

# TERRA INCOGNITA.

## THE FAR NORTH-WEST.

### Natural Centre for Beet Growing.

(By S. Butchkoff)

In many respects the Far North-West is truly an unknown country. On the geological charts is just as blank as the polar region. I suppose it is. If it isn't, then some geologist must have been very imaginative and very presumptuous to make the chart without seeing the country.

I have collected a number of different sorts of shales, some of them evidently oil shales, and intended to send them to the Government laboratory for analysis, and then, to my surprise, I found out that they don't do analyses without fees. I consider, if I pay postage for a parcel of samples it would be quite sufficient contribution from a private person for the benefit of the Mining Department. But to give voluntarily this form of contribution to the Government, and to be graciously fined for the same contribution, though this fine might be called a fee—well, I fail to fathom its wisdom.

And yet the Government seems to make a lot of bustle with mining development—cutting tracks, giving encouragement and help to the prospectors, testing all the oil shales in the country, and so on. But when you compare the praiseworthy activities of the Government with the little solid fact just given above, you can't help thinking that all the Government's bustle is only of ornamental nature.

Though geological survey of the Far North-West would be of considerable interest, yet primarily it is an agricultural country. And in this respect it is very little known to the Government, or rather, it is being regularly and honestly forgotten.

I have taken a great interest in the Government's efforts to find out if sugar beet industry is possible in Tasmania. When the manager of Maffra sugar beet factory was invited to Tasmania he

When the manager of Maffra sugar beet factory was invited to Tasmania he was shown different parts of the country to express his opinion as to their suitability for the industry. His opinion was principally negative, for many reasons, and he couldn't find a single patch of country shown to him which he would recommend as suitable for the immediate opening of the industry. Probably he was over-cautions. Yet, it was not a fault of his that he was not shown a part of the country where the industry could be started at once.

In "The Advocate" of July 25 was published the report of the Tasmanian delegation to Maffra. Perusing it, I see that outside the fertility of land, proximity of railways to the beet growing fields is the main consideration. Taking into account all the recommendations, I cannot think of a more suitable part of Tasmania for this industry than the Far North-West, with Mowbray Swamp as its centre. Even in the present hardly half-developed state, there would be not only 12,000 acres, as recommended in the report, but double this number, and, more, of rich and varying in nature soil, counting only the land that is already cleared. Mowbray Swamp is a natural centre, and its soil doesn't want' recommendation; it is sufficient to say that, while Tasmanian potato crops average under three tons to an acre, Mowbray Swamp crops would rather average twenty tons without using any fertilisers. Railways run from Mowbray Swamp to the West, South and East. The Western railway serves Montagu and Marrawah, the last one being the largest area of rich land in Tasmania in one piece. The Southern railway connects the centre with Trowutta, Rogerton, and Sunny Hills. It is on this railway that is situated the famous Copper Creek flat, the richest soil in Tasmania, probably in the Commonwealth. All the alluvial flats served by this railway are of high fertility, and in tablelands are either of chocolate soil or heavy loam, with clay subsoil. The railway running to the East connects Mowbray Swamp with Green Hills in Stanley, Forest, Mengha and Irish Town. All this part is highly developed in the agricultural sense, and consists principally of rich chocolate soil with occasional stretches of alluvial flats. All the above-mentioned

vial flats. All the above-mentioned Eastern and Southern lands lie pretty well within ten miles from Mowbray Swamp by railway; only Marrawah is farther, but the distance is not unreasonable.

It is well to point out that the same railway system will serve the bulk of extensive and rich swamp areas that are bound to be reclaimed sooner or later. But, considering only the present agricultural condition of the country, one doesn't fail to see that it presents a unique opportunity for the sugar industry. And yet it has never been as much as mentioned in any responsible quarters.

I just mentioned rich swamp areas that are bound to be reclaimed sooner or later. It is here that one pauses in bewilderment. What is the Government's attitude towards the reclamation of swamps in the Far North-West? No one knows. The Government has never uttered anything definite, though selling-out draining plants makes one think that the Government really suffers from some sort of hydrophobia.

The amount of imbecility and ignorance shown in connection with Welcome Swamp is more than it would be wholesome for the country to acknowledge. These humorous analyses of soils represent Welcome Swamp not much better than a desert. And yet the Government will never dare to say that they discontinue reclamation because the land is not worth reclaiming! They want only that the public make this inference and condemn the enterprise started by the previous Government. Isn't it party politics?

Meantime, there is another adventure threatening our State on the scale and nature of Soldiers' Settlements. The difference is only that Soldiers' Settlements had quite justifiable patriotic and sentimental underground. But the purchasing of big estates in the Midlands, along the railway line, if it has any justification at all, it should be looked for in the incompetence of the guiding spirit of the scheme. Papers reported that the Premier was agreeably surprised to find out that the landowners were ready to sell their estates. Holy innocence! Why not? It is the chance of their lives. They always will sell if they get fancy prices, as the case inevitably will be when the Government purchases their lands. And

the case inevitably will be when the Government purchases their lands. And even if the prices are moderate, they will be big enough to drain and to clear the wettest swamp; that swamp which will require no further expenses for irrigation as the Midlands will; that swamp which never will present the same problem of fighting the rabbit pest as the Midlands do; yes, that swamp which is a hundred times more fertile than the Midlands.

Gentlemen! You might build an expensive hot-house in the Midlands, and even on the summit of Mount Wellington, and try to prove that it is exactly in the centre of agriculture in Tasmania. But when the fog created by party politics disperses, it will be as clearly seen as ever that agricultural Tasmania is its North-West, with the Far North-West not as the tail, but as the head of it.