

The Settlement Of The West

"THE whole wealth of that great section (the West) was based on land," remarks the *Ohio State Journal*. The statement is not strictly accurate; for the production of wealth is due to labor. Labor, whether in the city or the country, can exert itself only on land. Land without labor does not produce wealth, and is not the basis of wealth. Our laws enable a few, by acquiring title to land, to take a large part of what labor makes. And these few absorb wealth merely by permitting labor to operate. This distinction escapes the attention of the *Ohio State Journal*. In an editorial entitled "No more Free Land," this daily praises the old homestead law, under which the cheap land of the West was so quickly "taken up." It was really a clumsy law, expensive to the taxpayers; inviting to the greed of land grabbers and speculators; and tempting land-seekers to fraud and perjury. That many did avail themselves of the opportunity afforded by the law to become workers and home-owners, is true, and some—the strongest—succeeded; but many failed; for the hardships and struggle were too great for their strength. In a short period after the opening of a tract of land to settlement we always find tenant farming taking the place of independent farming. It was noticeably so in Oklahoma. And this wild rush to the West was unnecessary, wasteful of human energy, corrupting and depressing. With a better land system, the unused spaces in the East would have been used first; more wealth would have been produced; a fairer division of wealth would have resulted; and the "free land" of the West would have been settled and used in a more sensible manner. Will not our editorial writers face the facts squarely and draw reasonable conclusions?

President Calles' Land Policy

THE Mexican government adopted the meddling policy and land purchase to settle the rural land problem in that distracted country. The results are what might have been foretold; for no government is fitted to deal with such matters. If a government collects revenues justly, builds roads honestly and well, keeps order, supplies water when people are unable to get it for themselves, constructs sewers, etc., and distributes mail, it is nearly all that can be expected reasonably. When a government undertakes to deal directly with more delicate affairs, loss and confusion, if not disaster, are almost certain to occur. Ernest Gruening tells in *The Nation* what has happened in Mexico:

"President Calles inherits an agrarian mess that is desperately tangled. Communities that should have land, haven't it. Others have land that is so sterile that it is useless. Others have land, but lack the implements and seeds to make it properly fruitful. Still others which do not want land have had it thrust upon them, are not cultivating it, and are furnishing ammunition for

paganda that no natives desire land. On the other hand, estates that were furnishing the country much-needed foodstuffs have been damaged productively to the detriment of the entire nation; for Mexico must import at high prices what she cannot grow. New agricultural activity has been rendered timid, not knowing whether the agrarian reform would follow the law or be guided by the whims or acquisitive propensities of some public official. * * * Mexico's need is to have the agrarian problem settled once for all as quickly as possible. In its present chaotic state, it is merely a hindrance to progress of any sort. * * * Both judiciary and state governments have been important factors contributing to the agrarian debacle."

We are thankful to Mr. Gruening for this concise statement. What he says about the Calles government is not reassuring; for the Mexican president's only idea appears to be to reorganize the Ministry of Agriculture. It should be abolished, and the so-called agrarian policy abandoned. Long before politicians took to "aiding" agriculture, the industry had developed rotation of crops, had introduced new vegetables, had begun to understand the breeding of cattle, and was inquiring about the chemistry of soils. Government has only put obstacles in the way of the development of agriculture. Mexico is cursed with too much government. Indeed, what people are not? In Washington is a department meddling with lead pencil sharpeners and with peanuts. Another, in a very silly and expensive way is trying to instruct farmers' wives how to take spots out of clothes, and its large and highly illustrated pamphlets are sent by congressmen to city bachelors perhaps as a joke.

The agrarian question is only part of the great land problem. It is necessary that urban and mineral lands, as well as agricultural lands, be free from the idle holder and speculator, and available to the user. It is not the business of government to decide how, when or by whom the land shall be used.

Foolish Real Estaters

THE National Association of Real Estate Boards, in convention at Detroit, did and said many foolish things, as usual with such gatherings. While silent about the heavy taxation of buildings and building materials, which doubles the cost of buildings during their lifetime, the Association adopted resolutions denouncing the erection of cheap structures.

The Association denounced the exemption from taxation of property which church organizations have abandoned but are holding until such time as it can be sold for a high price. This is futile. The church people are shrewd enough to keep within the letter of the law by having some sort of religious activity going in the old structure.

Next, the Association demanded that the publication of income tax returns be made a criminal offense.

The Association elected to office an allotment dealer who, during the war, made the crazy suggestion that, if