

A LAND OF PROMISE.

The Possibilities of the Colorado Desert Under Irrigation.

SIX CROPS ARE GROWN EVERY YEAR

On the Same Soil, Which in Many Places Reaches a Depth of Twenty Feet—A Land Surpassing Florida and California in a Fruit Growing Region—The Gigantic Irrigating Canal Proposed to Transform this Land into a Paradise.

Special Correspondence of the Intelligencer.

YUMA, ARIZ., Feb. 1.—The scene of the last communication which the Intelligencer did me the honor to publish was somewhere in West Virginia; the scene of this one is about 2,000 miles west of the mountain state; and its entire "formation," as they say out in this country, is radically different. Such a distance, and particularly where Yuma, Ariz., lies at the end of the vista, is a far cry in more senses than one, but there is at least one thing to be said in favor of Yuma and its environs, everybody has heard of the same. There breathes not a man with soul so dead in this country of ours who has not heard of the climatic conditions of Yuma; of the soldier who, having been stationed here in life, came back from Hades for his blankets; of the Yuma resident that dead and "condemned" (revised version) was unaware of his hard lot in eternity until told of it; and various and sundry other anecdotes of equal claim to veracity; and I suppose nine persons out of every ten have nothing but pity to bestow on a friend who informs them that he contemplates a journey to Yuma. I remember very distinctly the days and nights in Washington, when the mercury was hovering around the hundred mark, when the asphalt of the streets was taking on the consistency of river mud and old "General Humidity" was in the saddle, that I took a great deal of satisfaction out of the fact that there was always one place in the land hotter than Washington. That place was Yuma, Ariz. Washington used to make a brave fight for the lead at times, but Yuma generally managed to turn into the homestretch about ten degrees to the good. So much for a reputation. "Give a dog a bad name," you know, and even after the dog dies the name will survive.

NOT AS BLACK AS PAINTER. Not infrequently the name is undeserved. The dog does not always get the benefit of his side of the story. Yuma has seldom been heard in her own defence, and I want to assure you that she can put in a very good plea indeed. You would have thought so if you had stepped from the train, as we did, into a temperature of 70 degrees, in sight of a yard full of orange and lemon trees covered with fruit, with rose bushes in full bloom, at a time when, according to telegraphic accounts, Wheeling was experiencing a drop of 49 degrees of temperature in six hours. You would have been further impressed, perhaps, if you had camped out upon these surrounding deserts for the past eight days, as I have, with no greater amount of shelter at night than a pair of blankets and the stars. This, too, when we are reading of heavy snow falls from Texas to Michigan, mixed up with all varieties of blizzards. Snow and blizzards are scarce in a country that only affords about seventeen cloudy days per year and half that number of rainy ones, and where the average relative humidity is 44 per cent. Forty-four per cent of humidity means that there is less than half the amount of moisture in the air, on an average, necessary to produce precipitation in the form of rain, sleet or snow. The annual precipitation here is about three inches. There are places in the United States that show a greater precipitation in a single day. One point is said to show a smaller degree of humidity than this, the town of Winnemucca, Nevada.

AN IDEAL CLIMATE FOR CONSUMPTIVES. The peculiarity of the dryness of the air in Yuma is that it is attained at sea-level. Most of the places that are noted for their dry air are at considerable altitudes. Denver, for instance, is a mile above the level of the sea, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, is 6,000 feet up. But Yuma has an elevation of only 120 feet, and portions of the surrounding deserts are below sea level. It is this peculiarity which furnishes the basis for the claim of the residents here that this is the ideal climate for sufferers from throat and lung troubles; and this is why the little town is full of such sufferers at present. Some great tales are told of the cures wrought of pulmonary troubles. People are introduced to you, healthy enough looking, who came here to die of bronchitis and consumption, and who claim to have found complete relief. A few days since I was talking with one of these consumptives. He weighs now 250 pounds, and was telling me how he had grown 100 tons of alfalfa hay on eight acres of land in a year (seven successive crops, under irrigation). Furthermore, this dryness of air is the reason why the great heat of the climate is not felt more severely than it is and why sunstroke is unknown in the region. There is no doubt about it, they have heat enough and to spare in Southern Arizona. The records of the United States signal station located here show that, just as they do the other meteorological phenomena, above quoted.

ONE OF THE first things that impresses the visitor is the preparation made on every hand to ward off as far as possible the effects of the rays of this tropical sun; the double roofs on the better class of houses, the abundance of porches and hallways, and, most typical of all, the "summer bedrooms." These summer bedrooms are simply board floors, built out in the yards, surmounted by a light frame work, the latter covered over with chess cloth to keep out mosquitoes. Yuma moves its bed out of doors about June 1, and it is to such places that it moves it. As regards the airiness of such an arrangement there can be no question, but as to privacy there might be a difference of opinion. However, as between privacy and discomfort, the former has to give in.

CLOUDLESS SKIES THE RULE. For three months in the year the natives admit that their weather is a trifle too hot for comfort—at certain periods of the day. For the other nine months they claim the finest climate on earth. Now, as to this famous heat. The highest temperature recorded by the signal service here in its twenty years of existence is 118 degrees. This, of course, in the shade. What it was in the sun would not be safe to predict. And there are plenty of days all through the summer season when the mercury hangs over and about 105. The skies are cloudless (Yuma has an average of 279 perfectly clear days per year), and there is nothing to interfere with the sun in his efforts to keep steadily at

work. One day is very like another; but on the other hand, and as a compensation, there is a change of some 28 degrees between day and night temperatures, and a difference of some 30 degrees in what is called the "sensible temperature," that is, the degree of heat which is actually felt. So, if the thermometer showed 118 degrees of heat, it is claimed that only about 88 degrees would be felt. This is the official estimate. In Washington, to take an example of the opposite, every degree is felt—and sometimes more. At any rate, by these two kinds of thermometric change life is made more bearable during the summer and for portions of it not unpleasant.

There is usually a morning or two every year when Yuma experiences a degree of cold sufficient to form frost, not by any means a killing frost, but enough to show a trace. The low temperatures are of shorter duration than at any other point of which there is a record.

So you have the two extremes of the temperature here. The mean for the year is about 73 degrees, and, as you know, the ideal thermometer should stand perpetually at 72 degrees.

This short dissertation on temperature is mostly by way of digression. I took up the subject of Yuma heat first because that is the first thing one hears in connection with Yuma, and on account of which it is so widely known. What I started to write about was the town itself, and the so-called Colorado desert, lying just across the Colorado river from the town, in California, and how it is proposed to take advantage of the juxtaposition of the river and so-called desert, and, with the aid of the hot climate, make this region one of the great garden spots of the world, just as other parts of Southern California now are.

IRRIGATION THE WATCHWORD. Irrigation is the watchword of all this western country. Go almost where you will people are talking irrigation; and, briefly speaking, the plan in this case is to turn a part of the water of the Colorado river out onto the desert and irrigate it. All that is needed in this land is water; nature does the rest. I have often thought of late that Yuma was directly in the mind's eye of the man who originated that joke about the place that needed only some water and a little good society. In any event his joke fits Yuma like a new glove.

As for the town, it is a typical southwestern one, possessing little individuality and few points of interest. It claims 1,500 inhabitants, lies on the eastern bank of the Colorado river, stretching between and over a series of bluffs and is built largely of adobe. But I doubt if any place on earth affords greater variety in the makeup of its population. Native Americans, Mexicans, Chinese, negroes, half-breeds, Indians, cowboys, miners, tourists—they are all here, and they all seem to get along after their respective fashions. Not that it is difficult to get along in some fashion in Yuma. A house is almost a superfluity, clothing ditto, food is cheap and time is no object whatever. This is the land of to-morrow and the day after. Nothing is done that can be left undone. The idea is to put off nothing till to-morrow that can be postponed till next week, longer if possible. Perhaps it was hither that Hiawatha came, when he finally departed

To the Kingdom of Pomegranate. To the land of the Hereafter. A POUSSÉ CAFE UNKNOWN. The arrival and departure of the overland trains on the Southern Pacific railroad furnish the pieces de resistance of the day. Once in a while, however, something else occurs which temporarily ruffles the placid calm of Yuma existence. There was an instance of this only a few days ago. The railroad tracks had been washed out over in California by the heavy rains on the Pacific slope and some of the trains were laid up near here. The travelers were killing time by wandering around town. One of them, clad in faultless eastern style, spick and span from top to toe, entered a saloon and, not having been properly coached in advance, walked up to the bar and confidently called for a poussé cafe. Now there are some things you can get in Yuma as easily as you can anywhere else in the world, but a poussé cafe is undoubtedly not one of them. When a man is thirsty in Yuma he wants something liquid quickly; he don't care to wait for mixed drinks of any kind. Consequently the bartenders get out of practice in that respect. The presiding genius of this poussé cafe before, and the whisky bottle which, as a matter of course, he had lifted from its resting place and was handing to the stranger dropped from his nerveless grasp with a crash as the unparalysed request was proffered. Over in the corner of the room a quiet little game of stud-horse poker was in progress, at which the proprietor of the saloon was taking a hand. The game stopped instantly when the stranger's wishes were made known, and the players turned to see what manner of man it might be who in this way had violated all Yuma tradition and precedent; meanwhile the stranger, in no wise abashed, repeated his request for a poussé cafe. The bartender, who was verging on total collapse, thereupon cast an appealing glance toward the proprietor. That individual was equal to the emergency. Slowly, majestically he approached the bar. "We ain't got none mixed up to-day," he said, with impressive distinctness, as he shoved the fallen whisky bottle insinuatingly towards his customer. A drink of whisky straight was taken, the same paid for and there was a vacant place before that bar in less time than it takes to tell about it. Without comment the poker game was resumed.

THE YUMA INDIANS. For many years Yuma was one of the principal military posts on our southwestern frontier. Old Fort Yuma is now an Indian school, in charge of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and a noble work they are accomplishing in the reclamation of these Indian children. Speaking of Indians, these Yumas are the finest specimens of poor Indians that you will find anywhere, physically at least. They are big fellows, straight and muscular, of whose athletic achievements much can be said. A hundred miles in twenty-four hours, across deserts and mountains, is not an unusual feat for some of them. Moreover, they are very quiet and docile, and, I suppose, come as nearly being good Indians as they can well be this side of the happy hunting grounds.

But, as I said before, the topic of greatest interest, not only to this immediate section, but to all the western half of the United States, is irrigation. Not even free silver coinage and the increased gold production of the west now command so much attention from thoughtful people east of the Missouri as does irrigation. Up in Colorado, for example, a state, as you know, which not long since was almost threatening to secede if silver should be "demonetized," as they put it; and which is now bidding fair to be the chief gold producing state of the union; there, I was told, not many weeks ago, that her agricultural products amounted in value to three times the combined values of her gold and silver output. The agri-

cultural portions of the state are a network of irrigating canals. Indeed, according to Mexican ideas, Colorado and New Mexico are doing altogether too much irrigating. Between the two the waters of the Rio Grande river have been almost totally absorbed; and the result is that when the farmers dwelling along the lower part of the river most need water for their crops the Rio Grande is little more than a memory. Mexico, it is said, is making some strong representations to our government on the subject.

A RIVER OF VALUE. There will be no difficulty of that nature in this section. The Colorado river, as it hurries along at the rate of four miles an hour, just beneath my windows, is as wide as the Ohio at the suspension bridge, and is at present eighteen feet deep. It drains, wholly or partially, five states and territories, and has the happy faculty of carrying its greatest depth of water at the season of the year when water is most needed for irrigation purposes. That is to say, owing to the melting of the mountain snows, it is highest in early summer. But that is not the only merit, from an irrigation standpoint, which this great river possesses. Standing on the bridge of the Southern Pacific railroad, which spans the Colorado at this point, and watching the turbulent flood eddy around the pier, one is impressed with the idea that there is more earth than water going by. The "muddy Missouri" in its palmiest days was never as muddy a river as the Colorado. Think of 5 per cent of sediment in a body of water! The Nile, the great irrigating agent of the ancients, whereon the Egyptians cast their bread, which, after the lapse of some days, came back buttered, possessed no such fertilizing qualities as the Colorado! According to the report of the agricultural experiment station of the territory, located here, this water, turned upon land, has a fertilizing value per foot of from \$3.42 to \$8.63 an acre, the value varying with the stages of the river.

And what kind of land is available for such fertilization? It is of two kinds—the bottom lands, along the banks of the river, and the mesas, or uplands, lying further back and somewhat higher; both the deposit of the river sediment for endless generations, a dark, sandy loam; the valley soil, perhaps, naturally more fertile; the mesa soil more porous; both capable of producing, and producing now, such crops and in such numbers as an eastern farmer never dreamt of. Twenty feet deep I have seen these soils at places where the arroyos, or dry water courses, had made an opening. There is no occasion for rotation of crops here, no sub-soil cultivation, no single season of sowing and harvest, simply turn on the water at stated intervals and, in the perpetual sunshine, one crop succeeds another as fast as they can grow. Rain, in the estimation of these farmers, is a drawback. It only interferes with outdoor work.

A MODERN GARDEN OF EDEN. What grows under these conditions? It would be easier to enumerate what does not grow. Every fruit, vegetable and grain that thrives under temperate or semi-tropical conditions is here in luxuriance. Oranges, lemons, limes, figs, dates, peaches, pears, apricots, pomegranates, prunes, grapes, all of which can be placed on the market from a month to six weeks ahead of those from any other section, as the famous coast fruit country is beginning to realize to its cost; and all of which are in bearing order one season earlier after setting out than in either southwestern California or Florida. From my own observation I should say that this would some day be pre-eminently the lemon and lime growing center of the world. I cut from a tree a few days ago a single lemon that weighed 8½ ounces. The branches of that tree were propped up with forked sticks to help sustain their loads of fruit and the lemon I cut off was not apparently superior to many others surrounding it. I have seen a lemon here that weighed 19 ounces. That was, of course, a monstrosity, and its flavor was probably not by any means equal to that of the ordinary run of the fruit, which is claimed to be unsurpassed. The skin, after the "sweating" process is complete, is about as thick as a playing card. The smaller fruits and berries might be said to grow ad libitum; one crop succeeds another just as quickly as time will allow. None of them could properly be said to have a season, in the sense that the word is used in the north. They mature at any time of the year. The same applies to grain and grasses. A farmer who does not get six crops of hay off his land every year thinks there is something wrong; and it must be remembered that with these people energy is at a large discount and work of any kind is a very serious burden. They have yet to learn all that savors of agricultural enterprise.

WHAT IRRIGATION HAS ACCOMPLISHED. South of Yuma a couple of miles, on the noted "Algodones grant," is the ranch of an irrigation company that has, with its settlers, all told, some 800 acres under cultivation. Of its own there are 200 acres, mostly in grapes, apricots, peaches and pears. I walked through this orchard with a gentleman who for several years past has had experience with the best fruit lands of western California. It was his opinion that the latter could not produce its equal. Still nearer to the town, and farther on the mesa, is the ranch of a Massachusetts man, who has recently interested himself in irrigation, as a side issue, so to speak, of his mining enterprises near by. He has 120 acres under cultivation, principally in oranges, lemons, grapes and small vegetables; and adjoining is the agricultural experiment station of Arizona territory, to which I before referred, established in the fall of 1892. Both are as yet in their infancy, but both are to all appearances flourishing; and on them I picked and ate strawberries and some of the smaller vegetables in mid-January, growing in the open air. Here it is that prunes, peaches and apricot trees bear during the second year from the bud; oranges and lemons during the fourth year and grapes in eighteen months. Over at Indio, on the western side of the desert, three crops of grapes are gathered every year. These ranches of which I have spoken are irrigated by pumping water from the Colorado river, the proprietors deeming that less expensive than a gravity canal, because of their position on the uplands. They figure the cost of water at from \$10 to \$12 per acre per year.

COST OF IRRIGATION. This brings up the question of the cost of irrigation in general. In the census of 1890 the first irrigation statistics were gathered. Taking the census estimates for Arizona, it is found that the average cost of water rights throughout the territory was \$7.07 per acre. By this is meant the right to take water upon one's land, exclusive of the regular annual rental. For the latter the average annual cost was \$11.55 per acre. The census furthermore, collected statistics as to the expense of reclamation of the land fit for irrigation. This was found to be \$3.60 per acre. As nearly, if not quite all of the land in question was taken up from the government under the desert land and homestead acts

at \$1.25 per acre, it is easy to compute the total cost to the owner. Exclusive of the annual water rental it would be \$10.92 per acre. The average valuation of this same land, including improvements, was \$18.93 per acre.

These ranches, near Yuma, of which I speak, were taken up under the desert land act. They are held now at \$109 per acre. I am informed that irrigable land around Riverside, Redlands and similar places in Western California, in a state of cultivation comparable to these Yuma lands, is held at \$300 to \$400 per acre. There is something in a name after all, you see. I have been talking about Arizona irrigation. A very different and, it is claimed, a far simpler irrigation problem is in process of solution on the opposite side of the river from Yuma, in California. There lies the "Colorado Desert," stretching out to the south and west, into Lower California (Mexico) on the south and to the Coast Range of mountains on the west, comprising some 1,500,000 acres of territory within the bounds mentioned. The Southern Pacific road passes through this desert, and, like all the overland roads, lays claim to every alternate section of land bordering on its track. The government owns the rest, all of it open to settlement. Directly opposite the town of Yuma, lying along the river is the reservation of the Yuma Indians, about 19,000 acres in extent. At the last session of Congress two bills became laws; one giving to the Colorado River Irrigation Company the right of way for its canal through this Indian reservation, the other throwing open the reservation to survey and settlement. The irrigation problem spoken of refers primarily to these two bodies of land.

LARGEST IRRIGATING CANAL IN THE WORLD. Starting at the northern end of the reservation, where a sufficient elevation is attainable, and where the water can be taken from the river by headgates instead of dams, the company in question has surveyed a route for a gravity canal down through the entire length of the reservation and thence out onto desert, the canal dividing at the entrance to the desert and skirting both edges in order that the pitch of the land may be utilized in each direction. The total length of the canal as surveyed is about 200 miles, its breadth 156 feet and the depth of water to be carried 10 feet; in other words, the largest irrigating canal in the world. Work is now in progress on the heading.

You will readily perceive that such an enterprise partakes of the nature of the gigantic. Such indeed it does; and yet it has not been undertaken hastily nor without a proper study of all the features involved. As a matter of fact the enterprise is not by any means a new one. Thirty years ago it was bronched, and the state of California proposed to give to the promoter the entire body of land if he would irrigate it and the government would transfer title to it to the state. The government failed to make the transfer and the scheme fell through. This present company proposes nothing of that kind. Its aim is simply to dispose of water-rights and rentals to settlers on the land which it covers, believing that there is ample remuneration in that for any legitimate enterprise. It is going ahead on that basis. Competent engineers have made the plans necessary for the canal, the soil is ready and waiting.

THE COLORADO DESERT. I spoke of camping out on the desert at this time of year. In company with some gentlemen interested in the canal enterprise I have lately been over almost all of the territory involved; have seen what they propose to do and how they propose to do it. We traversed country where it is said that not a dozen white men, outside of the surveying party and an occasional cattle herder, had ever previously been. I have seen the far-famed No. 1 hard wheat country of the Dakotas and a goodly number of other tracts in various parts of the United States noted for their richness of soil and salubrity of climate, but I am sure that I never saw anything like the unending miles of this so-called desert. I had thought after going over the bottom lands of the Indian reservation, which will be thrown open to settlement, that it would be difficult to find soil which appeared to be easier of cultivation or more likely to give abundant returns to the cultivator. I was undeceived by this desert panorama. Imagine a great plain ninety miles long by forty miles wide, stretching from one mountain range to another, from the San Bernardino on the east to the San Jacintos (a branch of the Coast Range) on the west, in shape like a big platter, the interior portion depressed just enough to allow of the downward flow of water from the canal lines running along the edges, under the lee of the foot-hills. Across this plain we drove for days, not a hill, nor a stone in sight, the land trending away to the horizon, with only an occasional clump of mesquite trees to break the monotony, the surface as even as a floor, and, wherever a little moisture remained from some long-past shower, carpeted with a thick growth of rank grasses. Here and there rains had sent down streams of water which had furrowed their way through the plain seeking larger water courses. Down the sides of these gullies, the black soil showed to the bottoms without a change; and it was in crossing one of the larger ones, the dry bed of the Carter river, that we measured the depth of the deposit, and found it to be, as I have stated, twenty feet.

Such was the desert as we saw it. It is so named, I suppose, because there is no water upon it. Certainly there is no sand, simply the deep, fine loam that needs only the touch of water to quicken it into life. I should like to go more into details concerning this rather unusual trip of ours, which extended into Lower California, and embraced a number of interesting sights and incidents. I should like to attempt a description of a howling wilderness in the very act of howling its loudest; but you have doubtless had enough for once and the rest can keep for another time. It will not be long, according to all calculations, before this big irrigation scheme will be able to furnish tangible evidence of the possibilities of Yuma and its renowned heat.



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