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## Times-Herald.

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## A STATE THAT IS IN PAWN

### NEVADA CONTROLLED BY BIG CATTLEMEN AND POLITICIANS.

An Act of Congress Twenty Years Ago Ruined Prospects of State—Act Has Now Expired by Limitation.

The question is often asked, "What is the matter with Nevada?" With an area of 71 million acres, 95 per cent of this 37-year-old state is still owned by the federal government. With much fertile soil, less than 3 per cent of the area is under fence and only about one-half of 1 per cent is under cultivation. The climate is unsurpassed, the soil produces all desired and profitable crops, there are farming lands, stock ranches, mines, railroads and eight large streams with their branches furnishing water. Notwithstanding these advantages population and wealth have steadily decreased, and during the past twelve months but nineteen homestead filings were accredited to Nevada, out of the 68,000 or more recorded in the general land office at Washington from the public land states.

It is not difficult at this time to say just what has hindered the development of this Western state, for Nevada has reached a turning point in her history. There have been minor difficulties such as competition of California on the west and Colorado, Utah and other states on the east, the earlier disincorporation of the Central Pacific railroad to develop intermediate territory, aridity of soil and a decrease in the general prosperity of the silver mining interests. The cause of Nevada's trouble, however, lies deeper than this and may be said to have largely originated in the policy adopted toward the state by congress in the disposal of public lands.

Every public land state, upon being admitted to the Union, has received from the federal government title to sections 16 and 36 in every township. In every state this has amounted to a magnificent domain, and as provided by the enabling acts of each state has been leased or sold, as the case might be, and the revenue devoted to the public schools. Nevada was given this land when admitted as a state in 1864. In the twenty years following admission little attention was paid to agriculture. The great Comstock mine of Virginia City furnished nearly all the material prosperity of the state, and agriculture even in the form of live stock raising was looked upon as a very minor industry.

In 1880, when in careless or indifferent mood, congress enacted a law at the instigation of a few far-seeing Nevada cattlemen by which the school sections 16 and 36 were taken back into the possession of the United States, in return for this refund of land, Congress authorized the state of Nevada to select 2 million acres of federal land in any part of the state desired, and as fast as selections have been made title has been given. It is not too much to say that from this piece of legislation have arisen practically all the ills which have afflicted this Western commonwealth.

The live stock growers of the Pacific coast were quick to see the advantages to be obtained under this law, and they secured the passage of a state law which made it possible for one man to obtain control of as much land as he might need and in such localities as he might choose. The Nevada legislature enacted a land law which gave each citizen the right to buy 640 acres of state land. The privilege was not confined to residents of the state, and the land was sold only after being selected by those who were to buy.

A cattleman desiring to secure control of a range filed an application with the state government for the purchase of 640 acres of land, this land probably being distributed in 40 acre tracts along one or more of the numerous well watered and fertile valleys of Nevada. It was not necessary that

this cattleman should confine his application to 640 acres, however, for the law allowed him to act as agent for others; so all he had to do was to use the names of his family or friends, as the case might be, and file applications for as many 640s as he cared to pay for. The state law provides that the land shall be sold for \$1.25 an acre. Twenty-five cents an acre deposit is required at the time of purchase; the balance is held upon twenty-years' time, with 6 per cent interest, with the privilege of paying up at anytime the applicant may see fit. The state land board took no interest in these locations, other than to file applications for the land with the United States government charging the acreage to the 2 million acre grant which had been made by congress.

This two million acres is now exhausted and the people of Nevada have an opportunity to review the workings of this peculiar act. They find that through its instrumentality probably one-third of all the land in the state now under private ownership has passed into the hands of a few cattlemen, most of them non-residents. Less than a dozen men own over 1 million acres of land, and this is a state where there are less than 4 million acres which are not still owned by the United States government. So long as this state law prevailed and government land could be secured under the state grant it is evident that no citizen would care to avail himself of the federal land laws, such as the homestead act or the desert act, with their more onerous conditions to be fulfilled before title could be secured.

That this is so is shown in the records of the land office, for in 1899 there were but three homesteads filed in the entire state of Nevada, only nine proved upon and not a single desert land claim, timber claim or stone claim was filed under the federal laws. The state law made land ownership to those who had influence and control of the water supply too easy for them to resort to federal channels. Hereafter any citizen obtaining land in the state of Nevada will be compelled to secure it under the federal law, but the trouble is that under the shrewd distribution of the state holdings all the water, all of the fertile valleys and nearly all of the available range, dependent as it is upon water and meadow, has been secured by those who manipulated the state grant.

The agricultural population of Nevada has remained stationary for several years, owing to this peculiar condition of the land ownership. The population of the state is now 43,355, a decrease of 3,426 in the past 10 years. There is a large proportion of voters in this population, there being about 11,660. This is due to the fact that the mines and ranches employ an unusual proportion of single men. The taxable property of the state amounts to 30 million dollars and the tax rate is low. Some of the leading men in Nevada have spared no effort to induce immigration and to encourage the development of their state, but they feel almost hopeless, for their work has resulted in practically nothing. The state itself recently advertised that it would give free title to all land which was reclaimed by any one under the provision of the Carey act, by which congress allowed each of the arid land states 1 million acres if such land was irrigated. There has been no response to this advertisement, and there will be none, for the land which could have been irrigated under the Carey act or under the desert land act in Nevada has been gathered in by the great non-resident live stock companies of California and other places.

Such an economic condition as is here represented has resulted in the notoriously corrupt condition of politics, which has made the name of Nevada a byword through the United States. The population of the state is so small, so large a proportion of the vote is controlled by a few men and money plays such an important part in the selection

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## MENACE TO THE SMALL MEN

### IT WOULD SOON PUT SMALL STOCKMAN OUT OF BUSINESS.

The Views of a Correspondent in the Sunday Oregonian on Proposed Range Leasing Law—Writer a Stockman.

Portland, Or. (To the Editor.)—While on various trips through Eastern Oregon and other grazing sections of the West, I have heard the question frequently propounded as to whether or not there was any likelihood of the passage, by the Government, of a "range lease law." Being myself a stockowner, I at once became much interested in the proposed measure.

From personal observation and careful research of this question while traveling through these range sections, I have certainly concluded that the smaller stock owners have much to fear from the enactment of such a law by the national government. In this great grazing country most of the springs, streams and valleys which lie contiguous to the mountain range (in isolated places, where one would least suspect it) I find in almost every case the land surveyed and homesteaded by the employes and hired men of the wealthy cattle companies and under their control and jurisdiction and in cases where a sufficient number of men could not be secured by the large stock companies to take up and hold the land containing springs and streams for the benefit of those stock concerns, scrip has been laid on the greater portion of the balance of such land.

Any person at all acquainted with range countries and stock industries will readily perceive that stock cannot long live and prosper unless access can be had to water. It is intended, as I understand it, that the proposed law is to be so framed that each rancher shall be allowed to lease Government range in proportion to the number of acres owned.

In view of the methods heretofore pursued by the large cattle-owners in securing control and management of large areas and tracts of watered and desirable grazing lands, it is easy to see the effect such a law would produce.

In the event of the enactment of such a law, what is to become of small stockowners? He will be unable to continue in business, his property will be confiscated, and fall in the hands of the more wealthy concerns. The watered portions having been taken, the less desirable or desert lands only could be leased from the government by the small stockraiser. Under these conditions the man of limited means, with only land enough to raise sufficient hay to sustain his flock during the winter months, will soon be compelled to give up his business.

Then, again, there is another class of persons, who, for a livelihood, depend upon raising hay to sell to sheepowners, who possess flocks and no land; they, too, would soon be forced to give up their business. Some stockmen are successful in their business without owning ranches, but who depend upon buying hay and feed from those who make a business of raising such for market. This business in many cases is carried on by aged men who are unable to endure the hardships incident to the handling of stock and who make a comfortable living by remaining at home and raising hay and feed to be used by the owners of flocks. Such as these the law should be designed to protect, rather than to compel them to give up their occupation.

I am informed that a congressman recently traveled through the range country of Eastern Oregon accompanied by members of the large cattle companies, riding in the companies' carriages and expressing himself very favorably to a "government lease law." The small stockowner is fearful that by this means the Congressman may be (without fault of his) unjustly influenced against their interests.

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