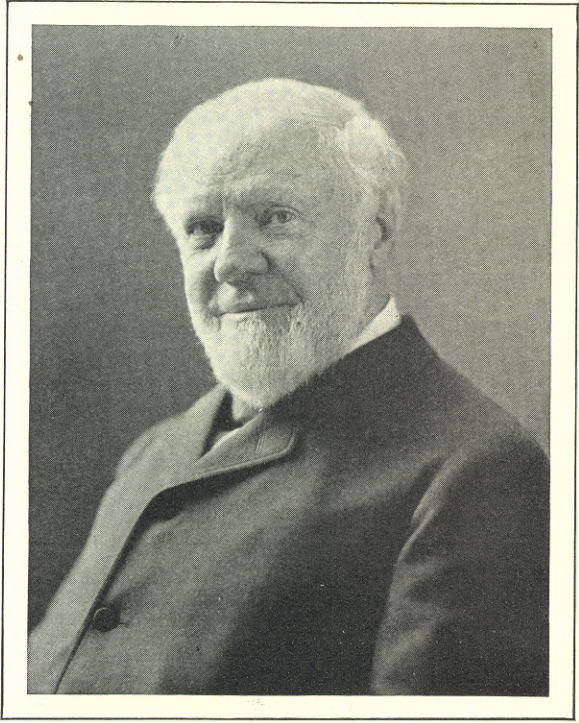


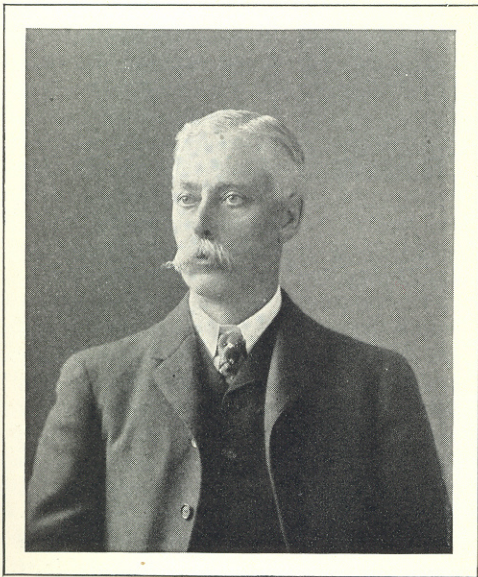
former Mexican Governor of California, had easily stolen a million acres. He saw how old grants had been stretched to include three times their original territory. He saw how the Mariposa grant, originally in the form of a plain quadrangle, was "floated" miles and miles out of its first boundaries, to take in valuable outlying mines, until it had assumed the form of a boot. He saw how one grant, a square, inoffensive-looking affair on the map, had stretched forth legs and antennæ here and there, until it looked for all the world like a huge tarantula. He saw how the Los Megaños tract, in Contra Costa County, had been repeatedly stretched until twenty-five square leagues of land had been claimed when only three could be located by proper metes and bounds. He learned how, in measuring the grant-lands, the surveyors of the old days would take a riata of a certain length instead of a chain and stretch it and their Land Conscience as far as they could, and then drive the stakes anywhere.



*Photograph by Taber, San Francisco.*

LLOYD TEVIS.

This benevolently smiling old gentleman put miles of fence around public land that was not his.



*Photograph by Taber, San Francisco.*

FREDERICK A. HYDE.

His operations in taking up whole townships by means of dummy entrymen attracted Benson's attention, and they became partners in land grafting.

He saw that although no one man could legally acquire more than 1,120 acres under any combination of the public-land acts, yet, as a matter of fact, single individuals and companies owned vast tracts which a few years before were in the hands of the Government.

All these things John Benson saw; and he determined to profit by the understanding. He resigned as deputy surveyor and mapped out a magnificent plan of action, which comprehended the obtaining of large contracts for the surveying of Government lands, the employment of men to act as his deputies in the field, the securing of allies and confederates in the local land offices and those of the various surveyors-general, and even of reaching over to Washington and enlisting men in the General Land Office to help him to millions.

There had been defrauders of the land department before—robber-bees that had buzzed about and belted themselves with golden rings—but Benson, with his far-seeing eye, visualized a system beside which all the