

LOOSE THE LIGATURES.

Henry H. Hardinge
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Here is a mental photograph.

Almost anyone can take this kind; it needs but a sensitized plate called the imagination.

An immigrant just landed at Ellis Isle, strong, sturdy, ambitious,—at least sufficiently so to tempt him to leave his native land and cross the wide ocean whose western boundary is the America of his hopes and dreams, the place where social caste will no longer hedge him about like a fortified enclosure with sentries on every hand. The man has passed his infancy and dependent years in Europe. For more than a decade from his birth he has been a nonproducer, a drain upon the resources of his native country.

He comes here by the thousand, in the full possession of his mental and physical powers, ready to play his part, and make still greater the greatest experiment in democracy the world has ever known.

Not that he is conscious of all this. Indeed, all he wants is a "job," a chance to work and good wages.

This last is to him an Eldorado—the beginning and end of all his earthly dreams. At least thus far in his career he has never dared look for more. Even this has been so remote, so difficult, so almost impossible, that its enjoyment has seemed to him the fulfillment of his dearest hopes.

If he finds a job, it will be only on condition that he produce more than he gets. This is the unwritten law under which the great mass of newly arrived immigrants are employed,—that they shall produce more in wealth than they get in wages, that they shall leave the country richer every night than they found it in the morning.

They have not yet, nor will they for some time, learn how to live by their wits. Such men are too simple minded, as a rule. They have wit enough to work; but not to steal. You can, if you look, find them all over this broad country, doing useful work, developing the mines, the forests, and the farm resources of America and converting this rude material into a million useful forms.

Our immigrant is not a land speculator. He has neither the wit nor the money for that.

He is a "land user." He does things and makes things. So he is not overly respectable. Such men rarely are. He is too useful to be respectable, even in America.

Yet there is a feeling, widespread among labor unions and many others, that such people should be shut out by legislation.

Whence this feeling? Is it not because opportunity seems too narrow for the workers already here? If this is not the reason, what is it?

Does it not seem curious that in a country where "resources" are so vast and varied as ours, this feeling should exist? Yet it undoubtedly does. If, with a population of eight[y]-five millions we seem crowded, what will the pressure be like when the population is twice, or three times this, as it undoubtedly will be before another hundred years turns its back upon us?

Somehow, without reasoning it out, the average citizen feels that these additional millions will, for the most part, be housed and fed and clothed, as the present population is. None too well perhaps. But by constant effort most of them will keep their heads above water, while many will drown, as now. Whence, then, comes the pressure?

It is not because nature is niggardly. She is, in this country at least, more than bountiful. Nor is it because men cannot or will not work. On the contrary, the average American man is the most energetic and skillful in the world; also the best schooled and most intelligent. Hence his great productiveness. Still, the pressure is here. Though the ability to produce wealth increases, so does the difficulty of getting it. A most singular anomaly.

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But here is the answer.

There is no more land in America now than when Columbus discovered it. But there are vastly more people, and the land of this country has attained a value that defies comprehension, so vast, are the figures.

Fully seventy-five per cent of this value is artificially created by land speculation. This holds land just out of the reach of labor, at prohibitive prices, no matter what the population; and as the number of people needing land increases, so does the value. And since a vast amount of land is held out of the market, the owners not being anxious to sell owing to increasing values and low taxes, that portion which is offered for sale commands prices too high to admit of profitable use. It also, therefore, remains idle. Hence idle men and a labor problem.

There is the only competent cause: there also the effect.

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The remedy lies in making land plentiful and cheap by taxing idle land as heavily as improved, and leaving improvements alone — unburdened by taxes. This is the statesmanship that is the highest human wisdom.

The land gambler does nothing; why should he get anything? And why treat an improver like a criminal by fining him, — not once only, but every year? Is this the way to encourage industry?

Is it not clearly evident that if industry thrives in this country in spite of these legal handicaps, the result would be phenomenal if all such disabilities were removed? Industry will never reach its maximum until legal obstacles to its activities are abolished; and chief among these are taxes upon production and exchange.

Men live by industry. Hence men will never be really free until industry is free. +

Industry consists in production and exchange.

Tariffs and all such taxes hamper exchange. Taxes upon machinery or anything else produced by labor hamper production. So it follows that the only simple and practical method of freeing industry of useless burdens is to remove them by repealing every law now in the statutes which interferes with production and trade.

Industry needs neither bounties, encouragement nor protection. If once the legal ligatures are removed, free circulation will result. Not more laws, but less; not less liberty, but more.

And the basis of all liberty is liberty of mind. Men must free themselves of the false ideas which have held them in subjection for unnumbered centuries.