

CURSE OF LAND MONOPOLY.

The Shameful Way in Which Our Public Domain Has Been Squandered.

Evils of the Land Grant System Shown Up by Hon. William S. Holman.

During the debate in the National House of Representatives on the Post-office appropriation bill, the Hon. W. S. Holman, of Indiana, exhibited tables, compiled from official reports, showing that in the period embraced between June 30, 1862, and March 4, 1875, the enormous aggregate of nearly two hundred million acres of our public lands had been voted away by Congress in aid of railways, the total length of the railroads for which the grants were made being 20,803 miles. Mr. Holman, in discussing this matter, spoke as follows:

What are the conditions on which these grants were made? What rights has the Government reserved in giving away the common wealth of its people? There are some reservations, two of them, meager and inconsiderable, I admit, but still something. In all of these grants, however, in these years, there are the conditions, varied somewhat in terms but still substantially the same:

"And the said railroad shall be and remain a public highway for the use of the Government of the United States, free from all toll or other charges upon the transportation of any property or troops of the United States."

This is the first right reserved to the Government and even here in the beginning is a fraudulent purpose. Undoubtedly Congress understood by those terms that the railroad should be a public highway for the use of the United States free of charge, but you observe a slight ambiguity in the language, and under this ambiguity the Supreme Court has decided that the Government has the right to put its own locomotives and cars on these railroads and by its own employees transport its property and troops free (which of course is impracticable); but if the railroad transports the Government's property and troops, then the Government shall pay the railroad company one per cent. of the usual rates of transportation. That was the case in the case of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad Company vs. The United States, and yet the land grant to that company was made four years after Congress had, by a joint resolution I had the honor to introduce in 1862, declared that the meaning of the terms employed in that reservation was that the land-grant corporation "should transport the property and troops of the United States free of charge."

The other right reserved in all these grants is in the ambiguous language and in all the same substance:

"The said railroad shall transport the mails of the United States at such price as Congress shall by law direct."

Now, these two provisions cover all the rights reserved to the United States in consideration of these imperial grants. Contrary to the manifest intention of Congress, these corporations have received under the extraordinary decision I have named received millions or dollars from the Treasury for transportation of the mail, and are still annually receiving large sums and will for all time. But, as I have shown you, we have the clear and unquestionable right to fix the rate at which these land-grant roads shall transport our mails. Is not 50 per cent. of the amount you pay to railroad companies which built their own railroads a reasonable compensation to be paid by the Government to corporations whose railroads were virtually built by the Government? I think it is, and it is then reasonable.

There are others in which I have not included in either of the foregoing tables, where not a spadeful of earth has been dug in the construction of a railroad, yet the lands are withdrawn from settlement and claimed by the corporations, although the grants were long since forfeited. The forfeiture of these grants will of course be declared. Of all these grants over 100,000,000 acres, including over 16,000,000 this House has already declared forfeited, are beyond any reasonable compensation, and the declaration of that forfeiture by Congress is demanded by the highest considerations of public policy, common honesty, and justice to the people. Even to the extent these land-grant railroads enumerated in the first table were completed, you paid them, as I have shown, last year \$1,144,829.91 for transporting your mails. This bill would as to these roads, to the extent they are entitled to the lands granted and including the Pacific systems, save to the Treasury annually, I think, near \$100,000,000 dollars, perhaps more; but the restoration of the federal lands to the public domain is of far greater moment in any such monetary consideration; so that this bill cautiously declares that none of its provisions "shall be construed to waive or impair any right now existing in favor of the United States." While these corporations generally withhold the obtaining of patents for their lands to avoid local taxation, and are in the main holding their lands until the Government lands shall be exhausted, they still had taken out patents up to June 30, 1862, for 47,145,941 acres. If in the first table these values of these grants they obtain over 70,000,000 more it will be because incorporated wealth is stronger in controlling our affairs than the sense of justice and public duty which controls this Government in maintaining the rights of its people. So patents have already issued up to June 30, 1862, date of last specific report, for 47,745,941 acres, a territory in the aggregate as large as the two great States of Indiana and Ohio combined and nearly a half a million acres more. And the report of the Commissioner of Public Lands we are told that during the last year "twelve railroad patents, covering 124 pages of record, were issued." Yes, sir; and instead of these vast fields being covered with cheerful homes and a great multitude of prosperous and independent citizens, a handful of men became the proprietors of landed estates dwarfing the baronial possessions of Europe. Have the gentlemen who defend this policy considered the result under such a policy, if its development should be completed, the old-time republican simplicity of our institutions will give place to a splendid government controlled and supported by corporate power and concentrated wealth?

But the fact must now be apparent that no demands which the Government could make on these corporations for a free transportation of the mails, property, and troops, now and for all time, could compensate this Government and its people for the lands it has granted. The legislator who considers the same now in view of the land granted, enormous as it is, takes a very superficial view of the subject. Had the same number of vast millions of acres been granted in money from the public Treasury or expressed in bonds issued by the Government payable in money, the only evil to our free institutions would have been the granting of great fortunes by the special favoritism of Government to a portion of its people at the expense of their fellow citizens. (All monarchs present express the same policy.) The evil, great as it might be, would not go beyond this, and an honest and courageous vigilance of the people would and could in the end correct it. But the giving away in vast tracts to the favorites of Congress of the fertile lands which, on any just conception of our free institutions, ought to be the freeholds of our people, advancing the price of these lands beyond the reach of the laboring and landless men of the present period and early future, is an evil that admits of no remedy except revolution. To make these grants on the pretense of progress and power of the Government to the developing power of labor, to give labor a chance, is to invite to our shores the theory of the Middle Ages, baronial estates, baron and serf, the power of the one to shelter the feebleness of the other! Was it through imperial grants the great country from the Atlantic Ocean to the Allegheny range was settled, and thence onward to the Mississippi, with a prosperous

people, remarkable for the rugged virtues of their manhood, but still more remarkable (and, I think, a precedent in history) for the general contempt in their mortal possessions? Here was seen the natural outgrowth of our free institutions. Is the new theory of progress through baronial grants producing such results?

But the evils of this system are not limited to the withdrawal for all time from the great body of our laboring and landless people of more than 200,000,000 acres of public lands (a territory in the aggregate equal in extent to such States as Indiana); nor in creating conditions of unnatural wealth and monopoly over every department of your Government, tampering with official authority and claiming the benefit of every doubt, putting the Government itself at defiance; nor in the creation of overgrown fortunes, which enter the controlling departments of your Government through States organized under the auspices of these corporations and exercise judicial, executive, and legislative power. No, sir; the evil does not terminate there, but under this pernicious system of grants, innumerable and unnatural wealth and monopoly runs riot, the land jobbers hold high carnival, and the lands left after taking out the great grants, the lands left under this treacherous system for the people, are seized upon by the vigilant land-jobbing capitalist and his skillful and unscrupulous agents. Your land-grant roads everywhere meander through your most fertile lands, on the margin of rivers and through fruitful valleys, and even before the laboring men, your landless people, the men who long to settle with their wife and children, *bonda fide* settlers of the new country, are able to turn their faces westward the remaining lands—every fertile valley, every inviting field, even the alternate sections reserved in the land grants, and far beyond—are taken up section after section, swelling into great private estates; and your pre-emption law, through fraud and perjury, is made to do service in this most infamous proceeding. Opening up the wilderness! For whom? The *bonda fide* settler whose lands would be sold and farmed, and who, although reared in virtuous industry, would give strength and stability to their country? No, sir; to the land jobber and the land-holding capitalist who move so naturally alongside the land-grant corporation. You may travel for hundreds of miles even in Dakota, and, although you see no human habitation, every acre of the land has already ceased to be a part of our once grand public domain; in vast and solitary regions not an acre left for the settler. Under the old and honest system of our fathers, of the *bonda fide* settler of our land, every quarter-section entered would have been adorned by the home of an independent freeholder and the presence of his wife and children. Time will develop the great landed estates your land-grant system has rendered possible, even if that was not its original purpose, and will call down the execration of mankind upon the infamy. Even now a list of some of them is made public. How does this list become a republic? I clip the following from the San Francisco *Daily Examiner*, a leading journal on the Pacific coast:

Besides the millions of acres belonging to railroad and other corporations, the amount of land that is being acquired by foreign capitalists and landlords is fairly amazing. Ireland is to-day groaning beneath the yoke of oppression, and not many years will roll around before the American tenant, upon his knees, will also look up into the scowling face of his master and acknowledge his obedience.

Following are a few of America's foreign landlords, and the amount of their holdings expressed in acres:

The Holland Land Company, New Mexico..... 4,500,000 An English syndicate, No. 3, in Texas..... 3,000,000 Sir Edward Reid and a syndicate, in Florida..... 2,000,000 English syndicate, in Missouri..... 1,750,000 Marquis of Tweeddale and a syndicate, in Phillips, Marshall & Co., London..... 1,500,000 German syndicate..... 1,100,000 Anglo-American syndicate, Mr. Rogers, President, London..... 750,000 Bryan, Whaley, M. P., Peterboro, England..... 700,000 Duke of Sutherland..... 425,000 British Land Company, in Kansas..... 320,000 Wm. Whaley, M. P., Peterboro, England..... 310,000 Missouri Land Company, Edinburgh, Scotland..... 300,000 Robert Tennant, of London..... 230,000 Dundee Land Company, Scotland..... 247,000 Lord Dufferin, of Canada..... 120,000 Birken Newgate, Liverpool..... 100,000 Lord Houghton, in Florida..... 60,000 Lord Dunraven, in Colorado..... 60,000 English Land Company, in Florida..... 50,000 English Land Company, in Arkansas..... 50,000 Albert Peel, M. P., Leicestershire, England..... 40,000 Sir J. L. Kay, Yorkshire, England..... 10,000 Alexander Grant, of London, in Kansas..... 35,000 English syndicate (represented by Close & Wright, of London)..... 110,000 M. Ellerhaas of Hanover, New Jersey, in West Virginia..... 600,000 A Scotch syndicate, in Florida..... 500,000 A. Boysen, Danish Consul, in Milwaukee..... 50,000 Missouri Land Company, of Edinburgh, Scotland..... 165,000 Total..... 20,747,000

Twenty million seven hundred and forty-seven thousand acres! And the land-grant system was to enable the *bonda fide* settler to reach the public land! I admit the railroad grants are not responsible for two of the chief causes set forth in the above list, but, omitting those, here is a terrible list of the aggregate is nearly as large as the great State of Indiana, held by foreign corporations, lords, and capitalists, every acre of which, the two trusts omitted, I am assured, is within the land-grant regions, and entered unquestionably through the aid of that infamous system. I have before me a list of land purchases by thirty American capitalists in the land-grant sections, ranging from 25,000 to 2,000,000 acres, aggregating 7,427,000 acres. For what purpose did the North Pacific Railroad Company, the *bonda fide* settler of Europe to the recent festivities attending the pretended completion of that railroad except to invite attention to the princely possessions it could place within their reach? But why enter into detail? Did any member of Senate or House who supported those grants, making grant after grant until they permeated every fertile region of the public domain, and until the public voice changed the political sentiment of this republic, except and after the able report of the Commissioners of Public Lands we are told that during the last year "twelve railroad patents, covering 124 pages of record, were issued?" Yes, sir; and instead of these vast fields being covered with cheerful homes and a great multitude of prosperous and independent citizens, a handful of men became the proprietors of landed estates dwarfing the baronial estates of Europe. Have the gentlemen who defend this policy considered the result under such a policy, if its development should be completed, the old-time republican simplicity of our institutions will give place to a splendid government controlled and supported by corporate power and concentrated wealth?

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Does any intelligent man believe that our system of government can be maintained without the great body of our people being

independent freeholders? And yet this land-grant railroad system, by its own direct monopoly of the public lands and by the opportunities it has opened up for capitalists and corporations, European as well as American, to monopolize them, has nearly almost exhausted that portion of the public domain adapted to agriculture, rendering it absolutely certain that, throughout a vast region the plow will not be "in the hand of its owner," but landlord and tenant, great estates and squallid poverty, will curse the land. Nothing but forces and currents now bid from our view can prevent this. So the *bonda fide* property of our fathers, hoarding up these public lands, and the basis of their becoming the *bonda fide* property of their children, for it must be remembered that up to 1862, when this fatal and venal system was entered upon, the entire grants for internal improvements from the 17th day of September, 1857, to the 4th of March, 1861, made exclusively to States, not an acre to corporations, was but 31,600,846 acres, including the grant to the Illinois Central, so often mentioned, of 1,000,000 acres, and other millions of acres—large for a period, how trivial for the period from 1861 to 1875!

With the public land exhausted, disposed of by the evils of this system are not limited to the withdrawal for all time from the great body of our laboring and landless people of more than 200,000,000 acres of public lands (a territory in the aggregate equal in extent to such States as Indiana); nor in creating conditions of unnatural wealth and monopoly over every department of your Government, tampering with official authority and claiming the benefit of every doubt, putting the Government itself at defiance; nor in the creation of overgrown fortunes, which enter the controlling departments of your Government through States organized under the auspices of these corporations and exercise judicial, executive, and legislative power. No, sir; the evil does not terminate there, but under this pernicious system of grants, innumerable and unnatural wealth and monopoly runs riot, the land jobbers hold high carnival, and the lands left after taking out the great grants, the lands left under this treacherous system for the people, are seized upon by the vigilant land-jobbing capitalist and his skillful and unscrupulous agents. Your land-grant roads everywhere meander through your most fertile lands, on the margin of rivers and through fruitful valleys, and even before the laboring men, your landless people, the men who long to settle with their wife and children, *bonda fide* settlers of the new country, are able to turn their faces westward the remaining lands—every fertile valley, every inviting field, even the alternate sections reserved in the land grants, and far beyond—are taken up section after section, swelling into great private estates; and your pre-emption law, through fraud and perjury, is made to do service in this most infamous proceeding. Opening up the wilderness! For whom? The *bonda fide* settler whose lands would be sold and farmed, and who, although reared in virtuous industry, would give strength and stability to their country? No, sir; to the land jobber and the land-holding capitalist who move so naturally alongside the land-grant corporation.

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wisely given this great question of the public lands and forests a commanding position. For myself, I demand in the name of every laboring man in America that these corporations whose railroads were built and maintained, European as well as American, to monopolize them, have not only exhausted that portion of the benefits you have so lavishly bestowed on them. These corporations to the extent they fulfilled the terms of the grants will hold them until our ever-swelling population and the labor of our millions of laboring men in every field of human industry shall have enhanced their value. To this extent there is no remedy for the evil done. But common justice to the whole people and the highest public policy demand that the lands be restored to the public domain. The *bonda fide* property of our fathers, so far as it is concerned, became the *bonda fide* property of their children, for it must be remembered that up to 1862, when this fatal and venal system was entered upon, the entire grants for internal improvements from the 17th day of September, 1857, to the 4th of March, 1861, made exclusively to States, not an acre to corporations, was but 31,600,846 acres, including the grant to the Illinois Central, so often mentioned, of 1,000,000 acres, and other millions of acres—large for a period, how trivial for the period from 1861 to 1875!

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