

SPOKANE FALLS AND SURROUNDINGS.

OF ALL the names which diversify our map none catches the eye more quickly than Spokane Falls, and of none we may say that examination more completely fills in the pleasant outlines sketched by the free hand of fancy. It is a strategic point in the great Columbia basin. We approach it, therefore, to study not only its future, but also that of the vast region of which it is the natural center.

To strangers to the curious and interesting region commonly spoken of here as "East of the mountains," it may be well to give a brief outline description of its physical features. The drainage area of the Columbia contains two hundred and forty-four thousand nine hundred and fifty-nine square miles. The most of this is in the irregular square bounded on its entire western border by the Cascade mountains, on the east by the multiplied and broken spurs of the Rockies, on the south by the barren steppes of Nevada, and on the north by corresponding plateaus, with some high mountains, separating the Columbia from the Fraser. This vast basin includes all of Idaho, two-thirds of Oregon and Washington, and considerable slices of Montana and British Columbia. By far the greater part of it is elevated over fifteen hundred feet above sea level, much of it above that. Geologically it is one of the most interesting regions of the globe. It was once an immense lake, drained by the lapse of years by a chasm, cleft by volcanic and aqueous violence through the very heart of the Cascade mountains. The great elevation of most of it caused the rivers to fall with exceeding swiftness, so that deep canyons have been formed by the principal streams, while the plains between have been perfectly gridironed by the smaller tributaries. This is the reason that most of the Columbia basin is hilly.

The entire region has been burned, seared, melted, bubbling over with volcanic action. Everywhere west of the spurs of the Rocky mountains the common rock is trap and basalt. Granite is common east of Spokane Falls, and marble is found in places west of it. There, as is generally known, are sedimentary rocks metamorphosed by volcanic heat. The outflows of lava which thus originally covered the whole Columbia basin, have slowly disintegrated into soil. The work has gone on faster nearer the mountains, for there frost and rain have been more constant agencies. This decomposed basalt is the richest soil known. Century by century the ever thickening grass has formed a turf which has finally become an inexhaustible reservoir of nourishing material. Thus was the soil or the great basin formed. In its general external appearance the plain of the Columbia is rolling and destitute of timber. Now in the very center of one of the most considerable expansions of this great plain is Spokane Falls. The region to which it belongs is known as the Palouse or Spokane country, or both, which it properly is, inasmuch as both rivers drain it. The Spokane river is the outlet of Cœur d'Alene lake, and receives also several tributaries from

the prairie country west of that lake. It flows tortuously and with foaming haste to the Columbia. The Palouse rises in the mountains south of Cœur d'Alene lake and flows into the Snake.

Here is a region of country just about enclosed by the line of the Northern Pacific railroad on the north and the Palouse river on the south, which is destined to be one of the finest agricultural sections of Washington Territory, and which is naturally tributary to Spokane Falls. It is, perhaps, seventy miles square. There is hardly any waste in it, except that unspeakably dismal strip of rocks and swamps bordering the railroad between Spokane Falls and Cheney, and giving to travelers an unfavorable impression of the country. A few miles south of the railroad the fringe of pine barrens gives way to beautiful undulating plains of surpassing fertility, unbroken thenceforward to the Snake river, and, in fact, beyond to the crests of the Blue mountains. Besides this great body of agricultural land south of Spokane Falls and directly tributary to it, there is northwest of it the vast Big Bend region, much of which will naturally be a part of the domain of the future Spokane Falls. Northward is the great Colville valley, and eastward are many smaller valleys of fine agricultural resources and still greater capacity for stock.

Such are the agricultural environs of Spokane Falls. Nor are the interests which center there confined at all to the tillage of the soil and the rearing of stock. The gold and silver of the Cœur d'Alene and Colville mountains find here the most available point for exchange for the necessities of life. And besides these vast prospective mining interests are milling interests, both lumber and flouring, which are already unequaled by any in the entire upper country. The mountains bordering the beautiful blue Cœur d'Alene and its inlet, the St. Joseph river, abound in the finest timber. It is floated down the Spokane river, and when it reaches the tremendous water power of the falls it meets the golden tide of grain from the prairies to the south, and there they are both worked up. Thus it appears that Spokane Falls is the natural focus of four great lines of permanent activity: agricultural, grazing, mining and milling. To these the near future will no doubt soon add a fifth, quite likely to overmatch any of them in importance. This is manufacturing. Every natural facility can be found here for a manufacturing point. But we have been considering this "Minneapolis of the West" from a distance, and as to its possibilities rather than its realities; we must therefore enter it and see what it is. As before indicated, the route of the Northern Pacific is an unfortunate one in respect to exhibiting the country. The physical necessities of the case take it from the Columbia river to the *couteaux*—old river beds—and when it has mounted out of them it soon runs into the swamp belt, extending most of the way from Sprague to Spokane Falls. Aside from a small belt of good country and the beautiful lake near the town, one sees but little of interest from the railroad. Strangers need to be told of this fact, lest they get an erroneous impression.