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IRRIGATING THE PLAINS.

BY JUDGE J. C. KNAPE, WIS.

The best location for irrigation would be a plane surface, with a slope of an inch or two in thirty feet, because such a tract could be divided by embankments into beds, or compartments of parallel rectangles of the most convenient size, and thus admit of culture by the horse without breaking the borders or banks in any one direction. On such a plane surface the water would be made so that trees would stand in them, and in vineyards they could be made to fill the same. It is better to fill one bed from another, than to fill the two as one; and it is better to rebuild borders that are broken down in cultivation, than to have the beds too large. The banks of the creeks, ditches, and canals, should never be broken down in cultivation, and their beds may be kept clean and smooth enough for walks when in use for irrigation. Their banks will always form walks. On such a tract as we are considering, the acreage might be located twenty rods apart, and they would fill beds on either side one-half that distance, and as far down the slope as may be desirable. The general idea is that of a plane so leveled that each bed should have a level surface, and contain about two square rods of land. But as such a plane is seldom found, other plans must be adopted, such as will be fitted to each individual and particular tract, and meets its special formations. In all cases the beds should, if possible, be so formed that each bed should be above or below its neighbor, where the water is to flow from the one to the other, and all beds should be formed so to have a surface so nearly level that every portion will be covered with water when any part has two inches standing on its surface. When the water has risen about two inches over the whole bed, the border must be broken and the water drawn into the next lowest bed, and so on, until the line of beds are supplied; and the next line is taken in hand.

THE BEST LAND FOR IRRIGATION

is sandy loam, such as is found along most of the streams and rivers in the sand formations. Land of so sandy a character as to be liable to drift is nevertheless, excellent land to irrigate with muddy water. Next to this sandy land, is a soil underlain with gravel and sand, through which the water can readily percolate. But if the soil be two or three feet deep, of a light sandy loam, it will absorb but little water, and will be liable to dry up. If the soil be of a heavy, sticky, clayey nature, the water will lie too long on the surface, and it will take and crack in drying, and thus cannot well be avoided, though relieved by mulchings and hoeings.

THE ACRES AND TANKS ARE NOT WASTE GROUND.

The banks of the large creeks can be planted with fruit and other trees, and as they may form boundaries of plantations, they will constitute the support for trees for breaking the violence of the winds which blow with such force on the plains. The sides of the tanks, especially such as are oblong, can be reconnoitered in the same manner. These banks planted with plum, apple, and other fruit trees, and their tops kept as much as possible over the water, would cover and occupy the space, and their roots would have a full supply of moisture under the bottom of the tanks and creeks, and the currents, in committing their depredations on the young fruit, would, in many instances, fall into the water and be drowned. The leaves and fruit dropping from the trees would benefit the water by enriching it. The fruit might be gathered either in a boat or on the bottom of the ditch or tank when the water is drawn off.

TOO MUCH MONEY AND LABOR WILL

WASTE THEMSELF

on such land to pursue the idea of encumbering it with barren or even worthless trees and crops of any kind; and it should be made to produce to the greatest extent possible. Care in looking to the greatest results must be practiced in culture and planting. For that purpose it is suggested that the tract be surrounded by a compact border of

timber, rapid growers, and valuable for fruit, or both, making a perfect windbreak, and also acting as a wall to retain the vapor of the water of irrigation, or to retain a cloud of smoke over the surface made by kindling fires on a cold night, to keep off early or late frosts. A row or two of the mountain evergreens should form part of every such belt.

THE ORCHARD

should consist only of trees of well-known hardy habits, with good qualities of fruit and productiveness. Where peaches, plums and pears will thrive, they should be introduced, but experiments with trees of uncertain hardiness and quality of fruit should be sparingly used on such land. It is too valuable to be wasted. High culture and winter mulchings are absolutely necessary as a protection to the roots of the trees against the frosts of winter, therefore no under crop can be admitted to the orchard, except such as will bear irrigation, and leave the surface of the ground perfectly level, and such as will grow under drip and shade of the trees. Strawberries might be cultivated while the trees were small; and raspberries and blackberries on all the ground, even after the trees are fully grown, provided they are cultivated in hills, so as to admit the fruit gatherers and the introduction of the winter mulchings, and the removal of the spring. The produce of these small fruits would more than compensate the cultivator for his entire labor of irrigation and culture. His crops would be certain, and the small fruits would be no detriment to the trees. Currants could be grown beyond the drip of the trees, and some of the native varieties of currants are of great value.

THE VINEYARD.

There is little doubt that the manner of growing grapes as practiced in all countries where irrigation is practiced is best. The ground being prepared for irrigation by reducing it to a plane, is then marked off in squares of inches each way, which gives nine vines on a square rod, 1,440 to the acre. The vines are trimmed so that the soil which may be on the surface of the vines when drawn around the vines, will bury all the old wood, while standing erect. In that manner they are buried during the winter. In the spring the soil is leveled off, and the borders formed for irrigation. No stakes are used to support the vines, as the old stub is left, has never been bent down, and not being above the vines, will not retain all the foliage, new growth and fruit. The vineyards of the Rio Grande require irrigation once in ten days from the time the vines bloom until the berries color. Short jointed vines are far preferable to long jointed ones. Vineyards thus treated ripen their fruit to perfection. The vines are seldom damaged by the frost of winter, and the ground may be manured by burying manure and mulchings when the hillsings up are leveled down. During the first two years after the vines are set, bushbeans may be grown between the grape hills, as that crop requires the same amount of water as the grapes.

TO RAISE WHEAT AND CORN

and other crops reared in the same manner, the ground must be watered before the land is plowed, otherwise it is likely to be too hard. The crop must be planted as fast as plowed. That watering will bring up the seed and produce the point of the third or fourth leaf of the wheat, it should be watered to make it tiller, or stool. The water must be drawn in such a manner that the wheat has begun to rise, which will carry the wheat to the bloom; and at which time the fourth and last watering is given, and which perfects the grain. Corn is cultivated in much the same manner, except that sometimes the watering given when the plants are in bloom may be omitted.

THE EFFECTS OF IRRIGATION ON CROPS.

When the tiller of the soil has a supply of water, and proper soil, he can depend with almost absolute certainty on a successful harvest. His crops will not suffer from drought, and in that almost rainless region, never suffer from excess of water. The trees will always be vigorous and thrifty, and perfect their fruit to perfection. The vines will also be perfect. The grape-grower on the sandy land with plentiful irrigation, would secure better ripened vines, and have fruit with a more abundant supply of sugar, than can be secured without such culture. The vine, the peach, the apricot, the plum, the pear and the apple, will be again grown in the same conditions in which they have been perfected in Persia and Palestine, and as they are now growing in California. The vine-grower on the sandy land with plentiful irrigation, would secure better ripened vines, and have fruit with a more abundant supply of sugar, than can be secured without such culture. The vine, the peach, the apricot, the plum, the pear and the apple, will be again grown in the same conditions in which they have been perfected in Persia and Palestine, and as they are now growing in California. The vine-grower on the sandy land with plentiful irrigation, would secure better ripened vines, and have fruit with a more abundant supply of sugar, than can be secured without such culture. The vine, the peach, the apricot, the plum, the pear and the apple, will be again grown in the same conditions in which they have been perfected in Persia and Palestine, and as they are now growing in California.

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