

THE GRANDE RONDE VALLEY.

TRAVELERS from the east over the Oregon Short Line are much surprised to find in Eastern Oregon, which most of them have been educated to believe to be a desert waste, a valley of greater beauty and richness than they had hoped to find in the most favored portions of the Pacific slope. Because a portion of the route after passing the Rockies is through a sage brush country in which more or less sand appears, the eastern immigrant becomes convinced of the general sterility of the region, and as he does not pass through any section sufficiently different in character to awaken him to a realization of his error before arriving in the Grande Ronde valley, a genuine surprise greets him there. Of course, a great deal of fertile land is traversed before reaching this favored spot, but the traveler, unused to many of the characteristics of cis-Rocky soils, is scarcely qualified to judge of their relative merits, and if he were qualified the window of an express car is hardly a suitable point of observation from which to make a close analysis. Coming up from the Powder river country, the railroad threads its way through the spur of the Blue mountains that bounds the Grande Ronde valley on the south, entering the valley at its southern extremity and extending across its southwestern edge a distance of about twenty miles. Leaving this valley the railway crosses another spur of the mountains and then passes through the Umatilla country and on down the Columbia river to Portland. It has been but about four years since railroad communication was established with the Grande Ronde country, and those years have been fraught with many important changes for this particular gem of the mountains.

The Grande Ronde valley comprises the greater part of Union county, Oregon. It is eighteen to twenty miles wide and about forty miles long and has an area of over five hundred thousand acres, fully four-fifths of which are excellent agricultural land, immediately available for cultivation, though only two hundred thousand acres are now tilled. A feature of special importance is the large area of grass land. Thousands of acres of land growing a heavy crop of grass can be seen from the railroad, and cattle revel in the choicest feed during the entire season. Good grass land is necessarily moist and there is no spot in Eastern Oregon that will compare with the Grande Ronde valley and the adjoining country down the Grande Ronde river in the production of nutritious grasses. Some of the bunch grass hills make fine stock ranges, but the long distance to water in many instances impairs their value for grazing purposes; but the natural, moist grass lands of the Grande Ronde valley may always be depended upon, and

they grow the most succulent wild and tame grasses. From these the finest hay is harvested for feed in the short winter season. The area of grain land in the valley, however, greatly exceeds any other, though, of course, these grain lands will grow a great diversity of products. The valley is well watered at every season of the year. The sloping hills on its border can be utilized to any altitude desired, for the mountains enclosing the valley rise to a height of from two to four thousand feet, and the husbandman can go as far into the rough lands as he chooses, to suit whatever branch of agriculture may be his specialty. The valley proper has no timber to speak of, but all around it the hills and mountains are covered with a heavy growth of fir, pine, tamarack and spruce. The tamarack is a fine timber for finishing purposes, as it takes a good polish. All this timber is suitable for manufacturing, and a number of saw mills are now working it into lumber, which finds a ready market. There are also minerals in that country that will pay well for the working.

The chief city and commercial metropolis of the Grande Ronde valley is LaGrande, a city exceeding two thousand inhabitants, in the western part of the valley. Four years ago there were less than a thousand people in the city. When the railroad was built through that country it did not touch LaGrande. The city as it then existed was fully a mile from the railway. At once it was resolved to remove the city to the railroad, and almost the entire business portion of the town is now situated convenient to the railway station. What is known as the old town is by no means divorced from the city of more recent growth, however. The two are in one corporation, but the original townsite is now occupied chiefly by residences, their relative positions being well shown in the engraving. With the growth of the city building is being resumed in the old town, and the whole is experiencing the same improvement in every direction. It will not be long before there will be no distinguishing line between the two portions of the city, so rapidly is the building area increasing.

LaGrande has very large business interests. The tributary country is rich and constantly improving, and of course the city reaps an advantage from the development of the territory upon which it relies for support. In municipal affairs LaGrande is progressive. The city is not waiting to be pushed into prominence merely by the merits of the surrounding country but it is leading in improvements and is an active agent in promoting development in the country about it. The city's capital is in the farms and stock and minerals of the valley and mountains as well as in the situation which it occupies and the vigor and enterprise of its citizens. It is situated on the Grande