

PEACE RIVER DISTRICT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA—ITS GREAT IMPORTANCE.

There is a considerable portion of what may be termed the agricultural land of British Columbia, lying east of the Rocky Mountains, which is described with force and clearness in the evidence of Dr. Dawson, and therefore his words are again quoted:—"The eastern boundary of British Columbia follows on the 120th meridian from the 60th parallel southward till that meridian strikes the Rocky Mountains, and a large triangular portion of British Columbia thus lies east of the Rocky Mountains. The part of the Peace River basin that is of considerable agricultural value, and is included in British Columbia, I estimated at between 5,000 and 6,000 square miles."

"The part of the Peace River country," Dr. Dawson continued, "of which I am able, from personal knowledge to speak, is that lying south of the 57th parallel of latitude and reaching to the Athabasca River, and has an approximate area of 31,558 square miles. The Peace River country, I should state, is naturally separated from the Upper Saskatchewan country by a band of poor land along the Athabasca. The average elevation of this region is about 2,000 feet above the sea, or a little more than that. The soil is a very fine silt, which, where it is best, very much resembles that of the Red River valley, and is quite different from most of the soil intervening between the Red River and the Peace River country. The fertility of the soil, owing to the small attempts yet made at cultivation in that district, is chiefly evidenced by the extraordinary luxuriance of the natural vegetation found upon it. In general the Peace River country is more or less densely wooded, but there are considerable areas of prairie land also. West of the Smoky River I have estimated that the areas aggregate 3,000 miles, or 1,920,000 acres. One of the largest prairies—Grand Prairie, south of Dunvegan Pass, has an area of 230,000 acres nearly all prairie, with a few scattered groves of trees. The soil is magnificent; it is watered by beautiful streams, and is altogether one of the most attractive countries in a state of nature I have ever seen. The rest of the tract of 31,550 square miles, which, from its flat character, and low elevation, constitutes the arable region, is, as a rule, wooded, and for the most part with second growth; wood, which consists of poplar, birch and spruce. Taking this area again, and deducting all the known districts which contain poor soil, and 20 per cent. besides to cover other areas which could not be cultivated, it leaves an area of the Peace River valley, with soil suited to agriculture, of 23,500 square miles."

Dr. Dawson was here asked whether these remarks referred wholly or in part to British Columbia, and answered:—"I have spoken of the whole district, because that part in British Columbia—between 5,000 and 6,000 square miles of agricultural land is similar. I speak only of that part of the Peace River country south of the 57th parallel. I do not refer to that to the north, because I have never been there myself and could only speak of it from report. To give some idea of the value of the region as an agricultural country, taking the area I have given, and supposing as a measure of its capacity—merely, of course, as an empirical supposition for the purpose of estimating its value—that the whole were sown in wheat, at twenty bushels to the acre, it would produce over 470,000,000 bushels of wheat annually. I believe that the whole of this area will eventually be cultivated. I am not quite sure that over every part of it wheat will ripen and be a sure crop, but as far as we can judge of the climate, it is as good as, or better than that of Edmonton on the Saskatchewan River; and where wheat has been tried in the Peace River district, as a matter of fact, it succeeds, as well as other crops, such as oats and barley. We have, therefore, every reason to believe that over the greater part of this area wheat will be a satisfactory and sure crop. If only the estimated prairie area be taken as immediately susceptible of cultivation, its yield, at the rate above estimated, would be 38,400,000 bushels."

Dr. Dawson stated that summer frosts, which sometimes occur in this region, were not sufficiently intense to prevent the ripening of wheat and other grains. This he said was a fact within his own knowledge. He was asked whether the season in which he was there was not more favourable than usual; on the contrary, he said, it was an unusually severe season, but yet the frost did not affect the wheat crop. He added:—"I collected excellent specimens of wheat from the Hudson's Bay Post. In fact, the crops this year were later than usual, on account of a period of wet weather just before harvest, which delayed the ripening of the grain."

He further stated that "wheat thrives at Lesser Slave Lake Post. I saw barley

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