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THE STANDARD

EXTRA. No. 9.

Published Weekly by Wm. T. Crossdale, at the Office of The Standard, 42 University Pl.
[Entered at the Post Office in New York as second class matter.]

Price 2 Cts. NEW YORK, JULY 11, 1891. \$1.00 a Year.

Price of this number in quantities, 20 copies 10 Cts.; 100 copies 40 Cts.; 1,000 copies \$3.

HOW THE WORKING FARMER IS CRUSHED.

By W. T. Crossdale.

The Nebraska Commissioner of Labor and Industrial Statistics publishes some figures going to show that in Sarpey County of that State there are 141,100 acres of farm land, of which but 49,015 are under mortgage, and that these latter are mortgaged for an average of only \$11.71 per acre, at rates of interest ranging from 6 to 8 per cent. The New York Sun thinks this indicates that the people of Sarpey County are in pretty good condition, especially as the figures show that the money was borrowed for the following purposes :

To buy land.....	58 per cent.
Stock and improvements.....	7 per cent.
Business investment.....	20 per cent.

Before any one can draw an inference worth considering from these figures, there are many other facts that need to be known. Here are a few questions that we should like to have the Labor Commissioner of Nebraska answer: Who own those 101,085 acres of unmortgaged land? To what use do they put them? What kind of business investments were those noted? Were they made by working farmers growing rich by farming, or by landowners for the purpose of acquiring more land? Until these queries are fully answered it will be impossible to draw any conclusions as to the condition of the working farmers from the statistics given.

We know nothing of Sarpey County, Nebraska, but presume that it does not differ materially from other agricultural counties in that region. The figures given might be entirely consistent with such a condition of

affairs as this, say in Blank County, Nebraska: There are 141,100 acres of farming land in Blank County. Speculators have, in one way or another, acquired from pre-emptors and original purchasers nearly the whole area. Had there been no speculation these lands would not have been valued at over \$5 or \$6 an acre, which is a high valuation for ordinary unbroken farming land at that distance from any sea port. At these or any other natural prices, based on fertility, situation, and demand, these lands, and as much more as possible would have been taken up by men eager to use them for making a living. They are all held by speculators, however, who demand, say, \$15 an acre. The men who desire to use them must pay that price or move on. The poorest do move on, but those who can, stay. They pay the speculator \$5 or \$6 an acre in cash—all that the land is worth—and give him, in addition, a purchase money mortgage for more than \$11 an acre, on which they agree to pay interest at from 6 to 8 per cent. They live in “dug-outs” or mere shanties, though a few, and a very few, it seems, borrow some more money on mortgage for improvements.

If the weather is propitious, if grasshoppers do not come, and if the foreign demand for our surplus grain crop is sufficient to keep up the price, the farmers in Blank County can manage to buy enough tariff-taxed clothing to keep them warm, and now and then one may even risk buying enough tariff-taxed lumber to build a shed for his cattle. Let there be a drouth, or let the price of grain fall, however, and he will have difficulty in meeting his interest and taxes, and, taking one year with another, a considerable percentage of the whole number are sure to fail to meet interest, and thenceforth they are mere serfs working for a landlord, who takes from them every cent beyond what is necessary to enable them to keep body and soul together. Meanwhile there are in the same county over 100,000 acres of equally good land lying idle, on which they could earn more than a living, but for the fact that they cannot go upon it without putting upon their necks just such a yoke as that they are now wearing. Does any one imagine that it will make these men content to

show them that the load that is crushing them to the earth is a purchase money mortgage? The notion that a purchase money mortgage is a light burden, easily borne, is preposterous. It is generally the chief burden.

Let us suppose that the American people, before Blank County was settled, had been educated into a comprehension of the value of the Single Tax. Knowing full well that the annual increase in rental values of land would inevitably be taken by taxation, the speculators would never have invested in these lands. If the original holders had not cared to remain they would have sold their improvements to new comers and moved away. The purchase price of the land, irrespective of improvements, would have been a mere bagatelle, since the tax gatherer would take annually a sum equal to five or six per cent. of their actual non-speculative value, reckoning values as we do now. This is equivalent to saying that the taxes would be from 25 to 40 cents an acre. This would take the place of all other taxes, county, State and Federal, now paid by the farmers of every county, which probably nearly amount to that, and the farmer would be relieved of the interest tax of from 66 to 88 cents per acre he is now paying to a private individual, probably living in Boston, New York, Chicago or some other large city.

"Oh, yes," says a man now and then, in response to this argument, "that would have been the right way to start things, but unfortunately they were not started that way, and now it is too late." It is never too late to rectify mistakes or undo wrongs that affect communities. Death often renders impossible reparation to an injured individual, but the life of a community is continuous. At the most, it may now and then appear inconvenient or difficult to undo wrongs sanctioned by long usage. But there is no great difficulty in undoing the wrong we are now considering by a process so gradual that it will work hardship to a number of people infinitesimally small compared with those now wronged by the existing system. All that is needed is the gradual abolition of all taxes now imposed, directly or indirectly, on the products of industry. This process will necessarily be gradual; but, when it is com-

