

STEFANSSON'S SCHEME TO DEVELOP NORTHLAND

WOULD SOLVE PROBLEM OF FUTURE FOOD SHORTAGE

Over Million Square Miles of Grazing Ground where Musk-ox and Reindeer can live all year round and could supply World with Meat and Wool

In an address at Ottawa on May 6 before members of the Senate and House of Commons, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the Canadian Arctic explorer, presented a scheme for converting the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Canada into a great wool, milk, and meat producing area.

Mr. Stefansson recently submitted the proposition to Hon. Arthur Meighen, Minister of the Interior, whose department administers the natural resources of the north, and it was then thought advisable that Mr. Stefansson should address the senators and members upon the subject.

The Stefansson scheme involves the introduction of large herds of reindeer into the Canadian north; and the domestication and development of large herds of musk ox. Both these animals will furnish a milk and meat supply. The musk ox in addition will furnish a wool supply. The situation in the north is briefly this:

In the summer there is an abundant vegetation, which forms nutritious food for grazing animals in winter as well as summer. It is estimated there are at least a million square miles of such grazing grounds in northern Canada. The winter climate of these areas is too severe for ordinary domestic cattle, but musk ox and reindeer can graze there in the open the year round.

Mr. Stefansson says that most people who know reindeer meat consider it is the best meat on earth. In regard to musk ox meat, he says that for a year when he was in the north this meat constituted 90 per cent of his party's food supply, and that they found it indistinguishable in taste from beef. In view of these circumstances, Stefansson claims that the Canadian north can be utilized to help solve the problem of present and future shortage; and, in addition, that the development of this industry will naturally expedite the development of the mineral and other resources of the north.

In his remarks Mr. Stefansson pointed out that:

The domestication of animals among our ancestors developed in the sub-tropical part of Asia where the cow and the sheep and the horse were native. Through the conservatism which makes us prefer the foods we are used to, we have been engaged since then in the uphill task of pushing these animals north beyond their natural limits. In such countries as, for instance, northern Norway, they are already far beyond their reasonable range, and their cultivation is not very profitable because they have to be hay-fed and house-sheltered for a considerable part of the year, entailing great expense and trouble. It is temperamental with many of us, though it is not wise, to run counter to Nature and force her to our will. This can never lead to any great or stable success, and the wiser thing is to adapt ourselves and

our tastes to local conditions. So far as our old domesticated animals are concerned, therefore, we should not try to carry them farther north than they have already gone, and we should adopt instead, if they are available, some other animals that are equally good and that are suited by nature to a more northerly environment.

REINDEER IN ALASKA.

About twenty years ago the American Government introduced 1,280 domestic reindeer into the arctic Alaska. From the point of view of the Government at the time this was a sort of charity, for their sole aim was to give a possibility of economic independence to the Eskimo already inhabiting that country. At the time the prevailing opinion was that even this object would not be attained, and few of those who expected the enterprise to succeed even dreamt of its present magnitude or the meaning it would have for Alaska today or for the world to-morrow. Under Eskimo care these herds have increased at the rate of doubling in three years. But the few animals that are in the hands of white men are found to double in numbers every two years. The main reason for the difference is that the white men look farther into the future than the natives, and therefore butcher only male animals. The Eskimo, on the other hand, butcher a number of females each year for reasons of fashion in clothing. To them a spotted or a white reindeer skin has the same sort of value that silver foxes have among us; that is, a value depending on rarity and entirely independent of the warmth or other practical good qualities of the skin. For that reason most females that have a spotted or white skin are killed before they are three years old, for after that time their hides would not have the same desirability for clothing from the Eskimo point of view.

When the American Government gave reindeer to the Eskimo they made each Eskimo promise that he would not sell a female reindeer at any time to a white man, the object of the Government being merely to promote the economic welfare of the Eskimo. But it was found necessary to secure several Laplanders to instruct the Eskimo in the care of deer, and these Laplanders were by the Government allowed to own reindeer herds on the same terms as the natives. The Government overlooked, however, to bind the Laplanders as they bound the Eskimo, and these Laplanders have, therefore, recently sold practically all their reindeer to a firm of American capitalists, who own at present about 15,000 deer. This company sold about 1,500 carcasses of 150 pounds each on the American markets last year at a price ranging from five cents to fifteen cents a pound in excess of the corresponding cuts of domestic beef. There is in England a well-established market for reindeer meat, for there it has been imported for many years from northern Norway, and 100 carcasses of Alaska reindeer were this year sold in London at a price of about sixpence a pound in excess of beef.

"The Lomen Company," Mr. Stefansson said, "who own the Alaska reindeer, have told me that they can raise on the Seward peninsula about fifty reindeer to the square mile. It has been found that at Point Barrow and on the north coast of Alaska generally grazing conditions are better than in the Seward peninsula, for rocks are absent and the land is a level and rolling prairie covered with more abundant vegetation than the average of the Seward peninsula. We, therefore, know that Alaska north of and in the vicinity of the Arctic Circle has 150,000 square

miles of grazing territory capable of supporting fifty animals to the mile. So that arctic Alaska will in due time support over 7,000,000 reindeer, producing about as much meat per year as 14,000,000 sheep, or several times the present mutton production of all the settled portion of Canada. The price of reindeer meat will doubtless fall in due course to the vicinity of that of beef or mutton. Most people who know reindeer meat are enthusiastic about it and consider it the best meat on earth, but it is probable that when it becomes common on the markets people's opinion will vary as it does with other meats today and, while some will prefer it to beef, others will prefer beef or mutton to reindeer meat.

The Lomen Company say that at present they can raise reindeer meat in the Seward Peninsula of Alaska, butcher the animals there, send the meat by cold storage ships 3,500 miles to Seattle and by cold storage freight cars to Chicago, and sell the meat there at one-half the price of beef and still make a good profit. Seeing that instead of selling the meat at half the price of beef they are selling it as high as thirty-five per cent above the price of beef, it means that at present their business is tremendously profitable and, so far as can be seen, this will continue to be the case.

MILLIONS OF SQUARE MILES.

But while Alaska has one hundred or two hundred thousand square miles suitable to reindeer grazing, Canada has from one to two millions of square miles of territory equally rich in vegetation and in the main better located, so far as transportation conditions are concerned. Bering Sea is open for no greater period of the year than are Hudson Straits, and if it is possible to ship meat from lands adjacent to Bering Sea across thirty-five hundred miles of the Pacific ocean, then three thousand miles by rail and then another three thousand miles by water to England, it is obvious that the matter would be far simpler were the herds located, for instance, on the west coast of Hudson Bay rather than in the farthest corner of Alaska. Furthermore, as soon as the railway is finished to Port Nelson, the Chicago market will be reachable from Hudson Bay by a shorter railway haulage than that from Seattle to Chicago, giving the reindeer grown in the vicinity of Hudson Bay an obvious advantage over those raised in Alaska, unless tariff regulations exclude them. And even at that, we have the Winnipeg and other Canadian markets readily accessible by rail.

The Americans now realize that they made a fundamental mistake in starting the industry on such a small scale. It took them about fifteen years to develop the first twelve hundred to twelve thousand, and it is now easy to see that had they started with twelve thousand and saved fifteen years of time, they might now have an industry of huge proportions. For the same rate of increase which has developed the original twelve hundred into the one hundred and seventy thousand animals of today would have developed twelve thousand in the same time into between ten and fifteen millions, especially had the industry from the early stages been in the charge of careful husbandry men instead of under the haphazard care of natives.

I have not the patience to enter into a discussion with those who say that transportation difficulties forbid Canada's going into this industry on a large scale. I found the other day in talking with Lord Shaughnessy and Mr. Beatty that they saw no such transportation difficulties, and if men of that type don't, why need the rest of us worry? If once you realize the tremendous potentialities of the north you are in the position of those few who forty years ago realized the possibilities of Manitoba, and the problem to be solved will be merely the transportation problem of Manitoba over again even for the least favoured regions.

From the west coast to Hudson Bay we shall in a year have a railway, and we already have the ocean route to Europe. In order to find a country in

the grazing region that is as inaccessible as Manitoba was in 1875, you have to put your finger on some central spot in the vicinity of Great Slave Lake.

WORLD'S MEAT PROBLEMS.

The meat and wool problems of the world are becoming more acute every day and for an obvious reason. No solution proposed up to the present has been anything but a temporary solution. We hear much of the grazing territory of the Argentine, but, like our own West, that will last as a grazing territory for a matter of a few years only. You can raise more food to the square mile by cultivating cereals or orchards than by raising cattle or sheep, and so, while the wild land of Argentine of today may be the cattle and sheep land of tomorrow, it will be the farm and the orchard land of the day after tomorrow. In the temperate and equatorial lands it is only the semi-arid regions that are in any sense permanent grazing land, and even into them the progress of dry farming and of irrigation are making continual inroads. In eastern Oregon and Washington, for instance, and in our own southern British Columbia and in Alberta, irrigation has already converted huge areas from herds to orchards and wheat fields. And this development is bound to continue, constantly lessening the meat and wool producing lands of the world.

But unless some revolutionary discovery is made in agriculture, we have in Canada a great grazing area that lies too far north to be included in the profitable cultivation of cereals. This area is about three million square miles, but if you allow two millions for forests and fishing lakes and areas barren because they are rocky, you still have a million square miles of prairie land. The summer varies in length from six months north of Slave Lake to three months in the more northerly islands. But whether the summer is six months or three, it is abundantly long enough for the development of nutritious vegetation which, although it is green only in the summer, is satisfactory food for grazing animals throughout the winter as well. The snow fall in most parts of the far north is less than half that of Manitoba. I was brought up in Manitoba and Dakota in sections where houses were far apart. At one time our nearest neighbour was fifteen miles away across a rolling prairie. When you were out of sight of our house there was no other house in view. I speak with the authority of ample experience when I say that at that time a man brought up in Dakota or Manitoba if he could have been magically transferred to the middle of Banks Island would not have been able to realize by the ordinary evidences of his senses that he was not in his own country. Had the month been July, he would have seen the rolling prairie stretching away to the horizon in either place, green in either place, and differing in Banks Island only by the larger percentage of small lakes and the larger number of flowers. Of course, had he been a botanist he could by looking closely at any plant near him have told that he had grass of a different species, but at a hundred yards or over there would have been no telltale difference. And the like would have been true in winter, for, as in Manitoba or Dakota, he would have found deep snow drifts in certain places, but in most places a negligible amount of snow on the ground and the grass here and there sticking up through, so that it is only in a few places that animals have to use their feet for pawing away the snow as they feed.

NORTHERN RESOURCES UNKNOWN.

It is curious that the whole world should be as densely ignorant as it is of the climate and resources of the north, but it is deplorable, if it is not pathetic, that Canadians generally should share in the same impression. Fifty years ago it would have been difficult to convince the ordinary inhabitant of Montreal or Toronto that Manitoba was a fit place to live in or

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