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1st draft

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The Little piece I will now read in a critical report of an experience with one of these local reformers. Published in N.R.

"Save the Rich"

He sat in the front row, and somehow gave the impression of filling at least two seats. It was the freedome of his posture - easy, spreading, unconscious - the big looseness of his rough plaided jacket, worn over his conspicuously new blue overalls. But that aside, you would have remarked him at the first glance at your audience, - the black abundant hair, the eager eye, the ruddy face set him apart from a houseful of sallow, unrevealing countenances.

When I was launched on my discussion I remarked him in spite of myself, for he was with me - quite embarrassingly with me. His approval showed in emphatic nods, and if I caught his eye it was as if he said aloud, "Go to it. You are right. Keep it up."

He came around afterwards to speak to me. I knew of course that he would do that. But he wanted something more. He wanted to talk with me for a long time, he said. He must. He had something that I should know, something that I must help pass on.

~~It is not an uncommon experience, this listener who has a message for the speaker. He is usually a listener who~~ Ann he comes believes he had found a way to strike off the world's shackles and whose business on the earth is conversion. It may be that he sees us saved by sweeping out the bewildering maze of taxes with which we are afflicted and substituting the supremely

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simple single tax. Or he may have revolted against the material inequalities of life and would flatten them out by sweeping away the owing of things. It may be he sees regeneration in selling all that you have and giving it to the poor. Or he may go further and, turning his back upon all society, declare for a life of contemplation and negation.

You get queer douches after your hour of preaching, and they come from the most unexpected quarters of the heavens. There seems to be not an audience in the country that cannot turn out an Isiah, a John the Baptist, a Luther, a Karl Marx, a Madame Blavatsky, a Mary Baker Eddy or a Lenine.

You do well to listen. Behind their formulae lies some burden of the earth. It has lain so heavily on their hearts that they have been forced to find a cure. Without it their lives would be insupportable. They are spokesmen for man's incurable discontent and his equally incurable hope. And so I gave him my only free time in the morning.

He came on the tick of the hour. I found him sitting anxiously on the edge of one of the dingy upholstered chairs in the dull, impoverished, though once beautiful, hotel "parlor." Through its great windows one looked on a busy noisy street - or would have looked if smoke and steam had not dimmed their light. Its furniture and carpet, once gay and beautiful, were glossy and frayed. At one side a maid laid the bed, which over-crowding made necessary at night.

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He was pathetically eager, fearful lest I make excuses to escape, as in truth I had had it in mind to do. Was I not to take the 11:30,and were there not things to do? "It is serious, Sister," he began, almost pantingly. "You must hear me. Grievous times are impending."

my first struggle - Mar

"An evangelist. He has come to pray with me" - and I had a quick and disconcerting picture of myself kneeling beside him in the shabby room, while the amazed maid suspended her bed-making in disapproval or mockery.

But it was not that. "Grievous times are impending. We must get at the root of the evil. I know the root. I know how to destroy it. You must help me. It's the rich of the world who have lost their way and are destroying the world. We must save them. Not save them by hate, Sister, but by love. They have forgotten the economics of God. They are practicing the economies of the devil.

"I know what I am talking about. I have learned it by being up against 'em. I am only forty, and I started out thinking that everything was all right in the world, that all you needed to do was to work and keep straight and you could get your foothold - a patch of land, a cow and a horse. That's what my Pappy and Mammy said. That's what they done. What they had didn't look much - a shack on a scraggy hillside in Missouri ain't much for looks, but Pappy he owned it. And we had pigs and a cow and a horse. We worked like blazes all the time, but we was free and

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had a roof always - no rent and milk and bacon and potatoes and apples. Shut-downs never turned us into the street. And Pappy said, 'Boys, work like hell and get a farm and keep free. Don't ever be a hired man all your life.' And I growed up like that.

"About the time I was twenty I came out here to Oklahoma and got to be a cow boy. I married a cow girl, and right away we begun to figure about getting a farm, for she was brought up like me to believe that way. Wages was high, and I went to work in a railway gang, making roadbed, digging ditches - hard, but good pay. And we saved.

"The first thing I learned about what the rich does to men I learned there. There was something about the way we was living that wa'n't decent and wa'n't necessary. About seventy of us said we would go to the boss and complain. We did, one Friday noon, and the boss said, 'You come to me tomorrow and I will answer you.' Some of the fellows said we would be fired, but I said, No, that wouldn't be square. A man will listen to you. He has to listen to you in this country, he couldn't do less than that. So we went back Saturday, and the boss didn't waste no words. 'You are fired,' he said. 'I won't have no kicking here. I have filled those jobs with Dagoes, they won't be so nice.'

"And he did, Sister. Took the jobs away from men born right here in this country and gave them to greasers who live like hogs. They would put up with anything. They didn't have

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no standards of living to keep up like I was trying to with my wife and babies coming.

"And it wa'n't American what he'd done. I saw that then and I was mad, mad all through; and I went and joined a union. That's nearly twenty years ago, and I've seen it again and again since - no hearing like an American just naturally thinks he has a right to. It ain't American. That's what I said at the start - but I say more now. Something I didn't see at the start - it ain't Christian. It breaks one of God's economic laws. Listen to what He says."

He pulled out a worn little book, and, with fingers that still quivered with fear lest I escape before his message was delivered, turned to what he wanted. "Here is what ~~He~~ G-d says:

Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.

"He meant that for men as well as for oxen. St. Paul says He meant it for our sake. And here is what the rich has done - put a muzzle on a man that labors - won't let him talk, won't listen to what he has to say. And we ain't no right to stand that. It's against God's law, and we got to protest.

"You ain't got far to go to find out why the rich have put a muzzle on workers. It's because they want to get around God's rock bottom order:

He that planteth and he that watereth are one and each shall receive his own reward according to his labor.

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"That's the first law, Sister. The rich want to forget it. They don't want to divvy according to what each does. They want more - as much of labor's part as they can get. That's what they have been figgering on in this country right straight along.

"You could not make me believe that at first. Even when I saw they was trying to muzzle me and I would not stand for it, I thought I was getting all I was worth, and I was, up to the time I was throwed out, and then I thought there were places where it would not be so, and I said to my wife, 'We will go West and settle. We'll get that land in some other State. California is the place for us.' And so we worked our way out.

"'Hard?' I suppose it was, but we was young and happy, and we knew the plains. We felt sure we would get land there, and there was lots of work at first. And then, before you knew it, the Japs came. They worked cheaper and they worked fine and they saved and they didn't bother about American standards. And the Americans took them up and throwed us out when they could get something cheaper. The land we was looking for in California was there, but we couldn't get it because the Japs had the work. Having no work we couldn't save the money to buy the farm.

"I ain't revengeful, Sister. I don't see revenge is a part of God's economic plan, but I can't help feeling that the men that was howling now about the Japs owning land and doing better than they can on it, because they work harder and spend less, are getting just what was coming to them.

"And so we moved on - and on. And always we found that

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just as it was in Oklahoma, just as it was in California, the first law, that he that planteth and he that watereth are one and each shall receive his own reward according to his labor, - wa'n't obeyed. And always we found that when we said anything about it we was muzzled. I was getting bitterer and bitterer and losing my hope and saying, 'To hell with America. It ain't so.'

"I tried the unions, and nothing but fighting seemed to happen, and politics and foolish talk. And I tried the Socialists, and there was more politics and more foolish talk. I ~~wouldn't~~ have believed it ~~once, but it's so~~. When you've tried out everything and nothing does you, you're apt to get feeling around for God, to find out what He has to say. I never paid much attention to God. Pappy and Mammy always prayed and took us to church ~~now and then~~, nothing regular, but somehow when the unions didn't do it and I got fed up with Socialists doing so much talking and not getting anywhere, and I could see nothing else, then I began to think about God. I took to the Bible, and I began to read.

"Well, Sister, that's what I want to tell you, that God gives the only economic plan, ~~written down there~~, that will save the world. And all is the matter with us now is that the strong in the world has gotten away from it.

"It began when the first man got minded to be rich - that started it. Listen to this."

The still tremulous hands ran over the leaves of the little black book. "I have worked it all out here, logical like.

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Listen.

When a man is minded to be rich, he falls into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown a man in destruction and perdition, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

"That's what started it. Awful things happen to the man minded to be rich; and the first is that he loses his singleness of purpose, forgets that a man's first business is service of the Lord and good will for men - all men. When a man gets his mind set on money, it ain't so with him. He don't think about the will of God or the good of man. He can't. If you are trying to get rich, you must lie awake nights and be always thinking and figgering and trying to see how you can get ahead of this one and that one. When a man like that goes to church, do you think he can listen right through, soak it all in and praise God from start to finish? He can't do it, even if he tries to, things jump in ahead of the sermon. Most sermons ain't so interesting but you have got to help 'em out a little in your mind, kind of fire 'em up. You can do that if you're lit up with love of God and good will to men, like God's economic plan provides. But if you ain't, business gets in ahead and you keep thinking about things that you've got to do.

"I know how it is myself. I don't live down here. Reckon I didn't tell you how I came to be here. I live up in Oregon and

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work in the orchards, and some men sent me down here with a carload of apples, to sell them out. And I say, Sister, you can't figger how them apples worries me. I'm nothing but a punk laborer - no trade - never did have no education. Figgers worries me. 'Fraid I'll make a mistake - 'fraid something will happen to the apples - thieves get 'em - frost get 'em. I go to church and instead of listening, in bobs them apples - breaks up my singleness of purpose. I look at the rich and I feel for them, for I know just how it is. They've got worries - must have, and they can't concentrate on God like He expects them to and like they must if they carry out His plan.

"Then there's another terrible thing happens when a man gets minded to be rich. It makes him a respecter of persons. And that's something God hates, for He says we're to be one. Bein' a respecter of persons is one of the hurtful lusts that the text I read tells you about, one of the things that destroys men. Seems like money always stirs up a man to want to seem better than the poor. Why, you see it right along, even in church, just like the Bible says. Listen, Sister.

For if there shall come into your assembly a man having a golden ring, in fine apparel, and there shall come in also a poor man in mean attire,

And you have respect to him that is clothed with the fine apparel, and shall say to him, Sit thou here well; but say to the poor man: Stand thou there, or sit under my foot-stool.

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"That's what happens to me in my overalls, right away. They say to me, as you read it in the book - Stand thou there or sit here under my footstool. And that in God's church! He tells them, plain as can be, that that's a sin, and that to do that is as bad as if they broke all the laws.

"But there's more than that, Sister. It ain't only what they do to themselves, bringin' on their heads the wrath of God - it's what their setting in the good place and putting me under the footstool does to me. It makes me hateful in my mind, and I watch 'em and I forget God and His sermon. I see the gold ring and the gay clothing and, do the best I can, I can't help reckonin' what they cost. They tell me some of the rings with little white stones in them cost as much as a thousand dollars! I don't want them - it ain't that. But I never did see a man wearing a ring but what I'd figger to myself what I could do with what that ring cost, how I could keep Bill in school another years and have the doctor fix up my wife's teeth which is bad and always swelling up on her and keeping her awake nights. I ain't excusing myself - it aint right - but when I see myself set aside in church, I just naturally get mean and think about what I ought not to. It turns me away from God. And that's the worst thing they are doing - they are turning the poor against the Lord Himself. I tell you, Sister, it's come in this country that working men feel about the church like I used to about America - 'It ain't so - to hell with it.'

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"And it's the rich that's done it. Listen, here.

Ye have dishonored the poor man.

"That's what's happened. And when they do that, they set him against everything they support, God along with the rest.

"And the preachers are helping the rich. They have lost sight of the plan. They don't tell them any more straight out like Christ and the Apostles did, about money bein' the root of all evil. Why, they explain away even what Christ said about its bein' harder for a rich man to enter into heaven than for a camel to get through a needle's eye - which it is no use denying he couldn't do. I heard my own preacher doing that just lately. What he made out was that this young man was an exception, had to have special hard treatment to get his heart right, that Christ meant what He said only for him and not for the rich generally. Now, that was right consolin' for some people in our congregation, and it came in just the right time for the preacher was makin' up next year's budget for running the church - himself included, - and he was countin' on a raise. But I don't read what Christ said so. I tell you it makes a poor man hot under the collar, havin' a preacher backing them up when he knows things ain't square, and it turns him against the Lord Himself, just as I said.

"Truth is, Sister, we've got away from the whole plan, gone wrong through the desire of gold. When you get a plan laid down you've got to follow it if you are going to get where you are going. It's like running a railroad train - you have to keep the track. If they didn't keep my apple car on the right track I never would

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have got down here with it, and this world is never going to be the happy place that God meant it should be and that it could be, as long as we're off the track as we are. Worse than that, unless we get back we're all going to ruin.

"The rich don't see what's hanging over their heads. They don't know God's opinion of them for what they're doing; and the preachers ain't telling them any more. It's written down, plain as can be."

The little black book came out again. No tremor of the fingers now - he knew I would stay to the end. "Listen to this.

Because thou sayest I am rich, I have gotten riches and have need of nothing, knowest not that thou art the wretched one, and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

"That's His opinion of 'em.

"But there's more, and it scares me. God has warned them, and they don't listen. What He says is harsh and threatenin':

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten.

Your gold and silver is cankered and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

Behold the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of saboath.

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"That's what's comin' to the rich if we can't save 'em. Don't you see what we've got to do? We've got to show 'em - show 'em in love - make it clear to 'em. It ain't so much that they are bad as that they don't see. They have lost their way, Sister, just as my apples would have if they had not been kept on the right track. We all tell them. You must do your part. Some will listen to me, some to you. Maybe I will get one, maybe you will get one. And they will pass it on."

"All aboard for the 11:30." The call shrilled through the halls - nasal, insistent - not to be ignored.

"That's my train," I said, "I must go."

He rose with me - another man - confident, dominant, even gay. He was freed of his message. He had obeyed the voice. He could go now - look after his apples, happy until his hour returned, as it would, when he should see another who must hear him. Then again he would go through the pains of delivery.

"God bless you, Sister," he called, as I hastened away, "pass it on."

And that's what I am doing here.

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