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**Homesteads. (To accompany bill H.R. no. 934.).**

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H.R Rep. No. 25, 40th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1868)

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## HOMESTEADS.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 934.]

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MARCH 18, 1868.—Ordered to be printed and recommended to the Committee on the Public Lands.

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MR. JULIAN, from the Committee on the Public Lands, made the following

## R E P O R T .

*The Committee on the Public Lands, to whom was referred House bill No. 799, granting bounty land to soldiers who have been engaged in the military service of the United States in the war of the rebellion, have had the same under consideration, and now respectfully submit the following report :*

The proposition embodied in this bill should be considered under the two-fold aspect of its relations to the soldier, and its effect upon the settlement and improvement of the public domain; and a few well-known facts, which properly belong to the inquiry, will clearly point the way to a just conclusion.

At the close of the last fiscal year there remained outstanding 53,912 military bounty-land warrants, issued under various acts of Congress, calling for the aggregate quantity of 5,603,220 acres. These warrants are selling at about one dollar per acre. Under the agricultural college act of 1862 scrip has been issued to non-public land-holding States to the amount of 5,340,000 acres; and when the States of the south shall have received their shares under the act, the whole amount of land covered by it will be 9,600,000 acres. This will be the subject of monopoly in the hands of speculators, and the price of the scrip will depend, to a considerable extent, upon the quantity of it in market, and of the unlocated military bounty-land warrants. The price has generally ranged from sixty to seventy cents per acre, but has sometimes gone much lower. As further affecting the price of warrants and scrip, it should be remembered that over 43,000,000 acres of "swamp and overflowed lands" have been granted by Congress to the States, more than one-half of which is probably in the hands of monopolists; that about 200,000,000 of acres have been granted to aid in building railroads, and for other purposes of internal improvement, thus inaugurating further and fearful monopolies of the public domain; and that millions of acres of Indian lands, by virtue of the most pernicious treaty stipulations, are falling into the hands of monopolists, thus still further aggravating the wide-spread evils long since inflicted upon the country by the ruinous policy of land speculation. Every day gives birth to some new scheme of monopoly by which the paramount right of the people to homes on the public domain is abridged or denied, and its productive wealth seriously retarded; and no one will need be told that, should this policy be continued, the opportunities of settlement and tillage under the pre-emption and homestead laws must constantly diminish.

Keeping these facts in remembrance, the effect of the proposed measure upon the interests of the soldier must be quite apparent. It provides that "those who engaged to serve twelve months or more, and actually served nine months, shall receive one hundred and sixty acres of land; and those who engaged to serve six months, and actually served four months, shall receive eighty acres; and

those who engaged to serve three months, and less than six months, shall receive forty acres." Under the first class specified there are 2,037,413 soldiers, which number, multiplied by 160, gives the number of acres required, namely, 325,986,080. Under the second class there are 16,361 soldiers, who, at 80 acres each, would require 1,308,880 acres. Under the third class there are 191,885, which, multiplied by forty, requires 7,675,400 acres. These are the official figures which have been supplied by the War Department, after first deducting the number of acknowledged deserters, those who paid commutation, and those who were dishonorably discharged. The total number of soldiers to be provided for, as will be seen, is 2,245,659, and the aggregate quantity of land required is 334,970,360 acres, being more than one-third of our remaining public domain, and at least one-half the arable portion of the same. Now, considering the present price of college scrip, and of military bounty-land warrants, and the stupendous monopoly of the public domain which is constantly going on and threatening to swallow it up, what would be the natural effect of throwing upon the market 2,245,659 land warrants, made assignable by this bill, like those already issued? Every man can answer this question for himself; but the committee believe the price of warrants would fall as low as twenty-five cents per acre. It would, at all events, be a cruel mockery of the just claims of the soldier, and the policy in question cannot therefore be insisted upon in his interest. If land is what he wants, he can have it on the liberal terms of the homestead law, prescribing, however, the indispensably necessary conditions of settlement and improvement. If a bounty in money is what he needs, and we admit the necessity, then let money be granted by Congress, and let the just claims of all soldiers be *equalized*, by the payment of a fixed sum per month during the time of service, as provided for in the bill which has repeatedly passed the House of Representatives, and as repeatedly been defeated in the Senate.

But this measure will appear far more indefensible if we consider its effects upon the settlement of the public domain. This subject was carefully considered by the House Committee on the Public Lands of the thirty-ninth Congress, and perhaps we cannot do better than adopt their language in responding to a petition praying for bounties in land: "All the evils of land speculation, to an extent as alarming as it would be unprecedented, would be the sure result. Capital, always sensitive and sagacious, would grasp these warrants at the lowest rates. Land monopoly in the United States, under this national sanction, would have its new birth, and enter upon a career of wide-spread mischief and desolation. Speculators would seize and appropriate nearly all the choice lands of the government, and those nearest the settled portions of the country, whilst homestead claimants and pre-emptors would be driven to the outskirts of civilization, meeting all the increased expense and danger of securing homes for their families, and surrendering the local advantages of schools, churches, mills, wagon-roads, and whatever else pertains to the necessities and enjoyments of a well-settled neighborhood. This policy would stop the advancing column of immigration from Europe and of emigration from the States, which has done so much to make the public domain a source of productive wealth, a subject of revenue, and a home for the landless thousands who have thus at once become useful citizens and an element of national strength. It would, in fact, amount to a virtual overthrow of the beneficent policy of the homestead law, which has, perhaps, done more to make the American name honored and loved among the Christian nations of the earth than any single enactment since the formation of the government." These considerations are quite as pertinent to-day as they were two years ago; indeed, time and events have given to them a new emphasis, and invested them with a meaning which the representatives of the people have no liberty to disregard. Considered in the light of the facts we have submitted, the measure under notice can only be regarded as a frightful scheme of spoliation and mischief; and while it was doubtless proposed in the imagined interest

of the soldier, the committee cannot believe that the men whose valor and self sacrifice saved the nation from ruin demand any such relief at the hands of Congress.

But while the committee earnestly urge these considerations, they believe the land policy of the government ought to discriminate in favor of our honorably discharged soldiers and seamen, where this can be done consistently with the actual settlement of the public lands. Such discrimination may be made by declaring them absolutely free to such persons, save the trifling fees of the land officers, the aggregate of which forms an important part of their compensation, and cannot be remitted without disturbing the long-established and satisfactory machinery of our land policy. The committee therefore beg leave to report the accompanying bill as a substitute for that which they have considered, and which they ask may lie upon the table.