

Eastern Farmers Have Their Chance at Last

By A. C. LAUT.

A FEW years before the war, when the late Lord Stratheona had made one of his last trips over the great railroad which his genius helped to build and when St. Paul had tendered one of its last annual birthday dinners to the late Jim Hill, a party of Westerners who had been closely associated with both men was en route East from the Rocky Mountains. The late Sir William Van Horne was one of the party. The question came up, was it the forward march of the settler that had compelled the building of the great transcontinentals or was it the building of the railroads that had caused the stampede of settlers? In other words, was it the railroad builders or the settlers that had opened the West?

Van Horne sat at first rolling one of the huge cigars for which he was famous, but not saying much, though as a boy he had been associated with Carl Schurz on the railroads of Wisconsin and later most intimately associated with Hill and Stratheona and Mount Stephen, both in the American Northwest and the Canadian Northwest. When everybody had aired what were obviously only opinions he took his cigar from his mouth and began dealing that bunch of talkers a handful of aces in the form of facts.

"It wasn't the railroad and it wasn't the stampede of farmers that opened the West," he said quietly, "and it wasn't Hill, and it wasn't Stratheona, and it wasn't Mount Stephen and it wasn't myself. It wasn't any of the old crowd known as 'empire builders.' It was the civil war.

Civil War as Empire Builder.

"The civil war was the great empire builder. The boys of New Hampshire and Vermont and Maine, of the East and the middle East and the middle West, were the empire builders, though they didn't set out to be. The big fellows and the land speculators and the town site millionaires only cashed in on the opportunity those boys gave them.

"When I began railroading as a boy with Carl Schurz we were transporting troops from Minnesota and Wisconsin to Washington, and we thought we did well if we got them through in three weeks. As the war went on and the regiments got shot up and had to be reformed your Vermont boy got lined up between two Minnesotans, or your New Hampshire youngsters were bunked in with a bunch from Missouri or Kansas.

"I wasn't very old, but I have ridden back and forward with those troops in cattle cars, and I heard the talk. The yarns those Westerners told the Easterners would have made a real estate agent's eyes pop out of his head. Think those New York and Pennsylvania youngsters were going back to farms that cost from \$100 to \$150 an acre when they could get 320 acres of Missouri bottom land or black Minnesota mould for nothing an acre? They never stopped to think whether there was a railroad to haul out their produce, or a market.

"As a fact the Hudson's Bay Company was charging at that time \$1.50 a hundredweight on freight from Winnipeg to St. Paul. A ten barred gate could not have stopped the stampede to get in on the ground floor. Hill's and Stratheona's first little shambling line to Red River was swamped with freight faster than it could build.

Railroads Pressed by Settlers.

"I can remember seeing freight and settlers' effects piled on the wharves and docks at St. Paul higher than the terminal sheds. The railways had to sprint just to keep one hop ahead of the stampede, and I'll bet Hill and Stratheona cut a bigger melon on that first little railroad without any subsidy or land grant or anything else than they ever cut on the same outlay in the rest of their lives.

"Empire builders is a good catch phrase, but it was the empire talk of kid boys who wouldn't go back to the old grind after the civil war that opened the West. We all saw it coming. You couldn't help see it coming. It was like a swarm of locusts.

"It went over the top of you, and the empire builders were the wise boys who saw it coming, laid their plans, or rather rails—and we laid 'em without much road-bed at first—and we were ready to cash in on the opportunity, and I want to say the little land speculators cashed in bigger fortunes in proportion to their outlay of capital than the big fellows, who pledged themselves to the verge of ruin to get their rails laid helter skelter across the naked prairie," and there followed

Conditions Now and After the War Parallel Those That Made Western Empire Building Possible

stories of Hill buying up junk rails and junk discard street railroad cars in New York, while Stratheona and Van Horne financed navvies, who were building, by getting friends in the wholesale trade to advance groceries and clothing for the gangs for the winter on the personal I. O. U.'s of the two buyers.

And wasn't Van Horne's explanation the true one? Wasn't it the spirit of the boys returned from the war, who wouldn't go back to the narrow old life and the grind, that opened and pioneered and settled the West?

Hill saw it coming. Stratheona saw it coming. Van Horne, barely in his twenties, saw it coming, and each cashed in on his foresight and died colossally rich, though it is well known no one of the three cared for money in itself. Stratheona's passion was power. Hill's hobby was perfecting the farming of the great area his railroads tapped, and Van Horne's fad was art. If he had not been a great contractor he would have been a great artist.

Will 40,000,000 Settle Down?

And if these were "the wise boys" of thirty years ago, how about the reaction of this infinitely greater war on the 40,000,000 men who are to-day on the firing line? Will they go back contented to the ribbon counter and office stool and close grind and circumscribed outlook of the petty employee? Sings Service, who knows the heart of the rank and file as no poet has known it since the best days of Kipling:

The same old sprint in the morning, boys,
to the same old din and smut;
Chained all day to the same old desk, down
in the same old rut;
Posting the same old greasy books, catching
the same old trains;
Oh, how will I manage to stick it all, if I
ever get back again?
We've bidden good by to life in a cage:
we've finished with pushing a pen;
They're pumping us full of bellicose rage,
they're showing us how to be men.
We're only beginning to find ourselves;
we're wonders of brawn and thew;
But when we go back to our sissy jobs—
oh, what are we going to do?
We'll breathe the free air and we'll bivouac
under the starry sky;
We'll march with men, and we'll fight with
men, and we'll see men laugh and die;
We'll know such joys as we never dreamed;
and we'll fathom the deeps of pain;
But the hardest bit of all will be—when we
come back home again.
For some of us smirk in a chiffon shop, and
some of us teach in a school;
Some of us help with the seats of our pants
to polish an office stool;
The merits of somebody's soap or jam some
of us try to explain,
But all of us wonder what ever we'll do
when we have to go back again.

When Robert Service and Sir William Van Horne agree I am inclined to believe there is something in it.

What will be the reaction of the present war on land values? The civil war brought Eastern land values down from \$100 and \$150 an acre to from \$25 to \$5. You understand all Eastern land is not at this level of values. I can take you to centres where it ranges from \$200 to \$1,000 an acre, but farms which had been valued at from \$100 to \$150 fell to \$40, \$25 and \$15.

Mansion houses declined to pig pens. Fences melted away and whole hamlets shrank so in population that of three or four churches all had to be closed but one. Simultaneously land formerly not worth 50 cents an acre in the West increased in actual intrinsic value to \$100 and \$200 an acre.

Prosperity went over the West like a prairie fire from Texas to Alberta. Places that used to be an invisible spot on the map anchored from blowing away in a prairie wind by dumping off a derailed box car as a telegraph office grew overnight into cities of 100,000, 200,000 and 300,000. Want to know what places these are?—Houston, Galveston, Austin, Dallas, San Antonio, Denver, Colorado Springs, Kansas City, Omaha, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, and that is only one strip longitudinally.

What built those places? The feet of youth pressing westward to make a free living and a good living in the open, and there came out of the West such a host of land millionaires as the wildest gold stampede never knew.

Has High Investment Value.

Cynics sometimes say that more money was made out of the increased values of Western land than was ever taken out in crops, but that slander will not stand the light of truth for one second. It was the fact that Western land paid high interest on investment that kept and yet keeps the level of land values high.

The West turns out in wheat alone—Canada and the United States combined—almost a billion dollars yearly, and in corn, not counting east of the Mississippi, from one to two billions. That is real money, and it is more than ever came out of gold mines. Twice as much money comes in a single year from wheat alone as ever came out of all the gold mines in the world in a year, but it has come out of the Western lands because the "brawn" and the "thew" of youth went to those lands.

When the war is over where are the "brawn" and "thew" of youth going to

find cheap lands? In Mexico and Russia? Yes. But I don't fancy fighting men will want to go to either Eldorado. There remain western Canada—but land there is cheap only far back from settlement—and the Eastern States; and the more you know of Eastern lands the more you are convinced these lands are just as fertile as the richest black prairies of Dakota or Manitoba.

I am a Westerner, and I yield second place to no one living in my admiration for and confidence in the West. I have seen Western lands come up in value from 50 cents to \$100 an acre. But don't think for a second that all you have to do is to stick in a plough in the West and you get a crop.

There are lands sod bound that have to be mellowed. There are lands sour and swampy that have to be drained. There are dry lands that have to be irrigated and there are seas of Russian thistle weeds that have to be eradicated.

East Facing a Like Problem.

You are up against the same problems West as East. You have good land; but it takes "brawn and thew" to make it yield. It takes brains, muscles, cash; and of the three I should say brains were the most important and cash the least, and muscle is the pivot round which both must swing.

The big fortunes have been made in the West by getting in on low values and going up with the ground swell; but isn't that exactly where Eastern lands are just now? If you will get a State Department bulletin on lands for sale for a term of years you will find that in spite of hosts of back-to-the-landers failing, values have gone up 10 per cent. in five years; and we have entered a period of accelerated speed increase.

Values are going up for a lot of reasons based on hard pan facts. The commodity most in demand in the whole world to-day is food; and it will be for years after the war is over. The number of users has increased twice as fast as the number of growers.

Cattle are scarce, hogs are scarce, wheat is short, cotton is short, veal is scarce, in the whole world to-day. In cattle alone there is a shortage of 28,000,000 head, more than half a beef for every man on the firing line. There is not an article of food, except small vegetables, that is not scarce in the world to-day—butter, cheese, meat, wheat. That is the first reason that cheap lands in the East are bound to go up on a ground swell.

The second is that all cheap productive lands elsewhere are gone and gone forever. Where is the young adventurer of whom Service sings and on whom the big empire builders cashed in thirty years ago—where is the adventurer in life in the open to go if not to good old Down East, the land of his ancestors?

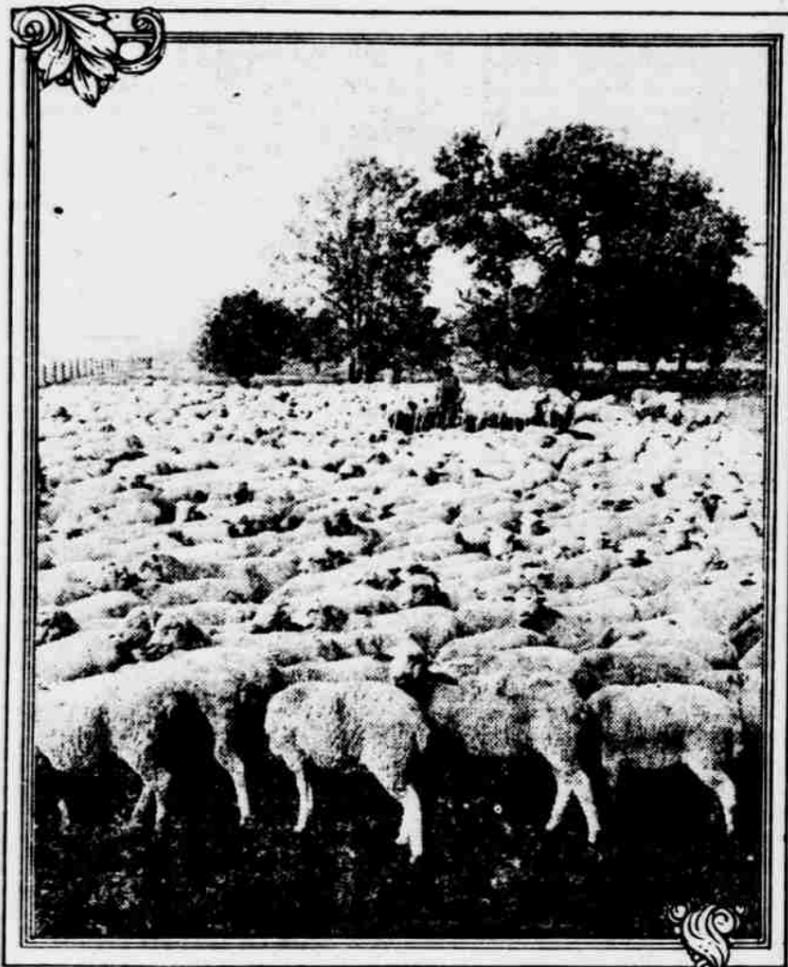
What He Will Learn in War.

Also in the European war he will have learned a thing or two that will be an eye-opener to our young adventurer. He will have learned that in time of panic and insecurity every other form of wealth except land takes to itself wings and flies away. He will have learned that cost of living and war taxes can assess every other industry out of its boots.

You may tax a farmer's income 80 per cent., as Austria and Germany are now doing, but you can't tax a farmer's stomach empty, or the clothes off his back, or the roof over his head. The farmer takes his living out before he counts income. Salaried men and industrial workers can't.

Also there is another fact that will be a revelation to our young adventurer on the firing line. For forty years our fool system of false and shoddy education has played up the farmer as "a rube." If a boy wanted "to make something of himself" his first step was away from the farm, to become a lawyer, a doctor, a preacher. The comic papers and the stage went a step further. They played the farmer and his wife up as clodhoppers in prunella gaiters—uncouth fools; and when I look at our market system I wonder if they were right.

But in every other land our young adventurers will see another brand of fact—the land owners in every other country are the aristocracy. They are the scurriest, surest, sanest, strongest section of the population. What handicap is the farmer under over here that the same conditions do not prevail? Bitter methods! Piffle! The crudest farmer, who knows his job, can give aces and spades to the professional theorist, though the farmer has no publicity bureau to preach old truths as though they were a new brand of the Ten



AN EASTERN FARM of the SORT TO WHICH MEN WILL TURN AFTER the WAR.

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