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"Save the Rich!"

He sat in the front row, and somehow gave the impression of filling at least two seats. It was the freedom 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 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 simple single tax. Or

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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 Isaiah, 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 gay and prideful hotel "parlor." Through its great windows, dimmed by smoke and steam, one looked on a busy noisy street. At one side a maid laid the bed, which over-crowding made necessary at night.

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

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take the 11:30 train, and ~~were there not things to do?~~ "It is serious, Sister," he began, almost pantingly. "You must hear me. Grievous times are impending."

"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 who have lost their way and are bringing destruction on men. We must save them. Not save them by hate, Sister, but by love. They have given up God's plan for running the world. They think they've found a better one. It is leading them to death.

"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 had a roof always - no rent and milk and bacon and potatoes~~

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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 and got to be a cow boy. I married a cow girl, and right away we begun to figger 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.

It was when I was workin' on the railroad that I begun to see how the rich was gettin' away from God's ideas. 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. And 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 he boss didn't waste no words. 'You are fired,' he said. 'I won't have no kickin' here. I have filled these 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 'em to greasers who live like hogs. They would put up with anything. They didn't have no standards of living to keep up like I was tryin' to with my

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wife and babies comin'.

"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 into God's plan. 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 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 the backbone of the plan:

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 accordin' to what each does. They want more - ~~as much of labor's part as they can get~~. That's what ~~they have been figgerin' on in this~~ country right ~~straight along~~.

"You could not make me believe that at first. Even when I saw they was tryin' to muzzle me and I would not stand for it, I thought I was gettin' all I was worth - and I was, up to the time I was throwed out, and then I thought there was places where it wouldn't 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. They saved. 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.

"I ain't revengeful, Sister. I don't see revenge as a part of God's economic plan, but I can't help feelin' that the men that's howlin' now about the Japs owning land and doin' better than they can on it, because they work harder and spend less, are gettin' just what's ~~was~~ comin' to 'em.

"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 gettin' bitterer and bitterer and losing my hope and sayin', 'To hell with America. It ain't so.'

"I tried the unions, and nothing but fightin' 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 feelin' 'round 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 doin' so much talkin' and not gettin' anywhere, and I could see nothing else, then I begun to think about God. I took to the Bible, and I begun to read.

"Well, Sister, that's what I want to tell you, that God has given 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

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little black book. "I ~~have worked it all out here, logical like.~~ 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. ~~He lies awake nights thinkin' and figgerin' and tryin' to see how he can get ahead of this one and that one.~~ When he 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, even if he tries to; things jump in ahead of the sermon. Most sermons ain't so interestin' but you've 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; but if you ain't, business gets in ahead.

"I know how it is myself. I don't live down here. ~~Recken I didn't tell you how I cam to be here.~~ I live up in Oregon and work in the orchards, and some men sent me down here with a carload of apples, to sell 'em 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 -

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thieves get 'em - frost get 'em. I go to church and instead of listenin', in bobs them apples - and two figgers - breaks up my singleness of purpose. I look at the rich, and I feel for 'em, for I know just how it is. They've got worries - must have, and they can't concentrate on God like He expects 'em 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 and that to be a respecter of persons is as bad as to break all the laws. 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. The man in good clothes gets the front pew and I in my overalls must set back out of sight. God's warned 'em that they'll have to suffer for that, but I recken they've got to where they can't believe He don't admire anybody that looks as fine as they do and carries around so much money; thinks God's like the preacher, sees the world saved by contributions.

It ain't only what they do to themselves, bringin' on their heads the wrath of God - it's what they do to me. It makes me hateful in my mind, and I watch 'em and I forget God and the sermon. I see their gold rings and good clothes, and I can't help reckonin' what they cost. I don't want 'em - 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 he paid for it - much as a thousand dollars

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some of 'em, they tell me. Why, I could keep Bill in school another year with that, and have the doctor fix up my wife's teeth which is bad and always swellin' up on her and keepin' her awake nights.

"I ain't excusin' myself - it ain't 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 from God. And that's the worst thing the rich are doing - they are turnin' the poor against the Lord. I tell you, Sister, it's come in this country that workin' men feel about the church like I used to about America - 'It ain't so - to hell with 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 don't warn 'em, seem to have lost sight of the plan themselves. 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 denyin' he couldn't do. I heard my own preacher doin' 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. But I don't read what Christ said so.

What they're doin' won't work. When you get a plan laid

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down you've got to follow it if you're goin' to get anywhere. It's ~~like runnin' a railroad train - you've got to keep the track.~~ If they didn't keep my apple car on the right track I never would have got down here with it. 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 there's goin' to be a big smash - no way to stop it. It's laid down in the plan.

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

The little black book came out again. No tremor of 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.

"And this:

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 on the way, Sister. I reckon they think they can beat the Lord runnin' the world, show Him that He's wrong about money, that it can save the world. But their plan won't work. It ain't workin' today. The destruction God warned would follow if they set their mind on riches is on the way. You can hear the rumble of it everywhere. They'd hear it but that they've deafened their ears.

"Don't you see what we must do, Sister? We must make them listen - 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. I have to tell 'em - I must have help. 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."

(Pause)

"All aboard for the 11:30." The bus man's voice shrilled through the halls - nasal, insistent.

"They are calling 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 the 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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