

Irrigation—A Safe Business Proposition.

In its issue of March 17 the Philadelphia Ledger discusses irrigation in a temperate and fair-minded manner, says the Helena (Mont.) Independent. Its editorial is worth reproduction in full in order to call attention to certain matters, particularly with reference to the method of going about this great national business on a safe, sound and paying basis. The editorial is as follows:

Irrigation of some of the otherwise irredeemably dry lands of certain Western States by the government, which is to say, by the people of the whole country, who are to be asked to pay the great price of the improvement, was long commonly regarded by conservative authorities as an "iridescent dream," dreamed by western railroad and other land speculators. But it began to assume form and substance when President Roosevelt, in his recent message, spoke favorably of the proposition. The president's familiarity with these arid lands is much greater than that of his countrymen generally. He has again and again traversed them as but few Americans have done, and, no doubt, he has considered them as they are and as they might be if generously irrigated.

They are now practically without value for agricultural purposes, and a large proportion of them must remain so, since, if irrigation were physically possible, the cost of it would be far greater than the benefits to result therefrom. The president's accurate knowledge of the subject imparted to his official deliverance regarding the proposed scheme of irrigation assured weight, which was recognized by the introduction to the house of a caucus measure based upon the president's recommendation. This bill is now on the calendar, but that it will pass congress during the present session is exceedingly doubtful. Although a different measure on the same subject has already passed the senate, it is not unreasonable to believe that the plan to irrigate a great part of the western arid lands will not be executed in the near future.

Of these lands in the possession of the government which, it is stated, can be successfully irrigated, there are about 100,000,000 acres, and, as it is proposed to sell them and apply the purchase money to the work of irrigating them, it is of course, of the first importance to consider the cost, which will be out of all proportion to the selling price of the land. The proposition is that the work shall be done and paid for on the installment plan, congress to appropriate so few or so many millions every year for the undertaking as it progresses.

Our esteemed contemporary, the New York Sun, one of the careful newspapers in its presentation of statistics, has gone into the matter pretty thoroughly, and in concluding its review of it says:

"Let us see. The first reservoir contemplated is for the Gila River region in southern Arizona. The cost of the reservoir alone, independent of accessory works, is \$1,000,000; and it is intended to render fertile an arid tract of 100,000 acres.

"At that rate the initial cost of water storage for one hundred million acres would be not less than one thousand million dollars.

"River and harbor improvements, Federal buildings extravagance, war pensions, new navies and interoceanic canals become petty items in comparison with the unknown possibilities of irrigation as a channel for a continuous flow of money from the United States treasury.

"The first step will cost. How much it will cost no man knows."

That is a fair presentation of the case, and congress, if it seriously considers the plan of irrigation at all, now or lately, is likely or certain to consider it from the point of view where the cost can be counted not only at the beginning, but to the end.

Besides that, the general sentiment of all those States which, while receiving no direct benefits from it, will be

called upon to, indirectly, at least, pay a large proportion of the cost of irrigation, is opposed to it. The influence of these States will be exerted and felt in congress against so expensive a scheme.

The Independent has no difficulty in understanding the Eastern opposition to irrigation of Western arid lands on the ground of cost and on the ground of the uncertainty that the government—the people of the United States—will ever "get their money back." And while it may appear to be an answer to these objections to say that the money will come back in increased "general welfare," that is not an answer so far as the Eastern people are concerned. It is as good an answer as can be given in excuse for the huge river and harbor appropriations; but it is not an answer that carries conviction and gets votes.

The irrigation proposition can be presented as a purely business proposition, as a dividend paying investment; and it is in that way that it should be presented to the enormous Eastern majority. Let us take, for example, the Gila River reservoir, mentioned by the New York Sun, and the 100,000 acres that the \$1,000,000 reservoir will make fertile. There is an initial cost of \$1,000,000 for a reservoir alone, to say nothing of the cost of canals and laterals. That initial cost amounts to \$10 an acre for the 100,000 acres, before a spadeful of dirt is thrown for the canals and laterals. It is impossible to convince an Eastern opponent of irrigation that this money will be wisely spent if the land is sold for \$5 an acre, or even \$10 an acre. No matter what we in the West may say or think, we must submit a business proposition to the East.

There is no trouble in formulating such a business proposition. We know that irrigated lands in the West are worth from \$15 to \$100 or \$150 an acre, depending on population and accessibility to markets. "Why," the Eastern man may ask, "should the government sell irrigated land at \$5 or \$10 an acre and thus make a free gift of from \$5 to \$140 an acre to the settler?" It must be admitted that there is no reason why this should be done. Nor is it necessary to do this, because there is a better way.

The government can set aside an irrigation fund, or it can lend to an irrigation bureau a fund for the reclamation of arid lands. Then it can adopt a policy that will accomplish three things: 1. Insure return to the

government of every cent so spent. 2. Kill monopoly of the irrigated land. 3. Prevent speculation in the irrigated lands.

The government cannot do this by selling the lands to settlers. It can accomplish this by leasing the irrigated lands for their annual rental value, with revaluation every five or ten years. With this policy it would be absolutely impossible for the government to lose anything, and it would have a steady and increasing income from the lands. This policy would be best for the government and best for the actual settler who goes upon the land to make a home rather than for speculative purposes, particularly if he is a poor man. He would not have to pay down a large sum of money for land, but would be able to use his money for needed improvements.

16 to 1.

One of the peculiar features of the bill before Congress for the government of the Philippine Islands is a provision for the establishment of a mint at Manila and the free coinage of silver, the dollar to contain 416 grains of standard silver. "Upon the said silver dollar there shall be devices and inscriptions to be pre-

scribed by the government of the Philippine Islands, with the approval of the Secretary of War of the United States, which devices and inscriptions shall express or symbolize the sovereignty of the United States, and that it is coin of the Philippine Islands, together with the denomination of the coin expressed in English, Filipino, and Chinese characters, and the date of its coinage."

The bill also provides "that any owner of silver bullion may deposit the same at the mint in the Philippine Islands to be coined. Silver bullion brought to the mint of the Philippine Islands for coinage shall be received and coined by the proper officers for the benefit of the depositors."

Will Help Southern California.

The Four-Track News, edited by George H. Daniels, general passenger agent of the New York Central Railroad, contains a large cut of "A melon patch in Southern California," showing the effect of good climate and irrigation, together with appropriate reading matter. The picture is reproduced in the illustrated Sunday supplement of the New York Tribune. Such things cannot fail to interest the people of the east greatly in Southern California and its products.—Los Angeles Herald.

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