

THE MUDDY VALLEY.

Editor Deseret News:

On Monday morning, the 21st of March, in company with Elders Myron Abbott and George W. Lee, jun., of Bunkerville, I continued my journey from that place toward the south-west, and after traveling 36 miles and crossing the Rio Virgen 17 times, we at length arrived at St. Thomas, on the Muddy, and put up for the night with Bro. Moses W. Wilson. The next day we continued the journey eight miles up the Muddy to Overton, where we held a meeting with the Saints, and the same evening paid a visit to St. Joseph, situated on the east side of the creek, five miles above Overton.

This valley reminds me of some of the waste places of Zion which I visited three years ago in Missouri and Illinois; indeed the Muddy Valley can consistently be classed among these. It will be remembered that in the years 1865 to 1871, the Latter-day Saints had three flourishing settlements here, named respectively St. Thomas, Overton and St. Joseph, besides West Point, in the upper Muddy valley, and Junction at the point where the Rio Virgen unites with the Colorado river, twenty-five miles below St. Thomas. These settlements were founded by missionaries who were called by the authorities of the Church from the northern settlements in Utah to settle on the Muddy with an eye to raising cotton and other staples which the rich soil and sunny climate here were capable of producing. But it proved to be a very hard mission, and it required extraordinary efforts on the part of these colonizing missionaries to subdue the extensive alkaline deserts, which composed the greater portion of the valley.

During the years 1865-1870 inclusive the people expended at least one hundred thousand dollars in labor in constructing dams and irrigation canals. What lumber they were able to obtain they had to haul about one hundred and fifty miles, over a sandy desert most of the way, from the Pine Valley mountains, north of St. George, at a cost of twenty dollars for every one hundred feet, and in the beginning their necessary supplies for a living had to be hauled from the settlements in central Utah. Then they had to feed an Indian population outnumbering their own, and that too without the aid of a single dollar from the government. They also constructed about one hundred and fifty dwellings, planted orchards and vineyards, cleared about five hundred acres of cotton fields, and did all in their power to establish permanent homes, when it transpired that the boundary line of Nevada was established, locating the settlements of the Muddy in that State, and the authorities of Nevada demanded of our people on the Muddy the onerous tax imposed upon its citizens of three per cent. on all taxable property in gold coin for State and county purposes, and four dollars in gold pole tax. Being an agricultural people and far remote from any market and unable to convert their produce into cash, the settlers were unable to pay this heavy tax; and as the State authorities gave no heed to a petition setting forth these facts, and the county officials proceeded to collect the unjust tax by

power of law, it was considered wisdom for the Saints to vacate the valley which they did early in 1871.

Since that time the Muddy Valley, although one of the finest and most productive localities north of the Rim of the Basin, has been under a cloud. A few mining prospectors came in and took possession after our people left, and located a few ranches up and down the valley, but they met with no success, and today there is only five families in and around St. Thomas, which numbered 216 souls, or about fifty families when our people lived there; only about eight families in and around Overton, which, when possessed by the Saints had about twenty families, and three in and near St. Joseph, which had forty families before it was broken up in 1871. Besides these three towns there was West Point, with about twenty-five families in 1870, and now occupied by two families and a bachelor. Of our people there are at present eight families in Overton, three at St. Thomas, one at St. Joseph, one at West Point, which together comprise the Overton ward, with thirteen families, or 106 members. Brigham Whitmore of Overton is Bishop, with David J. Cox of Overton as first and Moses W. Gibson of St. Thomas as second counselors.

The valley of the lower Muddy extends from the Rio Virgen river in a northwesterly direction for a distance of nearly eighteen miles and has an average width of two miles. It is covered in many places with a heavy growth of greasewood, mesquite, cedar, etc. Grass is abundant on the surrounding bluffs. There are several swamps in the valley, the Muddy being rather a sluggish stream with only a few feet fall in the whole length of the valley. In order to dry up these swamps and to secure the water for irrigation purposes, our people constructed a canal nine miles long on the southwest side of the valley, and were preparing to make a similar one on the east side, when the vacation occurred. Had our people remained and finished these and other projects, the swamps would today have been things of the past, as well as the fever and ague, with which the present inhabitants suffer in the summer season and which undoubtedly are caused by the marshy, swampy places, which now abound.

St. Thomas lies in the lowest end of the valley, about one mile and a half above the junction of the Muddy with the Rio Virgen and on the west side of the first named stream. The old streets of St. Thomas are easily traced yet, from the regular rows of tall cottonwood trees which line both sides of them, and from a distance the old townsite has the appearance of a beautiful grove. At the time of its prosperity St. Thomas consisted of eighty-five city lots of one acre each, and about the same number of vineyard lots containing $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres each, and farm lots of nearly the same number containing five acres each. Ten lots formed a block, and the streets were six rods wide, including side-walks twelve feet wide.

Overton lies on the same side of the Muddy, about eight miles northwest of St. Thomas, and its present appearance is very similar to that of St. Thomas; this is also the case with St.

Joseph lying five miles north of Overton, on the east side of the stream. At St. Joseph a number of ruins of the old houses are visible on every hand, and the general appearance of the place reminds me of something that was but is no more.

Will the Saints ever again possess this beautiful valley? Is a question which I have asked myself and a number of my brethren whom I have associated with on this journey. The place seems indeed to possess many natural advantages, which are denied a number of other localities where our people are making strenuous efforts to make themselves homes. In fact the valley of the Muddy can produce almost everything that the human race needs for food and clothing. Cotton can be cultivated very successfully here; figs, almonds, grapes, peaches, apricots and the numerous kinds of other fruits adapted for this climate can be raised in abundance; five crops of lucern are procured every season, and in fact the same ground can produce two crops in one year, one of small grain and one of corn, sugar cane or potatoes. The Muddy is a stream that is easily controlled, and most of the land is exceedingly rich and productive. This added to the prospects of a railroad passing through the upper valley in a near future ought to command the attention of Saints who are seeking for homes. But I am of the opinion that only a united effort could make a settling scheme a success here. If fifty or one hundred families would unite together and buy the whole valley from the State of Nevada and such parts of it that are already claimed from the present owners, I believe that in a few years this valley could be transformed from its present desolate condition into a perfect garden of Eden, and by draining the swamps and low places the sickness which has hitherto prevailed would be entirely overcome. And it might also be proper to state in this connection that the State and county officials of Nevada have changed as to their opinion and treatment of the "Mormon" people, and I have been informed that they look upon the attitude assumed toward our people in 1870-71 as a most unfortunate one, and regret very much that the Saints were forced away by this oppression and unjust taxation which I have referred to. And parts of the valley which is not already owned by the few inhabitants who occupy it at present or who hold claims here can be purchased from the State of Nevada for one dollar and a quarter per acre, with the privilege of paying most of it at their own option during a period of twenty-five years after purchase.

ANDREW JENSON.

OVERTON, Lincoln Co., Nevada.

March 23, 1892.

Old mother earth is somewhat uneasy. Her seismic breathings are becoming rather frequent. On the 12th inst. severe shocks were felt in the State of New York at Utica, Broadalbin and Fonda. From other points north and south reports of shocks have been made since. But California seems to be receiving most attention; several distinct shocks in succession have been reported during the past two days.