

BAKER COUNTY.

THE County of Baker occupies the extreme southeastern corner of Oregon, and is the second largest in the State. Powder River separates it from Union County on the north, while on the east the great Snake River—in early years known as the Lewis or Sahaptin—flows between it and the adjoining Territory of Idaho for nearly half its length, the fortieth Washington Meridian forming the boundary line for the southern half. On the south lies the State of Nevada. It is separated from Grant County on the west by the line between Townships 36 and 37, west of the Willamette Meridian, for three-fourths of its entire length, the line on the northern quarter following the summit ridge of the Blue Mountains. In shape it is nearly a rectangle, its length from north to south being 200 miles, and its width sixty. High, timber-clad mountains in the north, breaking, as progress is made southward, into lower and more barren mountains, elevated plateaus, sage-covered or barren plains, characteristic of the great Nevada Basin on whose edge it lies, and many streams, both large and small, along whose courses are numerous fertile valleys and natural meadows, are the leading topographical features. Of the estimated area of 11,000,000 acres, only one-third has been surveyed. There are vast tracts of good arable land, now covered with sage brush, which require only irrigation to render the soil extremely productive. The watercourses are numerous and never failing, and from these much of this dry land may be easily irrigated, while other tracts are not so conveniently situated. Here, as elsewhere, it has been observed that the bringing of large tracts under cultivation has a tendency to increase the rainfall, and the result is that already land that was formerly considered too dry for cultivation now receives enough natural moisture to render it productive. It is evident that gradually lands now irrigated will require such artificial watering less and less every year. For that matter, however, irrigated land, where the means for rendering it such are not too expensive, is preferable to any which depends upon the clouds to "rain fatness" upon them, since they may be depended upon to produce good crops even in the driest of seasons, and need never fear the excessive moisture often showered upon the farms otherwise situated. A farmer in a dry country, with good soil and an unfailing supply of water at his command, which he can, at will, turn upon any portion of his land which may require moisture, and shut it off from other portions which may already have sufficient, is independent of the caprices of Nature, and as near being his own master as the agriculturist ever comes. A comparison of what has been accomplished in California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Montana, Idaho and other points upon irrigated lands, with the results of operations on lands in the same regions dependent upon natural rainfall, is most flatteringly favorable to the former. There is a prejudice, springing solely from ignorance, against irrigated lands, which time will remove so completely that people will wonder that it ever existed. The greatest agricultural achievements of ancient civilizations were

accomplished by this means; and in the "scientific farming" of the future there is no doubt that the proper manipulation of the irrigation ditch will be counted as one of the most essential features.

The watercourses of the county are numerous and convey continuously a great volume of water. Flowing northward along the upper half of its eastern boundary is the great Snake River, the final repository of all the running water in the county, save that of a few small streams in the extreme southern end of the county which flow into the Humboldt. The leading tributaries of Snake River, beginning at the north, are Powder, Burnt, Malheur and Owyhee, each of which has numerous large and small tributaries. The bottom lands along these streams are very fertile, and frequently spread out into grassy valleys of considerable width. Some of this land, lying back from the streams and slightly elevated above them, requires irrigating to render it productive, much of it being favorably located for that purpose. Some of it, however, requires but slight irrigation, and still other portions none whatever. When all the land in Baker County which can be irrigated cheaply and handily shall be placed under cultivation the productive area will be increased tenfold. There are in this region no land grant complications, with the exception of the military roads, two narrow strips, crossing between the Malheur and Owyhee rivers. The land all belongs to the Government, save the two sections of each township granted to the State for school purposes, and now that the Desert Land Act will probably be repealed by the present Congress, *bona fide* settlers will find no obstacles in the way of settling upon desirable Government land and securing title as soon as the land laws are complied with. The most desirable portions have been surveyed, so that settlers need have none of the difficulties encountered by those who locate upon unsurveyed lands.

The most thickly settled portion is the northern, in the region of Powder and Burnt rivers. Powder River flows down from the Blue Mountains, just above the Second Standard Parallel, till it reaches the Grande Ronde Meridian, when it turns sharply to the north, flowing through Baker City and the Powder River Valley till it reaches the First Standard. There it receives the waters of the North Powder, a smaller stream which forms the northern boundary line of the county west of that point. It then turns southeasterly and forms the line of separation between Baker and Union counties till it discharges into Snake River. Powder River Valley is twenty miles long and about sixteen wide. This is the large valley shown in the accompanying illustration of Baker City. Along its whole course, however, the Powder has fertile bottom lands, spreading out at times into quite considerable valleys, in many of which there may be found excellent vacant locations for settlement. The large valley is well settled, and is the centre of the greatest population of the county. Through it runs the line of the Oregon Railway & Navigation Company, a portion of the new overland route via the Oregon Short Line. The soil is fertile and susceptible of the highest state of cultivation.