

The Arid Districts

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ment have demonstrated the possibility of diverting the larger part of the volume of the principal streams for irrigation purposes, and it is now certain that very extensive areas in the vicinity of Calgary, and between that point and Medicine Hat, in the district lying to the north and east of Calgary traversed by the Rosebud river on the well known Lethbridge plains and throughout the country adjacent to McLeod, can be supplied with water for irrigation from the Bow, Red Deer, St. Mary and Old Man rivers respectively, and the foothills country from the many minor streams intersecting it every few miles.

The central portion of the region comprising Western Assiniboia will be supplied with water from the South Saskatchewan river and the numerous small streams heading in the Cypress Hills, and although the supply in this district is more limited than in Southern Alberta, there is certainly sufficient to reclaim large areas.

The eastern portion of the district comprising the Regina plains and country to the west will be supplied with water diverted from the South Saskatchewan through the Qu'Appelle Valley, and from storage of storm and spring freshets at present allowed to go to waste.

I seem to hear the exclamation, "why take up our time with such Utopian ideas as these, which are visionary dreams of the future?" and I reply, this is no idle dream, but an outline of possibilities which will be realized within a comparatively few years. We have to-day in Southern Alberta and Western Assiniboia 121 irrigation ditches and canals in operation, comprising over 300 miles in length and which have cost at a low estimate some \$150,000, by this time next year, the number and mileage will probably be doubled, without taking into consideration the three or four large undertakings which have been projected. The results from the application of water from these ditches and canals has demonstrated beyond argument that the virgin soil of our plains and foothill country, combined with favorable climate, and when aided by water applied through irrigation, will produce crops equal and in most cases surpassing any grown in Manitoba or other portions of the territories, and while there is no intention of casting the slightest doubt upon the many advantages which this province and the humid portions of the territories offer to the home-seeker, an intimate knowledge of which has been acquired by the writer during the past twenty-two years spent in visiting most parts of the country, it is desired to give emphasis to the fact that although the large area of our territories above described must look to irrigation as the means of making agriculture successful, a convention such as this, which is, I presume, charged with the duty of considering the question of best methods of colonizing our country as a whole cannot overlook this vast district, which in some particulars possesses advantages not to be found in the sections more favored in the way of rainfall. It may also be stated, and, if necessary, easily proved, that the possessor of an irrigated farm is much better off than the farmer dependent upon rainfall; the former turns on the moisture when and in such quantities as may be needed, and knows no failure of crops from drought, while the latter, even in the most favored regions, is at the mercy of the elements, and is at times forced to stand by and see his crop perish from lack of moisture, and finally as a justification for the foregoing remarks, it may be accepted as a fact that immigrants may be secured from the many irrigation states and territories to the south of us to colonize our arid region,

who cannot be induced to move into any country where farming is carried on in the usual manner, which they aptly describe as "dry farming."

Having outlined the method of reclaiming our arid region it remains to speak of the proposed scheme for colonizing the reclaimed lands. In the first place it must be remembered that in the arid region, we have a much larger area of land than there is water to irrigate, even under the most favorable conditions of storage and use, and it is therefore evident that we should have the irrigated areas distributed as much as possible throughout the whole region, so that the unirrigated portions may be utilized for pasturage. This being the case, it follows that the system of settlement suited to portions of the country having sufficient rainfall to mature crops, is quite unsuited to the arid portion of the territories. The experience of the irrigation states and territories to the south of us, notably, Colorado, Utah and California, demonstrates that the greatest development by the aid of irrigation is to be looked for when the country is settled under the hamlet or community system and it is under this system that our colonization to be successful must proceed. Under this system, aided by irrigation, the Greeley colony in Colorado, the Mormon colonies in Utah, and the numerous colonies in South California, including Ontario, formed and colonized by Canadians, have been making history in the development of western lands and agricultural prosperity, and we cannot do better than follow their example.

The "hamlet system" of settlement possesses so many advantages over the ordinary method in vogue in this province and other humid regions that there should be no difficulty in getting people to adopt it. In the first place, the central hamlet, or village, permits of social intercourse and advantages in the way of education, religion and amusement, which are not possible when each settler lives on his own quarter section, and houses are from half a mile to one mile apart, and the mutual effort and co-operation in the construction and operation of a grist mill, creamery, cold storage, elevator and the numerous other industries, including money in farm implements and in the purchase of well bred male stock for breeding purposes required in connection with successful farming or dairying pursuits, becomes possible under the hamlet system, which are hard to obtain under ordinary conditions. Pages might be written regarding the advantages of the hamlet style of settlement, particularly when irrigation is practiced, but why take up your valuable time by advancing arguments to prove what is now history, open to any one who will take the trouble to inform himself of the facts regarding the success of hamlet or colony settlement in the countries above mentioned, let me rather proceed at once to outline the scheme under which it is proposed to apply the hamlet or colony system to the settlement of our arid region. The scheme is as follows.

It having been demonstrated that water can be supplied for the irrigation of certain large areas, let the owners of the land affected set aside certain portions within the tract susceptible of irrigation, for colonization under the hamlet system, and so soon as the necessary canals are completed, begin an active campaign in the United States and abroad for immigrants to take the irrigated lands under the colony or hamlet plan. That settlers can be obtained to develop the country under this system and by the aid of irrigation is proved by the experience of the States and territories already referred to, and by the spectacle witnessed a few days ago in the passage over the Canadian Pacific railway of a very considerable colony in their migration from the central and eastern states to Northern California, to found one of the colonies

which are being located at different points in the arid west by the American colonial club.

Mr. Chairman and members of the convention, let me close this paper which has already grown to an inexcusable length, by asking for your fair consideration of the facts regarding our arid region, and the advantages which it certainly has as a home for the immigrant who is desirous of going in for ranching and dairy farming, providing that he can count on the never-failing aid of irrigation to produce each and every year a crop equal both in yield and quality to anything produced in any other part of this our great western heritage, of which we are all so justly proud, and upon the early settlement and progress of which depends much of the future of our Dominion.

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