

REPORT OF PUBLIC LAND COMMISSION

Not many documents sent to congress by a president, which contain such far-reaching recommendations, have caused less notice than the report of the public lands commission, printed last week, with a special message from the president, heartily endorsing all its findings, and characterizing the subject as one of "great magnitude and importance."

The public lands commission is composed of W. A. Richards, commissioner of the general land office, Frederick H. Newell, chief engineer of the reclamation service, and Gifford Pinchot, chief forester.

Their report is a short document of a dozen pages, but it is a scathing, if dignified, arraignment of our various agricultural and timber land laws. If its recommendations are carried out by congress it will effect a smashing of cherished idols in the West and an overturn of a general practice of acquiring government land, because it is there to acquire and if one man don't get it, another man will.

Land Monopoly.

This report is one of the most profound documents which has come to congress for some time. In discussing the question of land monopoly, although not under that "yellow" head, it states that nearly everywhere in the West the large land owner has succeeded in securing the best tracts, whether of timber or agricultural land.

No specific acreages are stated in the report but to indicate the extent to which lands have been acquired by single corporations, a government engineer recently called attention, at a meeting of engineers, to a single tract of western land owned by a corporation embracing four million acres.

There has been some outcry against this condition, the report states, yet the lack of greater protest is significant. It is explained by the energy, shrewdness and influence of men to whom the continuance of the present land laws is desirable.

The "commission has had inquiries made as to how a number of estates, selected haphazard, have been acquired. Almost without exception, collusion or evasion of the letter and spirit of the land laws was involved. It is not necessary to be inferred that the present owners of these estates were dishonest, but the fact remains that their holdings were acquired or consolidated by practices which can not be defended.

Claims Patented Without Making of Homes.

"There exists and is spreading in the West a tenant or hired-labor system, which not only represents a relatively low industrial development, but whose further extension carries with it a most serious threat. Politically, socially, and economically, this system is indefensible. Had the land laws been effective and effectually enforced, its growth would have been impossible.

"The fundamental fact that characterizes the present situation is this: That the number of patents issued is increasing out of all proportion to the new homes."

The report states that under the timber and stone act "the government has lost and is losing yearly vast sums of money through the sale of valuable timber lands to speculators," and recommends in the public interest that the law should be repealed.

The lieu land forest reserve law is also criticized as a scandalous act and its immediate repeal recommended.

The commutation clause of the homestead law is also scored as having resulted in the entering of great areas of government land for the purpose of speculation.

Houses Built, But Not Occupied.

The homestead shanties of the commuters, it is stated, may be seen in various degrees of dilapidation, but they show no evidence of genuine occupation. The great bulk of the commuting business is transacted through some agent who represents his client in all dealings and prepares all papers to allow entry by school teachers, servants, etc., who are in no sense settlers.

The report denounces the desert land law as an instrument of speculation, fraud and perjury and recommends such radical changes in it as to amount almost to its repeal.

"Hundreds of desert entries were examined by the members of the commission in the last year, and the great majority of them were found to be uninhabited, unirrigated, uncultivated and with no improvements other than a fence. Many alleged irrigation ditches or reservoirs are familiar to the members of the commission, which are utterly inadequate to irrigate a square rod, and upon the strength of such works patent has been frequently issued to 320 acres."

The West Still the Great Unknown.
The commission states that the agricultural possibilities of the remaining public lands are as yet almost unknown, and lands which a generation ago, or even a decade, were supposed to be valueless are now producing large crops, either with or without irrigation.

"Because of possible development through irrigation, through the introduction of new plants, through new methods of farming, through forest preservation and grazing control, the remaining public lands have an importance hitherto but dimly foreseen."

Should Not Mortgage the Future.

"It is of the first importance to save the remaining public domain for actual home-builders to the utmost limit of future possibilities and not to mortgage the future by any disposition of the public lands, under which home-making will not keep step with the disposal." The commission reports against the 640-acre grazing homestead measures now pending in congress, and says:

"Until it can be definitely ascer-

taind that any given area of the public lands is and in all probability forever will remain unsuited to agricultural development, the title to the land should remain in the general government in trust for the future settler."

REVEAL GEOLOGICAL SECRETS. Well Drillers Find Pine Log 700 Feet Under Ground.

Mr. Schwabe, who resides on the Thomas McConnel place and is assisting in drilling the artesian well, was a La Grande visitor yesterday and stated that the well was now down 800 feet and would be driven another 100 feet, says the La Grande Observer. The study of the progress of this well brings to view some valuable information regarding the formation of the earth's crust in this valley.

At a point 700 feet below the surface the drill struck a yellow pine log which, from the pieces brought up, appears to be in a good state of preservation. Below the stratum in which the log was found came a stratum of quicksand. After passing through the sand a stratum of blue clay was found which was about 15 feet thick. The drill is now in quicksand again and the work of drilling is

therefore very slow, as the well fills up with the sand and the greater part of the time is taken up pumping the sand.

JAPANESE ORDER CANNED MEAT Three Hundred Tons Will Leave Portland Saturday.

Three hundred tons of canned meat will be carried to Japan on the steamer Numantia, which is due to arrive from the Orient on Saturday, says the Oregon Daily Journal. Space for the shipment was engaged this morning. The meat is coming from Chicago, and is for the use of the Japanese army. It is the biggest consignment of canned goods ever made from this port to the Far East.

The traffic from the Eastern states to the Orient by way of Portland is rapidly increasing. It is not so many months ago that flour, wheat and lumber comprised the entire list of products sent on steamers sailing from this port; but recently they have been carrying manufactured goods and raw material of all sorts produced in the Middle West, Atlantic and Southern states. Chief among these have been tobacco, cotton and machinery. The Japanese are not meat consumers to any great extent, but it is said they are gradually acquiring the taste for it.

If the demand in the Orient for goods from the Eastern states continues to increase, it will be but a short time before regular liners operating from Portland will be unable to han-

dle all the business. But the local officials of the Portland & Asiatic Steamship company say that the matter of adding another steamer to the fleet has not yet been given any consideration. When it becomes apparent that more tonnage is required, it is announced that the matter will be given prompt attention. With the large number of tramp steamers now on the disengaged list tonnage can easily be secured at a reasonable rate.

Local Option is Upheld.

Judge Bradshaw last week handed down a decision in the circuit court, upholding the local option law in Hood River, and deciding that the city must pay the saloon men the rebate on their licenses. The attorneys for the city have given notice of appeal to the supreme court of the state. When P. F. Fouts filed his suit against the city to recover \$260 as rebate on unexpired saloon license the city's attorneys filed a demurrer, questioning the constitutionality of the local option law. The case was argued before Judge Bradshaw and on Thursday of last week the judge overruled the demurrer, thereby sustaining the validity of the law. Judgment was rendered in favor of Fouts for the amount claimed.—Glacier.

L. M. Poole is the first man to be convicted in Washington under the new law concerning men living off the earnings of fallen women. He was sentenced at Spokane to five years in the penitentiary.

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