

LAND MONOPOLY

If a man were finding his way along a road, or through a wood, with no other mortal within a mile, the way in which he swung his arms, or otherwise behaved himself, would be of no consequence to any one but himself. If he met, now and then, another, his movements would have to be put under some slight and occasional restraint. If he were walking down a city street, his entire behavior would necessarily be subjected to discipline. If he were trying to force his way through a dense crowd, he would have to be content with very slow speed, and would have to use the utmost care and attention in the mode of his contact with the individuals around him. The limitations on his freedom of movement, on his chances of getting ahead with speed on his own business and on his personal comfort, would not advance in proportion to the increasing numbers about him, but would advance in a progressive and very rapidly increasing ratio.

If a man lived on a farm with no neighbor within a mile, the sanitary arrangements in and around his dwelling would have little importance except for his own family, and sanitary arrangements would be of very little importance at best under such circumstances. If he lived on a village street, sanitary arrangements would attain a certain importance. If he lived in a city they would become a leading interest. If he lived in a tenement in a densely populated part of a great city, sanitary arrangements would stand among the very first of the interests of himself and his neighbors. The interest and importance of sanitary arrangements would advance

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under the same law as the limitations on personal chance and convenience in the previous case.

If there were a space which possessed advantages for any interest of mankind, — being in the sunlight or out of it, in the wind or out of it, near to a spring or remote from a swamp, salubrious, possessing a fine view, or otherwise desirable, — if this space were large and ample in proportion to the number of men who desired to avail themselves of it, no competition or struggle would take place between them for it; but if their number increased, contact and collision would begin. If there should come to be more persons eager for the advantage of situation than could find place under the physical limitations existing, this struggle would go on to any degree of intensity. It would advance under the same law of progression previously stated.

If a number of persons are out in the fields, fresh air is present in immense superfluity. The personal habits of these persons, *e.g.*, cleanliness, would be of little importance; even if some of them had a contagious disease, the danger of infection would be slight. But if they came nearer together, and then nearer, and were finally crowded tightly into some limited and enclosed space, they would consume the air away from each other, they would poison each other; and if there were a disease among them its chances of being transmitted would rise toward certainty.

In the mere matters of space and fresh air and sunlight, therefore, men are under conditions of monotony and exclusion; their spheres of interest and of life-supply collide, and they become noxious to each other, whether they will or not, under a rapidly increasing progression, when their numbers increase with respect to the natural conditions.

If a number of men live on the banks of a stream which offers a supply of water far in excess of all their requirements, no question of water-supply rises among them. If, however, they need water to irrigate their land, or if they keep flocks and herds which must get water from few, scattered, and scanty springs, water may come to be an object of earnest contention and struggle; if they want water for power, they find that the power of a certain fall is a limited quantity. If they contend for it they may divide it up. If the competitors become more numerous, an advancing limitation and deficiency are experienced by all; they run inevitably into a situation where so many want all that none have any. If they want air for power, they find that the favorable situations for windmills are limited, that these will all be occupied as the number who need them increases, and then that the occupiers will impede each other.

If men who have a large wood-supply waste it as fuel, no human interest is affected. It is true even then that what one takes out of the supply of nature another cannot have and use; but when there is more than enough for all, no protest is made. As numbers increase and the wood is cut off, every man who appropriates a tree to make a table out of it, or to burn it for his own fuel-supply, invades by just so much the sphere of interest of his neighbors, and as the number increases all must sink into a condition of want and misery, that is, of imperfectly satisfied necessities, not in a direct ratio, but under the same advancing progression.

If the woods are full of game and the men are few, there is no problem of food supply and no social question. Land means nothing but game. Any one who kills an animal invades and exhausts the common stock,

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but no one complains. As the number of the men increases, their consumption surpasses the natural increase of the animals and reacts upon the number of the men. An increase in the number of the men will therefore produce all the darkest phenomena of the competition of life, reduce the whole to misery, and produce a "social question." As regards furs used by man, we have a case of this law at the present time in the midst of civilization. Art has been able only in a very limited measure to act upon the production of fur; we are still obliged to rely upon the natural increase, and the fur industry consists in little else than the appropriation of what nature produces. It is, therefore, an industry nearly on the plane of the very first and primary industries of mankind. If we confine attention to the best and finest furs of wild animals, this would be absolutely true. Now, as the earth is more and more fully populated, and the animals are killed off, the supply diminishes, and as wealth increases the demand increases, so that a fur industry is inevitably a monopoly, and one with an unearned increment of the best defined character; yet if we should all try to make good our claim to the bounty of nature in the seals of Alaska or the sables of Siberia, how should we do it?

We see, therefore, that every natural agent is a natural monopoly. Men want land only for the sake of the standing-room, air, water, sunlight, animals, fish, trees, minerals, stone, lumber, firewood, etc., which they get out of it. In regard to every one of these things they are living and working under the conditions of monopoly. When the supply under any monopoly is indefinitely large with respect to the demand, the monopoly has no stringency or pressure and is of no importance; but as the demand rises the pressure of the monopoly

advances in a progression to which no limits can be assigned. The exclusion which the men exercise toward each other is not in law or in property; it is in use. A man appropriates a plant, tree, animal, mineral, or other thing out of the raw product of nature, because he wants to consume it in satisfaction of his wants. When he does so consume it, he excludes everybody else from the same satisfaction by the use of the same natural product. He cannot do anything else if he proposes to live; his only alternative is to commit suicide and get out of the world so as to leave more room for others.

Hence, it is clear how crude and futile is the notion that monopoly, or monopoly of land, is modern and a product of civilization; and the same is true of the whole current set of notions about appropriation, "bounty of nature," "unearned increment," and all the rest; and, more especially still, the notion that in some primitive time and under some original organization of society, none of these things were as they are now. In fact, there has never been a time when the natural monopoly of land pressed harder on men than when there was no private property in land at all. Hunting and pastoral tribes do not have private property in land. What is the condition, however, of men in a hunting or pastoral tribe, when the numbers of the population exceed that which the existing supply of animals (which is what land means to hunters) or of pasturage (which is what land means to a pastoral tribe) will support? Our Indians and the hordes of Asiatics who have invaded Europe offer ample evidence from which to answer the question.

It is a crude modern notion that property grows rationally and justly out of labor. It does not, and every lawyer knows that it never has. Every act of labor has to be preceded by an act of appropriation in taking

the raw material out of the material product of nature; that is, it is inevitably based on this monopoly use of land which is so vehemently denounced. The simplest case is that of the domestication of animals. For domestication, animals must originally be appropriated from nature, and then, instead of being consumed directly, they must be retained for increase, and for secondary products, as milk, butter, eggs, hair, wool. In time labor is spent to raise the breed and to produce artificial varieties, just as land is, by cultivation, turned into a thing utterly different from land as it appears in the "Boon of Nature." In spite of the application of labor and capital, the natural monopoly element never disappears; it recurs in new form in the case of the specialty and rareness of the highly cultivated breeds. Here, also, there is an unearned increment. If we compare the relative value of horses and other things in the Middle Ages with the value of horses and other things now, it appears that a family which had bred and sold horses from then until now, would have made far greater profits than a family who had held land and rented it from then until now.

Under the pressure of the natural monopoly of the means of subsistence, any body of men is doomed to advance to a position of general misery and want. They will be substantially equal under it, if that is any satisfaction to them. Their real and only escape lies in the arts of civilization and in science; but if they pursue those they will have to give up equality, and will have to consent that those who lead the way out shall enjoy the largest share of the gains. They have always consented to this, not because they loved the leaders, but because it was best for themselves.