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WHAT WE SAW

On a Trip to Mecca and the Coachella Valley

How Our Neighbors Are Prospering on Small Ranches With Limited Water Supply. Special Products and Cultural Methods of Great Importance to Our Farmers.

Last Sunday morning we boarded the 4 o'clock train and went to Thermal, in the Coachella Valley, eight miles beyond the Salton Ocean. We spent Sunday and Monday looking over that country, visiting Salton Sea, the Mecca Date farm, Thayer Bros. asparagus field, Dr. Abbey's grapes, and numerous cantaloupe ranches.

We believe it will pay any Imperial Valley man to take this trip, as we did, for if he does, he will return more than ever convinced of the splendid advantages of this Valley. The most striking difference one notes between this valley and the Coachella valley is in the relative amount of land in cultivation and the size of the ranches. We don't believe, to take the Coachella valley over as a whole, that there is to exceed one-tenth of the land in cultivation, yet it has a far more dense population than we have. Some of their land is quite salty, perhaps too much so for their small water supply but we don't believe there is any of it that could not be reclaimed if they had Colorado river water in the quantities we have in Imperial Valley. The greatest handicap they have against farming on such a scale as we do, and raising the crops we raise, is in their irrigation supply. All their water comes from wells, most of it artesian, though quite a per cent is pumped, especially in the upper end of the valley and on the higher lands back next the foothills. The smallness of the water supply and the expense of getting it has naturally caused the Coachella valley farmers to turn their attention to intensive farming and the growing of special crops. They are the pioneers in cantaloupe growing, having established the reputation and built up the demand for California cantaloupes to its present position in the markets of this country, and as with cantaloupes, so will it be with asparagus, onions and malaga grapes. These products are being grown by the farmers of the Coachella valley to great success, and in a short time their reputation will be just as great as it now is for California cantaloupes.

In our drive about the Coachella valley, one of the first ranches we visited was that of Dr. C. C. Abby, of Redlands, which is famous for having the oldest Malaga grape vines in this part of the state.

There is just one acre of these vines that have been set out five years. We gave these vines and their crop a good looking over, and our judgment is that the same kind of vines in Imperial Valley will be as large and grow as heavy a crop at three years old as those of Dr. Abbey's. Nevertheless his vines literally cover the ground and are fairly loaded to the tendrils with magnificent bunches of perfect grapes. The crop is variously estimated at from six to eight tons on the acre. As an indication of the value of such a crop we will say that Jeffries & Co., the great Fresno fruit shippers, have offered Dr. Abbey \$600 for the

grapes, just as they hang on the vines, and that the doctor has refused the offer. And this isn't any case of two fools met, by a long sight, for both of them are keen, shrewd business men, and know exactly what such a crop of such grapes are worth.

There are about ten acres of younger Malaga grapes growing on the Abbey place, and a good many thousand cuttings heeled in.

But here was a fair illustration of the one prominent fact that sticks out all over that country, and that is the scarcity of water. A great majority of Dr. Abbey's almost priceless Malaga cuttings were dead, simply because there wasn't water enough to keep them growing. The situation regarding water seems to be this: During the cool months of winter and early spring, when there is very little evaporation and the ground doesn't dry out rapidly there is apparently a great plenty of water. Thus encouraged the farmers go ahead and put in crops up to the then apparent limit of the water supply. Everything goes all right till hot weather comes. And it comes in Coachella valley too, just a little more so than in Imperial valley. With the coming of the hot days and heating of the ground, the little heads of water their wells and reservoirs supply prove in adequate to the largely increased demand and the result was to be seen on nearly every ranch, either in the abandonment of part of the cantaloupe field or else in the apparent want of more water over all of it. While more water can be developed by boring more wells and putting in more pumps, and it can be stored by building bigger reservoirs and more of them it is perfectly clear that so far as natural advantages are concerned we have far and away the best of it. While in this valley, with our abundant irrigation supply we can wash the salt out of any land that might contain it, and reclaim it from almost any condition, and can do it at very little expense.

The Coachella Valley farmers have to confine their operations to their best lands, leaving those anyways salty in their desert state. But the limitations nature has put upon their farming operations has been more than overcome by their thrift and enterprise.

While our people are raising grain by the thousands of acres, and maybe coming out a little to the good these people are farming on little five and ten acres patches out among the mesquite trees in the desert, and beating us to death making money. From Dr. Abbey's place we went to the ranch of the Gordon Bros. This ranch is out of the salty land but it is also out of the artesian belt. They raise their water supply with a 15 horse power Otto gas engine and it is quite an expense. However, they seem to have plenty of it, for their cantaloupes were not suffering nor were any of them abandoned. At this ranch they were just finishing the onion harvest and the last of the

crop was being topped and crated. Upon inquiry we learned that the onion business was quite profitable. It costs about \$100 per acre to grow and harvest a crop of onions producing ten tons per acre. They are selling for two cents a pound and will average more than that price the year round. That would make the crop worth at least \$400 per acre at a cost of \$100, leaving \$300 per acre. If the crop turns out less the cost will be less per acre but of course the profits would be less. However, ten tons per acre is the average crop where it is well cared for and the grower understands the business. While that profit is not as attractive as malaga grapes yet it is all right. Gordon Bros. already have 32 acres set out in malaga grapes and are expecting to drop cantaloupe growing and turn their attention exclusively to onions and grapes. Onions grow in the winter season and then not only is the water supply abundant but it is far more comfortable for out door work.

The seeds are planted the last of August for the onion crop. They are sown in beds and will be ready to transplant in October. The Gordon Bros. said they had been one month late in getting their onions in last fall for had they planted in proper season the onions would have all been off a month or more ago. Of course we saw lots of cantaloupes and they are still the leading crop, but nearly everyone we talked with expressed the belief that Imperial Valley would go into the business so heavily after this year and has such great advantages over them for the production of this crop that they expected to abandon the field and devote their attention to growing onions, grapes and asparagus.

We went from the Gordon Bros. ranch back to Thermal and got there about the time the farmers were coming in with their day's pack of cantaloupes. There was enough of them to load an express car. This car was hitched on the afternoon passenger train and these Thermal cantaloupes sped on their way to the tables of the epicures of New York.

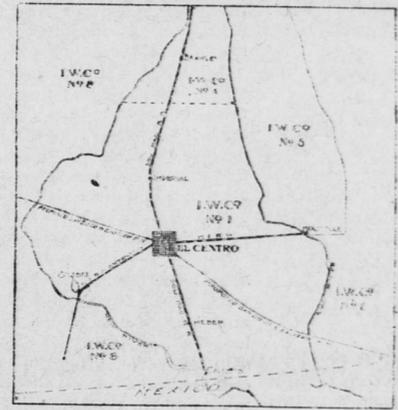
Monday we drove down to the Salton ocean, visiting on the way Thayer Bros' asparagus fields and the government date farm. At the ranch of Thayer Bros. we found everybody busy but still willing to give us any information we asked. Of course we were anxious to learn all we could about the asparagus and was shown the field of six and one half acres. This is the first year they have borne any crop, a small cutting have been made early last spring. The asparagus was ready to cut on February 12th and a little cutting was done along for about three weeks. Then they stopped as they preferred to have all the growth of the plants for this year remain in the ground so that they will be all the more prolific hereafter. This is the second year from the setting out of the plants and third year from the seed. The small amount cut last spring, only about 1500 pounds, sold for \$500, which is about \$80 per acre and it can hardly be said any cutting at all was done. Full bearing asparagus which means this field after this year produces from two to three tons per acre. It can be seen from this what the outlook is for asparagus. Thayer Bros. told us the last asparagus they shipped brought the best prices and that the prices were still higher afterwards. They did not understand grading the asparagus at first so lost quite a bit on that account till they learned the trick. After looking over their ranch and sampling their Thompson's seedless

grapes and some cantaloupes we drove on to Mecca and the date farm. At the date farm we met Mr. Johnson, the patient enthusiast, who has banished himself to this place in order to help the government make a difficult test in date growing and desert farming generally. We don't pretend to be much of a judge of date growing but we don't think they could have picked out a worse place for the trial in the whole Colorado desert. There isn't any soil at all and the water runs through that sand like it would through a hog wire fence. Mr. Johnson is toiling away like the soldier in the Light Brigade but it is very evident that "someone has blundered" or that date farm would be on land where there is at least a fighting chance of making them grow. From the date farm we drove down to the "ocean," a distance of about a mile and a half. Mr. Johnson accompanied us and as he had been to the same place the day before and had set up a gauge we had a good opportunity to find out how fast the water is rising. From Mr. Johnson's measurements it had risen eight inches from Sunday at noon to Monday afternoon at two o'clock. We were there at the water's edge about one hour and during that time it rose almost a half inch. The water level in the "sea" was then just about 218 feet below sea level and as some of the Southern Pacific track is as much as 206 or 207 feet below it can be seen that the present rise will soon put that company's overland line in jeopardy. There are quite a number of claims and some improved ranches that are already covered with water and several others that are certain to go under before the present flood subsides. The general expression of the people of the Coachella Valley is that if the water is not shut out it will inundate their entire valley. We heard more talk of appealing to the government and suing Mexico for damages during the two

days we were there than we have heard in a year here. While they are very much concerned about the rise in the water and the damage it may do if it is not stopped they are not letting that interfere with their going ahead to develop their country on the most valuable lines and to adjust their business so as to get the most out of their ranches and in the most comfortable manner. The way they are farming and planning to farm it will take about three men to care for twenty acres but they will turn out products that will net three hundred to five hundred dollars per acre. And I must say that I did not see a single product growing or being produced there that cannot be better grown and more advantageously produced here in the Imperial Valley.

While only a small per cent of their land can be farmed under present conditions every acre of ours can be tilled. We have fully as good soil and what is all the game in a desert country and that is an abundant water supply. So great a difference does this make that the grape vines and asparagus now growing on the ranch of Mr. W. S. Corwin, four miles northwest of El Centro, are as large at two years old as the same products are in Coachella Valley at three and four years old. The same is true of all the other grapes and asparagus in this Valley. Our farmers should see how the people of Coachella do to make so much money on so few acres and then they should do likewise. There is an unlimited market for these products at the time they can be produced in this Valley.

The people are reading the magazines and papers, the muckrakers have killed off meat eating and made a limitless market for all the early vegetables, asparagus, grapes, onions and cantaloupes that can be produced on the entire Colorado desert.



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