

RESULTS FROM IRRIGATION

HOUSE OF COMMONS,
COMMITTEE ROOM 34.

TUESDAY, June 7, 1904.

The Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization met here this day at 10 o'clock a.m., Mr. Douglas, chairman, presiding.

The CHAIRMAN.—I may say to the Committee that we tried to secure the presence of one of the members of the Department of the Interior to speak to us with reference to immigration. Mr. Scott, who was expected to come, has been in Winnipeg I think for two weeks, and it is not yet known when he can come here, so that instead of immigration we had to fall back this morning on irrigation.

Mr. Samuel M. Genest, from the Department of the Interior, is here, and will be able to give us some information with reference to the work of irrigation in the North-west. It is the first time this matter has come before the committee, but there is a good deal of money being spent in connection with irrigation works, and it is well that the committee should hear of it and learn what is being done.

Mr. GENEST.—Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen, as irrigation in the North-west is comparatively a new proposition and may be quite unknown to the majority of members here, I have prepared a synopsis of its history—how it was established in the North-west and what have been the results.

IRRIGATION IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA.

Prior to the year 1890, the greater portion of Southern Alberta was thought to be only suitable for grazing purposes, and was, therefore, mostly taken up by ranchers who obtained leases of certain tracts ranging in area from 5,000 to 10,000 acres, upon which cattle and horses were bred. This industry was a great attraction to settlers in that portion of the country, who, besides being paid wages to look after the ranchers' interests, were also desirous of making a home for themselves by securing a homestead and opening up the same, the wages alone affording them a comfortable livelihood.

These small settlers were in reality the means of bringing to the Government's attention the necessity of distributing the limited supply of water in the North-west of Alberta and South-western Assiniboia to the best advantage. For instance, the thing that these settlers did in choosing a piece of land was to ascertain if water was available on the same, and therefore, they were sure in every case to try and secure a quarter section upon which a spring, creek or a good approach to a river was located; and it was with great difficulty that the government protected the interests of those already established in the country by setting aside such pieces of land as water might become the water supply of vast areas surrounding the streams, creeks or river approaches.