

## Hard Times, Pensacola Opera House, April 30, 1894, by Henry George

This is the first time I have been in Florida; this is, in fact, the first time that I have been in your section. The question I get from every new acquaintance I meet is: what do you think of Florida? I think well of Florida, as far as I have seen.

To a man that has traveled much, so beautiful does he find the world—so rich, so rich—that it is hard for him to say that one place (in all things at least) surpasses others; but certainly this great state with its magnificent climate; with its great harbors; with its wonderful coastline; with its abundance of lakes; with its great forests; with its underground reservoirs of water; with all that can conduce to the production of wealth, is certainly one of the most gifted archs of the earth that any stranger can perceive.

I have been interested, much interested in what I have seen. Interested, and much interested in the people I have met. Yet here, as in every other part of the civilized world that I have entered, one great problem presses us. Of all I have seen in Florida, what most impressed me was St. Augustine. These great palaces that have arisen as if by magic on the sand of the sea shore—by the will, not of a Louis XIV; but as it were by the touch of a simple citizen of the United States. A simple citizen of the United States coming from the common ranks of common men; bearing no title, yet worth today, men say, fifty or sixty or seventy millions of dollars. Ah, it is a beautiful city. Those great buildings; embodiments of the highest arts. Those wondrous gardens. A city replete with all that can make enjoyments; that conduce to the luxury and enjoyment of life.

Yes, I have seen some other things. Florida is a rich state; a new state; a state where one does not look for those monstrous discrepancies in human condition; that we, who have lived in the capitals of the world, have become accustomed to. Yet even here. Florida is a rich state, yet as one plows along the railroads he can but notice the poverty of the majority of homes he sees. It reminds me in many cases of Ireland.

I saw coming along the road between Jacksonville and Pensacola a man whom I stopped to look at. A man and a boy; father and son. They were black; and the clothes attracted my attention. There was evidence of thrift in them; thrift of a certain sort. Joseph's coat of many colors would hardly have surpassed in its variegation these garments; neatly patched, here a piece of white, there a piece of red, and there a piece of blue; and the ends of it totally different colors. Shoes that were curiosities. If I had not been afraid of offending the proper pride of the man, I would like to have tried to buy those shoes. I never saw so much hole for so little shoe in all my life. He was a black man; hardly old enough to have been a slave except as a very young one. He looked like a decent man to have to wear clothes of that sort.

But I came along a little further until as the night fell on this station (De Funiak) I saw a sight that was well calculated to arouse a man's attention. Right on the side of the station lay a man wrapped up with a blanket around him and sort of an old cloth coat gathered up about him, sound asleep. I said to a boy: "Who is that asleep there?" (It was a place where the cars stopped for meals.) He said: "He is a tramp." I said: "A tramp? What does he do?" He said: "Nothing, he walks around and gets what he can to eat, goes from place to place." He was not a black man; he was a white man. I asked the boy if there were many such. "Well," he said, "I never saw a man lying down that way on the station, but a good many of those tramps come along here." And when the train moved on, I interviewed the conductor of the sleeping car. He said: "Tramps. Oh, yes, we have them in Florida. We see them all along the railway. They are not very bad here, because it is pretty hard work hanging underneath the cars; it is so dusty. They get on the freight trains sometimes." And I said: "Do you find many of them in Florida?" He said: "Oh, nothing to what you see in the North, but still we find them everywhere. Wherever you see the tourist there you see the tramp."

Ladies and gentlemen: You in this part of the country are afraid of yellow fever as we in New York are afraid of the smallpox and the cholera, but the appearance of yellow fever, of smallpox or of cholera is not so ominous to a republic as is the appearance of men like these. All over the country they have been gathering; growing with our growth; advancing with our progress. They are not new to you of the South; they are new to we of the North to men of my age. The tramp: there was a time when we did not know him.

We have been advancing and advancing in wealth; we have been conquering the wilderness, building railroads where but a few years ago the buffalo roamed. Today everywhere we hear of the tramp. Ridiculous as they may seem in some of their aspects, yet the most ominous indications of an industrial social equilibrium; marks of a deep-seated and rapid disease—the tramp. As I said to the conductor: "What are these people?" He said: "Men of that

kind I don't believe really want work." There are two kinds of tramps; there is the workingman who is tramping in order to get some work and there is the professional tramp who would rather tramp than work. I said to him: "Did you ever hear of the professional tramp until you first heard of the workingman tramp?" He said: "No." And it is so. The one is the precursor of the other.

Last summer I saw, as doubtless some of you present have seen, the wondrous White City that arose on the shores of Lake Michigan.

The grandest, the fairest exhibition of the power and wealth and glory of this highest of civilizations that the world has yet seen. A few months later I was in Chicago again; Chicago, the very city to which all that was great, all that was beautiful, all that was powerful of the world had been gathered together as though into a focus. In that city at that time every and each room in the corridors of the city hall were crowded with men glad to get a sleeping place on those cold flagstones. Crowded together as no merciful man would crowd his beasts. The city was full of men; honest, industrious men forced to accept such lodgings; forced at the peril of starvation, to accept the dole that meant degradation in order to preserve life.

Men cannot so be fed, cannot so be lodged, cannot so be forced to ask for food and shelter without ere long losing all that is the real ... of human nature; without losing that proper pride, that self-respect which alone will enable a man to stand the buffets of the storms of life. (Applause.) Feed a man that way, to clothe him that way, compel him to look vainly for work, and in a little while you must have the professional tramp, the man from whom all hope is gone, all courage is gone; the man who from a useful member of society has become but a parasite.

A little while ago in one of the great cities, of Rome, a cardinal delegate of the pope addressing a great congregation of Catholics assembled from all parts of Italy, declared to them that the social question was the question of today. "Politics," he said. "... have become senile and foolish beside it." So it is.

All over the country and throughout the civilized world the question of questions is: Why is it that an advancing civilization, adding constantly to the power of human hands to gratify human wants, is making the struggle for existence, not easier, but harder? Why is it that all these great inventions, calculated in themselves to increase the earnings of labor, calculated to make easier the lot of all mankind within the radius of our civilization, are merely widening the gulf between the rich and the poor; are on the one side developing the hundredfold millionaire, and on the other side the tramp? That is the question. (Applause.)

It is the question that lately has so forcibly presented itself to us; a question which industrial depression must resolve itself. What is this industrial depression? On one side it seems like a business depression. You who are in Florida have felt it. The orange districts have felt the low price which oranges brought this year. Here your leading fish packers tell me that the demand for those luscious fish drawn from the Gulf of Mexico and carried now, not merely to Baltimore and New York, but to Chicago and Dakota, fell just as soon as the depression set in. And so in every part of the country. Businessmen of all kinds have felt it.

What is it? What does it come from? Some say from a mere threat of reducing what they are accustomed to think this beneficent tariff of ours. Others say it is from some adjustment in our currency system. Now, the tariff is an important question in my opinion. The tariff is an efficient mode of robbing the many for the benefit of the very few. (Applause.) But, important as the tariff question is, it is not important enough to account for such a state of things.

The worst that (from the standpoint of the protectionist) could happen if free traders like myself would have their way, would be simply that we should be free to trade with the whole world, as we are now free to trade with the citizens of other states. The worst that could happen from my standpoint if protectionists had their full way, or at least would carry out their doctrine, would be that we should have no intercourse at all with any other nation; but this country could stand either free trade with all the rest of the world, or if need be, to the exclusion of the rest of the world. It is rich enough for me to get a living in; wide enough to accommodate many times our present population.

So with the currency question. Large it may be, but not large enough to account for such phenomena as we see today. Men lived before there was money; men have lived under all sorts of currency. Today throughout the civilized world we see many forms; but here is something more than the shortness of the mere counter of exchange, for money after all is a counter of exchange, performing in exchange precisely the same office that poker chips do in a game. (Applause.)

The trouble is this: not that there is a want of demand, or rather a want of need for the things which merchants and manufacturers and businessmen have to sell, but as our phrase is, that there is a want of money among consumers. But money is the mere counter. When a man gets money, he values it merely for what it will purchase.

Money that cannot be exchanged is worth nothing. We neither eat money nor drink money. We use money merely to get the things we want.

The trouble is, evidently, that there is on the part of a great mass of people, a lack of purchasing power. Now, what is ultimately that which really consists of purchasing power? In the last analysis, it is labor or products of labor. Adam Smith said: "Labor is the first price that is paid for everything." And the clear and simple and easy explanation of our hard times and industrial depression, is simply this—that large numbers of men able to work and willing to work in order to transform their power to labor and the power to purchasing, find some difficulty in doing so.

There is an impediment there, and running with this cry of industrial depression, preceding it, everywhere comes the cry of want of employment. What on one side is business depression or lack of purchasing power, is on the other side the want of employment. Now, when we come to think of it, is it not strange that there should be such a thing as a want of employment? Want of employment? No one really ever wanted employment; no one works for the sake of working. What men work for is the gratification of those wants that can only be supplied by work. Those wants exist. The very time that we talk of the want of employment, at the very time that business depression exists all over the country, there is such want of the things as employment or work produces that all through our country men have had to be supported by charity.

Voice from the gallery: "But not in Pensacola."

Well, thank God for that. But it will not long continue, for as Pensacola grows, so must it come into the conditions that exist in other parts of the country.

Now consider: what do we mean by employment? What is production? The exertion of labor in producing wealth. Analyze it and it comes to this; that, in satisfying our wants and meeting our desires, our physical wants and material desires, all our making of things or our producing of things is the exertion of human labor upon land. Labor exerted upon land produces all wealth, satisfies all desire, and therefore, when there are men able to work, willing to work, yet who cannot find opportunity to work, it must be from the fact that labor is shut out from land. That is the explanation of the present condition of things. That is the explanation of the change that has been steadily coming over this country.

We can see in any direction that we look, what has been the marked feature in all our advance. The increase in the values of what? Not of the things produced by labor; not of cotton or cotton goods; not of corn or wheat or fish; not of buildings, or machinery, or of clothing. On the contrary, the constant progress of our civilization is a constant reduction in the cost of production. But everywhere the thing which goes up in value; the thing which we have seen during all these years advancing in price, is land.

And as land goes up, what does it mean? Simply this: that labor must pay more and more of its profit for the use of land; not under a free condition. Where chattel slavery does not exist, as the price demanded for the use of land becomes higher and higher, it must reach a point where labor shrinks back; where all can get is less than the way it has been accustomed to, and then there comes a check in production. Men stop work, and in stopping work, lessen the effective demand for the production of others.

There is the explanation—the simple explanation. There is the reason why, with all our advances, social conditions in the United States have been steadily becoming harder. We pride ourselves, we of the North (and I think now that you of the South very largely agree), upon the abolition of chattel slavery: at last there is no chattel slave under the Stars and Stripes. Chattel slavery which consisted in making the man himself the property of another, never grew up and never was long maintained except under conditions where population was scarce and land was plenty.

There is a more [?] form of slavery. You may make the man a slave just as truly and just as fully by making property of the land on which and from which he must live if he has to live at all, as by making property of the man himself. What difference would it have made if when Friday came ashore to Robinson Crusoe when Robinson had risked his life for him, and Friday knelt at his feet and kissed them in token that for the future he was his slave; what difference would it have made if Robinson had raised Friday and said to him: "You are a man and a brother, and on this island there is no chattel slavery; you are just as free as I am with this difference: that this land is my property." Now, since Friday was not a fish and could not swim off through the sea; since he was not a bird and could not fly away in the air; since he was only a man, and if he lived at all, had to live on Robinson's land, the mere ownership of the land must have made him as obedient to the will of his near landlord as he must have been to the will of his chattel master.

It was not that the people of the South were wicked above their brethren of the North that chattel slavery grew

and took root here while it died out in the North. It was for the reason that the very ships—the English ships and Scottish ships that brought slaves, took slaves from the coast of Africa—brought them from the West Indies to the new lands of America and did not take them to Ireland and England. What would have been the use when there men could be had for the asking for work? Begging for work: ready to give for the privilege of working, all that their labor would yield beyond a poor living.

The conquerors of Ireland were not particularly tenderhearted men; they conquered the people of Ireland but they did not make them slaves. It would have been foolish; Ireland was a well-populated country. All they did and all that it was necessary for them to do was simply to make them owners of the land of Ireland, and then the people of Ireland; the people who had to live on the land, if they were to live at all; but had no legal right to the use of one-square inch of the land; had to come hat in hand, asking permission to till the soil and to keep for themselves only so much of their labor as the meanest and hardest master would have had to give the chattel slave enough in good times, to give a hard, poor living.

We have not abolished slavery by the carrying of the amendment. We have abolished only one form of it. That form of slavery which has been in the history of the world—the greatest instrument by which some have compelled others to do their work—still exists, and with our growth increases. Our fathers did not realize it. Coming here to a country where there seemed an abundance of land; they fell into the habit which at that time prevailed in countries from which they came; and began to trade land as though entitled to the same sections of property as those which justly adhere in things that are produced by labor.

And we begin to see the consequences with their growth. We begin to see how the world moves past: how the democratic republicanism of which they were so proud is but an idle boast. Already today in these United States, democratic republicanism is breaking down; we have no titles of nobility that are [?] by our Constitution, but we have simple untitled citizens who exert more power, who yield more influence than any duke or earl in the Old World.

Take that municipal corporation of which New York City is the highest type and example; do you suppose that it is because particularly bad men have banded themselves together, the corporation of Tammany exists in New York? Go through the streets of New York. On one side you will find palaces; on the other side you will find human beings crowded together closer than anywhere else in the world. On the one side some citizens so monstrously rich that they care nothing how public affairs may go; on the other side citizens so poor that the mere promise of a little work, a few dollars on election day, the [?] of some local politician is more to them than any consideration of how the affairs of the state are managed.

Republican government is breaking down in such cities as New York just precisely as it broke down in ancient Rome. Democratic institutions are the best of institutions: where the body of the voters have indeed a stake in the country where there is something like equality in the distribution of wealth. Where you have on one side the many-fold millionaire and on the other side the tramp or the workman who must beg for employment, and democratic institutions become the worst of institutions. (Applause.) Political power is seized and must be seized by the demagogue; by the man who finds his private interest in it; the man who can use the power of money.

What shall we do about it? There is but one thing to do. Either to restore prosperity to business, or to bring wholesome security to our institutions. It is to secure the equality of men to their natural rights; to give men, not equality of wealth, but equality of opportunity. (Applause.) To restore to all our people that most fundamental of all rights—the right to the use of the bounty of their Creator (Applause.)

How can it be done? Easily. The Mosaic institution to which Mr. Yerger refers, fitted as they were upon the social conditions of that time and people, are not fitted for our social conditions. We could not now divide land equally, nor could we by any device secure the permanence of that equality; but it is [not?] necessary to divide land equally. All it is necessary to do is to prevent monopolization and to call upon the individual who holds, or to whom is accorded the possession of a superior quality of land, that which any citizen is free to get—to call upon him for a commensurate contribution to the common fund.

In other words, it is only necessary to adopt that simple measure which we have been accustomed now to call—single tax. Now, by the single tax we mean a tax upon land values exclusive of improvement, and to resort to that for all public purposes. The road to that is easy; it consists simply in the abolition of all the taxes that we now levy upon labor, the methods of labor or the products of labor; the taxes that we now levy upon wealth in any of its forms, and the resort to a tax upon the single item of the value of land, irrespective of any improvement in or on it. Try that simple measure in any way you please. Put to it any test whether it be a test of expediency or a higher test of morals, and you will find that it is the ideal tax.

I am told that a member of your legislature proposed last year (whether it ever took the form of a bill I do not know), but he proposed that the State of Florida should bond itself for a term of 60 years, and apply the proceeds to all public expenses, remitting all taxes. His notion being that if there were no taxes in Florida, Florida would be made such an inviting place for the investment of capital and for the exertion of labor that capital, population would flow in. There is some sense in that, and yet some miscalculation. If you were to do that; if you were to bond the state for 30 years, you would be accumulating a great debt that would have to be paid after 30 years, and that the prospect of it would work as an incubus to the people who wanted to come to Florida. He miscalculated there, but still more did he miscalculate about the effect.

If some benevolent individuals, some of these great millionaires, would make a summer resort of Florida; if they would come to this state and say: "We will pay your taxes;" give the state enough to pay all public expenses for 30 years, what then? You need have no taxes for 30 years; what would be the effect? This: Land in Florida would become much more valuable; land values would go up, and as land values went up in Florida, it would simply mean that the people who come to invest or to settle in Florida would have to pay just so much the more for the privilege of doing so.

No, there is a much better way of accomplishing all that is good in that proposition, without any of the evil, and that is this: Abolish in Florida all the taxes that fall upon improvement; all the taxes that fall upon wealth in any of its forms, and raise public revenues by the tax on land, irrespective of improvement, and you will have all the good without any of the evil of that proposition. Perceive: What increases the wealth and prosperity of Florida is not the ownership of her land, nor any profit made by the owners of land; the mere ownership of land produces nothing. What adds to the wealth of the state is the building of houses; the opening of farms; the erection of manufactories; the bringing in of tangible wealth; the production within the state of wealth.

Is it not stupid when we come to think of it, that this state, or any other state, should do as we are all doing, and tax the very men who produce wealth? The more houses, the more cattle, the more fruit, the more steam ships, the more machinery, the richer the state. Tax any of those things, and you check their production. You must necessarily have less of them; but you can tax land values all you please, and there will be not an inch less of land; tax land values all you please, even though you go to the point of taking them all for the benefit of the community and land will be no harder to get.

(Audience: "That's it, that's it.")

But a man wants to use land, and it is the man who uses the land who adds to the wealth of the state, not the man who merely holds land. (Applause.) Try it as a matter of justice. We who think as I do are believers and upholders of the rights of property. We say that there is a sacred right of property—that which a man produces, that which by his exertion he brings forth from the reservoirs of Nature, is his, and against all the world. (Applause.) His to use; his to sell; his to give; his to bequeath; his to pass on to anyone he pleases. To everything produced by human labor, from the building of a ship; to a fish that is taken from the sea; to a crop that is raised; to an article of clothing; to a watch; there is a clear and indisputable title of property that goes back to the man who made it, the man who produced it.

Who can show that title to land. (Applause.) The value of a house, the value of a ship, the value of agricultural products that come from the exertion of the individual; but the value of land; what does that come from? Not from any individual exertion. It comes from the growth of the community.

See these enormous land values of New York. Do they represent any exertion of the individual owners of New York? On the contrary, these enormous values come simply from the presence in New York of that whole vast population, from the fact that New York is the center of exchanges for the greater part of the country. A man may come to a place where there is yet no population; he may build or improve in any possible way; he may create a large value, but it will be a value of improvement. Land has no value until there is a value that remains if the improvement is destroyed, but then population begins to center, then there is a value irrespective of the improvement; a value which remains, even though the improvement be destroyed; a value that arises from the advance and growth of the community; a value which therefore belongs to the community.

Take that, and then all [?] for taxing men on what they have made, on what they have added to the wealth of the community, is gone, and we can take for the uses of the community, that value which the growth of the community brings into being. Take it as a matter of public expediency. All over the United States we have been trying to tax men on their wealth; on their products; on what they exchange; everywhere we have succeeded simply in taxing the poor earth; simply in bringing about corruption and evasion. By this simple means of taxation, we could do away with all these hordes of tax gatherers; all these spies and searchers and informers; all this calling of citizens to come up and

testify how much they have. Land lies outdoors; you cannot cover it up; you cannot hoard it or carry it off; its value could be determined more easily or, certainly than any other value, and can be collected with the least expense; the fewest officials.

(Question from the audience: "How would you do it?")

How do it? Simply as we do part of it now. In this state, as in the State of New York (and I think in all our states), some part of our revenues are collected by a tax on real estate, including as real estate does, the land and improvement on the land. Now, the simple way of coming to the single tax is by the way of abolishing other taxes. We could do away, for instance, so far as the national government is concerned, with the tariff; we could do away with all these license taxes; with all the taxes upon personal property, and then when we came to real estate, exempt all improvements so as to impose the tax upon the land itself; on what the land was worth, and by that mode of abolition, you would simply arrive at what we call the single tax. It is not a new thing: it is simply a simplification of what already [exists].

(Question from audience: "Then you would not tax improvements?") Certainly not. As a matter of expediency; the more improvements the better for the state. On the same principle as this: Once I went to the Astor House in New York; took a room for a night; came out in the morning with the key in my pocket. They knew me and did not ask me anything. I came out, forgetting to pay for my room, and about three days after I remembered and went back; asked my bill; the clerk said: "Three days at two dollars a day, six dollars." I made no objection. Why should I? I had not used the room, but I had kept somebody else from using it. (Laughter.)

I met a gentleman today; a gentleman from Montgomery, and only had a few minutes conversation with him; he told me, among other things, his opinion of "crackers." He said the "crackers" were the worst thieves in the world; that they were all a set of thieves. I asked him would they steal a watch, and he said: "Steal a watch? Why, of course; why, they will steal timber, and any man who would actually cut timber on another man's land, why he would steal anything." And that reminds me of a form on school books when I was a boy; written on most of our books:

Steal not this book my honest friend.  
For fear the galleys be your end;  
And when you die, God will say:  
Where is that book you stole away?  
And if you say you do not know,  
Then He will send you down below.

I said to the gentleman: "So you think it is as bad to steal timber as a watch?" And he answered: "Just as bad."

Supposing you said to the Lord: "This man stole my watch." The Lord would ask: "How did you get your watch?" "Well, from the man who made it." That I think would be pretty clear evidence of title. If you said: "This man stole my tree," I think the Lord might ask: "How did you get that tree?" You could hardly say: "I made the tree" or "I bought it from a man that did make it." If you did, the Lord might say: "I made those trees not for your benefit, or the benefit of the man you bought them of; I made them for the use of the people who sometime would come upon this earth."

The right to land. The right to the forests. The right to the veins of coal. There can be but one right to land; that is the right of possession, not of ownership—the equal rights of all. There is a right of possession in natural opportunities, because possession is necessary in some cases; the possession of natural opportunity is necessary to the right of ownership in the products of labor. No man will build a house unless he be assured the right of possession to the land necessary, sufficient to assure him the right of profiting by the exertion of labor; but that is not the right of ownership; that is not a right which justifies our selling veins of coal; great groves of trees; miles of land before they are needed, and to conserve the rights of those who do use it, but to prevent the exertion of those rights.

It is the worst of all speculation—the monopoly of that element which is absolutely necessary to all human exertion—which is absolutely necessary to all human existence. But by this simple proposition; but a simple plan of taxing land values, letting everything else go, and taxing those values so as to take as near as possible the full amount of the value that the taxes to the bare land itself, monopolization would be done away with; speculation would become impossible; no one could get profit by holding land, except as he wanted to use it, and no one would then go and get land without wanting to use it; simply to hold it as a "dog in the manger," until someone else came along and [?]

They are doing in Florida what we have been doing all over the United States; in selling these great tracts of land.

In giving them away to corporations, you have been selling what is the heritage of your children. The men who buy these lands do not want the *land*: what they want is the income that the land gives, or soon will give. Where does that income come from? It must come from labor; it can only come from human exertion. What you are doing; what you have been doing; what we have been doing all over this country in selling, giving away these great bodies of land, is simply selling our children into servitude.

It is too late to go back, nor is it necessary. The easy way to restore equal rights to all; to give to all equal opportunities, is by this simple way. The value of land taken for public purposes; no one then will want the whole land, unless he can put it to its proper use, and that being done, there will be nothing to spare for those who want opportunity to labor; that being done, the cry of unemployed labor can never be heard. There will come to the American demanding labor, and the products of labor, the greatest of all purchasers—the needs of labor itself.