

## THE NORTH-WEST IRRIGATION ACT.

In the year 1893, after having sent out circulars to some of the best known and most experienced settlers of the North-west Territories, it was decided that it would be well to regulate the disposal of the available water in those districts by an Act of Parliament, and consequently the North-west Irrigation Act was passed and assented to on July 23, 1894. This Act was subsequently amended on July 22, 1895, and again on June 13, 1898.

It was probably not without a certain amount of hesitation that the Government decided to lay such a bill before Parliament, for some parties who knew the North-west well were pessimistic as to the results which would be obtained from irrigation, and fear was expressed that such an Act might stop intending immigrants from settling in that portion of Canada, as the Act might be the means of leading them to believe that Southern Alberta and Western Assiniboia were too arid to be farmed and tilled to advantage; in fact, it was even feared that the settlement of the province of Manitoba might be materially retarded if such an impression was implanted abroad. This fear was not without a certain excuse, for even corporations with big interests in that part of the country were doubtful as to its agricultural resources, and such an important company as the Alberta Railway Company, which held thousands of acres in Southern Alberta, disposed of large blocks of the same at the rate of \$1 and \$1.25 per acre, thinking at that time that they were getting good value for their land.

After the Irrigation Act was assented to, it was necessary to find out who were the parties who had irrigation works constructed, in order that they might be notified to come under the provisions of the same; that is to say, secure a license from the Crown for the water required by them within a certain period, which was to lapse on July 1, 1896, and which period was subsequently extended to July 1, 1898.

After investigation it was found that at the time the Irrigation Act came into force, there were about 119 irrigation schemes constructed, or in course of construction. These schemes came under the three classes defined in clause 2 of section 8 of the Act, as follows:—

Twenty-eight came under the heading of domestic purposes, and comprised the diversion of water for railway purposes, the supply to mills worked by steam, and the watering of stock.

Seventy-eight came under the heading of 'irrigation' and were found to have been constructed since 1890, or were in course of construction at the time the Act was enacted, all of them on a small scale, irrigating at the most from 25 to 200 acres, which goes to show that irrigation was in its infancy at that time and the results from the same were only problematical.

The remaining three schemes came under the heading of 'other purposes,' one of them for the purpose of operating mills by water pressure, the other two constructed, or in course of construction, by the Calgary Water Power Company, and the Calgary Irrigation Company which held a Dominion charter prior to the passage of the North-west Irrigation Act of 1894.

## IRRIGATION COMPANIES FORMED.

With the exception of the Calgary Irrigation Company and the Spring Bank Irrigation Company, which had made application for water to be diverted from the Elbow river and Jumping Pond creek, the former to irrigate 45,000 acres, and the latter 21,000 acres, no company had yet taken up irrigation on a large scale, till the Canadian North-west Irrigation Company applied in the year 1897 to be given the water reserved from the St. Mary river for the purpose of irrigating 500,000 acres of land, which after survey, were considered to be susceptible of being irrigated from that source. After having secured the necessary authorization the company began the construction of these works at an estimated cost of \$400,000, but which expendi-