

ARABLE LANDS OF SOUTHERN IDAHO.

ALTHOUGH Idaho is known to the outside world as a mountainous region whose chief industry is mining, it is none the less the fact that agriculture and stock raising have taken strong hold in that region, and the indications are that the soil will ere many years, as is now the case in the great mining State of California, yield more under the hand of labor and support a larger population than the golden sands or mineral-laden rocks. The area susceptible of cultivation, or valuable for pastoral pursuits, is enormous. Valleys and vast table lands or plateaus, covered with a deep, fertile soil, form a large portion of the surface of the Territory.

There are in Idaho 10,200 square miles of arable valley and prairie land situated at an elevation less than 3,000 feet above the level of the sea, making an agricultural tract equal in size to the whole State of Vermont. Not one-twentieth of these lands is occupied. The valleys are long, narrow strips lying on either side of water-courses, and flanked by mountains or rising in benches to table lands.

The soil may be divided into four classes—alkaline, mountain, plain and valley. The first, when relieved of its superabundance of salts by irrigation, becomes extremely fertile. There is not, however, a large area of alkali lands. Mountain soil in the wooded sections is black, deep and full of vegetable mold. The soil of the plains, also, contains much mold and is fertile and highly productive of cereals. The valley soil contains the condensed richness of vast areas of vegetable growth, which has been for ages brought down from the mountain sides by the hundreds of streams which form the large water-courses. The mountains are high but not very precipitous, affording good protection to the valleys from cold winds.

Between Bois  Valley and the southern boundary line there are fertile valleys traversing sage brush plains and table lands. The proportion of timber in this region is small, being confined chiefly to the lines of streams and mountain sides. Three-fourths of this vast surface is capable of reclamation by irrigation, and will produce abundant crops. In the southwest section of this district are several fertile valleys tributary to the Owyhee. In the southeast section among others are the upper end of Cache Valley, which produces all kinds of cereals and vegetables, and Malade Valley, fifty miles long by from three to four miles wide. The last named is a fine, fertile valley, containing several farming settlements. It contains 175 square miles of irrigable land. The valley is flat, and though the streams have but slight fall, still, as the benches are everywhere low, the water can be taken out all over the valley. Bear Lake Valley contains about 275 square miles of tillable land. It extends in a broad belt on both sides of the river southward from Soda Springs for fifteen miles, where the river is forced into a narrow canyon, but begins again at Georgetown and extends up the lake. In the valleys of the Blackfoot and its branches there is much valuable land. Probably 175 square miles can be made productive.

In Southern Idaho irrigation is generally necessary. So far from being a drawback, however, the farmer has now come to regard this fact as an advantage. Crops thus cultivated are not subject to the vicissitudes of rainfall; the possibilities of drought are avoided; the farmer's labors are seldom interrupted and his crops rarely injured by storms. This immunity from drought and storm renders agricultural operations much more certain than in the Eastern States. Again, the water comes down from the mountains and plateaus freighted with fertilizing materials derived from the decaying vegetation and soils of the upper regions, which are spread by the flowing water over cultivated lands. It is probable that the benefits derived from this source alone will be full compensation for the cost of the process. Experience will correct the errors occasionally resulting from permitting too great or too rapid a flow of water, and the irrigator soon learns to flood his lands gently, evenly and economically. A stranger entering this arid region is apt to conclude that the soils are sterile because of their chemical composition; but experience demonstrates the fact that all the soils are suitable for agricultural purposes when properly supplied with water.

Bois  Valley, especially in the neighborhood of Bois  City, affords an excellent example. Within twenty years a barren sage brush plain has been transformed into a paradise. Trees and shrubbery adorn the streets and gardens. Orchards bending beneath the burden of their fruit, fields of waving grain, gardens producing every variety of crops, are on all sides. The larger and smaller fruits, perfect in form and flavor, and the mammoth vegetables whose characteristic flavors are not affected by their size, surpass the much-extolled products of California.

The area formed by the junction of the Bois , Payette, Weiser and Owyhee valleys is a vast agricultural region. In the immense basin formed by the confluence of Idaho's great rivers is a compact body of farming lands millions of acres in extent—the largest agricultural area between the great prairies and the plains of the Columbia. In soil, climate and facilities for irrigation it is unsurpassed. It is mainly the rich, warm loam that produces sage brush to perfection in its natural state, and all the cereals, fruits and vegetables of this latitude when cultivated. There are acres upon acres of apples, plums, pears, peaches and small fruits, and alongside of them, almost as far as the eye can reach, are stretches of wild farming lands awaiting claimants and cultivation. It is not unusual for immigrants to locate on wild lands in these valleys, put up comfortable houses, good barns, good fences, etc., and pay for all such improvements with the first year's crop of potatoes or other vegetables, taken from only a small portion of their farms. The fact that Idaho farmers were, as a rule, very poor when they embarked in business a few years ago, and that they are now generally well off, and have fine buildings and improvements, with large herds of stock, is proof that this is a lucrative pursuit. Oats yield 55 bushels per acre; wheat, 30; rye, 25; potatoes, 250.