

CORRESPONDENCE

DARLING RIVER IRRIGATION

To the Editor 'Western Herald'

Dear Sir, — Mr. Tilghman's article on Bourke history, challenging Mr. O'Mally's authoritative inference on the subject provokes me to write this.

I have not met Mr. Tilghman, and have no reason to doubt the gentleman's statement that " he collected some history data about old Bourke." But even if that "history data" was written in a ballad form and recited by a poet I doubt if it was worth sacrificing an evening for an old pioneer of Mr. O'Mally's kind to listen to it. It is this kind that made history, and is an integral part of it!

Here they were, when Bourke was a goat town. They are the case history of Darling and environs written indelibly in their hearts and minds.

The pioneers who battled here, dreamed their dreams, suffered broken hearts and disillusionments. Often staking their all to meet inclem-

king their all to meet inclement and capricious elements in a battle of survival ... they know the Darling when this blood artery of the land they walked dry shod !

If they offer criticism and resentment to Mr. Tilghman's "New Ideas" then there must be some substantial reason for it, for I am sure that nobody would love more to have our thirsty semi-desert turned into gardens, orchards, rice fields and lucerne greens than those who were born here to love it. So let us look into the matter in a hope to find a cause for the friction.

"Last May Mr. Kitamura, departmental expert said (quoting Mr. Tilghman) "You could make Bourke a second Mildura." ... and Mr. Curteis said later (quoting same source) "If Pakistan had your soil and irrigation potential there would be a family on every fifteen acres." I am sure that not one person in Bourke, its environs, nor in the whole of Australia would not welcome Mr. Tilghman to pioneer a second Mildura in Bourke. He would make new history and build a monument for himself and earn blessing in generations to come. But if we wish to be guided by past experiences of successful pion-

experiences of successful pioneers. in this case Chaffey Brothers. then certainly we would have to cautiously follow their methods as far as possible. less we fall.

Chaffey Brothers started on a very small scale at their own risk till they gave actual proof of economical soundness of their venture to a financial world. Then and only then Mildura came into being by outside capital investment. So called irrigation trusts were formed one after another as the need arose for Mildura's expansion. There was nothing spectacular in birth and growth of this wonderful enterprise. No boost, no political push. no friction was created between local landholders and the promoters, like the case in Bourke of attempted Shire grafting on Western Lands Lessees. already burdened by high rents, rates and other burdens preposterously piled up by every bureaucrat that sees any loophole to squeeze a pin prick into the body. ironically the backbone of the country—the land settler on the land that he rents from the Crown. The scapegoat of "high wool prices" . . . But let us come back to Chaffey Brothers for the good of our soul.

our soul.

Chaffey Brothers made history. Quiet, practical men, not theorists that could be allured by rail outlets etc. like Bourke or Wentworth, but sailed into an obscure corner without rail, road or any hamlet. Why? Because they were practical irrigationists seeking ideal soil, with corresponding sub-soil and topography first. They floated in a boat for hundreds of miles and inspecting every likely alluvial spot, till they found what they wanted. Rail was built after Mildura was made.

Before finishing this lengthy article I must express my surprise at Mr. Curteis statement (as quoted) that a Pakistan Family could make a living on 15 acres of irrigated Darling soil. In my young days, a long time ago, when I was residing in the Far East, a handfull of rice was sufficient to feed Pakistan. Indian or Chinese peasant. 10 acres of ordinary sod was enough to provide for any European peasant family. It

sounds to me that Mr. Curteis had not only helped to irrigate Pakistan dry lands on

gate Pakistan dry lands on Australian money but showed them how to rise the standard of living to the white man's level.

I wonder why quotation by Mr. Tilghman commenced with — But, so : "But, without vision people perish." Do we old, sunbaked bushmen of the Darling lack vision? Or do we subscribe to safety first slogan: "Look, before you leap "

Maybe that we dream of another classic adage, but are shy to whisper it, such as : "Charity begins at home."

If £5,000,000 (and more since) given to Pakistan by Federal Government were spent at home on a Darling Irrigation project or on still mightier dream of Dr. Bradfields to revive the dead heart of our Mother Australia (which may not be dead "but sleepeth.") then we may have been able to turn our potential (the like of which Mr. Curteis apparently had not found in Pakistan) into a grainery to feed not only Pakistan families, but numberless others, unfortunates, and accidentally to build our desert into a citadel of mighty nation to hold and protect the heritage.

Truly, "Where there is no vision (political?) people perish" : Prov. 29.14.

Thanking you.
Yours faith- |
fully

T. VOLKOFSKY.
"Curraweena."