CHAPTER II

PEOPLING THE NATION

The wealth over which the people of the United States were struggling in 1878 had been drawn from a magnificent estate over 3,000,000 square miles, in extent (3,026,789 - Alaska excepted. Fully one third of this area, about one million square miles, still belonged to the Federal Government. The other two million square miles was in the hands of the states, of corporations, of individuals. The farmers owned less than half of it, or to put it into acres, something like 537,193,538 of the 1,248,000,000 acres.

The most densely populated sections of this domain were that known as the North Atlantic Division including in addition to the New England States New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Here a land surface of 162,103 square miles accommodated 14,507,407 people. The most sparsely populated was the Western Division made up of eleven of our present states, seven of which were still territories. There on a land surface of 1,175,742 square miles was scattered a population of 1,767,694, slightly over one to a square mile. (1)

1) Compendium of the Twelfth Census. Page 32.

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Outside of the Western Division there was more unsettled land per man in the Dakotas neither of which had as yet been admitted to statehood than elsewhere in the country. The center of population lay in Kentucky, eight miles west by south of Cincinnati, Ohio. In twenty years it had moved 99.6 (102) miles Westward, 4.2 Northward. (1)

The task before the country if it was to hasten its ambition of rapid development was to push this center south/westward, north westward, that is it must fill its waste places with people.

The National Government led in this drive for settlers. The one million square miles it owned was what was left of an immense public domain originating in gifts by the states, chief of them New York and Virginia, to the General Government on condition that they be held and used for "the common benefit of the United States." How best secure that benefit? The government had adopted the policy of distributing the land on easy terms and in small parcels to the actual settler (2), but by the opening of this period it was apparent, as President Cleveland was to tell the country in his first annual message (December 8, 1885) that "Laws which were intended for the common benefit have been perverted so that large quantities of land are resting in single ownerships.....

1) The World Almanac, 1935. Page 261

2) Fish, C. R. The Rise of the Common Man, A History of American Life. VI, 126-131; Cole, A. C. The Irrepressible Conflict (same series VII, 115-119; Nevins, Allan, Emergence of Modern America. 118-121

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"It is not for the common benefit of the United States that a large area of the public lands should be acquired directly or through fraud by a single individual..... A rapidly growing population creates a growing demand for homes and the accumulation of wealth inspires an eager competition to obtain the public land for speculative purposes."

And Mr. Cleveland added this prophetic word - "In the future this collision of interest will be more marked than in the past." (1)

The states went along with the Federal Government in its effort to entice settlers on to the then unoccupied lands. As each had come into the Union the Federal Government had bestowed upon it as a dower a tract of the public domain within its boundary. This land was to be used "for the common benefit" that is, for the development of schools, roads, railways, settlements. Where large tracks still remained in the states' possession strenuous efforts were made to bring in settlers; Immigration Bureaus were set up, each with its own technique. (2) Missouri, for example, established a bureau with a commission and an appropriation. Its duty was to collect information about the resources of the state, its undeveloped land fit for farms, its minerals and timber, its railroads and its waters and to spread this abroad in pamphlets, maps, "essays and articles." (3)

1) Messages and Papers of the Presidents. Vol. VIII. Page 359

2) Schlesinger, A. M. The Rise of the City. Pages 15,16, 27-34, 55, 57, 64, 66.

3) Annual Cyclopaedia for 1880. Vol. IV. Pages 641,642

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Practically every state in the Union was doing something of this kind, including most of those East of the center of population. Here it was not as in Missouri "land which has never been brought under cultivation." It was a growing anxiety about an increasing exodus from cultivated land - the reason for it. In the decade from 1880 to 1890 the abandonment of land in New England states became a concern of all their Boards of Agriculture. (1)

In Rhode Island the secretary reported that neglected or untilled farms were found in every county. The forest was engulfing many of them; once handsome homes were falling into decay. When the actual number of farms came to be counted it was not so great - three hundred forty nine in all, in November 1900 - something over thirty thousand acres. The object of this investigation and these reports was to find settlers who were willing to buy land at the low prices at which they were offered - the average price - $14.00 per acre. By 1891 a movement for the reoccupation of abandoned farms was well under way in Massachusettes, New Hampshire, Vermont, as well as in Rhode Island.

The railroads, particularly those West of the Mississippi, were the most active of the land boosters. Their future depended on settling the country and developing its resources. "Each mile of railroad constructed in a new country is a kind of centrifugal pump furnishing for exportation hundreds of tons of the products of such country." (2)

1) Schlesinger, A. M. The Rise of the City. 69-72

2) Bernard, M. F. Journal des Economistes quoted by David A. Wells in "Recent Economic Changes." Page 176

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At the beginning of our period the process of consolidating railroads into systems similar to those of the East was going on dramatically in the territory beyond the Mississippi where five trunk lines laid, or soon to be laid, tied the East to the West. The first of these, the Union Pacific, was opened in 1869. (1) In 1881 the Atchinson, Topeka and Santa Fe joined the Southern Pacific at Deming, New Mexico making a second through if irregular route. Two years later it had straightened itself out by running its line due West from Santa Fe to California while the Southern Pacific had gone Eastward to New Orleans. This gave two routes roughly three hundred miles apart south of the Mid-Continental route. (2)

The first through route north of the Union Pacific was the Northern Pacific opened in 1883. A second, the Great Northern paralleling the Canadian border and terminating at Puget Sound crossed North Dakota but those who knew the dreams, purposes and methods of its builder, James J. Hill, ———————————

1) For building of Union Pacific see Nevins, Allan - The Emergence of Modern America. Pages 53-55. See Footnote and Index.

2) Ripley, William Z. Railway Problems. Page 417.
Haney, Congressional History of Railways, Chapter IX

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looked on this fifth trunk line as good as finished to Puget Sound.

The ambition of each man at the head of one of these transcontinental arteries was to control as large a block of adjacent territory as he could reach before a rival entered. If a rival did come to contest his ambition the usual procedure was to force him out or into his combination. The fact that a railroad had made a place for itself in a certain district had become a valuable servant of the territory, did not protect it from attack. There was the Denver and Rio Grande which had undertaken in 1870 to connect Denver with the capital of Mexico and little by little it had worked southward across the mountains to the banks of the Rio Grande.

About 1875 the Atkinson, Topeka and Santa Fe reached Pueblo on its way to California. The two roads arranged to use each other's tracks for traffic in and out of the territory, each tapped a natural arrangement. It did not last. The Santa Fe decided to parallel center stretches of the Denver and Rio Grande. And then there came a tremendous tooth and claw struggle over rights of way. There was loss of life; loss of property; a wasteful interference with established business. This unholy row which went on through 1879 was typical of what had happened and was still to happen in the building up of these transportation empires.

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It was not however along the tracks that the warfare was usually carried on or where it was most destructive. These reversals to savagery were soon over. The great wars, the great plundering, belonged to the field of finance. There had been a day when the promoter of a railway was looked upon by the innocent public as a benefactor.

"Laws were passed," said the Interstate Commerce Commission in its first report in 1887, "under which municipal bodies were allowed to give public money, or loan public credit in aid of his schemes on an assumption that almost any road would prove reasonably remunerative, but that in any event the indirect advantages which the public would reap must more than compensate for the expenditures.

"In time it came to be perceived that these sanguine expectations were delusive. A very large proportion of all the public money invested in railroads was wholly sunk and lost. Many roads were undertaken by parties who were without capital, and who relied upon obtaining it by a sale of bonds to a credulous public. The corporation thus without capital was bunkrupt from its inception, and the corporators were very likely to be mere adventurers who would employ their chartered powers in such manner as would most conduce to their personal ends."

By 1880 railroad financing was largely in the hands of the men who had set out to develop transportation states of which they would be the rulers; four such states were fairly well defined West of the Mississippi by 1880. The center of the first and oldest was San Francisco, the metropolis of the West coast. In and out of it flowed the immense wealth of the mines and timber lands of the Coast. The men who had built and who controlled the railroad centering in San Francisco controlled the resources of the Coast. These men were Leland Stanford, Collis P. Huntington, Charles Crocker and

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Mark Hopkins. (1)

They were the builders of the Central and Southern Pacific which before the end of our period was to pass into the hands of one of the ablest railroad consolidators and operators the country had ever seen, the late E. H. Harriman.

Three cities of the Southwest, St. Louis, Kansas City and Denver, were the feeding points of a second immense railroad kingdom. Its satrap, Jay Gould, had come into the country after a long and successful carewr of plundering the Erie.(2) By 1880 he had gained control of the Union Pacific and undertook a grandiose scheme of consolidation which before the end of our period was to conclude in what was called the Gould group:- The Missouri Pacific, the Texas and Pacific, St. Louis and Southwestern, International and Great Northern, the Denver and Rio Grande, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas, the Rio Grande Western and the Wabash - over sixteen thousand miles of rail. (3)

Gould was working steadily on the building up of this great kingdom in the '80's and his methods of work, his financial manoeuvres, were such as to make him both the most feared and the most hated man operating in the Southwest.

In the extreme Northwest the young state of Oregon and its adjacent territory, a third smaller but immensely promising

1) Myers, Davis. History of the Great American Fortunes. Vol. III. Page 124

2) Nevins, Allan. Emergence of Modern America. Pages 194-199
3) Industrial Commission. Vol. XIX. Page 308

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

transportation kingdom, had been staked out by one not a railroad man by training or association, Henry Villard, who in the '70's had come to the Coast in the interest of a group of German clients who held bonds in certain small lines in California and Oregon from which they were getting no interest and no reports. Villard's examination of the properties and of the resources of the country on which they depended convinced him that the Valley of the Columbia and the little city of Portland, only about 17,500 in population when Villard first saw it, was destined to be the center of an immense wealth which he believed to be ready for the taking.

The fertility of the Valley of the Columbia and its tributaries, the endless stretches of timber, the possible mineral wealth, all excited Villard. He dreamed of a transportation system which would be a "benevolent monopoly" where he would direct settlers in developing what he, alone, would carry and he did not rest until he had collected all the small water and rail transportation companies of the territory system into what was called the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company. In spite of the fact that he was neither a railroad man nor a financier Villard had no trouble in getting money for his consolidation. He had won the admiration of Wall Street by a recent handling of Jay Gould in an attempted raid he was making on the Kansas and Pacific, of which Villard was then receiver.

It had been a long fight ending in Villard securing a fair value for the property entrusted to him.

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He was quite justified in saying, as he does in his memoirs describing this transaction that the triumphant issue of his contest with "that most unscrupulous and most dreaded machinator" raised him to a position of influence in American financial circles. (1)

That position enabled him to put over in 1881 one of the most spectacular financial coups of the period - the "blind pool" - as it is called in Wall Street history.

The Northern Pacific had come into money having sold what was for a time a huge issue of bonds - $40,000,000 and Villard feared it would invade his territory by continuing its line down the Columbia to the sea. The only way to control the situation was to buy in to Northern Pacific, assure himself a place on its Board. But if this was to be done it must be done secretly and in February 1881 he sent a confidential circular to fifty persons asking them to subscribe to a fund of $8,000,000, the object of which he would reveal to them later. Twenty-four hours after the

1) Memoirs of Henry Villard. Vol. II. Page 283

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circular was issued twice the amount had been subscribed and applicants were begging for more.

When the plan was finally revealed to the chosen fifty they at once subscribed an extra $12,000,000. As Mr. Willard was now able to buy a controlling interest in Northern Pacific there was nothing for the management to do but to allow him the representation that he sought. The President resigned andin September 1881 Mr. Villard was made President. (1) He at once proceeded with great energy to spend the money in the Treasury to complete the Northern Pacific and in 1883 the ceremony of driving the last spike took place in Western Montana. A tremendous celebration - the greatest in the railroad world since the day in 1869 when the Union and Centeral Pacific was joined up by a gold spike. (2)

The completion of the Northern Pacific might well have shattered Mr. James J. Hill's dream of a route to Puget Sound, but Mr. Hill was not alarmed. To one of his partners who knowing his grandiose scheme was worried about the threat to it, he wrote -

"I think the time is at hand when railway property generally will be tested by its capacity to pay net earnings, and we have some neighbours who will surely have difficulty in making both ends meet. I think the Northern Pacific will have its greatest trial when its line is built through and its finances

1) Memoirs of Henry Villard. Vol. II P. 300

2) Idem P. 309 - 312

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are no longer sustained by sales of bonds, but all payments must be made from earnings; then I think they will need help much more than at present." (1)

However, the Northern Pacific was through. It tapped a great country, but it was soon to learn that, as Mr. Hill said, "earnings and not stock quotations make a road great."

James J. Hill who had made this wise prophecy headed the fourth great western transportation state centering in St. Paul. He was a born transportation man and a new type of railroad leader, one who held that traffic and its development were more important to the future of the road than the amount of stock and bonds it could float.

Hill, "That Hill," as he was called in the Northwest was an Irish-Canadian's son who as a boy had decided to make India his home and establish a transportation line on the Brahmaputra

from his home in Ontario
When he was eighteen he started for India/but got no farther than St. Paul where he took a job in a house handling Mississippi River freight.

From that time on his life was to be spent on transportation - not on the rivers of India but on the rivers and plains of the country where he had been stopped on his route to India. Every form of transportation in the hard, hustling days of this country when James Hill came into it, in 1851, he touched. Before twenty years were over he had become one of the most influential business men in the Northwest and certainly no one equalled him in knowledge of its resources or in faith in them.

1) Pyle, Joseph Gilpin. The Life of James J. Hill. Vol. I. Page 337. (1917)

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He had seen the traffic of the Mississippi, once the only incoming traffic power, displaced by rails from the Southwest. He had seen endless plans for railroads made, rights of way secured, great grants of land going with them, stock sold, and he had appraised these roads for what they were worth. His great dream was to reach Winnipeg by the Red River Valley. And finally he became an owner of boats, able to carry on traffic in competition with the great monopoly of that part of the world, the Hudson'sBay Company and win their respect, even co-operation, something not common in the period.

Hill had seen the Northern Pacific routed and begun. He had seen, too, how the Northern Pacific had made its plans to absorb all the various little roads included in what was known as the St. Paul and Pacific, to go up the Red River Valley to Winnipeg - his route. But, up to 1873, he had seen no means of doing anything to halt its ambition and then came the panic of 1873, terribly crippling the Northern Pacific and practically prostrating the St. Paul and Pacific.

It would be hard to find a parallel in the country, rich as it is in stories of railroad inefficiency and plundering that equals that of the St. Paul and Pacific. It was not a system though it posed as one; it was a set of fragmentary roads, "a formless creation of enterprise speculation and greed." (1)

1) Pyle, Joseph Gilpin. The Life of James J. Hill. Vol. I. Page 58 (1917)

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James Hill, knowing that the only group in the country that really desired the St. Paul and Pacific was disabled, at least temporarily, formed what to his associates seemed the mad plan of buying it himself. He was not a rich man, though the businesses which he had built up in twenty years were all of them sound and prosperous. They included a line of boats on the Red River, a big coal business, warehouses - enterprises which had grown logically out of the needs of the country, needs which he had seen and which he had met by his daring and by his energy.

Now he went to work to find partners who would aid him in buying the St. Paul & Pacific. He found them, the most important being the agent of the Hudson Bay Company, the most powerful man in Western Canada, later to be known as Lord Strathcona, a man who knew Hill and who had himself both a knowledge and breadth of outlook to understand the possibilities in a well managed St. Paul and Pacific in the development of the Northwest.

By 1878 it had become certain that the collection of fragments known as the St. Paul & Pacific was safely in the hands of Hill and his friends. Moreover, that they were doing the incredible thing of raising some $44,000,000 to put their property into shape. That is, at the beginning of the period of this book there had been launched in the Northwest a combination which promised to give to Minnesota, Wisconsin and Dakota an outlet such as they had never had into Canada; and, as Hill was soon to see an outlet to the Pacific which would break the complete monopoly the Northern Pacific dreamed of building.

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here was
Moreover, a new type of railroad management for that part of the world. Hill came in as a transportation man, a man who considered it his business to move things - freight and people - and to do it in such a way that shippers and travelers would be so satisfied that they would multiply their trade. He had the profoundest belief in the future of the section through which the new road traveled and in every way possible he encouraged settlers.

"Make it desirable for people to come here, make it easy for them to carry on their business, and we will get the freight," he said. (1) "We consider ourselves and the people along our line as copartners in the property in the countries we both occupy, and the prosperity of the one should mean the prosperity of both and their adversity will be quickly followed by ours." (2)

It was a new railway philosophy. Indeed, from his letter to associates and friends in those days one could compile a code for railroad development that would have aroused the contempt of many of his rivals. A man who believed five hundred thousand bushels of wheat carried by his road was more valualbe than $500,000 worth of stocks sold was no associate for the average railway financier of 1880.

1) Pyle, Joseph Gilpin. The Life of James J. Hill. Vol. I. Page 297 (1917)

2) Idem

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To secure the men and women they must have to build their roads, work in the mines, settle the land, The Western railroads now undertook to ~~canvas the older states for those who were dissatisfied, idle~~ or adventurous, ~~as well as to~~ tap the man power of Europe. This drive for emigrants was conducted largely through or in co-operation with the steamship companies and land companies. At one time the Inman Steamship Company had 3500 agents in Europe and as many in this country selling prepaid tickets to friends and relatives of emigrants already settled here. (1)

In 1880 there were about 6,700,000 foreign-born in the population. As times were again good after the long depression of the '70's they became the most potent drawing force in Europe and all the agencies here which like the Western railroads were wanting men and women to carry out their project used them. That is it was directly or indirectly through emigrants already here that emigrants flooded the country with prosperous times.

In the opening of our period, 1878, the smallest number had come in since 1862 - only 138,469, but in 1880 the number was more than trebled - 457,257. In 1881 it was 669,431; in 1882, 788,992. In the decade 1880-1890 nearly 3,000,000 people were added to the population by immigration. Some sixty percent of these persons were males. In 1887, seventy and one half percent of the immigrants were between fifteen and forty years

1) Smith, Richard Mayo. Emigration & Immigration (1890) Pages 46,186

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years of age. That is as Richard Mayo Smith puts it they were of the "best age." (1) The money value to the country was estimated glowingly by Andrew Carnegie. (See 33 A

The country from which we were drawing most heavily in this period was Germany; 30.3 percent of all immigrants from 1880-1884 were Germans - of those between 1885 and 1889, 23.7. England, Scotland and Wales contributed 13.2 percent in the first period, 1880-1884; Ireland 12 percent; Sweden and Norway, 10.9 percent - 66.4 percent from the four sources. The remaining 33.6 percent was made up of 108,216 (3.6%) from Italy, 92,392; (3%) from Austria, 68,591; (2.3%) from Russia and Poland, 46,156; (1.5) to Hungary; 23.2 percent of the 3,037,594 who came in between 1880 and 1884 are credited to "all other countries." (2)

As these figures show it was Western Europe which was making the largest contribution to the incoming flood - over two thirds of the total between 1880-1889. It began to decline in numbers in the latter half of the decade while that of the Southern and Eastern Europe rose. This shift in the sources of immigration continued in the second decade of our period, while from 1885 to 1889 the Northern countries gave us 1,500,510 from 1895-1899 they gave us but 495,286. The Southern and Eastern countries increased from 492,710 in the former period to

1) Smith, Richard Mayo. Emmigration and Immigration. Pages 28, 51 (1890)

2) Report of Industrial Commission. Vol. XV. Immigration & Education. Page 271

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During the ten years between 1870 and 1880 the number of immigrants averaged two hundred and eighty thousand per annum. In one year, 1882, nearly three times this number (789,000) arrived. Sixty percent (473,400) of this mass were adults between fifteen and forty years of age. These adults were surely worth $1,5000 (300 £) each - for in former days an efficient slave sold for this sum - making a money value of $710,000,000 (£142,000,000) to which may be safely added $1000 (£200) each, or $315,000,000 (£63,000,000) for the remaining forty per cent of the host. Further, it is estimated that every immigrant brings in cash an average of $125 (£ 25) The cash value of immigrants upon this basis for the year 1882 exceeded $1,125,000,000 (£225,000,000). True, 1882 was an exceptional year, but the average yearly augmentation of the Republic's wealth fromimmigrants, who seek its shores to escape the enormous taxation and military laws of monarchical governments, and to obtain under Republican institutions entire political equality, is now more than twice as great as the total product of all the silver and gold mines in the world. (1)

1) Carnegie, Andrew. Triumphant Democracy (1886) Page 34

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747,122 in the latter.

It was to the immigrants from North Europe that the western states and railroads looked for their settlers. Their preferences based by this time on experience were voiced to the Senate in 1895 when a bill providing an educational test was under discussion and an expression of the race preferences favored by their states were sought from governors. In the "Hill Country" Wisconsin preferred Germans because they all work and are generally very prosperous." Montana wanted farmers from the north of Europe where climatic conditions approximate those of Montana. In Jay Gould's territory Kansas wanted Scotch, English, Scandinavians and Germans; Nebraska, Germans, Swedes, Italians but added no demand for labor of any kind at present; Arkansas, American, German and English-speaking immigrants - farmers, but welcome all desirable immigrants.*

By 1900 these particular states had received of foreign-born - Wisconsin, 515,971 - over half of them Germans, about 62,00 Norwegians, 26,00 Swedes. She had also some 25,000 Poles (German) and about 80,000 Russian, half of them Russian Poles. Montana which now had a population of about a quarter of a million, a fourth of which was foreign-born (67,067) a fifth of them came from Canada (one of the big immigration sources throughout our twenty years) England, Ireland, Germany and Austria accounted for a half of the foreign born. There was not

* Report of U.S. Immigration Commission Vol 39-41.

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a single one of the thirty sources of immigration tapped by the Twelfth Census that had not contributed by 1900 to Montana's population. There were 2,437 Japanese, 1,675 Chinese - forty seven from Mexico.

Kansas by 1900 numbered 126,000 foreign born in her population, about 40,000 of them Germans, 15,000 Swedes, 14,000 English, 12,000 Irish, 11,000 Russians. Kansas had sprinklings of all other nationalities, enumerated among them 165 "born at sea." An eloquent comment on the hasty methods of this national recruiting was that in 1900, 8,310 of our foreign born came under the caption "born at sea." (1)

The high pressure advertising of the various agencies directly interested in rapid settlement quickly brought returns, filling the country with a mass of humanity seeking new homes. In this procession were hundreds of disillusioned Eastern farmers victims of the long depression of the '70's. They came from the Western Reserve of Ohio, from Middle Western New York State, from New England, Virginia, Pennsylvania. Not always were they traveling long distances; Missouri men sought the Red River of Minnesota in 1880; Kansas men went to Colorado at the story of irrigation; North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia to Florida in these restless '80's.

Sometimes it was the struggle to clear wooded lands,

1) Compendium of Twelfth Census. Pages 58 to 63

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sometimes it was rocks that had conquered them. "You pick 'em up one spring and the next there they are agin." "Nary a tree to grub out and I reckon a body could plow a furrer a mile long and not strike a rock as big as a hen's egg," were reasons Eastern farmers gave for migrating to Minnesota - Missouri. (1)

Sometimes it was incorrigable optimism and love of change and adventure, oftener it was their saddening conviction that they would never get on where they were. The explanations they found outside of themselves, the "times", the banks, the trusts, the tariff - all against them. They would begin over. They did and often with the same results, for the same reasons and with the same explanations.

Mixed with the throng moving west and Northwest, South and Southwest, were the thousands upon thousands of Europeans seeking new homes.

The size, quality and fearlessness of this great mass made it possible to inaugurate in this period three

1) Benson, Ramsey. Hill Country. Pick Overturf's opinion of the Red River Valley.

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great land redemptions schemes. The first of these was opening the land along our Northern border from the Great Lakes to Puget Sound to the growing of grain. This land had been considered in early days too cold for grain growing, but Mr. James J. Hill did not agree.

"The further North life is developed, whether animal or vegetable, the more vigorous it is," Hill argued. "Someday," he prophesied, "wheat will be sowed and reaped up to the Artic Circle and it will be the best wheat the world ever saw." (1)

And he proved his theory. But Hill offered those who came into the Northwest to raise grain for him to carry something more than raw land. He was a great colonizer and his own experiments with rotation of crops, with cattle, with drainage of lands, with vegetables and fruits, were carried on not merely for his own amusement but chiefly to build up a body of knowledge for the colonists in a country where soil and climate were unsolved problems, their possibilities and their hazards unknown. When the price of corn was so low that the farmer lost on every bushel Hill led the way in feeding corn to cattle, inaugurating in the Northern States of the Middle West the feeding system with which Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa , were already experimenting.

1) Ramsey, Benson. "Hill Country" Page 26

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It was a new processing of corn. (1)

It was largely due to Hill's unceasing interest in all that pertained to getting the most out of a piece of land that the Hill country developed more evenly and with fewer tragedies than any other large scale land development of the period. It added in these years a new zone of production.

The most ambitious and far-reaching attempt to make public land hitherto called waste, fit for the throngs pressing Westward was begun in the '80's in what was known as the Mountain and Pacific Region, eleven states making up fully two-fifths of the entire country, Alaska excluded. The population of these eleven States and territories at this time, 1880, was 1,750,897, nearly half of which number (864,694) lived in California. The most populous State, after California was Colorado, and the least populous section was the territory of Wyoming, where there were but 16,479 over ten years of age.

The miner and the cattleman were the ones who up to this period had chiefly profited by the resources of this vast region, but in 1879 a new conception of possibilities of the undisposed of lands was put before the people in a

1) Pyle, Joseph Gilpin. Life of James J. Hill. Vol. I. Page 368

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

report made to Congress by Major John Wesley Powell, geologist in charge of the United States Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region. (1)

Major Powell was one to whom the country listened with respect, for it was under his leadership that one of the most extraordinary and adventurous explorations that the country had seen since the first crossing of the plains, had been conducted - the exploration of the Colorado River, including a thrilling descent of the Grand Canyon. (2)

The territory on which Major Powell reported he called the Arid Region, but he pointed out that it contained a goodly though undetermined percentage of public lands which could be made arable by irrigation.

Major Powell insisted that too much attention had heretofore been paid to the chemical constituents of soils and too little to those physical conditions by which moisture and air are supplied to the roots of the growing plants, and he laid down as a principle that all soils are suitable for agricultural purposes when properly supplied with water. This was going against the popular superstitution that alkalines permanently ruined land. Powell claimed that they could be washed out.

1) Powell, J. W. Report on the Lands of the Arid Region. Government Printing Office, 1879

2) Nevins, Allan. Emergence of Modern America. Pages 153,284

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

In all of the states and territories covered by this survey there were at least small proofs of what could be done through irrigation. In New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California, every Spanish settler, Mexicans and occasional Indians had practiced crude irrigation. Groups of settlers had in some instances been successful in redeeming land. The most important undertakings were in the Mormon settlements of Utah, where, through what Powell spoke of as "co-operative labor", large tracts had been irrigated and were producing abundantly.(1) Here the co-operative laborers had worked under the severe and intelligent direction of the Mormon church, but what had been done by them could be done obviously ~~anywhere else that~~ there was water to be impounded; that is, if the settlers could be persuaded to work together.

Outside of the Mormon colonies, a successful and well known example of irrigation had been carried out in the ten years before the report was published in Wade, a Northeastern county in Colorado, where the Union Colony had, under the direction of a board of trustees, irrigated a large section near Greeley and were now prospering. The thing could be done, but if it were to be done on a large scale and without severe losses and delays, Powell felt that Congress should enact regulations for would-be settlers, which would give them the advantage of all accumulated experience and prevent

1) For the early development of irrigation in Utah see Cole, Irrepressible Conflict, 1-2

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so far as possible the waste and abuses incident to undirected settlements, under conditions with which generally speaking, they knew little or nothing.

He outlined for the attention of Congress bills which included his suggestions for scientific, orderly development of the public lands, not forgetting to call attention to the said community and educational necessities of settlers. If, he said in part, the irrigable lands could be taken in quantities to suit purchasers, and a colony system provided for poor men who wished to co-operate; if the timber lands could be opened in ways that he suggested, to timber enterprises, and pasturage lands offered under a colony plan such as he indicated, a land system would be provided for the Arid Region, adapted to the wants of all persons desiring to become actual settlers.

Powell was saying here that "no conquest was possible by the old individual methods. The physiographic province itself decreed that the destiny of this new frontier should be social rather than individual." (1)

"Thousands of men," Powell asserted, "who now own herds and live a semi-nomadic life; thousands of persons who now roam from mountain range to mountain range prospecting for gold, silver and other minerals; thousands of men who repair to that country and return disappointed from the fact that they are practically debarred from the public lands; and

1) Turner, F. J. The Frontier in American History. Page 258

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thousands of persons in the Eastern States without employment, or discontented with the rewards of their labor would speedily find homes in the great Rocky Mountain Region."

Powell's report and suggested bills went to Congress with the recommendation of Carl Shurz, then Secretary of the Interior. They served both to stir that body to interest and to awaken numbers of adventurous and restless people to the possibilities of the region.

Powell had pointed out that capital as well as co-operative labor might take a hand in developing irrigation schemes. It was already at work and in the decade that followed there was a veritable irrigation boom. In every state and territory of the Arid Region, companies were formed to take up land, irrigate and invite settlements. The country was flooded with agents offering securities in this or that irrigation scheme. The rosiest possibilities were presented. It was sure wealth for investors, quick prosperity for settlers. There were no warnings that time, money, courage were needed, that the best of the projects were freighted with difficulties, many of them probably unforeseen.

In response to the offerings not only were large amounts of stock sold but numbers of people were soon finding their way across the plains, sometimes hundreds of miles from

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a railroad, to a land which they expected at once to see blossoming like the rose. Almost immediately these co-operative undertakings, for so they were called, showed all the weaknesses of stock companies in many other lines in the more highly developed parts of the country. Just as in oil, coal, ore and many manufacturing industries, the promoters frequently had little knowledge of what was necessary to put their undertaking on a solid basis, as well as frequently little desire to do anything more than to bring in money. And just as in all other undertakings many rushed in not as serious developers but as speculators, so now many of the new settlers in these undertakings did not come as bona fide farmers but as restless people with a desire to make a quick turn over. Every unsound and dishonest exhibit in the use of capital, which was common in the country, showed itself in these irrigation schemes. The loss and suffering that resulted to serious settlers was the greater because they were cut off from the machinery of civilization. (1)

In Wade County, Colorado, the success of the Greeley colony naturally attracted capital, but with the result that soon the county was threaded with more canals than the water supply could take care of and the early settlers, who naturally felt that they had priority rights were complaining ~~that they were short of water~~. Grave disturbances, great bitterness of

1) Newell, F. H. Report on Agriculture by Irrigation in the Western Part of the United States. Eleventh Census. Government Printing Office, 1894. Page 91.

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

feeling and large losses of crops resulted from this over-development. It was not until the great drought of 1890, however, that the one-sided character of many of the contracts for water held by farmers was demonstrated.

These contracts contained a clause which could be interpreted as relieving the company from responsibility if it failed to furnish the quantity of water agreed upon. Such a failure might, and did when the great drought came, mean the destruction of an entire crop, making it impossible for farmers who had mortgaged their lands to pay for water rights as most of them had to meet their payments. This default might, and frequently did, mean a foreclosure by the company.

"Apparently," said Frederick Haynes Newell, who at that time was studying irrigation for the Government, "it is in the power of a company failing to furnish water to foreclose a mortgage and obtain possession of the land."(1) The over-development, bad management, unsound and sometimes dishonest financing in a great number of the irrigation schemes undertaken without sufficient knowledge of what they were going into; and frequently, it is to be feared, with no other purpose than to draw large sums of money from credulous and ignorant people, resulted in the ten years following Powell's first report in giving irrigation companies as bad a reputation as gold and silver minding companies already had, and for much the same reasons, ~~never learn~~.

1) Newell, F. H. Report on Agriculture by Irrigation 1894 P. 95

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Confused and inadequate laws were largely responsible for many of the abuses. "They had grown," says Newell, "much as the ditch system, by adding here and there."[1] The arid experience of the '80's, however, led all the states and territories undertaking to systematize and develop more adequate legislation.

In California what was known as the District Law was passed in 1887 creating irrigation districts. These districts could be formed on petition of the people. They were to be governed by a board of directors which had a right to sell bonds for development. Each District was to work out its own system of selling and controlling water. But, although some forty districts were formed in California between 1887 and 1892 only two were really successful. The chief difficulty was that the local men chosen to raise and supervise the spending of money had little or no business judgment. They were small farmers or professional men of the district, without financial experience and their management was, as a rule, extravagant and inefficient. There was less of dishonesty than of inexperience.

Mr. Newell said of the mismanagement of the California Districts that, as a rule, the districts had been as well managed as other corporations conducted by untried officials.[2] It was the story so familiar all over the country in every line of endeavor - a few men undertaking hopefully

1) Newell, F. H. Report on Agriculture by Irrigation, 1894 Page 94

2) Idem Page 32 et sq.

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to launch enterprises of the nature of which they knew nothing and of innocent people who had no idea what ~~were the~~ qualifications ~~which~~ they should demand of those who conducted the enterprises in which they invested, committing themselves trustfully and often losing everything, health and hope as well as money.

Wyoming was the only state that took early steps to prevent the disasters which had attended so many of the/undertakings. ~~in which she took no part.~~ In 1890 she had 1917 irrigators out of a population of 60,705. She enacted that year a set of laws founded on the experience of other states which was generally considered the best and most practical that had been so far developed. The Wyoming law recognized that practically no state up to this point had recognized that the first step in any sound irrigation scheme was to know how much water was available for a given territory. Knowing this, and knowing what was called the "duty of water," (1) that is, how much land we will say, an inch of water could be expected to irrigate, their law required it to be decided who had a right to this water; and it provided agents to see that the proper persons received the water. If you were a settler you had a paper showing the order of your priority, just how much you were to receive, the number of acres on which the water was to be used.

1) Newell, F. H. Report 1894. Duty and Value of Water. Page 12.

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The scandals, the suffering, the failures, the irritations in connection with irrigation in the various states of course found their way to Congress. It was realized by the more intelligent that the fundamental difficulty in the whole irrigation problem was attempting irrigation projects without knowing the amount of water available; that is, whether it was adequate to do what was promised.

An irrigation survey was ordered in 1888. What this meant was that in all this Arid Region the flow of water of the streams, big and little, ~~should~~ was to be measured, and an estimate made of the ~~water~~ amount that could be depended upon over a given period. These surveys were under the direction of Frederick Haynes Newell, a graduate of the Boston Institute of Technology, who had had large field experience in the Southwest, under Major Powell's direction, and who in 1888 had been appointed assistant engineer of the United States Geological Survey. Major Powell appointed Newell to see what could be done about measuring and impounding water.

The work thus begun went on steadily for a number of years under Newell's direction, winning for him the title of "The Father of Irrigation." The first and most important of his reports quoted from above embodied all the experience of the settlers, favorable and unfavorable. It showed that if there had been exploitation and injustice, there had also been a large body of important, practical knowledge accumulated. It showed, too, that whatever the failures and

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difficulties there had been a vast amount of intelligent carrying on. The number of bona fide irrigators in the Arid Region had increased to 52,584, and the number of irrigated acres from not over 1,000,000 at the beginning of the period to 3,564,416.

The discussions in Congress in this period, many of them bitter and highly controversial, as well as a succession of irrigation congresses, the first of which was held in Salt Lake City in September 1891, finally led to the passage of what is known as the Carey Act in 1894 (1). According to its terms a public land State could make a contract with the United States, by which the latter bound itself to grant to the State, free of cost, up to but not over one million acres of desert land if the State would see to it that this land was irrigated, reclaimed and occupied within ten years of the passage of the Act, that is, by 1904. But there was no quick response to the Carey Act on the part of these States. Less than one million two hundred thousand acres in all were applied for, and only the State of Wyoming carried out the agreement so that it actually received the patent for the lands and this patent was for but eleven thousand three hundred twenty one acres. (2)

However, the work was pushing ahead. By the time the Twelfth Census, that of 1900 was taken in 1899, the number of irrigators which ten years before had been 52,584 had become 102,819, and the area under irrigation had increased

1) U. S. Statutes at Large, XXVIII, pt. I, 422-423

2) U. S. Reclamation Service, Institute for Government Research. P. 6

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by fully one hundred percent. Take a single territory as an example - New Mexico - whose governor wrote in 1898 of one system with fifty miles of ditches, twenty five reservoirs covering twenty two thousand acres, of another controlling fifty seven miles of ditches and ten reservoirs supplying thirty thousand acres. In the central portion of the territory he declared that more than fifty companies had been organized, several of them having plants in operation offering to the home seeker ample opportunities for reclamation and settlement. (1)

The governor also called attention to the number of individuals who had erected wind mills and were obtaining ample supplies of water by pumping from artesian wells. (2)

It was not only in New Mexico that artesian wells were used. Great numbers of farmers were depending upon them, particularly in the Southwest, and in what Major Powell called the sub-humid region including the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas and Texas.

The great achievement of this twenty-year period was that it taught the thoughtful and intelligent among legislators, developers and settlers what was necessary to establish and conduct irrigation projects. The sound knowledge that had been achieved had come mainly from two sources, the hard and continued efforts of individual and cooperative laborers scattered throughout the Arid Region, the man or group of men

1) Annual Cyclopaedia for 1898. New Mexico. Report of the Governors. Page 491

2) Idem.

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that had redeemed a few desert acres by continuous effort over a period of years, that had demonstrated what could be done. The second was the high character of the scientific work done under the direction of such men as Major John wesley Powell and Frederick Haynes Newell. It was this work which gradually convinced Congress that if any great stretches of the Arid Region were to be redeemed by irrigation, larger undertakings than those possible through cooperative labor or private capital were necessary. It was gradually becoming clear to those who were studying the problem that the Government itself must go into the business of irrigation. (1) Scientists working on the problem had selected locations in different arid territories where they had shown that it was possible to impound such vast quantities of water that literally millions of acres of desert could be redeemed and that at the same time electric power could be furnished, sufficient for all the needs of the settlers.

Such was the achievement in irrigation of the twenty years we are studying.

While far away the most extensive redemption of public lands in the period from 1880 to 1890 was through irrigation it was not the only redemption going on. In several states swamp lands were draining. The largest undertaking, and the one which from the point of view of the future was the most significant was in Florida.

1) For the action later taken by the government at Washington see H. W. Faulkner, The Quest for Social Justice, 3-4

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The State had been admitted to the Union in 1845 and had received as a dower from the Government of the United States some 500,000 acres. In 1850 Congress passed the Swamp Act, under which a State was given all overflowed lands that it would drain. At that time at least three fourths of the State of Florida was subject to this Act. The State promptly established what was called "The Internal Improvement Fund" and the body in charge was given full control of the swamp lands. As the agents employed to select swamps were paid twenty percent of the value allowed by the United States the acquisition of lands went on briskly. From the start those acquired were used for trading purposes, particularly with the railroads. (1)

The work of the Internal Improvement Fund was well under way when the Civil war broke out. Before it was ended what had been gained had been practically lost. The railroads were destroyed, tracks torn up, bridges down, stocks worthless. Not only were the railroads bankrupt but so was the Internal Improvement Fund for it could not sell at any price the lands on which it was depending for its living. For eight years after the War the Fund averaged only a little over 13,000 a year for the sale of lands. (2)

1) Nevard, Caroline. A History of Florida. Florida Historical Society

2) Idem

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By 1880 things had began to look up. Henry Flagler of the Standard Oil Company was building a road down the East Coast and H. B. Plant, one of the first to realize the opportunities in the South, was building across the state to connect with the cotton belt part af a system tapping six states and connecting with steamers to Cuba and Canada.

So far as the swamp lands were concerned it was comparatively little that either man did; they had enough with their railroad building.

The first big boom in Florida lands came in 1880. The State had elected a new governor, W. D. Bloxham. Bloxham's slogan was "drainage." He had the good fortune to fall in with a millionaire, Hamilton Dittson, a Philadelphia saw manufacturer, who, like Plant and Flagler had first come to Florida to fish and hunt and had become fascinated with the problem of redeeming the country. Particularly did the draining of the Everglades attract Dittson. Bloxham was not slow in making a bargain with him. If he and his associates would, at their own expense, work out a system of drainage around Lake Okeechobee, the huge shallow lake on the North side of the Everglades, alternate sections of land reclaimed would be deeded to them.

At the same time the Governor persuaded Mr. Dittson to buy outright four million acres of swamp land, North of Okeechobee at twenty five cents an acres - a million dollars

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in cash. It was enough money to save the Internal Improvement Fund from bankruptcy. (1)

Dittson worked out a grandiose colonization scheme for his water soaked acres. Half of the tract he sold to foreign developers, principally Englishmen. When the settlers arrived they found that little more had been done for them than to stake out their undrained lands. ~~They thought~~ The problems which confronted them were too serious for the courage of all. Only a few remained in and around Lake Kissimee to struggle with the drainage problem. Gradually they succeeded in reclaiming extensive tracts.

While the Englishmen were struggling with their swamps on half of the four million acres, Dittson was selling the second two million through land companies. Various grades of land were offered - twenty five cents an acre for the over-flowed, ten Dollars for the dry. He also formed a villa company and a canal company. Stock in these concerns was sold in the North, particularly in the State of Pennsylvania.

A more substantial development was started at this

1) The Deeds, Grants, Covenants and Warrants signed by Bloxham and Dittson are all preserved in the records of the Florida State Land Office.

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time by H. A. Deland who had made a fortune in soda and saleratus in Fairport, New York. Deland went to Florida in 1876 on a sight-seeing trip. He had been captivated by what is now Volusia County and here he bought a great tract from the Improvement Fund, laid out a town and laid it out well - streets sixty feet wide - planted trees, started and academy and sold land to settlers.

They came in numbers, many of them Swedes; and like all new settlers in Florida in that day, planted one crop - oranges. Their groves were about to bear when in 1885 there came a killing frost. It ruined most of the orange groves, and it ruined Mr. Deland, who in selling had guaranteed settlers ten percent on their investment as soon as the groves came into bearing. Unlike most promoters, he met the obligation though it took almost everything he had. #1) ‡

The frost of 1885, tragic as it was for Deland and many of his settlers, did not discourage them all. A considerable number of the sturdy Swedes remained, replanted their groves, setting their trees deeper, devising methods of fighting frost; and while the trees were growing sought for a crop which would carry through.

They found it in celery, which since that time has become one of Florida's most profitable vegetable crops.

Discouraging as the failures of Dittson's speculation and Deland's sound development were they did not stop drainage or

117 ‡ From Information given author in an interview both Dr. Lincoln Hulley, Pres. of John B. Stetson Univ. at De Land Florida in 1926

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development in Florida. In the ten years, from 1880 to 1890, one hundred thousand people were added to the population, bringing it up to two hundred eighty three thousand two hundred fifty. Orange groves continued to be planted and by 1893 Florida was shipping five million boxes a year.

People continued to come. By 1900 Florida had a population of nearly three hundred thousand.

It was not agriculture alone that brought people into Florida. Many hundreds came in response to the opening of the phosphate deposits lying East of Tampa. A tract which turned out to be about forty by twenty five miles in extent and which in some places was as deep as three hundred twenty five feet was opened in the late '80's. It was believed that there was enough of the deposit to make fertilizers for the whole country and the proposition was the more attractive because it was surface mining.

But, as was characteristic of all the pioneer undertakings of the country, a large percentage of the first comers knew nothing about the business they were entering. People rushed to the phosphate mines as they did to the irrigation projects of the West, the drainage projects of Florida, to find a possibility if you were prepared with capital, experience and energy. Many were ruined in "the phosphate boom" though, as always, a few of the more sturdy stuck. The period of trial and experiment passed, the mines and manufacturers learned their business and phosphates became one of Florida's important products.

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In ten years the campaign begun in 1879 to increase the farms and farmers of the country by opening new zones of production, redeeming the Arid Region, draining the swamps, finding purchasers and settlers for abandoned farms had substantially increased the wealth of the country. In 1880 the wealth from agriculture was reckoned to be $12,200,000,000. By 1890 it had risen to $16,100,000,000. (1) In the next ten years - 1900 - to $20,400,000,000. (2)

The most important gains, as far as the Arid Regions were concerned, was the discovery that the desert offered nothing but despair to the individual. Only cooperating groups working under the direction of a central authority like the state or Federal Government could redeem the Arid Regions. Men must unite, must go into business with the government. It was a hard lesson for many a man to learn, but if he was to live, learn it he must.

State and governments were learning on their side the wastefulness and injustice of enticing settlers to unsettled and unredeemed land where no adequate colonization policy had been developed. Major Powell in 1880 had emphasized the necessity of direction for colonists. Newell had preached it; James J. Hill had preached it; so had Deland in his Florida development, but they were the exceptions. Railroads, states, land companies continued to dazzle the ignorant and the adventurous with pictures of the wealth to be had in deserts and swamps. They sold the land, dumped

1) Doane, Robert D. Measurement of American Wealth. Table I Page 10-11

2) Idem.

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the settlers, and left them to what for a majority was for many years a hopeless proposition.

Their story was the one y Kipling tells in his "Story of the English."

"By the bones about the wayside ye shall come to your own." (1)

The government was succeeding, but slowly however in getting its idle acres off its hands. In 1898 the Secretary of the Interior reported that of the one million square miles in the Public Domain in 1878 their remained five hundred eighty million ~~acres~~. (2)

The determination of the Federal Government to prevent individuals and corporations grabbing great tracts under Grover Cleveland's vigorous leadership went ahead. In his message of December 3, 1888, he reported that "over 80,000,000 million acres have been arrested from illegal usurpation, improvident grants and fraudulent entri es and claims, to be taken for the homesteads of honest industry, ~~although these~~ ~~than one greater areas others unjustly held~~...It is a recompense for the labor and struggles of the recovery." (3)

While Cleveland was fighting "illegal usurpation" in the interests of bonafide settlers other settlers had combined with the corporation and were fighting his efforts

1) Kipling, Rudyard. Quoted by F. J. Turner
The Frontier in American History. Page 262

2) Messages and Letters of the Presidents. Index. Vol. X, Page 448

3) Messages and Letters of the Presidents. Vol. VIII. Page 795

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to keep them off Indian lands.

At the beginning of the great drive to settle the Arid and Semi-arid land of the west there had been a bold and lawless attempt to seize lands in various states which by treaty belonged to Indian tribes. The argument the whites put up was outlined in a memorial sent to Congress by the legislature of Colorado in January 1879. (1) It was a prayer that the Ute Reservation be opened to settlers and the Indians removed. The argument briefly was that it was too rich a tract for Indians, well watered, good grazing land with gold and silver deposits and as big as Massachusettes. In order to get to mines already opened it was necessary to cross this Ute territory and the Indians were hostile . ~~That is~~ open these lands and thousands would be attracted to the State. (2) The State of Colorado was being deprived of something to which it had no right, but something which it wanted.

Grover Cleveland set himself against the drive on Indian lands at the outset of his administration. His first Proclamation issued nine days after his inauguration on March 4, 1885, warned the motley crowd of "individuals, associations of persons and corporations" which had organized

1) Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia of the year 1879.
New Series, Vol. IV. Page 150. (1880)

2) Idem

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

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to enter and settle the Oklahoma lands in the Indian territory to give up their enterprise. If they did not he would send the military power of the United States to put them out. (1)

A month later he ordered that certain tracts of the Old Winnebago Reservation and the Sioux Reservation in the territory of Dakota, which his predecessor, Chester Arthur had restored to the public domain just as he left office, be returned to the Indians. (2)

"The order is illegal," declared Mr. Cleveland, "and in violation of the plighted faith and obligations of the United States."

In July he was ordering all "persons" other than Indians "who were grazing cattle without authorization" on Indian Reservations in the Indiana territory "to depart and entirely remove therefrom with their cattle, horses and other property."

This protection of the rights of the Indians against squatters and organized bands of invaders continued to be a major interest of Grover Cleveland in both terms he served as President.

1) Messages and Papers of the Presidents. Vol. VIII. Pages 303,304
2) Messages and Papers of the Presidents. Vol. VIII. Page 306

The degree of success resulting from these combined efforts to people the sparsely settled portion of the nation is graphically shown by the number of territories admitted to statehood between 1880 and 1900. In the Western Division of the United States there were as we have seen but four states in 1880. Five were added in the succeeding twenty years. In order of their naming, Washington, 1889; Montana, 1889; Idaho, 1890; Wyoming, 1890; Utah, 1896. (1)

The population which in 1880 was 1,767,697 had grown to 4,091,349, 846,321 of which was foreign-born. (2)

1) World Almanac for 1934. Page 861

2) Compendium of Twelfth Census. Page

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