

Land—the Priceless Heritage

MANY things in our history change but one thing remains constant, the lust for land. As population and wealth increase, the open land to the west brings the subject of conservation into fierce contest.

For the damage done to California beaches by the "Santa Barbara tragedy" over a billion dollars in suits and claims have been filed. The ocean land was leased by the government after competitive bidding, for more than \$600 million. The government was to receive a royalty on oil produced. As Noah Alper remarked, this is but a sample of revenue that might have been had for the support of government if the exploitation of all such things as oil, minerals, timber, radio and television channels and the rental value of surface areas, had been similarly handled.

California papers are making much at present of a beautiful blonde heiress, Mrs. Joan Irvine Smith, who has filed suit in Los Angeles Superior Court against the managers of the foundation in control of the family holdings, because they placed 60,000 acres of the 80,000-plus in an "agricultural preserve." This move into the preserve status by the Irvine management is precisely the kind of speculative waiting game that takes advantage of a well-intentioned law. Although she is a vast landholder, she has in the past opted for the justice of site value taxation. Much of her land, she said, was ready to be sold.

Field and Stream, in October 1968, reported at length on grazing areas in

"The Plot to Steal the West." The author, William Voigt, Jr. said "these lands are everyone's priceless heritage, but private interests are trying to gain control."

Testimony presented to the Public Land Law Review Commission for the National Wool Growers and American Farm Bureau Federation, held that the majority of the public lands would be more productive if put in private ownership or under private management. The American National Cattlemen's Association said that much more federal land should be placed on the tax rolls under new land laws and policies, and that state and local governments should have more power to decide when disposition of public lands should be made.

Twenty years ago the "great land grab" was halted by a few aroused conservationists. But hunger for land doesn't die easily, especially as the government has for a century and a half been practically giving land away. It is said that certain livestock leaders have been quietly moving in on large acreages managed by the Forest Service — even into the national parks. There are big game preserves for deer, elk, antelope and bear, where the lakes and streams are filled with trout and other fish, and millions of visitors roam these lands and camp along the trails. But as big game animals have multiplied they have begun to compete with animals belonging to the stockmen for the available grass. And so the debate continues among vociferous contenders in today's land grab.

