

Cattle Ranching--Its Condition and Prospects.

BY JOHN R. CRAIG, ALBERTA, N.-W. T.

Cattle ranching in Alberta has passed through the experimental stage, and now rests on a firm basis of prosperity. Established by men who were willing to risk their capital in the venture, it is through their enterprise that Southern Alberta ranks to-day with the most favorable grazing districts on the continent of America. It was contended in some quarters that Alberta was too far north to be economically employed in raising cattle, that the per cent. of loss during winter seasons would prove so great as to discourage the industry. The past sixteen years' experience, however, has proved all such predictions to be entirely groundless, as the average loss of cattle from severe winters and other causes has been much less north of the 49th parallel of latitude than south. While it was known that the Northwest Territory was the home of the buffalo for bygone ages, it was also recognized that they gathered in great numbers to the foothills and adjacent plains, where the Chinook winds prevail, for winter grazing. This area is embraced between Calgary on the north to the boundary line—160 miles—on the south, extending from the foothills of the Rockies eastward to the Little Bow River, 120 miles. This district was set apart by the Government for cattle ranching. Leases for grazing were granted at the nominal rent of one cent per acre per annum, to run twenty-one years.

The first large importations of cattle were made from 1881-84 from Montana ranges, of mixed herds, viz., females of all ages, and all steers, the increase of the herd up to four years old, which gave the rancher an annual return for his investment from the sale of beefsteers from the time they were placed on the range. The cattle were of high quality.

spring and fall "round-up" for calf branding; then turning the herds loose to range at their own sweet will the year round, with only what food and shelter nature provided. There has been a very material change in this respect. The necessity of protection against the losses through allowing calves to run with their mothers throughout the winter led to weaning at the close of the fall "round-up," and providing the calves with food and shelter for the winter. As a remedy against the loss from cows calving through winter, some attempts have been made to regulate the breeding season by gathering the bulls off the range and herding them together until July; but this measure has not been fully adopted by all districts.

The latest estimate of horses and cattle on the range was made last year by the Ranchers' Association by dividing owners into six classes, as follows:

6 companies, from 5,000 to 10,000.
3 " " " 3,000 to 4,000.
9 owners " 2,000 to 3,000.
8 " " 1,000 to 2,000.
28 " " 500 to 1,000.
185 " " 100 to 500.

The horses make a small percentage in the estimate, and are more than covered by the number of cattle owned by settlers with 100 head and under. This estimation shows approximately 100,000 head of cattle ranging in Alberta between Calgary and the boundary line. The shipments to Great Britain for the present year from Alberta have been 15,000 head. The local demand is estimated at 8,000 head, making a total of 23,000 head disposed of at an average of \$40 per head on the range—\$920,000—a satisfactory return when we consider that the growing stock will more than fill up the drafts from the herds made by sales, and leave the herds increased for the future.

Like other investments yielding large returns,

been taken from the herds on the range. At the spring branding the most forward and promising calves are left for range bulls, in the proportion of one for every ten or twelve heifer calves. This may appear to an Eastern breeder a large proportion of bulls, but experience has proved that it is necessary if the fullest increase in the calf crop on the range is expected. It is obvious that such a system of breeding would in a few years greatly deteriorate the quality of the herds. Instead of improvement, there has been retrogression in some districts to such an extent that they have left no bulls of range breeding for two years, and bought young bulls from Ontario, but the supply falls very short for the necessity of the herds. There are some notable exceptions to this system of breeding by companies and private owners, who, having their leases within natural boundaries, keep their breeding herds under their own management, and have kept a liberal supply of thoroughbred bulls. The necessity of a large supply of thoroughbred bulls of beef-producing qualities for the Alberta range is apparent if the high reputation of the range cattle is to be maintained.

It has been surmised in some quarters that the day of large cattle companies is drawing to a close. That through the increase of the number of owners of smaller herds, and the arrival of the settler, they will be forced out of the business. There is no good foundation for such an opinion. Taking the extent of grazing country into consideration, the number of cattle on the ranges might be increased one hundred per cent. and then not be overstocked. Cattle companies and owners, great and small, are making preparations for preserving reserves for feed for winter. The irrigation ditches will produce all kinds of fodder for winter feeding in unlimited quantities, while there is still left a very large range for cattle to roam. Shelter is also necessary



A "ROUND-UP" ON THE CATTLE RANGES NEAR KAMLOOPS, B. C.

This opinion was expressed by an eminent Short-horn breeder, of England, while on a visit to the Alberta ranches in 1883, in company with a rancher. On looking through a mixed herd of four thousand head, a typical herd, which had just arrived from Montana, after a drive of 250 miles, he remarked: "I am surprised at the high quality of the whole herd. I expected to see Texas blood predominating in Montana cattle." The rancher replied, "They are good cattle, but we will improve them." The visitor emphasized his opinion by saying: "You will be fortunate if you keep them up to their present quality. There are cows and heifers which would make a creditable appearance in the showyards at our county fairs in England. Without a liberal use of high-class bulls that herd will retrograde."

A few ranchers began with a breeding herd only, no purchase of steers, deciding to wait four years for any substantial return for their capital. Some ranchers have commenced with cows and heifers brought from Ontario with satisfactory results. The average prices paid for mixed herds in Montana for the Alberta range in 1881-82 varied from \$18 to \$22 per head, calves not counted. The demand for Canadian ranches sent the Montana prices up to \$32 to \$35 per head, calves counted, the next three following years.

Up to 1886 there was a good home market, at high prices, to supply the Indian beef contracts and the construction of the C. P. R. As the herds increased, the supply exceeded the local demand. In 1887 the first large shipments of range cattle to Great Britain commenced, the English market from that time determining the price of cattle on the range suitable for export, four-year-old steers bringing an average of \$40, and dry fat cows from \$27 to \$35.

The management of the herds consisted of the

cattle ranching is accompanied by corresponding risks. The long-continued severity of some winters has created serious havoc among the herds. The winter of 1886-87 will be a memorable one for its severity, and its consequences the most calamitous ever recorded. Losses in Montana were variously estimated from 25 to 60 per cent., while in Alberta it was estimated between 15 and 20 per cent. April is the most trying month in the year for range cattle. After surviving the storms of winter they are less capable of combating adverse circumstances. In the latter part of April, 1892, after a favorable winter, a severe snow storm of ten days' duration swept the Western ranges from the north to Texas, with most disastrous results to spring calves, as well as the weak ones of the herd. These experiences were somewhat disheartening to large companies, and instrumental in encouraging men of small means to engage in the enterprise and own only such as they can provide food and shelter forthrough the winter—men who will grow up with the business; men of ability and energy, who, from a small beginning, see their herds increase to whatever they are capable of taking care of.

Another enemy to the rancher has been the depredations of wolves. A bounty of \$5.00 per head has been the means of bringing in 1,800 heads of these insatiable calf destroyers; quite as many more had been killed before any bounty was offered. They are now almost exterminated in some districts. The bounty is increased, so that losses from that cause will, it is hoped, be practically nil in the future.

THE BULL QUESTION

is to-day the most important facing the ranching interests. The quality of the cattle cut out of the herd for the shipper decides the success or failure of cattle-raising. The principal supply of bulls has

and is being provided for. Of course, this all means some curtailment of the larger companies. Those ranchmen who fall in with the necessities of the future are those who will continue to succeed. We believe this to mean extraordinary prosperity for the cattle interest, and the greatest good to the greatest number.

[NOTE.—The foregoing narrative is confined to Alberta, but there is another great ranching district in Assiniboia, viz., Medicine Hat, Maple Creek, and Crane Lake. There are practically no sheep south of Calgary in Alberta, and little to be said about horse ranching there.—EDITOR.]

Good Draft Horses and Long-wooled Sheep.

To the Editor FARMER'S ADVOCATE:

SIR,—There is a great scarcity of good draft horses in this Province to-day. When prices declined some five or six years ago, farmers almost entirely gave up breeding horses, and now there are practically no big two and three year old colts to be seen anywhere. And this in face of the fact that P. E. I. seems peculiarly adapted to the raising of horses, our horses having a great reputation for their ability to stand the wear and tear of the cities, and can always find a market even in dull times; but now, with a rising market, there is no doubt as to the profit in raising heavy draft horses. You could also urge the keeping of more sheep—long-wooled sheep—in this Province. Wool at twenty cents a pound is a profitable production of the farm, and though not necessary to state the reasons, the long-wooled breeds do best in this Province. Of cattle, both beef and dairy, we have plenty here now, but there is great need of better methods both in feeding and breeding to show the profit there should be in breeding and feeding cattle.

Prince Edward Island.

WM. CLARK.