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THE PACIFIC COAST.

JUDGE MAGUIRE OF SAN FRANCISCO
ON CALIFORNIA LAND TENURE.

By James G. McGuire

Half of the State Owned by Five Hundred Men - With but a Million Inhabitants, and an Area One-Third Larger Than Italy, the State is Overpopulated.

SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 23. - With an abiding faith in the ultimate triumph of natural justice, I hail The Standard as the herald of a new and better era. A few more brave battles, a few more sacrifices, and the shackles will fall from the limbs of the toiling millions. The heirs to God's bounty will claim their heritage, and peace and plenty will flow to labor as its natural reward.

The land must be restored and preserved to the people, or freedom and happiness must soon perish from our glorious land.

The present condition of land tenure in California forms a dark chapter, for land monopoly is the one great drawback of our Golden State. It is peculiarly sad that a land so supremely blessed by the Creator should be blighted and cursed by an institution fostered by laws of popular enactment.

We have a population of about one million inhabitants, an area of more than one hundred million acres, one-half of which is the private property of five hundred men, according to the statement of Mr. Stephen Gage, president of the Southern Pacific Railroad company, whose facilities for obtaining exact information upon the subject are good, and at least as trustworthy as any in the State.

Of these lands large tracts are held by the railroad companies for speculative purposes. They are kept free from taxation by allowing the apparent title to remain in the federal government until sales are effected upon satisfactory terms, bonds being then given for deeds.

Patents are procured only for such lands as have been sold, and in the hands of the occupying owners they first become subject to taxation.

Of private landlords, one firm of cattle dealers (Miller & Lux) own more than a million acres, most of which is arable, and all of which is very valuable. They use it for pasture, paying minimal taxes, hoping soon to realize fabulous wealth by selling or leasing to the people, for whom it was created, the privilege of making

homes upon it.

It is said that this firm can drive a herd of cattle from Fort Yuma to San Francisco (about 600 miles), camping every night on their own land.

However that may be, it is certain that hundreds of American families have searched over the same routes through millions of acres of unfenced and uncultivated farming land without being able to secure a place large enough for a modest home, except by mortgaging their lives to some human vampire for the privilege.

A few weeks ago I had occasion to hold court in San Luis Obispo county, and returning, passed through the beautiful Santa Margarita rancho, a magnificent valley, containing 51,000 acres of the finest, deepest, richest and best watered soil on the face of the earth. It is the private property of one man. It is capable of supporting in comfort 2,000 families at least. It is now a cattle range. There is one farmhouse upon it and one stage station. While traveling through this great wealth of natural resources we met four emigrant families looking for homes. The women, brave specimens of "the noble mothers of the west," were worn and haggard and sick at heart from hope deferred; the children were barefooted, sunburnt and ragged. They were searching for land. The best land in the world was lying all around them unused, waiting for tillage. But human laws had deprived them of their natural, God-given right to use it. Footsore, weary and despairing, they were compelled to travel on, doubtless finding everywhere that speculators with superior facilities had preceded them.

Leaving the Santa Margarita we traveled through a succession of rich and fertile valleys, varying in width from three to thirty miles for a distance of seventy miles, all of which, except a few hundred acres, is the private property of seven speculators, who have not even fenced half of it, while families who would gladly make true American homes on twenty-acre tracts of the valley land, are scrambling and even fighting for the possession of steep and rocky ridges in far less eligible places in the same vicinity.

These are but examples, and moderate examples, of the infamous conditions existing here - conditions which have forced upon us, with a population of only one million inhabitants, all the horrors of over-population, while Italy, for example, with only a little more than two-thirds of the acreage of our State, supports thirty millions of people.

Men like the emigrants of whom I have spoken, forced in their helpless despair to abandon their families, have drifted out upon the roads in search of work. Spurned, rebuked, buffeted, they have finally abandoned hope and sunk slowly,

but surely, into that indescribable condition of mental, moral and physical degradation which is best expressed by the term "tramp." These wretched creatures, who under natural conditions would nearly all have been useful men, now swarm upon the highways and infest the towns of every county in our State.

In Alameda, a second-class county, during six months of the year 1885 over four hundred tramps were convicted and imprisoned for vagrancy.

Such are the fruits of our present system of private property in land, by which a few hundred men are enabled to own and hold the natural opportunities of millions. As the natural and necessary result of this great curse we may truly say with Goldsmith:

Our country blooms, a garden and a grave.