

The Commercial

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BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Several important occurrences have recently taken place in our province of British Columbia. The most important of these is the completion of the first railway connecting the province with the United States. On account of the fact that water communication exists at all times of the year, between British Columbia and the Pacific coast states, the matter of railway communication is not of as vast importance as it would be in an interior province like Manitoba. Still it is a very important epoch for the province. The first railway to give connection with the United States is the Westminster Southern. The northern terminus of this railway is on the Fraser river, just opposite the city of New Westminster. It is expected that the river will be bridged in time, so that the trains may run right into the city. In the meantime a railway ferry may be used. When the river is crossed, the road can be connected with the Canadian Pacific, a branch of which latter line reaches New Westminster. From New Westminster, or rather from the point on the Fraser river opposite that city, the road runs in a southerly direction to the United States boundary at Blain, in the state of Washington. At the boundary connection is made with the Fairhaven and Northern railway, and thence there is connection through to Pacific coast points south. An important feature in connection with this road is the fact that it will be controlled and operated by the Great Northern. This means that New Westminster is to become practically the northern terminus of the Great Northern on the Pacific coast.

Another important matter is the completion of the sugar refinery at Vancouver. The large buildings for this industry have been erected, the plant has been placed in position, cargoes of raw sugar have been received from across the Pacific, and the refinery is now regularly at work. British Columbia will now be independent of the East in the important commodity of sugar, and a great industry has been established in the province. As population increases in the province, and also in the prairie country east of the mountains, it is evident that the coast towns of British Columbia will become industrial centres in many branches for the country eastward.

In the address at the recent opening of the local legislature of the Pacific province, a couple of matters were mentioned which are also worthy of special comment. The first was the announcement that a commission had been appointed to revise the mining laws, with the object of promoting the development of the vast mineral wealth of the province. This work, it is understood, has been entrusted to a number of practical men, who have an extensive knowledge of the subject to be handled. British Columbia will undoubtedly become the wealthiest mineral region of Canada, if not of the continent. To say that its mineral resources are vast, is but to use a common expression

which will convey but a faint idea of the actual condition. Almost every mineral known to the scientist is found somewhere in the province. It is therefore of the utmost importance that this great natural wealth should be fostered by wise laws. The appointment of a commission of practical men, to consolidate and revise the mineral laws, would indicate that the government is anxious to deal with this great heritage to the best advantage.

Another matter mentioned at the opening of the local house, was the announcement that the house would be invited to consider what measures would be best calculated to discourage speculation in agricultural lands. This move was expected from the action of the Government some time ago in withdrawing agricultural lands from private sale. A good deal of valuable agricultural land in the province has already passed into private hands, and it is to be feared the government has not done its duty in the past in holding the public domain for the people—that is actual settlers. Large tracts have fallen into the hands of speculators and others, and are held at exorbitant prices. In this way settlement is discouraged. However, it is better to take action late than not at all, and if the public domain is properly handled in the future, no doubt the neglect of the past will be overlooked. Besides, it is only during recent years that the full value of these agricultural lands for settlement has been made apparent, and on account of the situation of the past in the province, the policy governing the disposal of lands is not so open to criticism. Changing conditions have changed the situation, and rendered a more conservative policy necessary in dealing with public lands.

While speaking of speculation in lands, another class of speculation might be referred to. This is speculation in town sites. From the many advertisements of this nature appearing in British Columbia papers, it would appear that there is something of a disposition abroad to speculate in town sites. A large number of new towns are being advertised as profitable places for investment, and each one of these places is of course to become a great city. This reminds us of the situation in Manitoba early in the last decade. When lots had advanced to such an extent in Winnipeg that they were beyond the reach of parties with limited means, a new class of investments were placed upon the speculative real estate market. Towns were laid out all over the country, and a good deal of hard cash was invested in many of them. Where are these embryo cities now? Echo answers where! A good many of them have disappeared entirely, and have been plowed up for wheat fields, or still remain as virgin prairie. Some are small villages. None of them have come anywhere near attaining to the extravagant expectations made of them. None of them have proved profitable investments. In the case of British Columbia it may be different. Possibly a few of these towns may become places of importance, and lands purchased in them may prove profitable investments, if purchased at a low valuation on the start. That the majority of these places will not become places of importance, is almost a certainty. One point against investments in new towns proving profitable, is the fact that

the lands are usually sold at the start for as much as they would be worth in an established town of considerable importance. British Columbia has a number of established cities, where judicious investments are certain to prove of permanent value. These include Victoria, Vancouver, New Westminster, Nanaimo, etc. The placing of so many new town sites upon the market, indicates a dangerous limit of speculation, which no doubt has been encouraged by the great progress made by the province during the past year.

MANITOBA OATS.

The Winnipeg grain exchange has taken up the question of the quality of Manitoba oats, with the object of endeavoring to have our farmers enlightened as to the advisability of exercising more care in growing oats. A committee of the exchange has been appointed to interview Hon. Mr. Greenway, to urge him to have a bulletin issued for distribution among the farmers, giving information as to the best kind of oats to grow, etc.

This is a very important move on the part of the exchange, and it is to be hoped it may bear fruit. THE COMMERCIAL some weeks ago called attention to the serious loss to Manitoba farmers owing to the quality of oats grown here. The black and mixed oats usually grown here are not nearly as valuable for marketing abroad as a good white oat. Manitoba oats are also largely mixed with wheat, barley and other substances which impair their value. At Montreal, while Manitoba oats were quoted at 44 and 44½ cents per bushel of 34 pounds, Ontario oats were quoted at 47 to 48 cents for the same weight, per bushel, this represents a serious loss to Manitoba growers. It would be just as easy to cultivate a white oat as the mixed quality now mostly grown, and the freight would not be any greater on the choicest than it is upon the poorest and dirtiest oats marketed. The three or four cents difference in the value between our oats and the choicer eastern oats is therefore just so much dead loss to our farmers. In his address at the annual meeting of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, President Bawlf said that he estimated we would have 3,000,000 bushels of oats for shipment this year. On this quantity of oats we will lose about \$120,000 on account of the quality and variety grown. In United States markets the same conditions exist. If we were marketing our surplus crop there we would be docked considerably on account of quality. At present the high duties keeps our oats out of that country, but this may not be for long. Our surplus oat crop will no doubt continue to increase, and we should endeavor at once to improve the quality so as to obtain the best price. It is therefore to be hoped that Manitoba farmers will be fully advised in this matter before another crop is sown.

The attempt to arrange a combination of oat meal millers of the province of Ontario has fallen through, it having been found impossible to get the whole of the millers to agree upon prices and the output of the various mills. It is stated a majority of Ontario oatmeal mills are running at not more than one-third their capacity, owing to decreased demand and increased competition.