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THE PEACE RIVER COUNTRY.

Some little time ago Mr. James M. Macoun, Assistant Naturalist of the Geological Survey branch of the Department of the Interior, created something of a furore by a report on the conditions and possibilities of the Peace River country. The report was so pessimistic as to the agricultural prospects for that "great lone land," and was at the same time so totally at variance with the published opinions of such eminent authorities as the late Dr. Dawson, Dr. Macoun, (his own father), and others, that it was at once recognized that something was radically wrong. Naturally the people of Edmonton and other places comparatively near to the debated section were indignant at what they considered pure calumny, and they called loudly for some sort of a rectification of the error.

This to a certain extent has been done by the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization at Ottawa, in the report of Mr. James M. Douglas, the chairman, appearing in a blue book, dated 1904 and just to hand. In this Mr. Macoun's report is practically annulled, though his evidence is reprinted, as explained, "with such remarks by honorable members as appear therein," any elimination being liable, in their judgment, "to mutilate the same, so as to mar the sense."

The following sentences, abridged from Mr. Douglas' "report" will give an idea of the feeling of the committee with regard to the status of the Peace River country:

They are of opinion that Mr. Macoun was not possessed of sufficient information to make a report upon the Peace River country, and that he was not warranted by the facts within his knowledge in making the report he did, and in arriving at the sweepingly unfavorable conclusion he has. Mr. Macoun spent less than three months in the Peace River

country, travelling the greater part of that time on foot. The area covered by his report amounts to considerably over twenty million acres, and it is unreasonable to suppose that any man could, within that time, acquire sufficient knowledge to enable him to make the report and give the evidence which Mr. Macoun did.

Dr. Dawson says: "The soil of the Grand Prairie is almost everywhere exceedingly fertile, and it is covered for miles together by a deep, rich loam which it would be impossible to surpass in excellence." Mr. Macoun, in his report, says of the same district in speaking of its soil: "The loam, as I saw it, varies from four to six inches in depth; it may be deeper in places, but if so, such soil has not been seen by any one whom I have met in the country."

Mr. Ogilvie says that were it not for the difficulty of getting into and out of that country, stock raising might be profitably engaged in. Hay is abundant and of good quality, nearly everywhere; and in summer grazing is excellent. Mr. Macoun condemns this country for stock raising, and in his evidence, upon being asked: "Isn't it good for either cattle or grain?" said, "That is what I say. I don't think it necessary to make it plainer. If you want it definite, it is less suited for cattle as an industry than for grain raising. It is not only difficult to get hay for winter, but it is difficult to get water."

The committee are of opinion that it is regrettable that Mr. Macoun's report was ever printed or distributed, and earnestly advise that no more copies of said report be given to the public until a careful examination shall have been made by reliable experts.

Finally, the committee refuses to decide on the differences of opinion existing between Mr. Macoun and the authorities mentioned, but it is strongly inclined to believe that he had not sufficient knowledge or data on which to found the conclusions he reached.

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