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**GOV. HASKELL AND THE MUSKOGEE FRAUDS.**

At last an unsuspecting innocent man has been unwittingly dragged into the mills which grind exceeding slow. The grand jury has indicted the governor along with other prominent citizens in an attempt to recover some of the lands which have been pilfered from the Creek Indians.

And this is what the Governor says: "I have just heard of the indictment for conspiracy, coupled with seven or eight of the oldest and highest characterized citizens of Muskogee, men who developed and built up that country by their unselfish effort. From now on the proceedings will be open to both sides. Hearst's crooked manipulations will be at a discount."

"I am satisfied that the Interior Department has been misled by false statements. I am confident that there has not been a dishonest act done by any of the indicted parties, and that good citizens in general regardless of politics feel the same way."

The public may discount what Mr. Hearst has to say about the matter indeed. It needs only the evidence accumulated by the department of the interior to show that Gov. Haskell and the glorious company of Muskogees are grafters of the first water. Indeed it proves nothing at all that the men can be said to be the highest characterized men in Muskogee.

This is the state of things in Oklahoma.

The Creek nation held all the land and still holds it as a tribe. No member of the tribe can give the land away nor sell it. The Creek citizen has no title, for the title is held—not by individuals but by the whole tribe.

When the land in the Creek reservation was found to be good and the deposits of minerals and the oil wells were discovered "squatters and squawmen" came into the country. White girls endeavored to marry a Creek brave. For citizenship in the Creek nation means a matter of several thousand dollars and the girl who marries a Creek marries a wealthy citizen. And so the land was populated with men who had no right to the land at all. Some actually settled on the land and in due course of time the town of Muskogee was founded.

In 1893 the policy of the government led to the Dawes commission which had for its cause of being the object the allotment of lands among the individuals and the extinguishment of the tribal title in the towns. This went on until it was determined that the towns and villages which were springing up should be laid out and sold under the provisions of the Curtis Act in 1898.

Whether by accident, carelessness or design the Curtis act was full of treachery to the Creeks and the Dawes commission was instrumental in the debauchery of the lands of the Indians. It is a significant fact that the Dawes commission had at least one man on it who advanced himself from comparatively little means to a millionaire. The chief of the Creek nation himself was in complicity with the grafters it afterward developed by his own confession to Secretary Garfield and he alone restored what he had defrauded from his fellow Creeks although it made him a bankrupt man.

What this Curtis act was it is impossible to mention in detail except that it was provided that certain towns be laid out and the lots scheduled and sold. The squatters were treated with liberality so that the so-called owners was enabled to buy his lot at half the appraised value otherwise his lot was to be sold and he was to get the whole value of his improvements.

The theory of these provisions was that although settlers had no title, yet, inasmuch as their settlement and their improvements added to the value of the real estate, they should be allowed one-half the value of any lot they wished to buy.

This was not all; it is enough to say that by the loose terms of the act any one who stuck even a piece of tin pipe in the ground was entitled to buy the lot at half its appraised value.

And this is actually what happened in Muskogee on one of the lots now worth thousands of dollars which the

"improver" bought for a small figure on account of his improvement to the land. The act also was so loose in its terms that any squatter might do even this piece of rascality after the act was a law. The law spoke of "legal occupancy" and "titles" but did not describe what a "legal right" was. Moreover the occupant might pay for it in installments but no penalty was fixed to forfeit the right of the man to his land if he did not pay the installments.

The law was bad enough. But worse things were to come.

On the slightest claim the Creeks were defrauded of their land. Landsharks made up dummy lists of owners, some were actual citizens who had never seen the land, others were minors, still others held claims for lands without being aware of the fact and others were purely fictitious names. The deeds (many of them forged) were shown by the agent to the Dawes commission and no other proof of citizenship was required. In the evidence it was brought out that the agents actually stole by forgery what they had given to men for their own purposes.

Mr. William Dudley Foulke was sent out as special commissioner in this matter, he found that the town site commissioners themselves admitted that they had no knowledge or information whether the quitclaim deeds which the agents showed them had ever been delivered and said that they had no knowledge of whom the deeds were made to. One commissioner said, "I do not know that I gave that much consideration. I thought that the nation was doing well to get some pay for them." There were thirty towns thus stolen from the Creek nation.

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It is generally known in Oklahoma that Haskell had some of these lots and it seems probable that if a grand jury has found sufficient evidence to indict the governor there is something in it. One of the inspectors stated that in his opinion there were very few men who had a legal title to the land.

M. L. Mott who is the attorney for the Creek nation says:

"In the controversy last fall between Haskell and me I wrote two open letters charging him with the very frauds for which the grand jury has now indicted him. He denied those charges then. I stated then that I had in my possession the sworn statements of the 200 'dummies' that Haskell had used in carrying out his land frauds."

If all the other "high characterized citizens" of Muskogee are in the same degree innocent it may be true that these are the pick of the state of Oklahoma.

It may easily be that the grand jury being also composed of these same citizens will follow the legislature of that state in declaring Haskell guilty but the Creeks it is to be hoped will be able to recover in the civil suits which are tried before the United States court.

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