

# Classify our Vacant Acres.

By W. D. ALBRIGHT.

Reconstruction is such a familiar topic these days that it is in danger of becoming hackneyed. Let us consider a phase of constructive legislation which would fit in most opportunely with the reconstruction programme.

In the course of a recent drive along a five-mile stretch of road traversing a district so poor that early settlers had regarded it as hopeless for homesteading, and almost too poor for ranching, I noticed in the midst of it a good house and learned that every quarter section along that road had been recently filed upon by hopeful settlers, some of them returned soldiers, I understand. Some of the land is so inferior that it does not produce decent pasture. Even the willows look stunted. The whitish soil has a complexion of poverty. Some of it is pure sand, while much of the remainder is so rocky that when breaking it, one would need a blacksmith shop on the place to sharpen plow-lays, and a gang of navvies to dig and pick up rocks.

The fact which recommended these quarters is that they lie along a Town Line which has some chance of remaining a public highway. Allowing full advantage for this and also for the fact that late comers homesteading in the midst of settlement can afford to put up with land which it would be folly for those with first choice to select, it yet remains a problem how such land can be cleared and farmed at a profit in a big new country such as the Peace River region. If there are not cruel disappointments in store for those who attempt it, many experienced settlers will be surprised.

## Some Land Best Left in Wood.

Why should this be allowed? Why leave such quarters open for settlement? If the welfare of the individual were insufficient reason to provoke administrative action, surely the good of the country would supply justification enough. Surely the state is properly interested in the welfare of its citizens. Surely it wishes them to produce and live where they can produce effectually, and live contentedly under conditions that will recommend the country to themselves and their friends! Surely we have enough good land for all.

Experience in both Europe and America demonstrates that land which is quite unfit for agriculture may be very profitably utilized for the production of timber, the preservation of game and for ranching. I believe it was a very wise policy of conservation which set aside the eastern slope of the Rockies and certain other areas as permanent forest reserves. The policy should be widely extended on a very elaborate scale which would reserve not only large tracts but local areas as well. The country should be fine-tooth-combed with this end in view.

Every agricultural community needs fuel, poles and building material; and the closer to settlement the better. Even at this early stage in the settlement of Grande Prairie, fuel and fencing material are becoming scarce in many localities. In the more open parts of the Prairie there is little enough of either and farmers living there have for years back been hauling posts and rails and coal for distances of twenty miles or more. Local forest reserves, judiciously selected, widely distributed and wisely administered, would serve the needs of tens of thousands of

people and contribute to thrift and economy in the truest sense.

## Water Power Facilities.

Incidental advantages would be the partial regulation of stream flow, the preservation of springs and the perpetuation of fur-bearing game and wild life generally, for which naturalists of the future would hold us blessed and which would contribute a not inconsiderable item of national income.

There would seem to be specially urgent need for prompt action to the end that soldier-settlers—who surely deserve the best the country can do for them—may be spared the tragedy of wasting the balance of their lives on unproductive land. What the country is now taking steps to do in the way of expropriating unused lands and disposing of them to settlers is in every way commendable and meets the hearty approbation of all with whom I have talked. Why not be equally solicitous of the interests of those who take up Crown Lands?

## Classifying Lands Would Pay.

What is to prevent a measure giving immediate effect to a broad, far-reaching plan of national conservation and thrift, under which all wild lands would be classified according to their adaptability and those unsuitable for successful agriculture withdrawn from settlement? Even occasional good quarters distributed among poor ones might well be withdrawn for the time being. Agricultural progress must be by communities and a good piece of land in the midst of an undesirable tract is not a fit place for any Canadian citizen to live and labor. Compactness of settlement, with a special view to school facilities and general neighborhood convenience, should be studiously planned. We have heard much of systematic town-planning. What about some timely country planning?

Lands of doubtful value for farming purposes might be reserved until such time as development clearly justified their opening to settlement. Err on the safe side.

Our Crown Lands would fall naturally into (a) farm land; (b) ranching land; (c) timber, park and mineral reserves. The latter areas should be thoroughly protected by game wardens and fire rangers, or police combining these functions. On the forested areas a far more efficient and strongly manned system of fire ranging should be instituted than we have ever yet known. It would be folly to preserve forests for fire to consume. Right within hauling distance of where this article is written, great quantities of jack-pine fence posts and rails of much use to settlers are annually consumed by wildfire and little is done to prevent it.

## Administering It Easy.

To administer such a measure as outlined would call for some new officials, though the Mounted Police and the homestead inspectors might possibly fit into the machinery. While the Department of the Interior is in possession of considerable detailed information through the reports of land surveyors, this is not in all cases sufficiently minute to go upon. It would be useful, however, to those who might be entrusted with the responsibility of classifying the public domain.

Of late years in various parts of America soil surveys of settled districts have been made by agricultural experts. Whatever

advantages may follow from these, it is obvious that vastly more good would accrue from surveys of unoccupied lands with a view to the wise control of settlement.

It is to be hoped that our returning legions, with the object lessons of centuries of European conservation fresh in their minds, will give force and impetus to legislation capable of vast and far-reaching benefits, if applied promptly at this juncture, in the domain of this nascent and resourceful young nation. May action be taken at once.

## INDUSTRIAL OUTLOOK.

The announcement in a Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, paper that one of the dry goods houses in that city had increased its capital sevenfold, shows the confidence which business men have in the future development of the country. Other firms are also increasing their capital and operations. Saskatoon is in the centre of a rich and fertile country which is growing more prosperous each year, and which is reflecting its prosperity in the city's growth. It is typical of many other cities in Western Canada, and is fortunate in being a railway centre of very great importance.

## LIVE STOCK INDUSTRY.

Canadian producers, manufacturers, transportation companies and bankers are co-operating in the interest of the Canadian live stock industry. The Canadian National Live Stock Council, the Canadian Bankers' Association, the Railway War Board and the meat packers have each nominated a member of a committee to consider, with the Government officials, the problems arising in connection with the domestic and export trade in animal products. The purpose of the Committee, which will meet with the Live Stock Commissioner, as occasion demands, is to discuss production, marketing and finance as affecting the development of the Canadian live stock industry and the Canadian meat trade in the export markets.

## CO-OPERATION ON FARMS.

In the provinces of Ontario and Saskatchewan, a director of co-operation and marketing instructs the farming community on the advantages of co-operation in disposing of their farm products. Assistance is given to inexperienced men to enable them to organise in such a way as to avoid mistakes, and to assist them to systematise and simplify their business transactions. These directors are supported by funds provided by the Dominion Government under the Agricultural Instruction Act. According to the report on the work carried on under this act in 1917-1918, 35 Associations in Ontario did business to the amount of £180,000, while Saskatchewan totalled over £400,000.

## SOCCER.

The 1st Reserve Battalion at Seaford sustained a severe shock latterly when they were roundly beaten by a team composed of ex-Imperial soldiers representing Seaford town, by five goals to one.

At one time the neighbourhood of British Columbia dazzled with football stars of more or less degree and magnitude.

The dour and hardy Scots were ever to the fore displaying the finer points of the game, and a Battalion from that district should have managed to put up a better show for the credit of the Province. However, any team may have an off-day, and it is to be expected that they will turn the tables at some early date.