

Everybody's Magazine

VOL. XII.

MAY, 1905.

No. 5.

The West Coast Land Grafters

By BAILEY MILLARD

EDITOR'S NOTE.—In 1850 Henry Miller landed in this country, a poor German butcher boy. To-day he is owner of 14,539,000 acres of the richest land in California and Oregon—more than 22,500 square miles, a territory three times as large as New Jersey! How did he get it? Well, here's a statement that shows how some other Land Kings of the West Coast got their holdings, and describes the amazing, stupefying graft in the land business of the West, and the questionable practises for which Senator Mitchell and Congressman Hermann of Oregon stand indicted to-day. Here are given details showing how the Government and the home-seekers have been plundered. The career of John A. Benson, from his start as a land surveyor, through his fraudulent titles, his false measurements, his imaginative maps, to his selling back to the Government lands stolen from it, is vividly presented. The Oregon situation, with its indicted Senator, Representatives, and United States District Attorney, is clearly described. So many prominent men have been indicted for Land Graft that to give their names would be, says Mr. Millard, "a sort of roll-call of nearly all who have secured large holdings of fertile lands in Oregon and California!" And this is only a beginning.

OUTWARDLY the real-estate man seemed honest enough, though he used all the dubious catchwords and ready-made phrases of his calling. I had been acquainted with him for a long time, but I did not know him as the agent of the land grafters, who always work in the dark.

"It's a gilt-edged proposition," said he to me. "You make five thousand dollars and it costs you nothing. Legitimate? Why, it's as legitimate as the schemes of any of the big holders. But you must keep quiet, for there will no doubt be a contest. Here's the idea."

Then he unfolded the plan, and while he talked I quietly sketched a future of purple and gold. A branch railway was to be built to the springs, and a summer resort to be established there. Close to the springs were the hundred acres, the title to which did not really vest in its claimants, the land being, in fact, free for entry. If I would go and live upon the land, the Moneyed Principals would build a cottage for me and give me a year's provisions and supplies. They would pre-

pare all the necessary papers and pay all the fees; at the end of the year they would take the land and pay me five thousand dollars for it. The hundred acres lay in a charming valley which would be a delightful place of residence.

But the necessary papers—could I see any of them? Yes; here was the blank form of application and the affidavit. The application was easy; but the affidavit? I must swear that my application was made in good faith, for the purposes of actual settlement and cultivation and not for the benefit of any other person or corporation; I must swear I was not in collusion with any person to give him the benefit of the land entered; I must swear not to make any agreement with any person by which the title I might acquire should inhere in whole or in part to the benefit of any person except myself.

I gasped.

"But you want me now to agree to deed the land to your people," said I.

"Certainly," said he.

"And aside from the making of this false