

Some Observations Made On a Trip Through The Great Northwest

I wish to state at the outset that in a trip through the country on a modern "flyer," or at the most only staying a few days in any one place, one's chances of observation are somewhat limited and imperfect; therefore my conclusions are necessarily somewhat superficial and only in a general way and may not always be accurate in detail.

In making a journey to the Pacific Coast via the Great Northern Railway on an "Oriental Limited" train, one leaves the union depot at Chicago at 10:15pm and is hurried west through the night on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy tracks to the "Great Father of Waters," thence along the east bank to St. Paul. After daylight one passes the cities of La Crosse, Winona, Fountain City and Alma, of interest to me chiefly I supposed because they were the first cities I saw, having grown up in their vicinity; though La Crosse is next to the metropolis of Wisconsin and Winona is a lovely city across the river in Minnesota. Alma is a county seat and used to be the main base of supplies and headquarters of the great logging and rafting works of the Beef Slough Logging Co., but the latter glory has departed with the pineries of Wisconsin. As the train speeds along Lake Pepin one is impressed with the picturesque beauty of this peculiar expansion of the Mississippi, about three miles wide and nearly 30 miles long. During the summer of 1890 a large excursion steamer with a picnic excursion party from lake City, Minn., on board, was capsized by a sudden squall and some 100 or more persons drowned.

To one who has not seen St. Paul and Minneapolis – the two great cities at the head of river navigation – for 25 years or more it is impossible to locate the old land marks. These beautiful bustling cities where four and stock food come from like the rest of the country have taken great strides in progress during the last quarter of the century. When one contemplates the enormous amount of machinery driven at the latter city by the Falls of St. Anthony one begins to realize the value of water power and why the national government endeavors to conserve these water powers to the states or to the people at large instead of their becoming private monopolies. I may add that the entire mountainous west abounds in fine water power and I think most of the trolley cars and electric light plants are supplied by electric currents generated by mountain streams miles away. This I know to be the case in Spokane, Kalispel and other cities.

After a short stop in St. Paul – the oldest city of the middle north – the train rushes across the fine fertile prairies of Minnesota, dotted with its many pretty little lakes, prosperous farm houses and villages, and next morning we find ourselves on the broad plains of North Dakota. Before noon we cross onto the plains that help to make the vast state of Montana.

As soon as one gets into the neighborhood of St. Paul and west of there one becomes aware that he is well to the north, for even then (Sept. 15) corn, potatoes and other tender plants are wilted by a killing frost. West of Minnesota, however, I saw but little corn either east or west of the mountains, and what little there was would have made a very poor showing beside Illinois corn. All through the north-west on either side of the great mountain ranges, wheat, reinforced by oats and barley, seemed to be king.

Along the route where the fast trains stop I noticed many good sized and thrifty towns, such as Fergus, Fargo, Grand Forks, Chelsea, Glasgow, Williston, Buford, Shelby, Culbertson, Cut Bank, Havre, Columbia Falls, Whitefish, Eureka and among others though in between there was a large sprinkling of stations that looked wretched enough.

In both the Dakotas and Montana there is considerable sage brush and alkali land which is but sparsely inhabited. Until about ten years ago such land was considered worthless, or at least non-arable and of but little value even as grazing ground, but of late years it has been found that by the so-called system of dry farming fair crops of wheat, oats, barley and certain vegetables can be produced. Of course wherever such land can be subjected to irrigation, which is just beginning to be extensively carried on, it is made to "blossom like the rose" and the very best crops of everything suitable to the climate are raised. Whenever expensive systems of irrigation are established and land is consequently high priced, at least in the coast states, the residents seem to confine themselves mostly to the raising of fruits, vegetables, berries and alfalfa, presumably because they bring better returns per acre.

Either the people on the great plains of North Dakota and Montana do not appreciate the great improvement that a few trees will make in the landscape or in the appearance of a city, or else they do not find time to plant any, for it would require no outlay as shrubs of cotton wood grown in abundance near the water courses on the railroad right-of-way. These great plains looked monotonous enough at the time with only here and there a miserable shack in the distance, rarely a fence, the roads barely perceptible here and there in the withered grass or sage brush, without a tree or green thing visible, but in winter they must be desolation itself. Nevertheless the prairie schooner was often in evidence, showing that even these regions are being rapidly settled.

Eastern Montana contains the most exquisitely level plains I have ever seen; they seem as level as the placid waters of a lake. Compared to them we have no level land here. One of the most extensive of these plains – I think it is called the Judith Basin – is said to contain fine and fertile farm lands.

At Columbia Falls, Mont., some distance across the Rocky Mountains, I took a stopover to visit relatives at Kalispel, Rollins and Dayton, near Flathead Lake and the former great Flathead Indian reservation. Kalispel, on a spur of the Great Northern, is a comparatively large and thriving city. It has a brick yard, a large flouring mill and other factories. Kalispel hard wheat flour is known and celebrated throughout the Pacific Coast. Best of all it has a large level and fertile farming country around it where wheat, oats, potatoes and apples grow in abundance. Somers is on the northern shore of Flathead Lake and has a large saw mill with an immense lumber yard, at least one planing mill and a box factory. Several boats ply from there on the lake. The lake is some 30 miles long and 15 miles wide, surrounded at various distances by immense pine forests, the logs being floated or hauled to the lake, made into rafts and towed to saw mills along the shore. It abounds in fine scenery with the mountains – some snow-capped – as a superb background, and is well stocked with mountain trout and some other fish. I surmise that in 10 to 25 years from now the little places Rollins, Dayton and others on its shores will be thrifty towns and that the little islands and rocky shores will be covered with summer resorts, orchards, and picnic grounds. I think the same will be true of Puget Sound.

The reservation which was opened last summer contains much level and fertile land, but also much that is sandy, rocky, steep and barren in appearance. No doubt much of this land, practically all, can and will be irrigated in the future. These mountainous regions abound in lakes and streams at high altitudes from which water can be readily piped and apparently high lying land successfully watered. What this section needs, however, above everything else to develop its vast resources is a railroad down the valley. Then the great pine forests and extensive free grazing lands will speedily be replaced by fields of grain and alfalfa.

A place that is conspicuous on the way to the coast for its size, beauty and genuine Chicago hustle is Spokane, Wash. It seems hardly possible that many of my friends, schoolmates and relatives who went west in the early 80's should have seen this hustling big city when it had less than a dozen houses and besides was burned to the ground a few years later.

The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific exposition at Seattle was on a much smaller scale than either the Chicago or St. Louis expositions. This, however, had many advantages to the sightseer in that one was not compelled to walk so much, the exhibits being more concentrated. The artistic effect of arrangement and lighting was grand. If any of the exhibits were not so large in quantity, they were equal in quality to anything I have ever seen. The United States government building, machinery hall, agricultural building, forestry building, fine arts building, and mining building were all large with good exhibits, but there were practically no state or foreign buildings. On the other hand Alaska, the Philippine Islands, the Hawaiian Islands and Canada had buildings of their own with their exhibits of grain, fruit and manufactured articles peculiar to their soil and people. Many counties and cities of Washington also had buildings of their own to display their cereals, vegetables and especially their fruits to the best advantage and attract attention to their individual merits of soil and climate so as to induce immigration. I was especially impressed by the completeness and beauty of the fruit, timber, mineral and livestock exhibits of the exposition as a whole.

A boat ride on Puget Sound – that peculiar arm of the Pacific, often not wider than a large river, but extending for hundreds of miles through north-western Washington and wroth so much to the commerce of the northwest – with a view of Uncle Sam's big battleships and cruisers and the dry docks at Bremerton, Wash., completed the stay at Seattle.

After a short trip to Portland, Ore., on the Northern Pacific Railway, I bade farewell to the coast and proceeded by the S.P. & S. Ry. back to Spokane along the north bank of the Columbia river with its famous Dalles and water falls. The country along this great river is more picturesque than fertile, at least in its immediate vicinity. The little towns of Roosevelt and Luzon and the larger and more pretentious town and railroad junction Kennewick are situated in an arid waste of rock and sand though by a primitive and simple system of irrigation they raise some nice vegetables, fruits and alfalfa.

From Spokane a side trip was made 120 miles south to Lewiston, Idaho. This is a flourishing city at the junction of the Clearwater and Snake rivers, the county seat of Nez Pece County, and surrounded by

fertile wheat farms and prolific orchards and vineyards. Its numerous and extensive orchards and vineyards produce as fine apples, pears, peaches and grapes as are to be found in the United States. Its scenery is sublime and its climate seems delightful and healthful. It has an abundance of water power in its two rivers for manufacturing and, like St. Paul, is at the head of river navigation. Altogether I predict a steady and rapid growth for Lewiston and Clarkston, its sister just across the Snake River. No place that I visited impressed me more favorably.

After returning to Spokane I continued my homeward journey via the Burlington Route through Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois to the "Queen of the Lakes," passing through many large and prosperous towns such as Great Falls and Billings, Mont., Newcastle, Wy., Edgmont, S.D., Broken Bow and Lincoln, Neb., Burlington, Ia., and Monmouth and Aurora, Ill., and many others of more or less note. In Nebraska the road runs largely through semi-arid sand plains and along a monotonous chain of sand hills covered by multitudes of cattle and horses. Almost the only change in the panorama was made by an occasional lake or small town around a station. Here the sod shanty was frequently in evidence but is preferable to many other pioneer dwellings one sees and is by no means as bad a structure as one is apt to imagine. On the rich prairies of Iowa large herds of dairy and beef cattle were distinctive features.

The question commonly asked, "What do you think of the country?" I will answer by saying that in my opinion the West has a great future before it. By the aid of irrigation from lakes, streams and artesian wells, by more intensive and diversified and dry farming the west will sooner or later be as densely peopled as the East. I believe that the advice of Horace Greeley to young men holds as good today as at the time he uttered it. Many of my schoolmates, friends and neighbors from Wisconsin who acted on the advice 25 years and some even only 10 years ago, have made a fortune in the state of Washington and all have greatly bettered themselves as far as I know. The man must, however, be willing to hustle and endure some hardships and privations, at least in many places even now, though not near as many as before the advent of transcontinental railroads. A married man with young children had probably go to the more settled parts of any of these states. A person with capital to invest can no doubt do well as interest is high and land values increasing. I predict that the fertile what lands in the Palouse country (Wash.) now selling at about \$50 per acre will in less than 10 years sell at \$100 per years. I also believe that land in Flathead County, Mont., and in other places now to be bought at \$30 per acre will double in price in a few years. If I were just beginning the practice of medicine I should go west as fees are much higher, in Washington nearly double and in Idaho and Montana more than double what they are here and the cost of living not much if any higher, but the work is somewhat more arduous. If however, a man owns a farm or a home here and does a good business, I would advise him to leave good enough alone.

Space forbids me to go into detail as to the peculiarities of western soil, crops, climate and conditions, but I will endeavor to mention a few in a general way. As far as possible I verified my own observations by the testimony of old residents or relatives or friends familiar with the conditions. The climate and soil conditions seem adapted to produce perfect specimens of certain plants in profusion. Pre-eminently one of these are the cone bearing trees. Great areas are covered with evergreen forests

containing pines and tamaracks hundreds of feet high and several feet in diameter. Young firs, hemlocks and pines spring up along every highway and byway like the box elder does here and vice versa, the box elder does not thrive out there. I have seen acres of them planted on timber claims, all stunted and sprouting out at the stock while dwarfed and blighted at the top. The Carolina and Lombardy poplars do best amount the deciduous trees and are great favorites. Enormous quantities of valuable wood are going to waste or are destroyed by fire – both accidental and intentional – and one or more saw mills at practically every railroad station with many more back in the forest are rapidly depleting the country of this useful resource. More's the pity.

Conditions also seem perfect for the cereals, especially wheat. On every roadside, over hill and valley, on vacant lots and even in pastures and wood lots heads of wheat show among the weeds. Authentic cases of yields of 60 bushels of wheat per acre are not uncommon and 40 and 50 bushels quite common in all these states.

Fruit – especially winter apples – seem to find ideal conditions in the Pacific Northwest. I saw bunches of grapes that weighed 5 to 6 pounds, and apples from the Yakima Valley – well I will not attempt to give their weight or size for fear people will think I am emulating Baron Muenschaue – suffice it to say that I do not think it would require more than one man to carry one of these big apples on exhibition at the A.Y.P. Exposition or any of the various county fairs, but I verily believe it would require more than one average man to eat one at a session. However it is not so much the unusual size as the remarkable uniformity of color, soundness and delicate flavor that is important. Slightly more than average sized fruit is commercially most in demand and therefore most profitable to the producer. The country around Spokane, North Yakima, Wenatchee and Clarkston in Washington, the Hood River and Rogue River regions in Oregon, Lewiston in Idaho and a few other places are famous for the abundant yield and excellent quality of their fruit. Spokane holds an annual apple show about this season of the year. I have not mentioned California because I have never been there and besides it is universally known as beyond all the states of fine fruits. Potatoes also do remarkably well all through the west both as to quality and to yield. Dr. Miley