

LOWER CALIFORNIA

A Dispatch From Mexico Says the Territory May Be Sold to the U. S.

Ever since the possibility of irrigating the Colorado desert from the Colorado river was first investigated, more than fifty years ago, the question of the purchase of Lower California by the United States has been recognized as desirable and has been agitated from time to time. This proposition was mentioned by the board of army engineers, who in 1854, made an investigation and reported on the geographical conditions of this part of the country. These men ran levels from the Colorado river to this Valley and found a natural course for water to follow over the bottom lands in Mexico, from the Colorado river to this Valley.

In those days irrigation was in its infancy in the United States, so but little stress was laid on its value, the principal feature dwelt on by the report being the possible effect on the climate by the filling of Salton basin with water. Not very long afterwards, or during the early sixties, Dr. Wozencraft of San Bernardino, evolved an irrigation scheme for the reclamation of the Colorado desert, and as part of his plan included the purchase of Lower California, or at least, enough of it to permit the water from the Colorado to be brought to this Valley on American territory.

Nothing came of Dr. Wozencraft's plan, however, and the matter seems not to have been mentioned again, except in a general way, until quite recently. The California Development company when it undertook the work

of bringing water from the Colorado river to this Valley, organized a corporation under the laws of Mexico and took the late General Andrade into the company. They bought 100,000 acres of land in Mexico, as a sort of right of way for their canals, and formulated plans for diverting the water from the river in the United States, and transporting it through Mexico, while still retaining control of it; in other words they tried to get around the difficulties presented by complying with the laws of both Nations. The controversy with the United States over the ownership of the water, and the contract with Mexico by which the Mexican corporation was granted ten thousand cubic feet of water, per second, by the Mexican government, are matters of such recent history that all are familiar with it. This concession was granted on May 18th, 1904, and is therefore, less than two years old.

Acting under this concession the Mexican corporation, on October 6th, 1904, made the incision in the west bank of the Colorado river, about four miles below the American line, which has become historical as the famous Mexican intake. It is not necessary to recount the progressive diversion of the river at that point. Suffice it to say that in just one year's time, almost to a day, the old channel of the Colorado river became dry ground below this point and the entire flow of the river was diverted and turned to this Valley. Formerly, no water reached this Valley, or flowed into the Salton sink except at the time of extreme flood stage of the Colorado river.

In 1902 no water came down either Alamo channel or New river and there was no "overflow." This condition

has been completely reversed now, the channel to this Valley has become so much deeper than the old channel of the river that no water goes to the Gulf of California any more except when the river is at a very high stage.

The developments of the past twelve months therefore, have completely changed the channel of the lower Colorado, and greatly modified the situation regarding the transfer of the territory affected to the United States. The diversion of the Colorado river and its discharge into this valley has already inflicted considerable damage to the property of American citizens. Some of these citizens have reported the matter to the Department of State, at Washington, and filed claims against Mexico for redress. Mexico sent a corps of engineers to the scene last November. These gentlemen doubtless reported to their government, and recommended a course of action. The following dispatch to the Associated Press from the city of Mexico, under date of March 29th, puts an entirely new light on the hitherto dark subject:

MEXICO CITY, Mex., March 29.—It is reported in official circles that the Mexican government is preparing to open negotiations looking to the sale of Lower California to the United States.

Interest in the proposition is especially keen in the territory concerned. Advices received from La Paz and other places in Lower California say there will be little if any opposition to such a transfer.

There are several large mining companies in the peninsula which are operated by Americans. They are especially desirous that the Stars and Stripes shall float over the territory. A Boston corporation is among the

largest of the land owners. A majority of the principal industries, however, and much of the lands of Lower California are in the hands of foreigners. The valuable pearl fisheries, located along the eastern coast are controlled by a British corporation.

A French concern owns a copper mining industry which is the most important single concern in the peninsula.

CONGRESS MAY NOT BE WILLING
WASHINGTON, March 29.—If the United States government acquires Lower California it will be necessary for the Secretary of State to negotiate a treaty with the Mexican ambassador for the transfer of the territory to this country. After a treaty is negotiated and ratified it will be necessary for Congress to appropriate funds with which to pay for the territory.

Nothing is known here about the project, and it is extremely doubtful if Congress will agree to the purchase of any more territory for some years to come.

It will be remembered that during the government ownership agitation in 1904, when the fact that the Reclamation Service could not expend their funds in a foreign country was pointed out. It was proposed to purchase a small strip of territory, just sufficient for the canal right of way. We were then assured that it was provided in the Mexican constitution as treason, punishable with death, for anyone in Mexico to propose to sell any part of the territory of that country, no matter how little. So as long as we believed that, the question seemed settled. Now, however, the matter appears in a different light.

Since the publication of this dispatch from Mexico City the Mexican consuls at both San Diego and Los Angeles have been interviewed on the subject and have both stated that all that is necessary is for the Mexican congress to pass a law authorizing the sale and it will be done. So the myth of the Mexican constitutional provision isn't working anymore. So much for that. The Colorado river is still "doing business" and Mexico is still liable for the damage it does to American citizens in this Valley. It has been known for some time that the large land owners in Lower California were favorable to annexation to the United States and also that many people in this country favored it as a step toward solving the questions involved in the use of the waters of the lower Colorado for irrigation. It is very encouraging to the people of this Valley to learn that this movement has reached the point to be publicly favored in official circles in Mexico. It was apparent to all who talked with the members of the Committees on Irrigation that were here last June that they looked upon the purchase of lower California as a desirable solution of our irrigation problems and were heartily in favor of it. With the subject as well understood as it is the governments should have no difficulty in getting together and making the necessary treaty for the transfer. Locally it would be a great thing for the Imperial Valley and especially for Calexico. It would settle all phases of the "water question" and open the way for the full control and utilization of the waters of the Colorado river by the United States Reclamation Service. As a result of this it would be a great benefit to the entire west. With lower California belonging to the United States, a new state of Southern California would be the inevitable outcome with a "scrap" between Los Angeles and San Diego for capital. A large city would be built at the head of the Gulf of California and the great stretch of arable land below the Mexican line would be settled with a teeming population. By all means let the transfer be made. The sooner it is done the better it will be all around.

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