

Speech to Anti-Poverty Society

Henry George
Standard, July 2, 1887

A Rousing Meeting Of The Society, In Spite Of The Hot Weather

A Lucid Address by Abner C. Thomas—The Thunder of the Vatican Will Be But the Echo of Tammany Hall—Henry George Shows How Poverty Afflicts the Rich and Well-to-do—Intelligent Questions and Convincing Answers

The ninth public meeting of the Anti-poverty society, held last Sunday evening at the Academy of Music, was as crowded and enthusiastic as any of the preceding ones. Chairman Abner C. Thomas opened the meeting with a brief speech, defining the aims and objects of the society. He said:

This Anti-poverty society of ours has been criticized by some of its enemies because it is said that we have in our address here emphasized the fundamental truths upon which all religion is based, and which, operating upon masses of men, move them more powerfully than any other class of impulses possibly can.

There is one reason, perhaps, why this tone has been given to the address upon this platform, which is more potent than all the rest put together. That reason lies in the fact that our president (wild applause), the man who, perhaps more than anyone else, has breathed life into this branch of the great movement in which we are engaged, is so saturated with the grace of God, so full of the spiritual impulses that make him look upon the most ordinary affairs of life with the eyes of a worshiper of the living God, that in every one of his addresses he has sought to lead us toward this great reform which he has so much at heart, along the lines upon which he has traveled for so many years, the lines which in his mind lead direct to the throne of the great Creator. (Applause) And in this effort of ours to lift humanity up to a higher plane and to destroy abuses which have corrupted the very foundations of the prosperity of the common people, it is right for us to look to the fountain of all goodness as the place from which inspiration may come for all good works. (Applause)

This is not a selfish Anti-poverty society. This Anti-poverty society is not organized upon the lines which make successful anti-poverty societies of one. This society is not working merely for itself. I question whether it would be possible to gather the audiences we have had in this hall Sunday after Sunday on any issue purely selfish. The newspapers have criticized this audience as being too well dressed to enter into any anti-poverty crusade. I admit they are well dressed. (Applause) We do not expect to lead this crusade toward success on the votes of men who need help the most. There are men in this community, God help them! who have been so crushed, so degraded, so debased by this horrible condition of affairs which we are trying to remedy that they have been ready to sell for a pittance the vote which ought to assist in bringing about their own reformation and help. It is by the votes of the men who are self-respecting and industrious, and honest and good members of the community that this great reform is to be worked out. (Applause)

We are in this anti-poverty crusade not merely for ourselves. We remember our children. And however successful we may have been in the battle of life, we remember the generations that are coming after us, and we know that under present conditions we have no assurance that

our own children will not share in the calamity which has befallen so many of our fellow citizens. (Applause) Free institutions, correct and just institutions, are a better inheritance for our children than any amount of money which we, individually, can accumulate. (Applause)

The time has come for a reconstruction, not merely of political, but of social institutions. It is but recently that all of the energies of the world seemed to be concentrated upon the creation of dynasties and the building up of nations. The time is coming when we shall consider, not only the relations of nations to each other. The time is coming when we shall consider the social problems that trample down the masses and lift up the few above them. (Applause) In this great country of ours it is within the memory of men still young that it seemed as if our great estate could not be wasted or frittered away. And yet we see before us today a state of things that reminds us most forcibly of the fact that when we came from the older countries of Europe, bringing with us the laws of those countries, the laws created for the purpose of manufacturing and maintaining an aristocracy. (Applause) When we brought over here this notion of the individual right to control the bounties of nature, we brought the seed that was to create the aristocracy as arrogant, as overbearing, as offensive as the aristocracy of any nation in Europe. (Applause)

With the changes we desire to bring about we desire to establish one fact more than any other, and that is the dignity of mankind, the dignity of labor, and the superior value of a man to any number of dollars. (Wild applause) We find in this great republic of ours all of our water courses, all of our lines of communication, held in the grasp of monopolists, and, more than all, the land monopolists, who are oppressing the people and making the poor poorer and more numerous, the rich richer and fewer. It is against this that our war is directed. We hope to uplift mankind. We hope to declare that every child born into this world has an inheritance in the world and shall not be deprived of its just rights by any law, however antique and however hedged about by acts of the legislature or by the constitution. (Applause)

There is another matter that lies very near to our hearts tonight. There is another subject which is in the mind of every one of you. Our friend, the man who stood by us (shouts of "We will stand by him; three cheers for Dr. McGlynn!" Long continued applause), the man who has sacrificed everything that he held dear in order that we might be saved, faces a great condemnation. They will not do justice to him. (Groans and hisses) I do not think they will do justice to him. But it rests with us, dear friends, in the time of his trial to gather close around him ("hear! hear!" and applause), to make him feel and know that the heart of this great people stands firmly with him. (Great applause. Voices, "We will stand by him!" "There isn't a man who won't stand by him!")

A sound will come from across the seas that will sound like the thunder of the Vatican; but we know the facts will know that it is an echo from Tammany hall. ("Hear! hear!" and applause) And when the time comes that the corrupt political machines who have lived by your votes, who have made themselves great by your friendship, ask for those votes again and appeal to your friendship, we will tell them, "Remember McGlynn." (Great applause) It is my firm belief that in this community there are men just enough to heap upon the heads of these tricksters and knaves, these managers of popes and cardinals (applause), these manipulators of ecclesiastical machines (hisses), such a condemnation as will make them—well, about as religious as we are. (Tumultuous applause) The voice will be the voice of Leo, but the hand will be the hand of O'Donoghue. (Terrific hisses and groans)

Miss Munier then sang Dr. Lawrence's song, "We Want the Earth," to the air of "Kilarny," the audience listening with keen enjoyment and greeting each stanza with applause.

The chairman next announced Henry George, who said:

Ladies and gentlemen: I thank you for the kind enthusiasm of your greeting; but I am still more pleased with your welcome tonight of the name of Dr. McGlynn (tremendous applause), because it is said that this coming week Dr. McGlynn is to be excommunicated. (Hisses) I read in yesterday morning's *Sun* (hisses and groans drawn out)—I read in yesterday morning's *Sun* (hisses, screams and hooting; voices, "Don't read it any more," "Don't mention it")—now, give me a chance to get along a little faster. I must mention the *Sun* (groans, long repeated). Very well then. I read yesterday morning in a paper that cannot be mentioned before this audience (uproarious applause)—I read that Dr. McGlynn was going to be excommunicated during the coming week, and that as soon as he was excommunicated he would sink out of sight. (Groans and hisses, and cries of "Rats," "The *Sun* is sinking out of sight." This latter sentiment was greeted with applause and laughter) We have heard that story before. When Dr. McGlynn was to be suspended, then he was to sink out of sight; and I am told on credible authority that the archbishop of New York (groans and fierce hisses) told a gentleman who remonstrated with him upon the importance of the step he was going to take in three days after he had suspended Dr. McGlynn he would never be heard of more. (Laughter) This audience, the audience that greets him today in Chicago, that enormous demonstration of last Saturday night, the enthusiasm that is evoked wherever his name is mentioned, shows how such prophecies have been fulfilled. (Applause)

There has been something in this matter from the beginning that these people have not understood. Behind Dr. McGlynn is a great principle. (Tremendous applause) Behind him is a hope and a trust that is rising into an overwhelming wave. (Applause) Let them excommunicate, if they please. (A voice, "That is it," and applause) This wave will but mount the higher. (Applause)

The manly, straightforward utterance of that priest this week in which he expressed his opinion of the ecclesiastical machine (hisses) has drawn forth from the press an effort to liken him to Luther. (Hisses; a voice: "They can't do it.") The best proof that they cannot do it, and the best proof that this is not a true parallel, is that the men who are trying so hard to impress Catholics with the notion that Dr. McGlynn is following the footsteps of Luther, are followers of Luther themselves. (Uproarious applause and cries of "You're right, they are." "That is where your head is level.")

The movement that Dr. McGlynn is heading is a far greater, a far more important, a far more vital movement than was that headed by Martin Luther. (Applause) This is no mere squabble about theological distinctions. This is no mere quarrel about points of doctrine. There is between the two powers that are brought face to face in this struggle an issue that goes deeper down. Dr. McGlynn is to be excommunicated, and the Protestants and all the atheists of the daily press cry amen! (Applause) He is to be excommunicated, not merely because he has asserted the right of an American citizen, has declared that as an American priest he is free and unfettered in his political thoughts and political action, and will acknowledge no foreign domination (great applause), but because he has said that poverty can be and ought to be abolished, and that it is the duty of Christians to struggle to that end. This is his sin (applause); and here is the great and vital difference between him and the ecclesiastical machines. (Applause)

I saw yesterday, after I had read that article in the paper that shall here be nameless (laughter), as I came walking down town, two Italians and a monkey. One Italian was grinding an organ, the other was leading the monkey around with a string. And it made me think of his

eminence, Cardinal Simeoni. (Hisses and laughter) I don't mean say that the monkey reminded me of the cardinal, but that the monkey reminded me of the cardinal, but that there were able-bodied men engaged—one grinding an organ and the other in leading about a monkey; and it made me think of the condition of the people that are being poured on our shores from Italy, and how little of true Christianity there could have been preached in Italy (long continued applause), when the condition of these people is all that there is to show for eighteen hundred years of it.

Here is the great distinction between the ideas represented by Dr. McGlynn on the one side and the ideas represented by propaganda and pope on the other side. (Applause) Dr. McGlynn believes that poverty is the result of human injustice, that it can be, and ought to be abolished. (Applause) They on the other side look upon poverty itself as something decreed by the Almighty (hisses); as something that must always continue to exist; in fact, as something that ought to continue to exist—in other people. (Laughter. A voice, “Just let them try a little of it themselves.”) Here are the words of Bishop Vaughan, which I take out of the first article in a Catholic periodical, *Donahue's Monthly Magazine*: “Poverty is a direct consequence of original sin.” (Laughter) Now, I always thought that the theological doctrine of original sin was that everybody incurred the penalty of original sin (applause); but this particular consequence of original sin, according to Bishop Vaughan, is only for the masses, and does not affect the classes. (Laughter) He goes on to say, “No political, social or philanthropic course of action will ever destroy the presence of poverty in the world. Poverty, indeed, serves more than one purpose in the economy of God's providence over the world. (Laughter) It exercises an important influence both in the natural and the supernatural order of things. Were poverty banished out of the world the consequences to mankind would be deplorable.” (Hisses and laughter)

And this is the doctrine quite as strongly of the Protestant saviors of society. This is the doctrine that you may hear today preached from pulpits occupied by followers of Luther (hisses); the same old doctrine, that God gives wealth to some and poverty to others. (A voice, “It is a lie.”) That poverty is ordained in God's providence to enable the rich to be charitable to the poor. (Laughter and hisses) Why, only last week, in the *Christian Union*, the organ of the great Congregational denomination, there was published a report made by four eminent doctors of divinity to the council of the church and the Home missionary society, in which they described in the darkest terms the condition in which thousands and tens of thousands of people live in the slums of our great city. And then they went on to say that that was a providential design of God (hisses); that God was bringing the heathen over here from Europe, and He was concentrating them in masses in these great cities so that the Home missionary society might get at them easier. (Laughter) What Dr. McGlynn stands for is a belief in a very different kind of a God. (Applause) He doesn't believe, and we do not believe, in an Almighty Father that gives to some of His children far more wealth than they can well use, and deprives thousands and thousands, deprives in fact the vast majority—of enough for the full use of their powers, and the full satisfaction of their needs. (Applause) We do not believe in that kind of a God. We believe in a God who is the equal father of all his children, who has placed them in a world stored with an abundance to satisfy all their needs, and who, leaving them their free will, puts it in their power either to abuse and waste what he has provided, or to so use it as to give plenty to all. (Applause) And we believe that the highest duty that is devolved upon us, the way in which we can best show our love and our gratitude to the provider of all good things, is by seeing that all His children get a fair share of them; is by attempting, in so far as it in us lies, to bring on earth the kingdom of His righteousness—to establish society on a basis of justice, so that there shall be no poverty. (Applause)

Dr. McGlynn has raised the cross of the new crusade (applause), not a crusade for the recovery from the infidel of the tomb in which Christ has lain, but for the redemption from the degrading and demoralizing conditions in which they are now imprisoned who were made in Christ's image. (Applause). And that is a battle that, once begun, must go on, and on, and on. (Applause) The cross that the good priest has lifted appeals to the hearts and consciences of men, and forbid them who may, they gather around it. (Applause) It is a worldwide movement, a movement that has in it far greater and far higher opportunities than any theological quarrel, and it is a battle in which the great mass of the men in New York are going to stand by the man who carries their standard. (Wild applause. A voice: "We are going to stay with him, too.")

When we talk of abolishing poverty most people are apt to think of that dire poverty that festers in the slums. It is well that we should keep that in mind. It is well that we should keep that in mind. It is well that we should aim at its abolition, for it is a truth that unless we raise the very lowest man nothing can be done for society as a whole. And yet, in aiming at it is something far more than that. The papers say, as Mr. Thomas has mentioned, that this is a well-dressed audience. Perhaps it is. And yet in this or in any other well-dressed audience that you get together in the United States you find men and women who are suffering from poverty. (Applause) We all suffer from poverty. Even William K. Vanderbilt or Jay Gould suffer from poverty (laughter)—not their own poverty. They do not suffer from that; but it is true that they do suffer from that; but it is true that they do suffer from the poverty of others. No man can live in human society without feeling in some way the injuries inflicted upon others in that society. (Applause) And not of this terrible poverty that lies at the bottom of society comes that greed, comes that corruption of thought, comes that degradation of high ideals that curses even those who have accumulated the largest number of millions. The very poor, the tramp, the pauper, I am not sure that they really suffer the most by the poverty that exists in society today. Though they may have no hope, yet neither do they have any fear. When men get down so low their sensibilities are blunted. The keenest suffering from poverty today probably exists among those who are well-dressed (applause); among those who have the fear and the dread of it before them ("hear! hear!" and applause); among those who are struggling to make both ends meet; struggling to bring up their children (applause); struggling to secure something for their wives if they shall be taken away.

This curse of poverty runs through the whole of society; and it is growing deeper and wider. Steadily, as modern progress goes on, the chances of the ordinary man to make an independent living become less and less. (Applause) A generation ago no boy who went to a trade, but hoped to become in time his own employer, a master in the business. No boy entered a store but who hoped in time to have a store of his own. How is it today? Look at these great establishments that are concentrating trade, these great monopolies that are concentrating various forms of production. See how, in every direction, business is becoming massed and concentrated; and then say what is the chance of the ordinary boy who goes into a factory, or who goes into a store. (A voice, "There is none!") The best he can hope for, unless there comes some accident to help him along, unless he has very unusual talents and opportunities to show them, is simply to go through life as an employee, making wages that if they enable him to live it is about all that he can expect. (Applause)

Poverty! We are all poor compared with what might be—even those who can dress well and have enough to eat. We hear a good deal of thrift and toil. But consider what man is, the powers that lie latent even in the poorest and most degraded of mankind, the capabilities of taste and enjoyment. Was man intended merely for toil and thrift? That he should go through life

working hard and stinting all his expenditures? In his tastes, in his powers, in his capacities, man is an expensive animal. (Laughter) He can only gratify his tastes and develop his powers when he has both leisure and the opportunity of making use of an abundance of the material things that minister to his needs.

How many of our population today, even those who are comparatively well-to-do, really enjoy the benefits and the opportunities that a civilization like this affords? How many of our people can go to Europe? How many of our people can even see our own country? How many of our people, of the well-to-do, men who make what we call a decent living, have any time for the development of the mental powers? How many read books? How many have the opportunity to gratify those tastes that can only be gratified by exploring the wonders of nature?

We hold, not merely that the gaunt poverty that festers in the slums can be abolished, but that a state of things can be brought about in which we all may be rich, in which all shall have abundant opportunity to develop their very highest powers and to gratify every reasonable taste. (Great applause) When one considers the forces of production that are now going to waste, when he considers the enormous waste arising from unemployed labor, the hundreds of thousands of men that even in what we call good times, are willing to work, and anxious to work, but find no opportunities to work—when we consider how abundant are the powers of production that are yet unused, the land that is untilled, the mineral resources that are uncalled upon, the great powers of invention that have not yet been utilized, no one can resist the conclusion that in a state of society based on natural justice all might be rich. In a state of society where every one who wanted to could get an opportunity to employ himself—in a state of society where this cut throat competition that now crowds wages down to the line of a mere living was abolished, in which gaunt poverty and the ignorance and the vice that come from it would cease, in which each child as it grew up might have an opportunity to select that vocation for which his natural powers were best fitted; no one need fret or strain, and every one, even the humblest, might have full opportunity for the highest life and the fullest development.

That is the social state we believe possible. We do not believe, as do the saviors of society (hisses), who call themselves followers of Christ, that some time or other God of His own volition is going to bring a millennium on this earth. (Applause) We believe that men have got to make the millennium for themselves (applause); that the coming of the kingdom on earth which shall be akin to that of heaven, is only to be hastened by the sincere and earnest work of men. (Applause)

It may not come in our time. Well, supposing it does not? It is at least something to have seen the possibility of its coming. (Applause) It is at least something to have had the privilege of working to bring it on. (Applause) When one realizes that the misery that springs from poverty in this world is not due to the intent of the Creator, but is solely due to man's injustice; when we realize that the Almighty is indeed a benevolent Father, looking with equal eye upon all His children, and not giving the good things of this life to a few, and promising to the great mass that if they will only lie quiet and be content that then, after death (laughter), he will give them some good things, too. (Laughter)

And it is the highest and the noblest inspiration that a man can have to feel that he has the privilege to do something to aid in this struggle of good against evil; that it is in his power to do something, no matter how little it may be, to make the world better and brighter for those who come after him. (Applause)

Mere wealth, the wealth gained by anti-poverty societies of one, cannot bring happiness. The rich men of our day, the men who by organizing the most thorough and complete and

efficacious anti-poverty societies of one, have grabbed millions of dollars together for themselves, leaving others to suffer; they are not to be envied. They remind me of the men whom I have seen on an ocean steamer, who from the time the steamer left port to the time she arrived, could do nothing but gamble. No matter how beautiful the sunset or the sunrise, no matter how beautiful might be scenery of the shores they were approaching, they had eyes for nothing but their cards. So it is with these rich men who, by force of habit that becomes an engrossing passion, devote all their powers, up to the verge of the grave, in grasping what they cannot take away. (Applause)

And what they leave becomes to their children oftener a curse than a blessing.

Wealth in the midst of poverty, wealth that no exertion has been made to gain, is often an injury. That is the best state in which there is no need of grasping, in which there is no need of undue toil, in which work may become a pleasure, and in which no one need fear that should accident befall him that those who are dependent upon him would suffer want. And such a state of society is entirely practicable. It is to bring it about that we have entered this crusade. (A voice, "The ballot will do it.") Aye, the ballot will do it; and it is the only thing that will do it. We must act on general conditions, and we can only act through the ballot.

Mr. George then announced that he would answer any questions that might be put to him by members of the audience. The following queries and answers ensued:

Q—Would unimproved property or improved property be the first to be confiscated?

A—We do not talk about confiscation of property. It is the other people. (applause) We do not propose to confiscate any property, even to take possession of any property. What we propose to do is to exempt from all taxation that species of property which is the result of human labor and to put our taxes upon land values irrespective of improvements. (Applause) Were that done the people who are now holding vacant land without using it would either to have to use it or part with it to somebody who would. (Applause)

Q—How and in what manner is the ballot to abolish poverty?

A—By securing the making of laws that by putting taxation upon land values and removing it from things produced by labor will give each individual an equal interest in the soil of his native country and an equal share in that vast fund that comes from social growth and social improvement and that attaches to land, giving it a value irrespective of the improvements upon it. (Applause) Secondly, by securing laws that will take into the hands of the community, or, at least, place under the control of the community, businesses that are in their nature monopolies, such as railroading, telegraphing, the supplying of gas, water, etc.

Q—There are three different kinds of taxation—municipal, state and national. How do you propose to arrange that?

A—I do not think it necessary just now to dwell upon how that division should be made. We are principally concerned just now in urging the general principle. Matters of detail we can very well leave to the future. ("Hear, hear," and applause) But I can say briefly, that there is no difficulty in the division. The municipality and the state could do as they do now—take various proportions of a single tax levied on land values, and a proportion could be taken for the general government. If, however, it is not deemed desirable to have the same source of revenue for the general government as for the states and municipalities, then there are other sources of revenues that, without interfering with the production of wealth, might be resorted to for the general government. For instance, a tax upon legacies and successions, while not having the same foundation in justice as a tax on land values, would yield a large revenue without interfering with the production of wealth. (Applause)

Q—Do you not propose to make labor saving machinery a portion of the property of the co-operative commonwealth of the future?

A—Not unless it is labor saving machinery whose use involves a monopoly. For instance, I would make railroads entirely free, at the expense of the city, just as in large buildings elevators are run. But I would not make the typewriter or the sewing machine the property of the community. (Applause)

Q—I have been told that this Anti-poverty society recognizes property in land of one nation as against other nations, and I would like to know what your answer would be to that, as it would help me in confuting our opponents?

A—We recognize this: That each nation, having come into being and carrying on its existence on a portion of this planet, is entitled to retain the management of its own affairs and to prescribe the terms on which it will admit to its membership members of any other nation. (Applause) We do not hold that nations, any more than individuals, can get absolute property in land. We do not hold that the red Indians who were here before us had any more right to sell this soil forever than we of today have. (Applause) We do not hold that the earth can belong to any individual or to any nation or to any generation, but that it is appointed dwelling place of all the generations who in the providence of the Creator are brought into being on it. (Applause)

Q—Suppose all the Chinese come into the United States, what is to become of the people here already. (Laughter)

A—If all China were to come into the United States under the present condition of things it would be most disastrous. (Laughter) And under the present condition of things, where competition of men deprived of all opportunity to earn a living for themselves fixes the rate of wages, in my opinion we cannot be too careful to keep out any large immigration from China. But if we were to base our social conditions upon principles of justice, securing to all men their natural rights, then I believe that we would have no need for any restrictions. For, to go no further, I believe that that example would spread like wild fire all over the earth. (Applause) That there is today in Europe a single crowned head; that there is today in Europe a standing army or a titled aristocracy, is our fault. (Applause) If we had really carried out in its spirit and truth the Declaration of Independence; if we had really based our institutions and laws upon the full recognition of the principle that all men are created equal and are entitled to inalienable rights, we would have had here such a republic that the nations of the earth would have followed its lead. (Great applause) We have gotten rid of the titled aristocracy, but we have a plutocracy of greater power. We have got rid of kings, but have accepted the rule of bosses. (Applause) All over Europe the ruling classes point to the United States with hissing and reproach. If we had been true to our principles; if we had established a truly democratic republic, the whole civilized world by this time would have been democratic and republican. (Applause)

And that is the work before us, men of today! The republic, the true republic, the republic that Jefferson had hoped for, has not yet been established. (Applause) It is ours to establish it. (Wild, tumultuous and long continued applause)

Q—If we have to divide the value of a house and lot, how can we find what part of the value attaches to the house and what part to the lot. (Laughter)

A—Very easily. In the state of California the assessors return the value of the land and the value of the house separately. Here the assessment rolls return only the sum of the values. But, as a matter of fact, to make their assessments the assessors of New York have to take first the value of the land and then the value of the house. Then they sum them up. All we have to do is simply to keep the assessments separate. The value of land is of all values that which can be

most certainly ascertained.

Q—As rentals of buildings decrease, will not land values also go down?

A—No, not as the rents of buildings decrease. Land values will only go down as the rent of land goes down. (Applause) What the gentleman means probably is: As what is ordinarily called house rent decreases, would not the value of land go down? Not necessarily. The rent of houses would go down, because the tax would be taken off houses and off of various materials used in building houses, but the value of the land might still be as great as ever. But it is worth while to go briefly into the principle the question brings up. Say a tax falls under the present system on a house and lot. That portion of the tax which falls on the house adds to the rent of the house; that portion which falls on the land does not add to the rent of the land. The reason of that is this, and it is a very important principle that it should always be borne in mind: A tax which falls upon an article of human production which must constantly be produced in order to meet the demand will add to prices, and must ultimately be paid by the user. For instance, if a tax is put upon coats or cigars, the makers of coats and cigars will not continue making them unless they can get the ordinary profit; so the reduction of supply that would otherwise ensue enables them to add the tax to their prices. If they were not to do so a number of them would step out and the supply of coats or cigars would be diminished until the demand rose sufficiently to pay a higher price.

So it is with houses. If you put a tax upon houses, it will check the building of houses until that tax can be got back from the user. But land is a fixed quantity. No tax that you put upon land will reduce its quantity. The rent of land has a value until two people at least want it; and its value is the highest sum that the demand will enable the owner to get. Therefore a tax imposed upon land values is a tax levied on a tax, a tax levied on the monopoly price which the owner can get from the community. So that the system of taxation we propose would tend to reduce house rent—in the first place, by increasing the price that must be paid by those holding land vacant, which would force them either to build or to sell to those who would build, thus increasing the supply of houses while reducing the price of lots; and, in the second place, the reduction in the tax on materials would reduce the cost of erecting and maintaining houses.

Q—Would the taking of the tax off the buildings prevent the owners of those buildings from paying twenty thousand dollars for a house, and a month or two afterward coming around and demanding a percentage on forty thousand dollars?

A—It might have that tendency. But house rent cannot be raised very much without inducing the erection of more houses. The rent that is constantly rising in this city is not the rent of the houses; it is the rent of the ground. (Applause)

Q—Those men put their own valuation on those houses, and raise the valuation with the understanding of getting a percentage on the increased valuation. How can we prevent that—by laws?

A—No, it is not necessary to pass specific laws to prevent men from robbing us in that way. If we can at once take off the taxes which now fall upon the building of houses, and prevent the speculation in land which makes house sites unnecessarily dear, the supply of houses will follow the demand. As a matter of fact, as we may readily see, the increase of rents so common in this city is due to increase in the value of land, not to increase in the value of houses.

Q—What is the difference between that landlord and the highway robber who presents a pistol and says, “Your money or your life?”

A—I don't know that there is much difference when you come down to the question of ethics, between the highwayman and the man who seizes that upon which all must live. But

there is this practical difference: With the highwayman, if you have no pistol, you wouldn't have much show. With the other form of robbery, however, you have a remedy, and that remedy is in your vote. (Applause)

Q—You say that the ballot is the only remedy. But you and I have seen times when the other side, the masters, did not recognize the ballot, and took up arms and fought for their property. We have three hundred and eighty-five lawyers in Washington; and they can always be hired by the Huntingtons and the Goulds. That very class has been organized. (Confusion, during which the questioner could only be indistinctly heard)

A—Where the people have not the ballot, and where their oppressors fight to keep them down, the oppressed may very properly also appeal to strength. The gentleman further asks, if I understand him, how can we do much in this country where we have so many lawyers, and where lawyers are so readily employed by the Goulds and the Vanderbilts. We can pay the lawyers ourselves. We also have something to tempt the lawyers when it comes to employment. When we are ready to cast our votes for this principle we will find men of the highest legal ability, as of all other kinds of ability, who are perfectly ready to go with us. (Applause)

Further than this, in the good time coming, this reform, simple as it is, will very largely diminish the number of lawyers. All the real estate lawyers will find their business gone, and many young men will not be driven into the law as they are driven into it now, in despair of making an honest living at something else. (Applause)

Q—You did not understand me. I meant that the southern slave holders took up arms against the ballot and tried to keep their property by force of arms against a legitimate majority of the nation.

A—I do not think the land owners of the United States will take up arms. All we have to do is to change the system of taxation; and they surely are not going to fight against the collection of taxes. And if they do it will not do them much good. The fighting will be very short. (Applause)

Q—The New York *Herald* claims this morning that Mr. Gronlund has made you admit that you are not sure whether, if the present system of land ownership were abolished, it would abolish poverty. Please answer that deliberate misrepresentation.

A—It would be pretty hard to ask me to answer all that the New York *Herald* says. You must not believe all that you find in the New York *Herald*, especially in its editorial columns. (Laughter) I am in no doubt whatever as to the efficacy of this means of abolishing poverty, not because it is a mere change in the method of taxation, but because I see in it the fundamental law of justice; because I see in it the fundamental law of justice; because I see in it the recognition of the equality of natural rights that must be the foundation upon which truly civilized society must be built. (Applause) I do not say, and never have said, that this is all that is necessary. But I do say that this is the first thing, that it is necessary, and that until this is done nothing else can avail. (A voice, "True" and applause)

Q—Wouldn't the landlord, in order to pay the taxes on his land, raise his rent to pay that tax?

A—No. The tax would give him no power to raise his rent. All economists are agreed in this—that a tax levied on land values gives no power to the owner of the land to raise the price he can get for using the land. And that this is so may be readily seen. Here is a man who owns a piece of ground which he is renting to a tenant. The increase of the tax on the value of this land might make him want to raise the rent he is getting, but it would give him no power to raise it. It could only do so by operating to decrease the supply of ground that tenants could get. But on the

contrary, this increased tax on the value of land would make it more difficult for the owners of unused land to hold it without getting some return, and would force these owners either to use the ground themselves or to hunt up tenants or purchasers by offering their land at lower prices.

Q—Mayor Grace has a number of tenants on Long Island. If taxes on the value of land were increased, what is to prevent Mayor Grace from adding the tax to his rent?

A—Just what I have said. If it were possible for Mayor Grace to add anything to his rents simply because he wanted to, I think Mayor Grace would add to it now. He is good business man enough to get all he can. The imposition of heavier taxes on the value of his land, and the taking of taxes off of improvements, would give Mayor Grace no additional power to add to his rents.

The chairman announced that the collections amounted to \$100.08; being \$164.98 contributions, and \$26 for initiation fees.