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THE LAND ANIMAL

By Bolton Hall

Suppose that some giant were able to sweep all the inhabitants of the earth off the world, and hold the world in one hand and the people in the other and then ask them, "Now, what do you want — Ballot Reform, Better Education, Improved Monetary System, Political Purity, Higher Religion? You can have anything you ask." What would they say? They would say, "Put us back upon the earth; then we can get these things for ourselves, but without the earth we perish."

Everything that we eat, or wear, or that shelters us, is produced from land by labor. Even the children know that the bread comes from the grain in the fields and is made by the work of men into flour and then baked into bread. But everything else comes from the same source: take any common thing — the paper upon which this is printed; that is made of wood pulp that came from the trees that grow wild upon the hills — they were cut down by workmen, ground up, rolled out and dried into paper. So it is with the coat you wear, the chair you sit on. the knife you use — everything is a product of the land, and of the labor of hand or brain.

Even the capital that helped to make this paper, came out of the land by labor — the paper was made in a building, perhaps of brick, for which the clay came from the clay-pit and was baked with the coal that came out of the coalmine, by labor. It was rolled between cylinders of iron that came out of the mountain, iron mined and wrought by labor: and even the money that bought it, and the car that brought it, are themselves derived from the earth by work.

We think of the products of farms as things that we eat, but the Census shows that less than one-fifth of the product of land and labor is things to eat. All of our wealth — cotton, hay, hemp, leather, lumber, metals, and a thousand other things — comes from that common source, so that economists and reformers are agreed at least upon this — that wealth is anything made out of the land, that people want: or, to put it in professorial language, "any product of land and labor that satisfies desire." Mr. Wanamaker might not have a penny in his pocket, a dollar in his till, or a deposit in his bank, and still if he had his great warehouse full of goods that are wanted and that are sure to be paid for, we should consider him a wealthy man. And we might examine any one of those things and we should find that it also came from that common source, like ourselves — from our Mother Earth. That is what furnishes, not only work, but the object of work — WEALTH.

When the Pilgrim Fathers came here they did not bring anything with them to speak of, except an incredible quantity of old furniture; but they proceeded to get rich working the land, and if anyone had come to them to say that he was out of a job, they would have laughed at him: they

would have said, "Why, till this soil or sow seed or break those stones or cut wood or burn limestone or do anything useful, and we can afford to give you a share of what you produce for doing it."

Those same lands are here, mostly still unworked; and, whereas, the fathers were hemmed into a little strip between the Indians and the deep sea, we have gridironed the continent with rail lines and opened up the world with steamship lines. Yet even in war time we do not laugh when a man says he is out of work or working for insufficient wages. We are so used to this that we do not reflect that it is because the opportunities for raising food and getting clothing by work are owned and held unused for a further rise in value.

Robinson Crusoe did not have to ask anybody for employment: he proceeded to extract from the soil and its products all the things he needed — his was Adam's trade: — to use the world for the satisfaction of his wants.

In the simplest form of labor the man plants and digs corn or potatoes, perhaps sand or lime, in the more complicated one he runs a coal-mine or maybe a Department Store — thousands of men operating together. In the mine, engineers, designers, drivers, bookkeepers, "operators", each one doing his part and co-operating each with the others; if they work they can produce what will exchange for all that they need.

That is one form of the use of the land, but we need land not only to draw materials from, but also to build upon with those materials — to construct houses, offices, stores, factories, elevators and railroads and all the other things that we count as the material wealth of the country. And until all people have all of such things that they want, it ought to be ridiculous and it really is ridiculous for any man to be underpaid or out of employment.

When we speak of the land's bringing forth, we do not mean bringing forth merely corn, potatoes, and cattle; nor, when we speak of using it do we mean simply plowing and digging. We mean using factory sites, and clay-banks, and mines, and coal-pits, and the trees on the hills — all those things needed by man that were here before men came, that will be here after men have gone, and that economists call land.

We can do little for the unemployed unless we alter the conditions that cause unemployment. It seems like a very good thing, that when a man or a girl is out of employment we find a place for him or for her. But it reminds one of a story of Theodore Hook's: — The boy was rather wild and his father said to him, "Dick, it's time you were settling down and taking a wife." "Why, so it is," says Dick, "whose wife shall I take?" You find a girl out of employment, and you get her a job: well, whose job did you get her? You didn't make extra employment — you couldn't do that; you simply put somebody else out in order to get her in, and now you have to find someone else's place for that person whom you put out.

No wonder there's need for more charities, and no wonder there is "hiring and firing" and constant changes in the ranks of workers. No wonder we puzzle over what the millions of soldiers will do after the war. All that is wrong: it is not right that we should have to live by preying upon one another instead of by helping and loving one another: it is not possible that

Providence was so stupid or so cruel as to put men upon an earth which could not support them. But when we have divorced men from the earth, driven them away from the table provided for their use, of course they are "out of work," and lack support.

In order that the earth may "satisfy the desire of every living thing," it is necessary that men should get *at* the earth; and when with our system of private ownership of the rent of land we have prevented people from getting at the earth, when we have fenced off the sheep from the pastures, then we have "a social problem."

Raymond Robins tells how, when he was at Nome after the gold boom, thousands of men had drifted out there attracted by the Twelve Dollars a day that could be taken out of the placer claims by the primitive plan of washing the sand. These lands were all taken up, but little of them was worked. Much more gold per man was being taken out by improved processes and improved machinery, and fewer and fewer workers were necessary. The ordinary miner, not being able to get at the land, could not get at the gold, and, consequently, a lot of them were gathered down on the seashore, — the only land that was not owned, — "out of a job." One of them idly struck his pick deep into the sand, then loosened it, and, from force of habit turned it up: his eye caught the familiar glitter — it was gold. Tremendous excitement followed. That land being below tide-water could not be made private property, and by next morning every unemployed man in town got to work taking out Eight Dollars a day in gold from the sea-land. This furnished employment and wages not only to the people that worked on the sea-sand, but to the rest of the men and women. The man who had been washing dishes in the restaurant for his board, goes to get his hat, and the proprietor seeing him says: "Why, what's the matter John?" "I'm going to leave," he says, "they're making Eight Dollars a day washing gold down on the sand and I'm not going to work for my board here." "Why," says the proprietor, "You needn't to go; we're paying Eight Dollars a day here." "Since how long?" says John. "Why since this morning," says the proprietor.

And the helper at the livery stable who had been working for Ten Dollars a week goes to the office and asks for his time: "What's the matter, Tom?" says the boss. "I'm going to leave, they're taking out Eight Dollars a day in gold down at the beach." "Why," says the boss, "you don't need to leave, I'm paying Eight Dollars a day myself." "Since how long?" says Tom. "Why since this morning," says the boss.

Wages in Nome promptly rose to the level of what a man could earn for himself when he had free access to the land. So we see that it is necessary not merely "to get the people back to the land," but to get the land back to the people, to restore the birthright, the earth; that it may "bring forth abundantly to satisfy the desire of every living thing."

At the lower corner of Wall Street and Broadway is a piece of land thirty feet by thirty-two (30x32), for which the owner refused years ago $700,000: it then had a little old four-story building on it — eventually he died, and the land was happily sold. Now it has a twenty-story building on it, which employed thousands of men in building it, and which furnishes modern convenient offices for a vast crowd — gives them better facilities for making money. Before that, it was only for taking money. When men want land so frightfully that they will pay the interest on $700,000, perhaps $40,000 a year,—to use a piece ten yards wide by eleven yards long, it isn't wonderful that thousands should be out of work when such lands as that are held unused or

partly used — idle lands make idle hands, and the first thing in order to solve our social problem — the problem of want and unemployment — is to get land back to the people.

Look at present conditions, — On the one side we have unused lands; on the other side unused hands; how could it be otherwise? It necessarily puts somebody out of a job when land which is needed, and should be used, is held unused. Practically, all land has some speculative value, and consequently there is hardly such a thing as cheap lands; there are low-priced lands, but they all have some speculative value, and it is this value that makes men hold them out of use. It is only a question of time when, with increased population, increase of wants, and the development of men, even the lowest-priced land shall have a value in excess of what is now called "desirable land." In this fact lies the "land question." What must be the result of this increase in price created by the very needs of men which they are prevented from satisfying?

Adam Smith wrote, a hundred and fifty years ago, — "Every improvement in the circumstances of society tends either directly or indirectly to raise the real rent of land, to increase the real wealth of the landlord, his power of purchasing the labour, or the produce of the labour of other people." ("Wealth of Nations", Chap. XI.)

Ralph Waldo Emerson said about the early days of Boston, in a paper published in the "Atlantic Monthly", 1892:

"Moral values became also money values. When men saw that these people, besides their industry and thrift, had a heart and soul, and would stand by each other at all hazards, they desired to come and live here. A house in Boston was worth as much again as a house just as good in a town of timorous people, because here the neighbors would defend each other against bad governors and against troops. (NOTE: Of course, Emerson meant the building site, not the building. The house could be built more cheaply as the community became more mutually helpful.) Quite naturally, house rents rose in Boston."

Experience proves that every improvement in the condition of the earth — agricultural, mechanical, political, ethical, educational or even religious, must go eventually and mainly to enrich the owners of the earth.

Man really is "entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; and, if he is entitled to life, then he is entitled to live somewhere. It can not be right, it can not be the will of God, that any child should be born into the world today with no right to stay in the world at all unless some one will pay a price for the purchase or hire of a place to put its cradle — even to put its little grave. We have taken away the birthright of the child, for the earth was given to *all* the children of men. We have said, "No; it belongs to a few of the children, who may keep it vacant, or charge the rest a fee for its use."

There is one simple way to get mankind back to the land. We cannot divide up the land equitably; if we could it would not stay divided, and even if it would, that would be unfair to those who are not yet born. But we can take the value of the land that is created by the public, in taxes. We can take the taxes off everything that men use and put them upon the value of the land. We are beginning to do it now; "but that is another story." Thereby we shall make it

impracticable, because unprofitable to keep the earth idle that is needed by mankind. We shall sap the moral and physical foundations of monopoly. We shall open up the boundless resources of the land so that "in the sweat of his face," (not of another's face) every man "shall eat bread."

BOLTON HALL.

REBUTTAL
By Mr. Floyd

Mr. Hall is right in saying that men prefer the earth to any other residential sphere that has been imagined; but, having the earth, they flock in great numbers to the most artificial portions of it in preference to siezing the natural advantages available. Young men leave the wholesome smell of fresh earth turned by their spades for the noxious fumes of gasoline exhaust in the town garage. The author of "Things As They Are" must admit the desertion of farms for the cities, and we can all agree in regretting the fact.

Now, what will stop this unfortunate shifting from the natural to the artificial and return the "Land Animal" to the land? Will an increased tax on land values send him back? No, the "Land Animal" will go snorting into the factories to work upon articles already transformed and free from a direct tax, and leave unconsidered the problem of securing the natural products that must be unearthed by some one. It will then be more than ever difficult to find men to labor at the natural resources, the development of which is not now so lucrative as to attract a waiting list of farm buyers or workers.

This lack of interest in the land is not entirely due to the inability of men to get the land. Mr. Hall can obtain thousands of scattered acres within a hundred miles of his office on lease for the amount of the annual tax, or buy many properties for less than the present owners paid five, ten, or twenty years ago. That does not indicate that it is speculation that keeps the land unimproved; but suppose the owners do intend to sell at a profit, that would not deter them from renting their land and saving their taxes while waiting.

They do not use the land because it is unprofitable to do so, either because they have not sufficient capital to purchase modern implements, or because the cost of machinery would add so greatly to the total investment that the land could not pay a fair return or produce an adequate living. The farmer cannot afford to hire labor all the year round and is unable to obtain sufficient help for the harvest season.

The farmer must work twelve to fourteen hours a day to pay the present land tax and accumulate a balance in the bank, and often finds himself in circumstances that warrant the definition given by his little daughter in school, of a farm as "a piece of land entirely covered by a mortgage".

The small plot at the lower corner of Wall Street and Broadway is 29.10 x 39.10 and was actually sold by executors in June 1905, for $700,000 and was valued by the City in 1917 at $625,000. All the facts about it seem to me to prove the uselessness of Singletax just as they prove the reverse to Mr. Hall.

(a) The value of the land has declined; the City's need of revenue has increased.

(b) The building that Mr. Hall approves was constructed under the present system. If the tax had been much greater, the building might never have been built, for it is none too profitable now. The tax on the 18-story building is only $2,950, compared with $14,750 for the land. Under Singletax it might be "perhaps $40,000" on the land and nothing on the building.

(c) Keeping 130 square yards out of use would have little effect upon the productivity of the earth.

(d) If, with the old building there, this valuable plot was "taking money," why did the owner improve it? The probable fact is that the plot did not pay unimproved and does not pay now. Miscalculations were made and the land owners suffered, as have the owners of several neighboring office buildings recently sold under foreclosure. Under Singletax, the Government would suffer for such errors.

The value of the little plot is sentimental; and so it is with Singletax.

With added taxes for the support of State and Federal Governments, as well as the present local tax, the land would soon pass into the hands of the State, a circumstance not openly advocated by most singletaxers who appreciate, as we all do. that the ownership of a homestead is one of man's greatest blessings, a tie that binds the family together and intensifies their love of country and of nature. Then why risk the abandonment of individual for corporate ownership when the graduated income tax is a more direct universal, equitable and positive method of accomplishing the desired equalization?