

Montana to Lead in Irrigation and Mining



SCENE IN THE YELLOWSTONE VALLEY, MONTANA.

THE great copper, silver and gold mines of Montana, the "Treasure State" of the Union, potent as has been their influence in its development and while they are yet far from their maximum output and value, must soon take a second place in the state's resources. It is Montana's destiny to be one of the richest agricultural states in the Union. As the agriculture of Colorado, now the foremost state in the production of precious metals, has already outstripped its mines, so in a few years will Montana's farming lead its mines.

With lands of surpassing fertility, in which agricultural plant food has lain stored for centuries, with no drenching rains to leach them away, and with a magnificent water supply from the rain and snows which fall upon the high peaks and watersheds of the continental divide, Montana's fat cattle and sheep, splendid fruit, heavy grains and varied agricultural products will become widely famous.

"The next ten years," said a prominent official of the government reclamation service, in speaking of the great present and coming development of the far northwest, "will see Montana lead all the western states in the area of its irrigated land. Its agricultural future is assured and brilliant. It has the land and it has the water—all that are needed in the arid region to produce fabulous wealth."

Montana has an area equal to that of France. It has, it has often been stated by various authorities, with all its great water supply conserved and made to irrigate its rich lands, room for as dense a population as that of France.

Over three-fifths of this great state is drained by the Missouri river and its big tributaries, such as the Yellowstone, the Jefferson, the Milk river and other branches. Strong rivers these are, rushing down out of their mountain fastnesses—the Absaroka, the Snowy, the Big Horn and Wind river ranges—where at elevations of 8,000, 10,000 and 11,000 feet the snows are perpetual, melting under the summer suns and furnishing a constant water supply, especially in the late summer when it is most needed for irrigation.

Much has already been accomplished by co-operative effort in irrigation among farmers. The irrigated area, according to the census figures, has increased during the past two years at the rate of about 160,000 acres a year and now aggregates 1,140,000 acres. This has been accomplished by the co-operation of small communities and some of the most successful examples are seen at such places as Hinsdale and Chinook in the Great Milk River valley, where farmers have combined, taking up land under the five-year homestead law and constructing their own irrigation works, thus owning the land and the water and paying no rent or tribute to water companies or water bondholders.

Most of these works have been simple diversion propositions without expensive dams, and the cost has been very light, land reclamation averaging, according to the 1900 census, but \$1.92 per acre. The opportunities are legion where bands of twenty or forty or 100 enterprising farmers with a little money and with their strong arms and good teams may build diversion or storage dams and lead the water out upon 160-acre homestead claims, building up homes upon the desert, which will make each and every one of them prosperous and wealthy. The total productivity of Montana's lands is shown by the census figures. The total amount invested in ditches in Montana up to June 1, 1900, was \$4,683,072, while the total value of irrigation products for the one year, 1899, was \$7,230,042.

At the rate of increase in farming and irrigation in the state during the last census decade, the next ten years will see Montana's cultivated area trebled if not quadrupled, even leaving out of consideration the vast reclamation works proposed



GOVERNMENT SKETCH OF MILK RIVER CANAL AS IT WILL APPEAR WHEN COMPLETED—NORTHERN MONTANA.

by the federal government under the national irrigation law.

The project for storing the flood waters of the Milk river in northern Montana under the direction of Engineer Cyrus C. Babb of the geological survey, is one of the first great works investigated by the government engineers, even before the passage of the national irrigation act. This involves huge dams and canals and will reclaim, when carried to full completion, a very large area—probably 500,000 acres—of exceedingly rich land in the already famous Milk river valley. It will be a famous engineering exploit, by which the water now flowing into the Saskatchewan and thence into Hudson bay, will be carried into the Missouri basin and ultimately reach the Gulf of Mexico. The government has also taken up the Fort Buford project in eastern Montana and North Dakota and is likewise preparing to spend \$2,500,000 in the Wyoming-Shoshone project, which will reclaim some of the lands of southern Montana. These are the most advanced of the government works. In various other parts of the state the national hydrographers are making reconnaissances and surveys, investigating reservoir sites and reclaimable areas.

A serious menace, however, to the agricultural future of the state lies in the tendency to land absorption into immense private holdings, which have resulted largely through the abuse of the desert land act and the commuters' clause of the homestead act, under which government land is entered by speculators and dummies and not by actual settlers. W. W. Wooldridge, president of the Montana Fruit Growers' association, in a recent address, cited eleven great ranches in Montana with an average acreage each of 55,000, and showed statistically the greater benefit which would have come to the state had these been settled up into several small farms and occupied by settlers and their families. There seems to be a strong sentiment throughout the state for the repeal of these laws, leaving only the original homestead law, which has worked so successfully in building up co-operative irrigation colonies in the Milk river valley.

All of this great promise of agriculture will, however, but add to Montana's fame as a mining state. "Speaking from a miner's standpoint," said the geological survey official above quoted, "Montana's surface



A MONTANA FARM AND ORCHARD SCENE.

has been but indifferently scratched. We know that whole mountains exist of ore too expensive to work because the cost of living for man and beast is too high. The state has thousands of other mountains of which we know little or nothing. Montana is a vast country of itself; the mountains of its western half cover thousands and tens of thousands of square miles. Now, extend agriculture throughout the state, lead the great stream out of their deep channels and spread them over some millions of acres of arid soil and this mountain wealth can be turned to man's account, railroads will penetrate the desert and Montana can almost supply the world with metals."

GUY E. MITCHELL,

China's Warriors.

"The Chinaman is the embodiment of the business spirit and the established principles of traffic permeates even the soldier

ranks. The secret of China's inglorious military career in recent years is that the rank and file had not been paid. The Chinaman's ruling passion for business displayed itself in the war with Japan. A general in the Japanese army told me that after the first fire from his regiment of infantry the Chinese troops arrayed against him disappeared like a mist. Not long thereafter they appeared in the rear of his army, retailing vegetables to his soldiers. Nevertheless, he was confident, there was no lack of bravery among those thrifty deserters. Inquiry developed that they had not been paid their wages and that they lived in no expectation that their miserable cash allotment as heroes would ever come their way. When they could coin an opportunity into profit, the alternative—of ingloriously facing the firing line without pay—naturally failed to kindle martial zeal.—Booklover's Magazine.