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THE OWNERSHIP OF AMERICAN HOMES.

By Henry George, Jr

With a view to getting some light upon this most important matter, the Single Tax Club, of St. Louis two years ago drew up a petition to the Superintendent of the eleventh census to collect data to show what percentage of the people own their own homes and farms; what proportion are tenants; of those who occupy their own homes and farms, what proportion have their property free from debt; and, of the homes and farms which are under mortgage, what percentage of the value is so mortgaged?

This petition was adopted not only by all the single tax clubs throughout the United States, but by all the Knights of Labor Assemblies, all the Farmers' Alliance Associations, and other farmer and industrial organizations. So strong was the demand, indeed, that Congress passed a special act extending the investigations of the Census Bureau to this work and made an appropriation of half a million dollars. The Census Bureau accordingly set about its task, which was found at the outset to be a gigantic one. No such work had ever been undertaken before in this country, and it was a problem to know how to proceed. At length a very simple plan was decided upon—that of sending out printed lists of questions into selected districts that seemed to be representative of larger regions. The idea was to make a thorough canvass by sending to every occupier of a home or farm within the selected district the list of questions, asking, among other things, whether he owned or hired the home or farm, whichever it might be, upon which he resided; and if he owned it, whether it was mortgaged, and if mortgaged, to what extent.

This information has for some time been coming in, but it is only now beginning to be tabulated. In a few weeks a bulletin will be issued showing tabulated returns from two districts, representative of a large part of the western country. By the kindness of the Superintendent, Mr. Porter, and of the expert in charge of this division of the census work, Mr. Holmes, I am able to give some idea of the remarkable conditions shown by the returns in these two districts.

One district consists of a group of ten neighboring counties in Kansas, a little west of Topeka. Kansas was selected because it seemed to be attracting more attention than any of the other States in that part of the country. The other district embraces ten counties in the southwestern part of Ohio and includes the city of Cincinnati. This district, covering

Details of tenancy are presented as follows:

Counties.	KANSAS.	
	Percentage of Hired Farms, 1880.	Percentage of Hired Farms, 1890.
Chase.....	19.23	35.69
Clay.....	13.67	30.16
Dickinson.....	13.08	33.18
Geary.....	15.38	29.66
McPherson.....	10.75	32.73
Marion.....	17.66	39.73
Morris.....	10.23	37.69
Ottawa.....	9.53	36.86
Riley.....	15.83	23.55
Saline.....	12.44	30.65
Ten counties.....	13.13	33.25

Counties.	OHIO.	
	Percentage of Hired Farms, 1880.	Percentage of Hired Farms, 1890.
Adams.....	18.40	37.39
Brown.....	17.50	32.19
Butler.....	30.48	41.33
Clermont.....	21.80	36.46
Clinton.....	23.92	38.34
Greene.....	28.27	39.28
Hamilton.....	33.51	39.52
Highland.....	16.85	31.44
Preble.....	30.49	37.68
Warren.....	29.69	40.68
Ten counties.....	24.96	37.10

The ominous importance of these figures grows as the figures are weighed. What is true of ten average counties is true more or less of a whole State, and to say that nearly a third of the farms of Kansas, and nearly a half of the homes are rented, and that over 60 per cent. of the other farms, and over 40 per cent. of the other homes, are heavily mortgaged, is to show that the tariff has not been such a blessing to the western farmer as its supporters have given us to believe, and also that the talk about plenty of free land or cheap land to be had in Kansas is a delusion and a snare. These figures mean, in plain terms, that the people of Kansas are being divorced from the soil and are becoming renters; that the process of divorce is rapidly accelerating, it having increased 150 per cent. in ten years, and that before many decades, if present conditions prevail, there will come to pass much the same order of things as exist in deeply sympathized-with Ireland, where few are owners and the mass are tenants or the hired servants of tenants. Indeed, there would be a great difference to the disadvantage of the American tenants; the eviction laws are much harsher in America than in Ireland, and American citizens could, and can to day, be more cruelly treated with the sanction of the law than can be shown has been the case in any one instance through the protracted period of the Irish agrarian agitation.

Doubtless when the tabulation of the returns of some of the northwestern

States commences, an even worse condition of things will be discovered, as the recorded mortgage indebtedness which has already been investigated was found to be heaviest there. There are other States in the West that will probably present a better showing than Kansas and Ohio, but it is certain that these two States cannot be far from representing the general condition throughout the West.

When the investigation comes East, it is the expectation that a very much worse state of things will be revealed, for there concentrating tendencies have been longer at work. In such a State as Massachusetts, for instance, it is certain that landownership has become highly concentrated, since the population has been picking into the cities at an accelerated speed. When examination comes to the great cities it will not be surprising if the condition discovered resembles that known to have existed in Rome when the landed nobles bought the suffrages of the landless, impoverished, and embriuted masses with bread and circuses.

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