ROBBERIES.

Now the masses of the people of Greater New York lose annually by the appropriations of the landed and franchise aristocracy —

In ground rents	\$225,000,000
In franchise values	30,000,000
While they are compelled to pay in various taxes for the support of local government	98,000,000
Which makes in all	\$353,000,000

What shorter way is there to relieve poverty and to do social justice than to abolish the \$98,000,000 of general taxes, which fall mainly upon industry or the fruits of industry and terribly hamper the masses of the people; and then what more simple than to appropriate for local governmental expenses that sum out of the \$225,000,000 of publicly-made land values? Why not further lighten the load of the masses by taking over into public ownership and management all public municipal franchises, just as are water and sewage now; and then why not cut down their cost of service to the public that \$30,000,000 which now represents purely franchise value in the charges of the private corporations that possess and manage them?

For a third step, why not make these municipal utilities free to the public, meeting the expense of their operation by another appropriation of the publicly-made land values?

And for a fourth step, why not appropriate for an old-age pension to every citizen, rich and poor alike, for public parks, for public lectures and concerts, or for any other or for all such purposes — all that still remains of the publicly-made land values?

What would be the result of such a policy? It would be that all the people in Greater New York would be relieved of the burden of \$98,000,000 of various taxes; that the great charge of the many branches of the public franchise service on the people would be entirely wiped out and abolished; and that the whole of land values, that is, of ground rents, would be enjoyed by all the people equally, being appropriated for public uses.

Would this make any difference in the community? The welkin is made to ring by the most influential of the tax-payers when, under present conditions, the taxation authorities raise or lower the tax rate even 1%. What, then, would happen if *all* taxation were lifted from the fruits of toil, if public utilities were made free, and if land values were to benefit, not a class, but the whole people?

Such a tax would be just, because it would fall on this publicly-made value; it would be certain, because land cannot be hidden or lessened in amount; it would force all unused or inadequately used valuable land into its highest use, for no one could afford to hold such land vacant for a speculation, as very many do now.

Land in Greater New York would therefore be cheaper — how much cheaper may be judged by the fact that two-thirds of the land within the city limits, though extremely valuable, is not now used. This unused land would compete with the used land for users, so that land values in the community generally would fall. At the same time all building materials, being relieved of present taxation, would be far cheaper, making two of the chief elements for house building would be greatly less in cost, and consequently, larger, lighter, better dwelling accommodations in every way could and would be supplied to the masses of the people, and especially to the million now living in tenements.

What would help the poorest would be of direct and indirect benefit to all others in the community; and this would be but one of a large harvest of good results that the people would reap from such a policy.

The privileged classes, the aristocrats, would lose their privileges, but they would have no less rights than any and all other citizens of Greater New York.

VII. THE CRIMINALS.

That able and public-spirited citizen, Mr. President Baldwin, of the Long Island Railroad, and Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce Anti-Vice Committee of Fifteen, has said that this is not the time for "idealist scheme of reform." But we are trying to put down vice and crime in the community; and the question is: Who are the criminals?

Let us be frank with ourselves: Who are the criminals? Are they the housebreakers, the unfortunate women who walk the streets and the police officials who take blood-money? Or are they those who rob the masses of the people into poverty — deep, biting, degrading poverty?

Are not the aristocrats of privilege, knowingly or unknowingly, the criminals we should first consider in an examination of civic disease in New York?