

Justice The Object— Taxation The Means

By Henry George

Address in Metropolitan Hall, San Francisco, February 4, 1890 on way to Australia

As I rise on this stage the past comes back to me. Twelve years ago, when I was halt of speech, when to face an audience, it seemed to me, required as much courage as it would to face a battery, I stood on this platform to speak my first word in the cause for which I stand here now. I stood on this platform to see, instead of the audience that greets me tonight, a beggarly array of empty benches. Many times since, in this country and in the dear old world, I have stood before far greater audiences than this; I have been greeted by thousands who never saw me before, as they would greet a friend long known and well loved; but I don't think it ever gave me such pleasure to stand before an audience as it does here tonight.

For years and years I have been promising myself to come back to San Francisco. I have crossed the Atlantic five times before I could fulfill that desire. I am here now, to go in a few days to the Antipodes; perhaps I may never return—who knows? If I live, I shall try to. But to San Francisco—though I never again can be a citizen of California—though my path in life seems away so far that California seems but a ridge on the horizon—my heart has always turned, and always will turn, to the home of my youth, to the city in which I grew up, to the city in which I have found so many warm friends—to the country in which I married, and in which my children were born. Always it will seem to me home; and it is sweet to the man long absent to be welcomed home.

Aye, and you men, old friends tried and true—you men who rallied in the early times to our movement, when we could count each other almost upon one's fingers—I come back to you to say that at last *Our triumph is but a matter of time*; to say that never in the history of thought has a movement come forward so fast and so well. Ten years ago, when I left, I was anything but hopeful. Ten years ago I would not

4 Justice the Object—Taxation the Means

have dared to say that in any time to which I might live, we should see the beginning of this great struggle. Nor have I cared. My part (and I think I can speak for every man who is enlisted in this movement)—my part has never been to predict results. Our feeling is the feeling of the great stoic emperor, "that is the business of Jupiter; not ours." Ours to do the work as we may; ours to plant the seed.

But so well forward is this cause, so many strong advocates has it in every land, so far has it won its way, that now it makes no difference who lives or who dies, who goes forward or who hangs back. The currents of the time are setting in our favor. At last—at last we can say with certainty that it will

only be a little while before all over the English-speaking world, and then, not long after, over the rest of the civilized world, the great truth will be acknowledged that no human child comes into this world without coming into his equal right with all.

I am talking tonight to my friends; I am talking tonight to those who are as earnest and well informed in this cause as I am; but I am also probably talking to many who have but vague ideas concerning it. Let me, since I am in San Francisco, speak of *The genesis of my own thought*.

I came out here at an early age, and knew nothing whatever of political economy. I had never thought upon any social problem. The first time I ever recollect talking on such a subject was one day, when I was about eighteen, after I had first come to this country, sitting on the deck of a topsail schooner with a lot of miners on the way to the Frazer River. We got talking about the Chinese, and I ventured to say—ventured to ask what harm the Chinese were doing here, if, as these miners said, they were only working the cheap diggings? One old miner turned to me and said: “No harm now; but it will not be always that wages are as high as they are today in California. As the country grows, as people come in, wages will go down, and some day or other white men will be glad to get these diggings that the Chinamen are now working.” I well remember how it impressed me, the ide

aJustice the Object—Taxation the Means 5

that as the country grew in all that we are hoping that it might grow, the condition of those who had to work for their living must grow, not better, but worse.

And I remember, after having come down from the country, sitting on Christmas eve in the gallery of the old American Theater, among the gods, when a new drop-curtain fell, and we all sprang to our feet, for on that curtain was painted what was then a dream of the far future, the overland train coming into San Francisco; and after we had shouted ourselves hoarse, I began to think what good is it going to be to men like me? those who have nothing but their labor? I saw that thought grow and grow; we were all—all of us, rich and poor—hoping for the development of California, proud of her future greatness, looking forward to the time when San Francisco was to be one of the great capitals of the world; looking forward to the time when this great empire of the West was to count her population by millions, and underneath it all came to me what that miner said: *What about the masses of the people?* When, after growing up here, I went across the continent, before the continental railway was completed, and in the streets of New York for the first time realized the contrasts of wealth and want that are to be found in a great city; saw those sights that, to the man who comes from the West, affright and appall, the problem grew upon me. I said to myself, There must be some reason for this; there must be some remedy for this, and I will not rest until I have found the one and discovered the other. At last it came clear as the stars of a bright midnight. I saw what was the cause; I saw what was the cure. I saw nothing that was new.

When I lectured for the first time in Oxford, a professor of political economy in that great university met and opposed me, and he said: “I have read Mr. George’s book from one end to the other. What I have

to say is this: there is nothing in it both new and true. What is true is not new, and what is new is not true." I answered him: "I accept your statement;

6 Justice the Object—Taxation the Means

it is a correct criticism. Social truth never is, never can be, new; and the truth for which we stand is an old truth—a truth seen by men everywhere, recognized by the first perceptions of all men, only overclouded, only obscured in our modern times by force and fraud."

So it is. I notice that one of our papers gives to me the character of an apostle and speaks of my comrades as my disciples. It is not so. I have done no more to any man than point out God's stars. They were there for him to see. Millions and millions of years have seen them precisely as I saw them; every man may see them who will look.

When I first went to Ireland I got a note from the most venerable of the Irish bishops, Dr. Dougan, Bishop of Waterford, asking me to come and have a private talk with him. I went, and the old man—white haired, ruddy cheeked—the man who under the mitre of the bishop still keeps the fresh true heart of the Irish peasant—commenced, with the privilege of age, catechizing me. He said: "What is this new doctrine that your name is associated with? You say that all men have equal rights to land; but all men can't use land. How do you propose to divide up?" And then he went on from one question to another, bringing *all the arguments, all the objections* that spring up in the minds of men, just as they probably sprang up in the minds of many who are here just as they spring up in the mind of any man—all the objections that are so current; and I answered them all. Finally rising, without saying anything, the old man stretched out his hand. "God bless you, my son; I have asked you to come here and answer my questions, because I wanted to see if you could defend your faith. Go on; go on. What you say to me is nothing new; it is the old truth that through persecution and against force, though trodden down, our people have always held. What you say is not new to me. When a little boy, sitting by the peat fire in the west of Ireland, I have heard the same truths from the lips of men who could not speak a word of English. Go on; the time has come; I, an old man, tell you that there is no earthly power that can stop this movement." And the years have shown that the venerable bishop was right.

Justice the Object—Taxation the Means 7

What is the cause of this dark shadow that seems to accompany modern civilization—of this existence of bitter want in the very centers of life—of the failure of all our modern advances—of all the wonderful discoveries and inventions that have made this wonderful nineteenth century, now drawing to a close, so prominent among all the centuries? What is the reason, that as we add to productive power—that is, invention after invention—multiplying by the hundredfold and the thousandfold the power of human hands to supply human wants; that all over the civilized world, and especially in this great country, pauperism is increasing, and insanity is increasing, and criminality is increasing; that marriages are decreasing; that the struggle for existence seems not less, but more and more intense—what is the reason? There must be but one of two answers. Either it is in accordance with the will of God, either

it is the result of natural law, or it is because of our ignorance and selfishness of our faith that we evade the natural law.

We Single Taxers point to *The one sufficient cause*.

Wherever these phenomena are to be seen the natural element on which and from which all men must live, if they are to live at all, is the property, not of the whole people, but of the few. We point to the adequate cure; the restoration to all men of their natural rights in the soil—the assurance to every child, as it comes into the world, of the enjoyment of its natural heritage—the right to live, the right to work, the right to enjoy the fruits of its work; rights necessarily conditioned upon the equal right to that element which is the basis of production; that element which is indispensable to human life; that element which is the standing place, the storehouse, the reservoir of men; that element from which all that is physical in man is drawn. For our bodies, themselves, they come from the land, and to the land they return again; we, ourselves, are as much children of the soil as are the flowers or the trees.

We call ourselves today Single Tax men. It is only recently, within a few years, that we have adopted that title.

8 Justice the Object—Taxation the Means

It is not a new title; over a hundred years ago there arose in France a school of philosophers and patriots—Quesnay, Turgot, Condorcet, Dupont—the most illustrious men of their time, who advocated, as the cure for all social ills, the *impôt unique*, the Single Tax. We here, on this western continent, as the nineteenth century draws to a close, have revived the same name, and we find enormous advantages in it.

We used to be confronted constantly by the question: “Well, after you have divided the land up, how do you propose to keep it divided?” We don’t meet that question now. The Single Tax has, at least, this great merit: it suggests our method; it shows the way we would travel—the simple way of abolishing all taxes, save one tax upon land values. Now, mark: *One tax upon land values*.

We do not propose a tax upon land, as people who misapprehend us constantly say. We do not propose a tax upon land; we propose a tax upon *land values*, or what in the terminology of political economy is termed rent; that is to say, the value which attaches to land irrespective of any improvements in or on it; that value which attaches to land, not by reason of anything that the user or improver of land does—not by reason of any individual exertion of labor, but by reason of the growth and improvement of the community. A tax that will take up what John Stuart Mill called the unearned increment; that is to say, that increment of wealth which comes to the owner of land, not as a user; that comes whether he be a resident or an absentee; whether he be engaged in the active business of life; whether he be an idiot and whether he be a child; that growth of value that we have seen in our own times so astonishingly great in this city; that has made sand lots, lying in the same condition that they were thousands of years ago, worth enormous sums, without anyone putting any exertion of labor or any expenditure of capital upon them.

Now, the distinction between a tax on land and a tax on land values may at first seem an idle one, but it is a most important one. A tax on land—that is to say, a tax upon all land—would ultimately become a condition to the use of land;

Justice the Object—Taxation the Means 9

would therefore fall upon labor, would increase prices, and be borne by the general community. But a tax on land values cannot fall on all land, because all land is not of value; it can only fall on valuable land, and on valuable land in proportion to its value; therefore, it can no more become a tax on labor than can a tax upon the value of special privileges of any kind. It can merely take from the individual, not the earnings of the individual, but that premium which, as society grows and improves, attaches to the use of land of superior quality.

Now see, take it in its lowest aspect—take *it as a mere fiscal change*, and see how in accord with every dictate of expediency, with every principle of justice, is the Single Tax.

We have invented and invented, improved and improved, yet the great fact is, that today we have not wealth enough. There are in the United States some few men richer than it is wholesome for men to be. But the great masses of our people are not so rich as civilized Americans at the close of the nineteenth century ought to be. The great mass of our people only manage by hard work to live. The great mass of our people don't get the comforts, the refinements, the luxuries that in the present age of the world everyone ought to have. All over this country there is a fierce struggle for existence. Only as I came to the door of this building, a beggar stopped me on the street—a young man; he said he could not find work. I don't know, perhaps he lied. I do know that when a man once commences upon that course there is rapid demoralization. I do know that indiscriminate charity is apt to injure far more than it can help; yet I gave him something, for I did not know but that his story might be true.

This is the shore of the Pacific. This is the Golden Gate. The westward march of our race is terminated by the ocean, which has the ancient East on its farther shore; no farther can we go. And yet here, in this new country, in this golden State, there are men ready to work, anxious to work, and yet who, for longer or shorter periods, cannot get the opportunity to work. The farther east you go, the worse it grows. To the man from San Francisco, who has never realized it before,

10 *Justice the Object—Taxation the Means*

there are sights in New York that are appalling. Cross the ocean to the greater city—the metropolis of the civilized world—and there poverty is deeper and darker yet. What is the reason? If there is more wealth wanted, why don't they get more?

We cannot cure this evil of poverty by dividing up wealth, monstrous as are some of the fortunes that have arisen—and fortunes are concentrating in this country faster than ever before in the history of the world. But divide them and still there would not be enough.

But if men want more wealth, why don't they get more wealth? If we, as a people, want more wealth (and certainly ninety-nine out of every hundred Americans do want more wealth), why are some suffering from the want of employment? Others are at work without making a living. But ninety-nine out of a hundred have some legitimate desire that they would like to gratify. Well, in the first place, if we want more wealth—if we call that country prosperous which is increasing in wealth—is it not a piece of stupidity that we should tax men for producing wealth? Yet that is what we are doing today.

Bring almost any article of wealth to this country from a foreign country, and you are confronted at once with a tax. Is it not from a common sense standpoint a stupid thing, if we want more wealth—if the prosperous country is the country that increases in wealth, why in Heaven's name should we put up a barrier against the men who want to bring wealth into this country? We want more dry-goods (if you don't know, your wives surely will tell you). We want more clothing; more sugar; more of all sorts of the good things that are called "goods"; and yet by this system of taxation we virtually put up a high fence around the country to keep out these very things. We tax that convenient man who brings goods into the country.

If wealth be a good thing; if the country be a prosperous country—that is, increasing in wealth—well, surely, if we propose to restrict trade at all, the wise thing would be to put the taxes on the men who are taking goods out of the country, not upon those who are bringing goods into the country.

Justice the Object—Taxation the Means 11

We Single Tax men would sweep away all these barriers. We would try to keep out small-pox and cholera and vermin and plagues. But we would welcome all the goods that anybody wanted to send us, that anybody wanted to bring home. We say it is stupid, if we want more wealth, to prevent people from bringing wealth to the country. We say, also, that it is just as stupid to tax the men who produce wealth within the country.

Here we say we want more manufacturers. The American people submit to enormous taxes for the purpose of building up factories; yet when a man builds a factory, what do we do? Why, we come down and tax him for it.

We certainly want more houses. There are a few people who have bigger houses than any one reasonable family can occupy; but the great mass of the American people are under-housed. There, in the city of New York, the plight to which all American cities are tending, you will find that 65 per cent. of the population are living two families or more to the single floor. Yet let a man put a house in any

part of the United States, and down comes the tax-gatherer to demand a fine for having put up a house.

We say that industry is a good thing, and that thrift is a good thing; and there are some people who say that if a man be industrious, and if a man be thrifty, he can easily accumulate wealth. Whether that be true or not, industry is certainly a good thing, and thrift is certainly a good thing. But what do we do if a man be industrious? If he produces wealth enough, and by thrift accumulates wealth at all, down comes the tax-gatherer to demand a part of it.

We say that that is stupid; that we ought not by our taxes to repress the production of wealth; that when a farmer reclaims a strip of the desert and turns it into an orchard and a vineyard, or on the prairie produces crops and feeds fine cattle, that, so far from being taxed and fined for having done these things, we ought to be glad that he has done it; that *we ought to welcome all energy*; that no man can produce wealth for himself without augmenting the general stock, without making the whole country richer.

12 *Justice the Object—Taxation the Means*

We impose some taxes for the purpose of getting rid of things, for the purpose of having fewer of the things that we tax. In most of our counties and States when dogs become too numerous, there is imposed a dog tax to get rid of dogs. Well, we impose a dog tax to get rid of dogs, and why should we impose a house tax unless we want to get rid of houses? Why should we impose a farm tax unless we want fewer farms? Why should we tax any man for having exerted industry or energy in the production of wealth?

Tax houses and there will certainly be fewer houses. If you go east to the city of Brooklyn, you may see that demonstrated to the eye. What first surprised me in the city of churches was to see long rows of buildings, of brown-stone houses, two stories in front and three stories behind; or three stories in front and four stories behind; and I thought for a moment what foolish idea ever entered the brains of those men, to have left out half an upper story in that way? I found out by inquiring that it was *all on account of tax*. In the city of Brooklyn, the assessor is only supposed to look in front, and so by making the house in that way, you can get a three-story building behind with only a two-story front and a two-story tax.

So in England, in the old houses, there you may see the result of the window tax. The window tax is in force in France today, and in France there are two hundred thousand houses, according to the census, that have no window at all—in order to escape the tax.

So if you tax ships there will be fewer ships. What old San Franciscan cannot remember the day when in this harbor might be seen the graceful forms and lofty spars of so many American ships, the fleetest and best in the world? I well remember the day that no American who crossed to Europe thought of crossing on any other than an American ship. Today, if you wish to cross the Atlantic, you must cross

on a British steamer, unless you choose to cross on a German or French steamer. On the high seas of the world the American ship is becoming almost as rare as a Chinese junk. Why? Simply because we have taxed our ships out of existence. There is the proof.

Justice the Object—Taxation the Means 13

Tax buildings, and you will have fewer or poorer buildings; tax farms, and you will have fewer farms and more wilderness; tax ships, there will be fewer and poorer ships; and tax capital, and there will be less capital; but you may tax land values all you please and there will not be a square inch the less land. Tax land values all you please up to the point of taking the full annual value—up to the point of making mere ownership in land utterly unprofitable, so that no one will want merely to own land—what will be the result? Simply that land will be the easier had by the user. Simply that the land will become valueless to the mere speculator—to the dog in the manger, who wants merely to hold and not to use; to the forestaller, who wants merely to reap where others have sown, to gather to himself the products of labor, without doing labor. Tax land values, and you leave to production its full rewards, and you open to producers natural opportunities.

Take it from any aspect you please, *take it on its political side* (and surely that is a side that we ought to consider clearly and plainly), while we boast of our democratic republicanism, democratic republicanism is passing away. I need not say that to you men of San Francisco—San Francisco ruled by a boss; to you men of California, where you send to the Senate the citizen who dominates the State as no duke could rule. Look at the corruption that is tearing the heart out of our institutions; where does it come from? Whence this demoralization? Largely from our system of taxation. What does our present system of taxation do? Why, it is a tax upon conscience; a tax upon truth; a tax upon respect for law. It offers a premium for lying and perjury and evasion. It fosters and stimulates bribery and corruption.

Go over to Europe; travel around for a while among the effete monarchies of the old world, and what you see will make you appreciate democracy. Then come home. At length you take a pilot. There is the low-lying land upon the horizon—the land of the free and the home of the brave—and if you are

14 *Justice the Object-Taxation the Means*

entering the port of New York, as most Americans do, finally you will see that great statue, presented by a citizen of the French republic—the statue of Liberty holding aloft a light that talks to the world.

Just as you get to see that statue clearly, Liberty enlightening the world, you will be called down by a Custom-house officer to form in line, men and women, and to call on God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, to bear witness that you have nothing dutiable in your trunks or in your carpet sacks, or rolled up in your shawl straps; and you take that oath. The United States of America compels you to. But the United States of America don't leave you there. The very next thing, another official steps up to demand your keys and to open your box or package and to look through it for things dutiable, unless, as may be, his eyes are stopped by a greenback. Well, now, everyone who has made that visit does

know that most passengers have things dutiable; and I notice that the protectionists have them fully as often as the free traders. I have never yet seen a consistent protectionist. There may be protectionists who would not smuggle when they get a chance, but I think they must be very, very few.

Go right through the daily stream—from the very institution of laws—down to the very lobby that gathers at Washington when it is proposed to repeal a tax, bullying, bragging, stealing to keep that particular tax on the American people, so patriotic are they; very much interested in protecting the poor working man.

See the private interests that are enlisted in the merely petty evasions of law that go on by passengers; see the gigantic smuggling, the under-valuation frauds of all kinds; the private interests that are enlisted in class; that enter the primaries; that surround our national legislature with lobbyists that in every presidential election put their millions into the corruption fund. Does not the whole system reek with fraud and corruption? Is it not a discrimination against honesty, against conscience, a premium on evasion and fraud?

Come into our States and look at their taxes, or look, if

Justice the Object—Taxation the Means 15

you please, by the way, on the internal revenue. You remember how, when it was proposed to abolish that stamp tax on matches that was in force during the war, how the match combination fought hard and fought long against the repeal of that tax. You remember how the whisky ring spent its money to prevent the reduction of the whisky tax; how today it stands ready to spend money to keep up the present tax.

Go then into our States; *take our system of direct taxation*. What do you find? We pretend to tax all property; many of our taxes are especially framed to get at rich men; what is the result? Why, all over the United States the very rich men simply walk from under those taxes. All over the United States the attempt to tax men upon their wealth is a farce and a fraud. If there were no other reason, this would be a sufficient reason why all such taxes should be abolished. In their very nature they permit evasion, law breaking, perjury, bribery, and corruption.

But the tax on land values, it has at least this advantage: land cannot be hid; it cannot be carried off; it always remains, so to speak, out of doors. If you don't see the land you know that it is there; and of all values *the value which attaches to land* is the most definite, the most easily ascertained. Why, I may go into San Francisco, into Denver, into New York, into Boston, into any city where I am totally unacquainted, and if one offers to sell me a lot, I can go to any real estate dealer and say: "Here is a lot of such a frontage and such a depth, and on such a street; what is it worth?" He will tell me closely. How can he tell me the value of the house that is upon it? Not without a close examination; still less, how can anyone tell me, without the examination of experts, what is the value of the things contained

in that house, if it be a large and fine house? And, still less, how can anyone tell me the value of the various things that the man who lives in that house may own? But land—there it is. You can put up a simple little sign on every lot, or upon every piece of agricultural land, saying that this tract is of such a frontage and of such a depth, having such an area, and it belongs to such

16 *Justice the Object—Taxation the Means*

a person, and is assessed at so much, and you have published information checking the assessment; you have the assessment on a value that can be ascertained more definitely, more certainly than any other value.

Substitute the tax on land values for all the many taxes that we now impose. See the gain in morals; see the gain in economy! With what a horde of tax-gathering and tax-assessing officials could we dispense; what swearing and examination and nosing around to find out what men have or what they are worth!

Now take the matter of justice. We Single Tax men are not deniers of the rights of property; but, on the contrary, we are the upholders and defenders of the rights of property. We assert the sacred right of property; that there is a right of property, which comes from no human law, which antedates all human enactments. That is a clear genesis. That which a man produces, that which by his exertion he brings from the reservoir of nature and adapts to forms suited to gratify the wants of man—that is his; his as against all the world.

If I, by my labor, catch a fish, that fish is and ought to be mine; if I make a machine, that machine belongs to me; that is the sacred right of property. There is a clear title from the producer, resting upon the right of the individual to himself, to the use of his own powers, to the enjoyment of the results of his exertion; the right that he may give, that he may sell, that he may bequeath.

What do we do when we tax a building? When a man puts up a building by his own exertion, or it comes to him through the transfer of the right that others have to their exertion, down comes the community and says, virtually, you must give us a portion of that building. For where a man honestly earns and accumulates wealth, down come the tax-gatherers and demand every year a portion of those earnings. Now, is it not as much an impairment of the right of property to take a lamb as to take a sheep? To take 5 per cent. or 20 per cent., as to take 100 per cent.? We should leave the whole of the value produced by individual exertion to the individual. We

Justice the Object—Taxation the Means 17

should *respect the rights of property* not to any limited extent, but fully. We should leave to him who produces wealth, to him to whom the title of the producer passed, all that wealth. No matter what be

its form, it belongs to the individual. We should take for the uses of the community the value of land for the same reason. It belongs to the community because the growth of the community produces it. What is the reason that land in San Francisco today is worth so much more than it was in 1860 or 1850? Why is it that barren sand, then worth nothing, has now become so enormously valuable? On account of what the owners have done? No. It is because of the growth of the whole people. It is because San Francisco is a larger city; it is because you all are here. Every child that is born; every family that comes and settles; every man that does anything to improve the city, adds to the value of land. It is a value that springs from *the growth of the community*. Therefore, for the very same reason of justice, the very same respect for the rights of property which induces us to leave to the individual all that individual effort produces, we should take for the community that value which arises by the growth and improvement of the community.

What would be the direct result? Take this city, this State or the whole country; abolish all taxes on the production of wealth; let every man be free to plough, to sow, to build, in any way add to the common stock without being fined one penny. Say to every man who would improve, who would in any way add to the production of wealth: Go ahead, go ahead; produce, accumulate all you please; add to the common stock in any way you choose; you shall have it all; we shall not fine or tax you one penny. What would be the result of abolishing all these taxes that now depress industry; that now fall on labor; that now lessen the profits of those who are adding to the general wealth? Evidently to stimulate production; to increase wealth; to bring new life into every vocation of industry.

On the other side what would be the effect when abolishing all these taxes that now fall on labor or the products of labor,

18 *Justice the Object—Taxation the Means*

if we were to resort for public revenue to a tax upon land values; a tax that would fall on the owner of a vacant lot just as heavily as upon the man who has improved a lot by putting up a house; that would fall on the speculator who is holding 160 acres of agricultural land idle, waiting for a tenant or a purchaser, as heavily as it would fall upon the farmer who had made the 160 acres bloom? Why, the result would be everywhere that the dog in the manger would be checked; for the result everywhere would be that the men who are holding natural opportunities, not for use but simply for profit, by demanding a price of those who must use them, would have either to use their land or give way to somebody who would.

Everywhere from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the lakes to the gulf, *opportunities would be opened* to labor; there would come into the labor market that demand for the products of labor that never can be satisfied—the demands of labor itself. We should cease to hear of the labor question. The notion of a man ready to work, anxious to work, and yet not able to find work, would be forgotten, would be a story of the misty past.

Why, look at it here today, in this new country, where there are as yet only 65 millions of us scattered over a territory that in the present stage of the arts is sufficient to support in comfort a thousand millions; yet we are actually thinking and talking as if there were too many people in the country.

We want more wealth. Why don't we get it? Is any factor of production short? What are *the factors of production*? Labor, capital, and land; but to put them in the order of their importance: land, labor, capital. We want more wealth; what is the difficulty? Is it in labor; is there not enough labor? No. From all parts of the United States we hear of what seems like a surplus of labor. We have actually got to thinking that the man who gives another employment is giving him a boon. Is there any scarcity of capital? Why, so abundant is capital today that United States bonds, bought at the current rate, will only yield a fraction over two per cent per annum. So abundant is capital that there can be no doubt that a Government

Justice the Object—Taxation the Means 19

loan could be floated today at two per cent and little doubt but that it would soon command a premium. So abundant is capital that all over the country it is pressing for remunerative employment.

If the limitation is not in labor and not in capital, it must be in land. But there is *no scarcity of land* from the Atlantic to the Pacific, for there you will find unused or only half-used land. Aye, even where population is densest. Have you not land enough in San Francisco? Go to that great city of New York, where people are crowded together so closely, the great majority of them, that physical health and moral health are in many cases alike impossible. Where, in spite of the fact that the rich men of the whole country gravitate there, only four per cent of the families live in separate houses of their own, and sixty-five per cent of the families are crowded two or more to the single floor—crowded together layer on layer, in many places, like sardines in a box. Yet, why are there not more houses there? Not because there is not enough capital to build more houses, and yet not because there is not land enough on which to build more houses.

Today one half of the area of New York City is unbuilt upon—is absolutely unused. When there is such a pressure, why don't people go to these vacant lots and build there? Because *though unused, the land is owned*; because, speculating upon the future growth of the city, the owners of those vacant lots demand thousands of dollars before they will permit anyone to put a house upon them.

WHAT you see in New York, you may see everywhere. Come into the coalfields of Pennsylvania; there you will frequently find thousands and thousands of miners unable to work, either locked out by their employers, or striking as a last resource against their pitiful wages being cut down a little more. Why should there be such a struggle? Why don't these men go to work and take coal for themselves? Not because there is not coal land enough in those mining districts. The parts that are worked are small as compared to the whole coal

20 *Justice the Object—Taxation the Means*

deposits. The land is not all used, but it is all owned, and before the men who would like to go to work can get the opportunity to work the raw material, they must pay to its owner thousands of dollars per acre for land that is *only nominally taxed*.

Go West, find people filing along, crowding around every Indian reservation that is about to be opened; travelling through unused and half-used land in order to get an opportunity to settle—like men swimming a river in order to get a drink. Come to this State, ride through your great valleys see those vast expanses, only dotted here and there by a house, without a tree; those great ranches, cultivated as they are cultivated by blanket men, who have a little work in ploughing time, and some more work in reaping time, and who then, after being fed almost like animals, and sheltered worse than valuable animals are sheltered, are forced to tramp through the State. It is the artificial scarcity of natural opportunities.

Is there any wonder that under this treatment of the land all over the civilized world there should be want and destitution? Aye, and suffering—degradation worse in many cases than anything known among savages, among the great masses of the people.

How could it be otherwise in a world like this world, tenanted by land animals, such as men are? How could the Creator, so long as our laws are what they are—how could He, himself, relieve it? Suppose that in answer to the prayers that ascend for the relief of poverty, the Almighty were to *rain down wealth from heaven*, or cause it to spout lip from the bowels of the earth. Who, under our present system, would own it? The landowner. There would be no benefit to labor. Consider, conceive any kind of a world your imagination will permit. Conceive of heaven itself, which, from the very necessities of our minds, we cannot otherwise think of than as having an expansion of space—what would be the result in heaven itself, if the people who should first get to heaven were to parcel it out in big tracts among themselves?

Oh, the wickedness of it; oh, the blasphemy of it! Worse than atheists are those so-called Christians who by implication, if not by direct statement, attribute to the God they call on

Justice the Object—Taxation the Means 21

us to worship, the God that they say with their lips is all love and mercy, *this bitter suffering* which today exists in the very centers of our civilization.

WHEN I was last in London, the first morning that I spent there, I rose early and walked out, as I always like to walk when I go to London, through streets whose names I do not know; I came to a sign—a great big brass plate, “Office of the Missionary Society for Central Africa.” I walked half a block, and right by the side of the Horse Guards, where you may see the pomp and glare of the color mounting, there went a man and a woman and two little children that seemed the very embodiment of hard and hopeless despair.

A while ago I was in Edinburgh, the Modern Athens, the glorious capital (for such it is in some parts)—the glorious capital of Scotland; aye, and I went into those tall houses, monstrous they seemed, those relics of the old time, and there, right in the shadow, in the centre of such intellectual activity, such wealth, such patriotism, such public spirit, were sights that would appall the veriest savage.

I saw there the hardest thing a man can look at. They took me to an institution where little children are taken in and cared for, whose mothers are at work, and here I saw the bitterest of all sights—little children shrunken and sickly from want of food; and the superintendent told me a story. He pointed out a little girl, and said: “That little thing was brought in here, almost starving, and when they set food before her, before she touched it or tasted it, she folded her hands and raised her eyes, and thanked her Heavenly Father for his bounty.”

Good God! Men and women—think of the blasphemy of it! To say that the bounty of that little child’s Heavenly Father was conceded so. No! No! No! He has given enough and to spare for all His providence brings into this world. It is the injustice that disinherits God’s children; it is the wrong that takes from those children their heritage, not the Almighty.

AYE, years ago, I said on this platform that the seed had

22 *Justice the Object—Taxation the Means*

been set. Now the grand truth is beginning to appear. From one end of Great Britain to the other, all through this country, into the Antipodes to which I am going wherever the English tongue is spoken—aye, and beyond, on the continent of Europe—the truths for which we stand are making their way. The giant Want is doomed. But I tell you, and I call upon my comrades to bear me witness, that there is a reward in this belief, in this work, which is utterly independent of results.

In London, on one of my visits, a clergyman of the Established Church asked a private interview with me. He said: “I want to talk with you frankly. Something I have seen of your sayings has made me think that you could give me an answer. Let me tell you my story. I was educated for the Church; graduated at one of the universities; took orders; was sent to a foreign country as a missionary. After a while I became a chaplain in the navy; finally, a few years since, I took a curacy in London, and settled here. I have been, up till recently, a believing Christian.

“I have believed the Bible to be the word of God, and I have rested implicitly on its promises; the one promise I have often thought of: ‘Once I was young, and now I am old, yet never have I seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.’ I believed that till I came to my own country. I believed that until I undertook the ministerial work in London. I believed it was true. Now I know it is not true; I have seen the righteous forsaken and his seed begging their bread.” He said: “My faith is gone; and I am holding on here, but I feel like a hypocrite. I want to ask you how it seems to you.” And

I told him in my poor way, as I have been trying to tell you tonight, how it is, simply because of our violation of natural justice; how it is, simply because we will not take the appointed way.

Aye, in our own hearts we all know. To the man who appreciates this truth, to the man who enters this work, it makes little difference—this thing of results. This at least he knows, that it is not because of the Power that created this world and brought men upon it that these dark shades exist in our civilization today; that it is not because of the niggardliness of the Creator.

Justice the Object—Taxation the Means

23

AND there arises in me a feeling of what the world might be.

The prayer that the Master taught His disciples: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven, was no mere form of words. It is given to men to struggle for the kingdom of justice and righteousness. It is given to men to work and to hope for and to bring on that day of which the prophets have told and the seers have dreamed; that day in which involuntary poverty shall be utterly abolished; that day in which there shall be work for all, leisure for all, abundance for all; that day in which even the humblest shall have his share, not merely of the necessities and comforts, but of the reasonable luxuries of life; that day in which every child born among us may hope to develop all that is highest and noblest in its nature; that day in which in the midst of abundance the fear of want shall be gone.

This greed for wealth that leads men to turn their backs upon everything that is just and true, and to trample upon their fellows lest they be trampled upon; to search and to strive, and to strain every faculty of their natures to accumulate what they cannot take away, will be gone, and in that day the higher qualities of man shall have their opportunity and claim their reward.

We cannot change human nature; we are not so foolish as to dream that human nature can be changed. What we mean to do is to give the good in human nature its opportunity to develop.

Try our remedy by any test—the test of justice; the test of expediency. Try it by any dictum of political economy; by any maxim of good morals; by any maxim of good government. It will stand every test. What I ask you to do is not to take what I or any other man may say, *but to think for yourselves!*