

schemes in this line looked like petty larcenies. For, after all, the operations of the whisky ring, of the Star Route swindlers, of the Belknap frauds, have been as nothing to those of the land grafters of California and Oregon.

Benson was a man of hypnotic power. It was not long before a nod of his head or a wave of his hand meant more in the land offices than many a ream-long petition, with ever so many signers. He made a close study of the land laws. He knew what he could do and what he could not do. During all his gigantic operations in the West for the past twenty-four years, in which over five million acres have been tied up as the result of his pernicious activities, he has never really been within the grip of the law until now. He has from the first known the brutal power of money, and he has safely counted upon it. He has had, behind him, through good and evil report, one of the most solid financial institutions in the West—the Nevada Bank of San Francisco.

As we have seen, Benson's word was mighty in the land office. He was able to have all his field-men appointed as deputy-surveyors without their knowledge. He took contracts in their names and had them sign—in blank—bonds, contracts, powers of attorney, etc., of the import of which they knew nothing. Many of these unwitting deputies were mere boys, who understood little about the work in which they were supposed to be engaged. One of them, in whose name Benson took out contracts to the amount of \$50,000, confessed that he would not know a solar compass if he saw one. So readily did the officials fall in with Benson's schemes that they accepted bonds of surveyors from store clerks, mechanics, street-car conductors, and others, wholly without worldly goods. Rarely was an oath of office required. Surveyors of

seventeen or eighteen years of age were qualified.

Often for whole seasons the field-work of the Benson gang was the merest sham. In the California counties of Sonoma, Mendocino, and Monterey, township after township for which survey-plots were made and field-notes written up was never seen by the surveyor. In central Monterey County, where mile after mile of lines was supposed to have been run, not a stake was driven. Men who tried to locate land under the homestead or timber-claim acts could not find a single corner. And yet the Government accepted the surveys and paid Benson, in the name of his

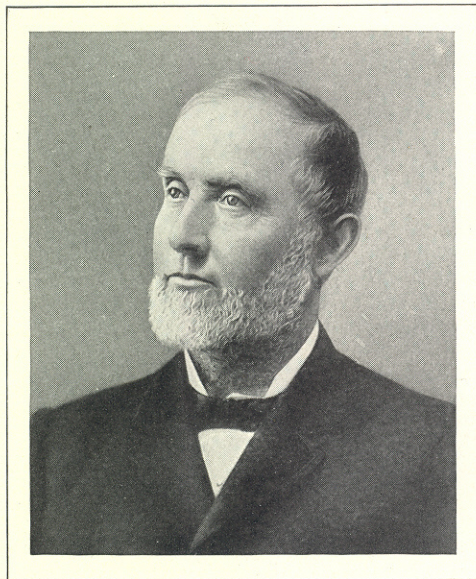
dummies, hundreds of thousands of dollars for them.

How was the fraud accomplished?

Simply by "faking" the surveys, which were made in back offices in San Francisco by men who did not go within a hundred miles of the land. The surveyor would take a county map, which showed some of the more prominent topographical features. That would give him a field to work upon where there was no need to weary himself by dragging a jingling chain through the brush. From this map he could make up a fanciful survey-

plot on a larger scale, showing land-monuments, blazed trees, rocks, hills, and other natural objects for the prescribed metes and bounds. Often blazed trees would be put into an utterly treeless plain, and branches of streams would be made to run three to four miles out of their true course. It is a noteworthy fact that the maps of these surveys were among the finest ever sent to the surveyor-general's office. They were things of beauty, full of fine details, and so satisfactory that, at first, there was not the slightest hesitation on the part of the officials in signing warrants in payment for them.

Benson soon became a very rich man and



HENRY MILLER.

A butcher boy when he reached this country, but now owner of an area three times the size of New Jersey.