

## Land Titles Investigated

*Land Title Origins, A Tale of Force and Fraud.* By Alfred N. Chandler.  
New York: The Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1946. 550 pp., \$3.

A prodigious amount of painstaking research has gone into the making of this book which lists in its bibliography one hundred and eighty-four of the best sources in the fields of history, economics and geography.

Beginning with the first landings on these shores, Mr. Chandler traces the history of land titles throughout the United States. A detailed account is given of the way land was appropriated, taken by force, granted to court favorites and sold by them to others. Each section of the country is treated separately.

In his summary of the reasons for migration to this continent Mr. Chandler ranks the desire for land as stronger than the desire for religious liberty. Bigotry and religious persecution, he points out, were widespread among those who, supposedly, had crossed the ocean in order that each might worship as he pleased.

The American Colonies, Mr. Chandler says, were not the haven of "free" land they are generally supposed to be. From early times, settlers were obliged to pay ground rents to titular owners. Except for some minor allotments in parts of New England, there was no free land until the passage of the Homestead Act two hundred and fifty-six years after the settlement at Jamestown.

The Indian attitude towards land-holding is described as one which did not recognize the right of private ownership. Several amusing incidents are related of how the Indians innocently sold the same piece of land several times over, leaving their bewildered customers to fight it out among themselves.

In a chapter devoted to the Public Domain, the author shows how the Federal Government amassed vast resources in land, much of which it later

sold to meet the national debt, offering for sale, however, tracts so large, at prices so high, that only speculators could afford to buy. The subsequent land booms in the West are held by some authors to have been largely responsible for the rapid development of the coastal territory. Nevertheless, it is hard to forget the impoverished thousands who were tricked into buying worthless land—stories of receptions staged at the railroad stations, with brass bands blaring a welcoming tune, the huge feasts which put the buyer into the "right" frame of mind, the oranges tied to Joshua trees are legendary—and the unscrupulous promoters who, overnight, became millionaires. The activities of the railroads in obtaining land grants are also described.

The wealth of information gathered by Mr. Chandler must certainly convince the reader of his conclusion that "all land titles of today run back to and are maintained by force." Frequently throughout the book he departs from his theme to show that what is true of America, is true in the same degree throughout the world. This, in fact, is his main thesis.

Perhaps only by the massing of such startling—often shocking—facts as are presented here, will modern man face and question, objectively, the present world-wide land policy. Many writers, both ancient and modern, are convinced that it constitutes a robbery of those who do not own land but who, by the will of the Creator, are entitled to participate equally in the advantages of a common heritage.

Mr. Chandler does not advocate nationalization of land or the confiscation of present titles. He believes that democratic means are available by which to secure for the public treasury the particular value which inures to land as a result of situation and demand. Intelligent reform, he points out, would unlock flood gates of opportunity to both capital and labor. The vast revenue which the public collection of land rent would yield, he believes, would immediately reduce, and ultimately abolish, taxes on production and consumption.

Dr. John Dewey, professor emeritus of Columbia University, New York, reports in a foreword that this book "brings together for the first time materials that are widely scattered," and is "a piece of historical inquiry into a very important aspect of the development of the United States."

Mr. Chandler was once a member of the lecture staff of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania. Besides this, he has been active in politics and in public affairs. This is his first book and he may well be proud of it. It is an important contribution in its field.

V. G. PETERSON

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