

LANDS IN CALIFORNIA.

SAN FRANCISCO, April 20, 1899.

MY DEAR CONSERVATIVE:

You were so recently in California, and, by repeated visits feel such an interest in us, that I am sure you will make good use of any addition to your store of knowledge about our rural industries and the soil upon which they are wrought.

You will remember that we talked about the lands uncovered by the recession of Tulare lake, and that you were suspicious of investment in them for fear that it is a pulsating lake, being emptied by evaporation in a series of seasons when its affluents do not reach it and slowly refilling during another series when they do.

You will see by this from The Tulare Register that the refilling has begun:

"Water came down the Tule west of Woodville yesterday for the first time in three years, and the boys were on the bridge watching for it. Sure enough about noon, it came tumbling over the sands a very welcome sight, but the funniest part of it was that right in the very van of the stream, where it was only a few inches deep, with the fins sticking above the muddy flood, there swam an immense carp in a great hurry to get to his old haunt, Tulare lake. One of the La Marsna boys, standing on the bridge, saw him and springing into the water grabbed the daring swimmer and threw him on the bank high and dry. He weighed nine pounds and certainly has not fared badly up stream during the last three years."

In no other part of the United States have occurred as many disappointments about land as here. Men have thought they could buy land anywhere in California as safely as in the prairie states, where land is land, fit for some economic use. But here it is not always land. If settlers had bought the dry bed of Tulare lake, they would have found that their land was water. In other places land is a thin sheet spread upon bed rock closely underlying the surface, making fertility impossible, while in still other localities alkali follows the plow. But when a right location is secured on good land, water and sunshine added enable the noblest uses to which the soil is put anywhere in the world. It is the geological probability that the great valley of California, that vast trough with its south end lifted up on the Tehachepi mountains and its northern end held up by Mt. Shasta, the unbroken wall of the Sierra Nevada on its east side and the coast range on its west, was once an inland sea. The San Joaquin river flows through it from south to north and the Sacramento from north to south, escaping by a common delta from its western side into San Francisco bay. People abroad who hear of the Sacramento valley and the San Joaquin valley think

there are two valleys, but there is only one and its two halves are named for the rivers which traverse them and meet in its middle.

In the mountain ranges on each side of this valley numerous volcanoes lit up its waters when it was a sea. In their fierce activity they sent up clouds of ashes which fell upon the water and sank to the bottom. The many streams flowing from the mountains brought down silt. The granite sides of the trough decomposed and other elements were added. Sedimentary rocks began forming in places under the water and these were overlaid, deeply or otherwise, by the silt and ashes. Finally, came the great upraise in the crust of the earth, carrying mountains and valleys with it. The volcanoes were raised beyond reach of the internal fires that fed them, and stand like the chimneys of a dismantled factory, whose furnaces have been moved away. The inland sea drained off. The mountain streams became confluent in the lowest channels and made the two rivers which carry its drainage into San Francisco bay. The great blanket of soil was spread out to dry. It is the granary, orchard and vineyard of California. Four hundred varieties of grapes grow in it. In the thermal belts on its east side are the largest orange orchards in the state. From its soils spring the lemon, lime, shaddock, pomegranite, medlar, the kaki—that Japanese persimmon as big as a belleflower apple, which the little brown men call "the fruit of the gods"—all of the stone fruits, peach, apricot, prune, plum, nectarine, the almond and English walnut, the core and seed fruits, apple and pear, and the cereals, wheat, barley, rye, oats and corn. In the midst of this valley is the center of American raisin production, with plantations that ship thousands of carloads of raisins every year. It and its productions are duplicated by many valleys which repeat it in miniature.

But the Eastern man who wants to buy California land can not take the map in one hand and the wonderful list of products of the soil in the other and buy at random. Heads and hearts have been broken here by that experiment.

No man should buy land in California without knowing what use he will put it to and its adaptation thereto. Our valleys have lands that will produce some crops without irrigation, while other uses require it, therefore that question must be studied. There are artesian belts where one well will irrigate eighty acres, some 160 acres. Other irrigable sections depend on water taken from streams and carried in canals and ditches. The foothills of the Sierra Nevada contain much valuable land. The soil holds moisture. It is disintegrated granite, and, when well pulverized, trees, vines and grain flourish in it without irrigation. The rain-

fall in the foothills is greater than in the valleys, and the moisture does not recede as rapidly as in the sedimentary soils.

Another class of soil is found in the tule lands in the delta of the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers. This is surpassingly rich, as are all soils in the deltas of land-building rivers. But it is subject to overflow and has to be protected by levees. When these are well-made with a sufficient berme outside to protect the levee against washing away, the tule farms are the most productive and profitable in the state. The line of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe road traverses vast tracts of these tule lands which when redeemed and tilled will produce immense crops.

It is remarkable how slowly men became aware of the merits of California soils. The Spanish padres who founded the early missions here, brought with them wheat, the grape and the olive, to supply the elements of the sacraments, bread, wine and oil. These flourished in the mission fields and gardens for nearly a hundred years but did not suggest to the Mexican population that they could raise them as well as the padres.

The land was valuable then only to graze flocks and herds. Wool and sheep pelts, and the hides and tallow of cattle, were the sole product of the great Mexican and Spanish grants. Horses ran wild on the plains, and when they increased to such numbers as to encroach upon the forage of sheep and cattle, the Vaqueros would collect them in droves and stampede them over the cliffs into the ocean. To this day the beach in some places is strewn with horse bones. When one of the great owners desired to punish a son for disobedience he willed him land, but left his sheep and cattle to his obedient children. The son, cut off with a shilling, in the shape of land with nothing to graze it, was often compelled to keep it until it descended unencumbered to his children. So it has come to pass that as a rule the representatives of the old Spanish families now living who are rich, owe their wealth to descent from these disinherited scapegraces. The land remained in the family until its nobler uses were discovered and it became valuable. The flocks and herds left to the good children disappeared and the family fortune with them.

I can only advise men who want land and a living from it, to come and see for themselves and not to be in a hurry about selecting in advance of complete examination, for usually the land that is offered by the best talker is of the poorest quality. In possession of good land even an old man may plant tree and vine in the assurance that he will rest under their shade and eat their fruit.

Very truly,
JOHN P. IRISH.