

THE TORRENS
LAW.

THE CONSERVATIVE has from time to time called the attention of its readers to the excellent invention known as the Torrens System of Land Titles, and proposes still to continue so doing until, if it can be effected, the citizens of Nebraska are as well served, and their rights as owners of land as well protected, as any of the most favored nations.

This is not the case at present. If farmers and owners of homes in general were once aware what a back-number our system of land-titles is, and how little real security it gives to the man who pays money for property of that kind, there would be many who would look about to see if there were no better arrangement possible.

The fact is that our real estate system is a thousand years old, with only a few Yankee notions added in this country, by virtue of our claim to being a progressive people. In England they still enjoy the methods introduced by William the Conqueror in the 11th century. Such an anachronism in such an important matter can be explained only by the existence of an influential class, whose livelihood is largely dependent on the difficulties inseparable from the holding and transfer of land by those monstrously antique methods.

Our ideas have really changed quite a little in a thousand years. At a time when the best title to a homestead was obtained by knocking the owner on the head and butchering his family, it was quite right and proper that in selling it again you should only part with your own interest in it. Then if in addition you agreed to defend your purchaser's possession against others, he was really as well fixed as the state of society at that time admitted. The idea of the king or the rest of the people being sufficiently interested to see to it that the rightful owner had his land, was not one that belonged to that period.

The idea that pervaded the earliest English law-courts is clearly shown by that iniquitous ancient maxim, "*caveat emptor*:" let the buyer look out for himself. If the seller turned out to be a swindler and the buyer thereby lost his money, it was his own fault; what must he be buying things for? And it is no otherwise in Nebraska in this year 1900: if you want to buy land or a house, you must find out yourself, or trust a lawyer with that duty, whether the man who proposes to sell it is the owner of it or not. The state is completely indifferent in the matter; the laws leave it entirely to the individual purchaser to protect himself. Most owners of land have an "abstract," which it took a considerable quantity of time and money to procure. This they think protects them in some way, but they find out differently if they ever try to prove anything by it in court.

Having bought your land, you have your vendor's guarantee, as in the time of the robber-barons, that he will "defend" you in your possession, and this the courts will compel him to do if he can; but suppose he dies, fails in business or otherwise disappears?

Now this improvement called the Torrens system, which was hatched in Australia and has been working there most admirably for forty years, arranges differently, going to the root of the matter, in this way: instead of Mr. Smith transferring to you, in return for your money, whatever rights you may decide, after looking up all the evidence Mr. Smith has to the land you desire, the state itself assumes the responsibility of knowing who is the owner of each tract of land within its boundaries. A thing that it can easily do, since land is land, does not change, and can always (except in the Missouri bottoms) be found where it is laid down. Then if you want Mr. Smith's land, if he can produce the state's certificate that he is the owner of it, you have no further evidence to seek; you pay the money, he has his certificate canceled at the courthouse and a new one is issued to you. Then, instead of Mr. Smith's promise that, if nothing prevents, he will protect you against any body that may turn up with a better right to the land, you have the positive guarantee of the state itself that you are the sole owner; and the "defending," if any is to be done, will be performed with all the power of the courts by the state itself, which does not die, fail in business nor otherwise disappear.

This plan, which, besides providing safety where there is no safety now, has the further merits of making transfers quicker and cheaper than at present, is already in operation in several states of the Union. Massachusetts is one, thanks in a large measure to the efforts of that ingenious and public-spirited citizen, Mr. Edward Atkinson. Illinois also now has it in such counties as desire it, after ten years of litigation; for there is no concealing the fact that the abstracters and some lawyers do not love the measure. And THE CONSERVATIVE would be very well pleased if enough property-owners could see the value of it so that the Nebraska legislature would take some action looking in that direction at its next session.

CHARLES FRANCOIS FELU.

BRUSSELS, Feb. 7.—Charles Francois Felu, an armless artist, died Monday in his 70th year. He painted with his feet and copied hundreds of the best masterpieces. Many specimens of his work are now in America. While working he held his palette with his left great toe and manipulated his brush with his right foot and with great skill.

He always shaved himself. He had written a successful tragedy.

Pluck Possibilities.

In the summer of 1886 THE CONSERVATIVE passed some time at Antwerp, in Belgium, admiring the works of the old masters which adorn the cathedrals and galleries of that ancient mart, whose wonderful docks and piers were constructed by Napoleon Bonaparte. The intense colorings of Reubens, in that wonderfully realistic picture, "The Descent From the Cross," his delineations of the emotions, in each face, and the tender, solemnity with which the greatest tragedy of the world's historic career is committed to canvass, arrested attention and compelled a reverent admiration.

Artists from every country and clime were gathered at that home of Reubens to do honor to his genius by attempting to copy his works. And among them we met and became acquainted with Charles Francois Felu. He was then fifty-eight years of age. His pallid and regular features were pleasant and attractive as his manners, which were those of a world-wise, scholarly gentleman of most amiable disposition. He was sitting bolt upright before his easel copying a famous piece, "The Fisher Boy." With his left foot he held his palette against the base of the easel and with his right foot he held his brush, mixed his colors and developed the picture before him.

With admiration for his genius and the pertinacity of his pluck, which had made him an artist of merit and prominence, though he had been born without arms, one could but feel how relatively incompetent he had been with his two hands, as compared to this industrious artist with no hands. His persistent and successful struggle to use his feet as hands and his toes as fingers made him an artist of world-wide celebrity. His pictures were in demand and THE CONSERVATIVE purchased the "Fisher Boy," which is painted upon a piece of mahogany about eight inches by ten, for fifty dollars. It is a constant inspiration to attempt, to endeavor against odds and by persistent pluck to overcome obstacles.

Every boy and girl, every youth should see and study the pictures, the life and the triumphs of Charles Francois Felu. Those who have strong arms and perfect hands, who have health and vigor, combined with quick intellectual abilities, may emulate the uncomplaining and courageous endeavors of this armless artist whose works are now a monument to his genius and skill, his talent and his triumphs.

The Belgian artist, Mr. Charles Francois Felu, Graduate of Letters, was born without arms at Waermaerde, in

Biography.