



JOHN A. BENSON, THE KING OF THE LAND GRAFTERS.

The first portrait shows him as he looks to-day, indicted scores of times, but never convicted: the second, taken thirty years ago, shows him as he looked when he began his career of grafting.

affidavit, I shall have to go on the stand in your anticipated contest and swear repeatedly, in reply to the questions of the lawyers, that I am in collusion with no one in this matter."

"That's about it," he owned.

"In other words, I shall have to perjure myself not only before the notary, but over and over again in court, the Lord knows how often, to earn that five thousand dollars."

"Well, you needn't put it so strongly as that."

"But that's the way I *do* put it," said I, with rising heat, "for that's the way it actually is."

"But," he insisted, "it's the regular thing. Applications and affidavits are filed every day for the benefit of men who are acquiring thousands of acres, and the most that is generally paid is one hundred dollars an entry. The reason why we are willing to pay more in this case is that the land is of high value, and we can't afford to let a common dummy act for us."

I bowed my acknowledgment of the compliment.

"It's done every day," he repeated. "They all do it. It's the regular thing. You needn't worry about it."

As he talked on, his words had a calming influence upon me. After all, who would be harmed by the transaction? Nobody but

myself; and would not the five thousand dollars be sufficient indemnity? They all did it. Was I more righteous than the rest? For a moment that strangely resilient thing, Land Conscience—that something which one neither fears nor very much regards when one is reaching forth for acres for himself or others—freed me from moral qualms. Frankly, I came near losing myself in the jungle of the man's sophistry. I will confess that the harrowing fear of those awful lawyers, with their awful questions, was the chief reason for my sad shake of the head and my reluctant refusal of the offer. If you have never tested your Land Conscience, you are not qualified to judge my momentary moral delinquency. Land Conscience is one of the most self-deceptive of human attributes.

Now, many times before I had heard of land frauds and had taken them for granted, as have other landless and incurious citizens; but when the busy, buzzing machinery of the great ring of grafters was thus vividly exposed to my view, I became subtly alive to the meaning of these things. Since then I have been making a study of the manner in which the land kings of the Pacific Coast acquired their tremendous holdings, and have been pursuing the question of land frauds generally, beginning with the manipulation of the old Spanish and Mexican grants in