

What Western Canada is Doing

Irrigation necessary to make crops a certainty in large areas of Alberta—The Government owes the settlers they have brought in a proper chance to secure good crops—
Saskatchewan and Manitoba Conditions

By E. CORA HIND.

Swift Current, Sask., July 8.—The writer left Winnipeg on the night of June 26 and in the intervening 12 days has attended the two large summer fairs of Alberta, Calgary and Edmonton, motored some hundred miles through the crops of that province and has spent two days at Swift Current, in Central Saskatchewan, attending a special conference called by the new minister of Agriculture for that Province the Hon. C. M. Hamilton, to consider ways and means of dealing with the areas in the south west and centre of that province which are periodically subject to drouth and soil drifting. Many scores of farmers have been met in the trip and conditions in their various districts discussed so that a general knowledge of conditions in the three prairie provinces has been gained.

Alberta Conditions.

The first matter dealt with on reaching Alberta was that of the big blown out area in Southern Alberta which affected some forty townships lying between Brocket west of Macleod on the Crows Nest Branch of the C. P. R., Stavley to the north on the Macleod Calgary line, Taber East on the Crow and Retlaw north east on the Suffield branch of that railway.

Owing to the efforts of the Board of Trade of Lethbridge to get the governments, Provincial and Dominion, to move in the matter of immediately starting work on the Lethbridge Northern Irrigation project, in which district much of the damaged lands lie, a good deal of publicity has been given to this damaged area and there has been a tendency on the one hand by provincial officials to minimize it and on the part of business interests to magnify the damage to include the whole of Southern Alberta. As the whole of Southern Alberta suffered from drouth in the years of 1918 and 1919 it is only fair the business and monied public should understand the present situation fully. The writer made a drive of 126 miles going in and out and round about in the territory affected and may therefore speak with some degree of authority on what has taken place.

Forty townships is roughly about one million acres and as these townships are situated in the "Big Farm" area of Alberta, it is safe to assume that at least 500,000 acres of this million have been broken for cultivation. As summer fallowing is extensively practiced about 300,000 acres would be under seeding at the time of the storm June 8, of this fully fifty per cent. or 150,000 acres will be a total loss.

As the three western provinces have over fifteen million acres in wheat alone, and the province of Alberta over three million acres in wheat it will be seen, that in comparison with the total wheat acreage the loss is comparatively slight. To the district that has suffered, however, it is by no means a light matter, indeed in many cases it is practically ruin coming on the two preceeding barren years.

A conservative estimate of the loss, allowing for the value of seed planted and the cost of preparing the land and putting it in and allowing for the value of an average crop the loss is conservatively estimated at \$7,500,000. It is scarcely to be wondered therefore, in view of the fact that a very large portion of the land affected is irrigable, that the farmers of this area are pressing for irrigation works to be proceeded with. Much of

the preliminary work in this territory has already been done, by the Dominion Government and there appears to be no doubt as to the value of the land for irrigation or of an abundance of water to irrigate if proper reservoirs for storing the immense volume of water from the mountains, which is now all waste, are put in. It is a bad time to finance new work of any kind but this would appear to be a work of necessity and mercy, if Canada is not to lose a member of very valuable settlers and there is equally no doubt that the Federal Government has a great responsibility in this matter, in view of the fact that it threw all of this country open to settlement, in the face of the protests of the ranch men and without any attempt at anything in the shape of an agricultural survey to determine what land would have to be irrigated to make it profitable, what land should remain permanently in pasture, what the soils were best suited for and many other matters which should have been definitely decided before homesteaders or purchasers were allowed in.

So far as irrigation is concerned there is no question of its success, the Coaldale country the project near Lethbridge, originally put in by the Alberta Land and Irrigation Company and now controlled by the C. P. R., the C. P. R.'s own irrigation farms at Brooks and Bassano, the Canada Land and Irrigation Company farms at Ronalane and along the Suffield extension of the C. P. R. all prove that irrigated lands in southern Alberta will produce and produce enormously, moreover that irrigated land does not suffer from drifting. These irrigated areas at the present time are just cutting their first alfalfa crops for the season and the yield will run from one and a half to one and three quarter tons to the acre, in spite of the fact that the spring season was late and that Alberta has had a cool summer.

Other portions of southern Alberta, outside of the blown area and the irrigation farms, have a fair promise of crop. Crop is late and there has been considerable damage from cut worms. The lateness has been due, in the main, to the fact that while there was plenty of moisture in early spring there was little since seeding was completed until three days ago when over an inch of rain fell practically all over Alberta and this will keep linked up the subsurface moisture which was abundant and the crops will now make progress. As this portion of the west rarely if ever has killing frost before the middle of September, there is every prospect that with warm weather from now on, a good paying crop will mature.

In northern Alberta rain has been abundant all season, stand of grain is heavy and rather late owing to cool weather, but as the weather is now much warmer progress will be rapid.

Saskatchewan Needed Rain.

Until three days ago there were portions of Saskatchewan suffering for want of rain, but now warm rain have been general and the weather is ideal for growth. In the west and centre, there has been some damage from soil drifting, more especially west of Saskatoon in the north and along the Weyburn Lethbridge branch of the C. P. R. in the south, but taken all together crop conditions in Saskatchewan, which is as big as a small Empire, are fairly satisfactory.

The conference referred to in the first paragraph is proving a very interesting one.

Saskatchewan, in common with Alberta, has big areas that suffer frequently from drouth and drifting, probably some of these areas should never have been opened for farming, but they have been opened and much money has been expended in development work and now the question is what can be done to render as much as possible of the land safe for crop every year.

Saskatchewan, unlike Alberta, has no prospect of any large irrigation development in her southern sections. The one big river, the South Saskatchewan, flows through too deep a valley to make the use of the water practicable. In the Cypress Hills which lie between the main line of the C. P. R. and the Weyburn Lethbridge line and have an elevation of over four thousand feet, above the sea a number of fairly large streams have their rise, some flowing north, some north east and a few south and south east. The "run-off" from these streams during high water is very material and the Dominion Government has made some surveys of possible reservoirs and the estimate has been made that, without too great an expenditure of money, some 100,000 or possible more acres could profitably be irrigated from these sources. While such irrigation centres would be invaluable in forming sources of food supply for stock in exceptionally dry years the acreage is too small to form any solution of the problem of the dry lands of Saskatchewan and the conference now sitting is composed of men who have succeeded in growing fair crops in these areas even in the driest years. Saskatchewan is taking an intelligent method of trying to find out what she is at. Two things have developed from the conference so far, namely, the Federal Government owes to the people who have been allowed homestead and purchase in these districts an immediate agricultural survey to determine what much of the land is suitable for, what portion of it should be returned to pasturage, and how that repasturage can be accomplished, and the second thing is that all remaining government lands in the province should be handed over to the Provincial Government to deal with. Present at the conference are a number of experts from the south who have been for years dealing with similar soil and climatic conditions. The conference has also been addressed by Sir Fred Stupart, Director of the Meteorological Service of Canada. There will be more to say of this conference in another letter.

Manitoba Conditions Good.

Manitoba is enjoying ideal weather for crop production indeed if Manitoba had as good an outlook for her new government as she has for her crop at the present time she would be all right. There are two reasons which the balance of Canada may well take from the Manitoba situation and they are: that three and four cornered fights usually mean that the least desirable candidate gets in; second that every person with revolutionary and socialistic tendencies has registered these days and is securing a vote and if the steady going citizen do not want that class to rule they had better register and vote also.

Quite apart from any question of politics, the Norris Government, in Manitoba should have been returned with a good majority on its record of performance, and more especially on its educational policy. No one excepting the people who want to make Canada a place of polyglot languages had a kick against them, yet scores of people for one petty prejudice or another took a crack at them, not really intending to defeat the government but in the end just about accomplishing it.

In these days of unrest and upheaval the sane portion of the community had better bury small personal grievances, fads and fancies and get to work or what has happened in Manitoba may happen in every province in Canada.