

Erastus A. Benson, Republican Candidate for Mayor of Omaha

ERASTUS A. BENSON, republican mayoralty candidate and the first in Omaha selected by the direct votes of the members of his party, is so thoroughly on record about his views and convictions concerning municipal government that he should be well understood. He has said many times in different and amplified language that he is opposed to all kinds of graft according to the widest interpretation of that elastic word; that he favors the enforcement of the laws to all concerned alike, and that he believes in city ownership of public utilities, and, without that, requiring the public service corporations to treat the people fairly.

Mr. Benson himself is the subject to be dealt with here. The real Erastus A. Benson is, according to his friends, a good many furlongs removed from the esthetic Puritan his foes would have him believed. It is true that no one has dug up any scandal worth quoting from his private life, nor ascertained that he committed any crimes in his business and public career. Although he has studied matters of city government closely for ten years, and his home is littered with books, pamphlets and magazines on the subject, and he has traveled extensively throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico and visited practically every large city on the continent, he has never held public office.

American for Many Generations.

When his forefathers emigrated from England during the reign of King James in the seventeenth century they picked out Virginia for an abiding place and passed up Plymouth Road. The Bensons, who in the dim ages sometime had originally hailed from Sweden, managed to get along without great moral discomfort in free and easy old Virginia until the father of the majority candidate got to advocating the cause of the slaves too hard. It was intimated to him very plainly that if he placed any value on his mortal existence he would do well to vacate those parts. Rather than try to fight it out alone, he came west to Illinois and later into Iowa, settling on a farm near Grand View, where the majority candidate was born. During the revolution several of the Benson ancestors were Puritanical enough to take a hand in it and scrap a bit for a new flag. The grandfather of his mother was a Frenchman and he came to this country to bear a hand in the revolution, and, finding himself on the winning side, stayed.

Birth and Boyhood of Benson.

The birth of Erastus A. Benson occurred April 27, 1854, and he was, therefore, but a lad when the war of the rebellion began. The father who had left his Virginia home because of sympathy for the slaves was unable to go to the front himself, but he sent three sons, elder brothers of Erastus. The latter says he remembers when a toddler of 5 seeing his father carried to the polls to vote for Abraham Lincoln in 1860. The elder Benson was a very sick and crippled man and his life was despaired of, but he insisted upon voting and was taken to the polling place, and the box moved out from the little store that held it so he might drop in his ballot. With the elder brothers in the war and his father disabled Erastus caught an early share of responsibilities and hard work on the farm.

When old enough he went to Grand View academy and later worked his way through the Wesleyan university at Mount Pleasant, Ia., and a year at the State university at Iowa City. He taught country school part of the time and worked in the harvest fields and elsewhere on the farm during vacation. He was about 20 years old when he completed his schooling at Iowa and immediately accepted a position as principal of the high school and superintendent of schools at Wapello, the county seat of his native county, Louisa.

His connection with this position has a bit of interest attached. The superintendent at Wapello had been forced to resign by a gang of young ruffians in the school, some of them 23 and 24 years old. Young Benson at Iowa City had gained something of a reputation as an athlete. He held the record for the jumps and had other feats to his credit. The first day he officiated at Wapello was peaceful. That evening on his way home he met several of his older pupils engaged in a jumping match close by the schoolhouse. They invited him, not knowing of his accomplishments, and he accepted. He outjumped them so far that they concluded the new superintendent was a man of such physical prowess that there was no hint of an encounter during the two and one-half years he presided over the schools of the town.

Law and Real Estate.

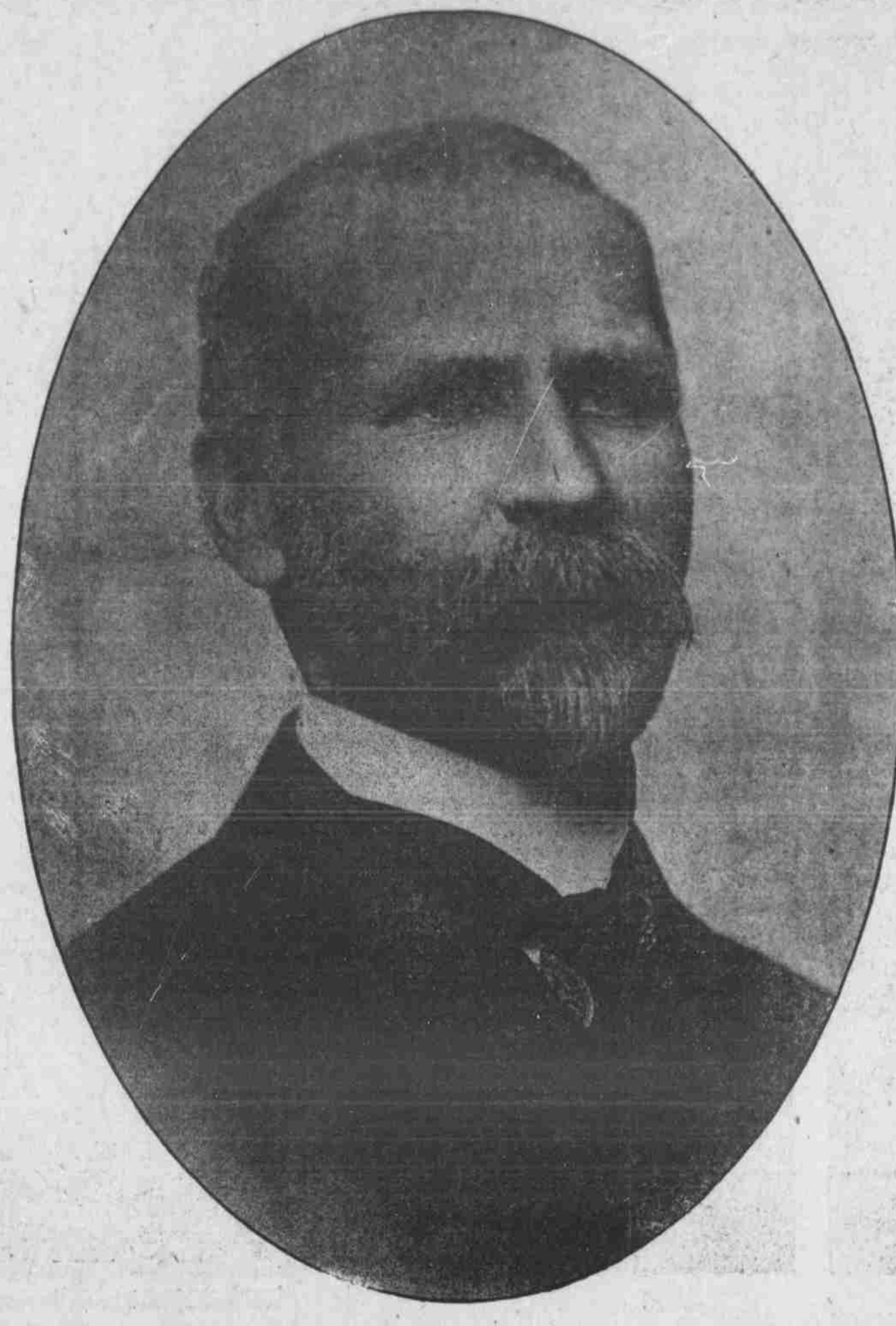
Young Benson was too ambitious to remain a country school teacher. He studied law at odd hours and about 1878 joined his brother who was practicing the profession at Davenport. He was admitted to the Iowa bar, but did not proceed far along legal lines, drifting largely by circumstances into the real estate business. A syndicate placed considerable money in his hands for the purchase of farm lands in Iowa and Nebraska, and it was on missions of this kind that he first became acquainted with Nebraska and Omaha. He made frequent trips always passing through and usually stopping off at Omaha. He remained in Davenport until June, 1886, when, having investments on his own responsibility at Omaha, he moved here with his family.

Since then Mr. Benson has been a local real estate man, doing title commission and no rental business, but buying and selling for himself and in partnership with others. His first big deal was the purchase and laying out of the suburb to the northwest that bears his name. His holdings originally were 50 acres. Most of this property has been sold, but he retained about 200 lots. He built a street railway to Benson as a means of inducing home owners to locate there, operated it during the hard times himself at a loss of about \$40,000 in order to keep faith with the people he had sold lots to and later arranged to turn it over to the street railway company.

Through Prosperity and Adversity.

Benson is now boasting of a population of 2,000. Many of the lots were sold on easy payments to men of small means who wanted to own their own homes. The years of business and depression followed, but it is part of Mr. Benson's most treasured pride to say that he never foreclosed a mortgage where a man wanted to retain his place, and has not foreclosed a mortgage in any contingency for ten years. To the contrary, many stories are told by others of his leniency and generosity. One mail clerk relates how he bought a home to be paid for at the rate of \$5 a month. His wife became an invalid and for seven years he paid nothing. Finally the wife died and the clerk found he owed all the principal and 27% interest. No demands had been made upon him for either. Mr. Benson cancelled the contract and received in full for the interest to give the man a new start.

At the same time the period of depression also caught Mr. Benson hard. His losses entailed by the failure of banks and shrinkage of realty values amounted into the hundreds of thousands. He had



ERASTUS A. BENSON.

bought Briggs Place, a tract lying between Forty-second street and the city limits and from Harney street to Capitol avenue and built and sold about thirty homes there, only to be forced to lose practically all he had put into it. But he set his teeth and weathered the storm, coming through the hard times shaken and a loser, but not destroyed. Since then he has recovered much of the ground lost and is today a man of large means in excellent financial condition. He declares that if he goes into the mayor's office he will do so at a financial sacrifice far in excess of the salary paid by the city.

Work for the City's Growth.

During his twenty years residence here, besides his direct personal interest in developing Omaha and its suburbs, Mr. Benson has been actively interested in many movements designed to benefit the city. A friend of his said the other day: "I cannot remember a single movement of consequence that pertained to the upbuilding or the interest of Omaha, whether it be such things as the Auditorium, the Grain Exchange, the Young Men's Christian association or hospitals and churches, that Mr. Benson has not assisted in some way. He has contributed practically to everything of this character and has served on numerous committees and in many organizations. His interest and philanthropy have extended beyond the usual bounds."

Mr. Benson donated half the ground, or twenty-four lots, to the St. James Orphanage at Benson, a Catholic institution, receiving the general support of the community. He was one of the leaders in the effort that secured the juvenile court law, served on the general committee that supported the measure and personally appeared before the legislature in

its behalf. He is intensely interested in the juvenile court and its workings and believes its mission is very important and the work done among children of inestimable value.

Mr. Benson might lay successful claim to being the sponsor of the "city beautiful" movement in Omaha. He originated, helped to form and was the chairman of the tree-planting committee in 1896. This was before the days of improvement clubs and it was their forerunner. The committee planted over 2,000 trees of different kinds in various parts of the city and along country roads. Most of them survive today, beautiful monuments to the effort. Only three years ago Mr. Benson was one of the organizers of the Omaha Improvement league which undertook to stimulate the beautification idea and accomplished a great deal. He served as chairman of the ways and means committee which collected the cash paid to children as prizes for gardens and the care of lawns.

The Commercial club and the Real Estate exchange number Mr. Benson among their charter members and he belongs to both organizations today. He was the first president of the exchange and served in this capacity several years. The Ak-Sar-Ben has included him among its loyal knights from the day of its inception. He is an Elk and an Odd Fellow and a member of numerous other organizations of public and semi-public character.

Personality of the Man.

Personal contact with Mr. Benson is the surest and quickest way to get acquainted with his characteristics. Some years ago President Hadley of Yale undertook to define the elements consisting a gentleman as those that gave consideration to the rights of the other person first. People get this impression from meeting Mr. Benson. He has the air of both a student and a soldier.

The outlines of his face suggest both and his bearing a military mind and training. His library at his home has proved too small for his books and they are piled in every room in the house. His collection is particularly complete in histories and books of reference. Municipal problems have interested him for years. The nature of his calling forced the consideration of such subjects upon him and he found them to his taste. City government is a favorite study and conversational theme. In visiting other cities inquiry into the local government has been his hobby. He is never at a loss to discuss themes bearing on or relating to the subject.

The Family Residence. In 1889 Mr. Benson built his comfortable home at 4756 Dodge street, where he has brought up a family of five children—Ben, aged 21, and Grant, aged 20, who are students at Bellevue college; Mabel, aged 18, who is in the Sacred Heart academy; Margie, aged 15, a high school student, and Newman, aged 13, still in the grades at Saunders school. The grounds around the Benson home are commodious and part of them has long been the playground of the neighborhood children. This is exactly as the owner wishes and the more foot ball and base ball games played there the better he likes it.

Principal Recreations.

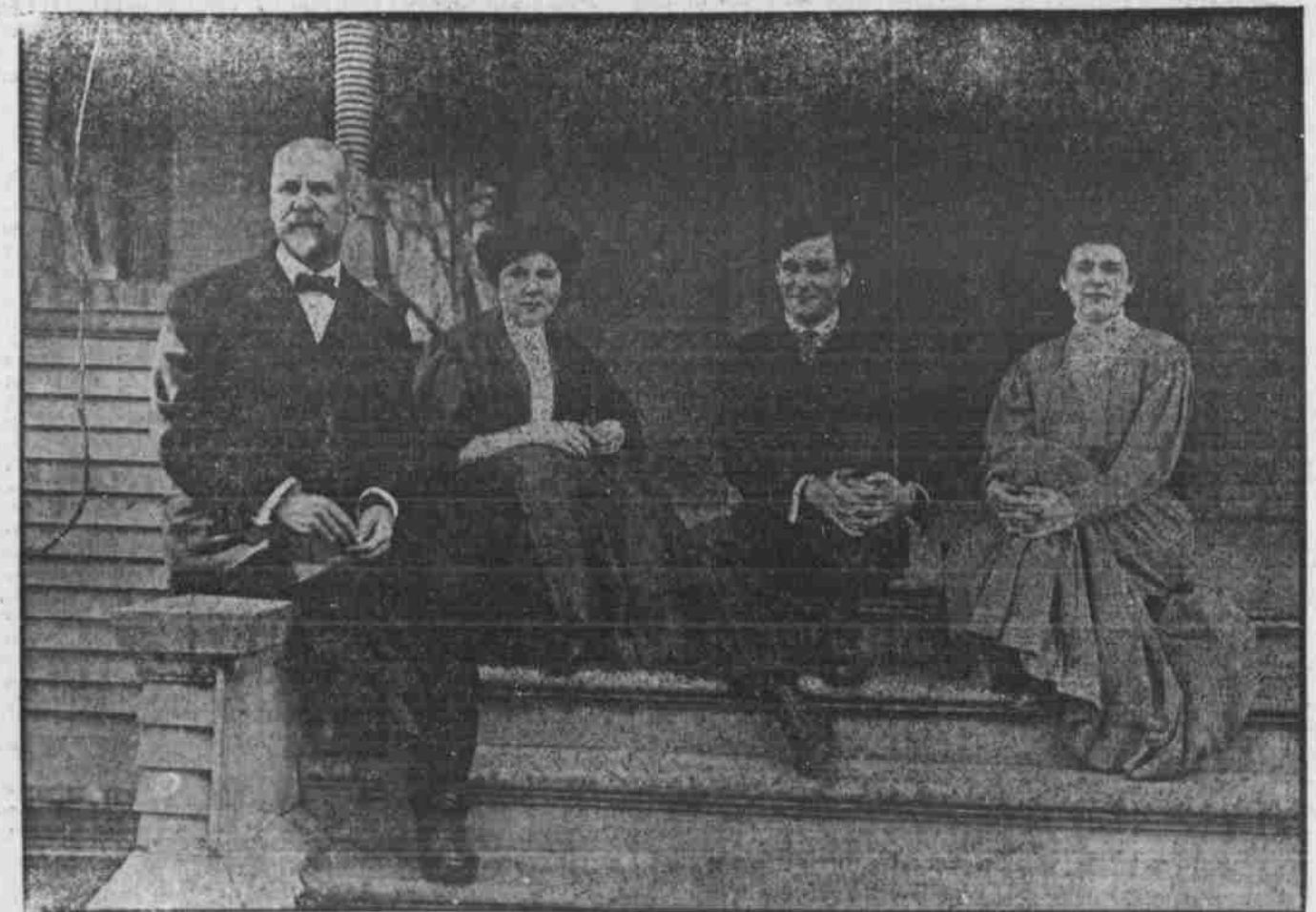
Mr. Benson is not a man of fads. His principal recreations are reading and conversation. He smokes a good many cigars, is not a teetotaler, although a member of the board of trustees and a supporter of the First Methodist church. He is a man of fluent and easy address, capable of speaking well extemporaneously when required. His ideas and conclusions are quickly arrived at and clearly expressed. He is tolerant in argument and always desires the other man's reasoning presented first.



RESIDENCE OF ERASTUS A. BENSON, AT 4756 DODGE STREET, OMAHA.



LIVING ROOM IN THE BENSON HOME.



ERASTUS A. BENSON AT HOME WITH ONE OF HIS SONS AND HIS TWO DAUGHTERS.

Interesting Sights and Scenes in a Famous Mexican City

HERMOSILLO, Mexico, April 2.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—After a night's travel from Nogales, Ariz., we arrive at 6 o'clock at the town of Hermosillo, and after a breakfast at the leading hotel we are ready for a day of pleasure. We engage a carriage at the sum of \$1 (Mexican) an hour and are rapidly driven around the town and suburbs. Our first visit is to the government palace, a large building of brick and cement, made to represent marble, and quite an imposing structure. On entering you find yourself in a large patio, which is filled with trees and flowers. There is also a grand staircase of marble, and bronze statues decorate the landings. Here are found all the municipal offices and through the courtesy of one of the officials we were shown through the entire building.

In front of the palace is the Plaza Zaragoza, a beautiful park filled with all manner of tropical plants, sweet smelling and richly colored as are all tropical flowers, it makes a beautiful and pleasant scene, and at night when all is lighted up by electricity, and the regimental band is playing, it makes a scene really beautiful, as the rich colorings of the flowers and the beautiful costumes of the señoritas, make a never ending panorama and a never forgotten scene.

General Torres' Home.

Our next trip was to the residence of General Luis E. Torres, commander of all the federal troops for this district, comprising the states of Sinaloa, Sonora and Lower California. He has one of the finest and most beautiful residences in this city,



CATHEDRAL AT HERMOSILLO, MEXICO.

and his hospitality will never be forgotten. We then went to see the old cathedral, an unfinished structure, the seat of the bishopric of Sonora, and which, when finished, will be one of the most imposing buildings in this part of the world. Our next trip was to the penitentiary, a massive lot of buildings, just about finished, where we saw about 300 Yaqui Indians who are to be shipped to Yucatan, where several thousand have already been sent, the government desiring to get them as far away from here as possible, as they are determined to do all the mischief they can. At present, after behaving for some time, they are again making trouble, killing and robbing wherever possible. The government hopes by the end of this year to be well rid of the entire tribe.

Our next trip was to the water works, built on the side of a mountain which skirts the town. The water is beautifully clear and free from alkali.

Hermosillo a Modern City.

Hermosillo is quite a modern town, having electric lights, street cars, cement sidewalks, macadamized streets, telephones and many other improvements. We also paid a visit to the governor of the state, Honorable Rafael Ysabel, a very pleasant official, who showed us every courtesy. The hotels here are all modern and up-to-date, and the large business houses carry very large stocks of merchandise. Americans are well represented here in the state and have at least \$4,000,000 invested.

Our next stop from Hermosillo was Guaymas, about ninety miles south on the Sonora railway, and situated on a bay of

the same name. It is a town of about 1,000 inhabitants, and lies at the head of one of the prettiest landlocked bays on the western continent. The city is old and quaint, but with the building of the new railroad from that point to Guadalupe, and the building of the smelter, Guaymas will make one of the most important cities in the republic. A big modern hotel, which is to be built by New York parties, will make Guaymas a formidable rival for California as a winter resort, as the winters here are mild, the climate is magnificent and boating, fishing and hunting can be indulged in to the heart's content. Fish abound in the bay and such game as rabbits, duck, quail, crane, etc., are in abundance.

Industries of Sonora.

Mining has been the chief mainstay of the state, but the uprising of the Yaquis has forced many mines to shut down for the present. Farming is also carried on to a great extent, and the new railroad is opening up a section of the country along the Yaqui river, which is considered by experts to be one of the finest and richest in the world. Everything can be raised with very little care and attention, and of most cereals two crops can be raised a year.

A New Zealand Law

In New Zealand a land holder may be compelled, by law, to sell his property to the government at the valuation he places on it for taxation purposes.

LOUIS HOBETTER.