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WHEAT INDUSTRY**

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*Dr. Cobb*

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,  
SYDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES. <sup>32</sup>

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BY

*Nathan Augustus*  
N. A. COBB.

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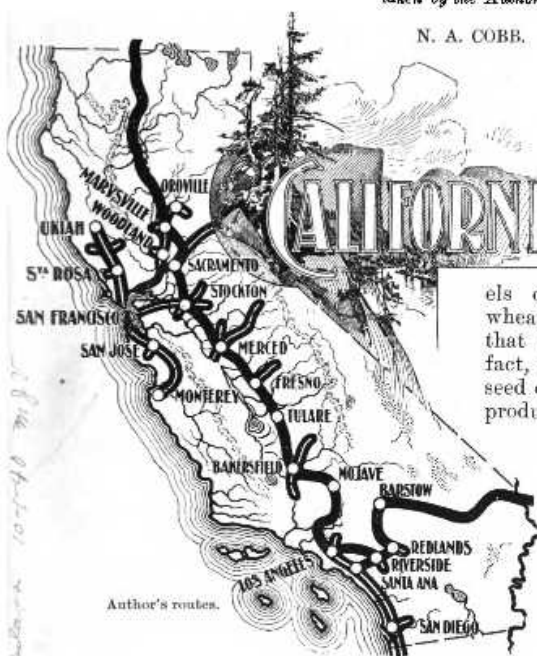
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1961.

# The Californian Wheat Industry.

[Illustrations from Photographs recently taken by the Author.]

N. A. COBB.



MOTIVE

produces 25,000,000 to 30,000,000 bushels of wheat annually. This wheat is of the same class as that grown in Australia; in fact, much of it is derived from seed of varieties that were first produced in Australia, and are still largely grown here. The climatic conditions of much of the Californian wheat area are remarkably like those prevailing in many parts of Australia, being characterised by a hot, dry summer, following on more or less rainy winter months.

Most of this Californian wheat is exported either to Europe or the East, or to Central and South America; occasionally it has been sent to Australia. Those enterprising people are sending their wheat not only to China and Japan, but actually to Europe by way of the Pacific and the Suez Canal; in other words, are growing wheat of the Australian class and sending it in steamers, six thousand miles further, to the same market. The fact that wheat of our own class, grown under climatic conditions similar to ours, is made the basis of a large export trade cannot fail to be of interest to our wheat-growers and merchants, and any lessons to be learned from a study of the particulars of such an industry are lessons we should master at the earliest opportunity. This thought gave zest to much of my recent travel in California and other Pacific Coast States of North America.



## II.

## SAN DIEGO TO LOS ANGELES.

**S**AN DIEGO, in Southern California, is the natural starting-point of one proposing to traverse the Pacific Coast of the United States from south to north. Beginning there and casting a last longing look southward to the home of the mesquite, the cactus and the yucca, and travelling northward through California, Oregon, and Washington, one may, at the proper season—namely, in the months of June and July—study to good advantage the wheat industry of the entire region, an industry having, as already stated, great interest to Australians because of the climatic conditions under which it is carried on. The rainy winters and the hot, dry summers of much of California are so nearly like the corresponding seasons in many parts of this State that the farmers of each of these regions may learn much from those of the other.



"The home of the mesquite, the cactus and the yucca."

During three seasons I had opportunities to observe and study Californian methods of dealing with wheat; and the following pages contain some of the results of my observations, more particularly for the summer of 1899, when, partly on my own itinerary, and partly as the guest of the people of San Francisco and of the Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations of the United States, I visited all the important agricultural industries of the Pacific Coast, travelling, with this object, several thousand miles.

For the sake of simplicity, it will be assumed that everything was seen in one trip, beginning at the south on the Mexican border, and



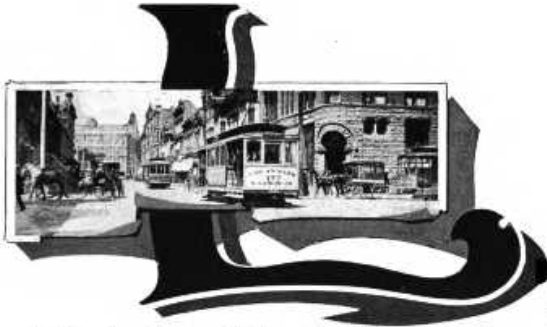
"Beginning at the south, on the Mexican border."

ending at the north at Seattle, Washington, instead of, as was actually the case, during half-a-dozen trips spread over three seasons. The present observations, moreover, will be confined principally to wheat. My observations on fruit-growing, fruit-packing, fruit-shipping, fruit-storage, fruit-drying, fruit-canning, artesian irrigation, mountain irrigation, olive oil making, wine-making, raisin-growing drying and seeding, fruit machinery, weather signals, celery-growing, orchard machinery, etc., etc., I must leave for other occasions.

For centuries the climate of certain parts of Southern California has been noted for its mild equability and dry healthfulness. In consequence it has become a resort for thousands of people in search of better health and a prospect of longer life. These people have brought with them wealth, culture, and brains. Their wealth they have devoted to founding the beautiful homes their culture has made so wonderfully attractive, and to exploiting the natural resources of the country, which their brains have enabled them to discover, and above all, to advertise. The prosperity of the region depends on tourist wealth, and irrigation as applied to fruit-culture.

In this part of California, wheat-growing cuts a small figure. The rainfall is too uncertain and meagre for even the earliest of drought-resisting varieties. Large areas are utter desert, and irrigation waters are at present too valuable for fruit-trees to be wasted on wheat. It is only here and there that one sees smallish areas of wheat grown under special conditions, the variety Sonora prevailing, so far as I could learn. There was so little wheat grown here that I did not give this crop the careful attention I devoted to it in the San Joachin and Sacramento Valleys.





## III.

LOS ANGELES TO  
BAKERSFIELD.

LEAVING Los Angeles, the chief city of Southern

California, the north bound mid-day train traverses the great fruit district for twenty-five miles or so and then enters the Sierra Madré mountains, and after a couple of hours of climbing descends into the Mojava Desert, here some fifty miles wide and as flat as a floor. Sand, yucca, and cactus present a hot monotony until toward evening, when we begin to climb up toward Tehachapi Pass.

Impressions taken on the spot and preserved on photographic plates, or in letters, will give a more vivid conception of this land as I saw it, than any amount of cold and patient recollection. I have, therefore, no hesitation in presenting here certain illustrations so procured, nor in inserting, in quotations, certain extracts from my correspondence. Of course it will be understood that after the work and worry of the day, and in a comfortable room, the chance to chat in a letter to some life-long intimate, leads to less restrained methods and a more careless style. If the reader will kindly allow for these he may glean from these letters and illustrations some clearer conception of my route and impressions.

"Bakersfield, California,

"10 a.m., Sunday, June 18, 1899.

"Dear A——,

"Bakersfield, as you will find on consulting the map, is half-way between San Diego and San Francisco, and is near the head waters of the San Joachin River. As its name indicates, its climate is so hot that no oven is needed for *baking*, any open place or *field* answering the purpose. It was barely 106 degrees in the shade yesterday, so we feel rather slack-baked; but the heat will soon reach the regulation pitch, when it is hoped there will be no further cause for complaint. The people say, 'Well, you see, this is the San Joachin Valley.' That is their explanation.

"And yet there are hotter places—the Mojava Desert, for instance. When we arrived at Mojava depôt yesterday, the depôt people (there are no other people at Mojava) were shaking their heads and saying the temperature was 113 degrees in the shade. It may be; the fact is, I found the desert so interesting that I forgot the heat. However, most people remembered the heat and forgot the desert—except one poor couple, who could remember nothing but their young daughter who had just died, and whose remains they were bringing to Bakersfield from Los Angeles, where she had been

attending school. Life did not seem worth much to them, and the desert was not calculated to restore their spirits, though it did seem so interesting to one of their fellow passengers.

"The Southern Pacific Railway, leading from Los Angeles to San Francisco, passes west of the Sierra Madré Mountains and climbs up into a corner of the Mojava Desert,—the same scorching kind of desert I think I wrote you of crossing in Arizona on entering Southern California. It is the land back to which the dead-and-gone-to-hell United States Regular is alleged to have sent his ghost in search of blankets,—the climate of Hades being a little cool in comparison with that to which he had been accustomed.

"Climbing up into the desert, the road took us through dry ravines of the foot hills of the northern Sierra Madré. These ravines are the Titanic flues that, heated by the summer sun, suck the sea-air inland, and so temper the coastal climate of the region. A few orchards of apricots, a bee-farm or two with scores of whitewashed hives, and a series of railway depôts solely for the use of the trains: these were the only signs of civilisation. Otherwise the mountain flowers bloomed in fastnesses as wild as though the white man had not yet arrived. Spanish Bayonets sent up great bouquets of creamy white flowers, as tall as soldiers and as well 'dressed'—ornaments appropriate to the sides of great hills. About their feet, scattered shrubs and herbs bore flowers of yellow, blue, white, purple, and red—a pasture-land for bees.

"Suddenly the train reaches a down grade, and we speed along for a few minutes, and then in mid-afternoon shoot out into the hot, dry Mojava, flat as



"Spanish Bayonets sent up great bouquets of creamy white flowers, as tall as soldiers, and as well 'dressed'—ornaments appropriate to the sides of great hills."

a floor, and bearing only a scattered growth of cactus, sage, and yucca—desolate but beautiful. The mountains towards Barstow, where I last left the desert on the Santa Fe route, though assuredly fifty miles away, appeared no more than ten. Mountains of such entrancing hues are to be seen under no other conditions, it seems. There must be fifty to one hundred miles of flat, dry country, with stupendous mountains at the back: then are born such blues, purples, and unheard of delicacies of colour, as lead some into superlatives and others into silence.

"I hardly know how to describe to you fifty miles of this desert; be sure my camera will do better than I. This extraordinary-looking camera is



"I hardly know how to describe to you fifty miles of this desert; be sure my camera will do better than I."

a source of conversation and entertainment wherever it goes; its owner sinks into the position of a mere accessory. A man asked me the other day to play a tune on it—he thought it was some kind of musical instrument! It has been taken for a surveyor's instrument, and a telephone, and heaven only knows what else by people who have kept their thoughts to themselves! I work

calmly on, the cynosura (isn't it?) of all eyes. Yes, calmly! At least so I shall maintain until developments disclose how many times I have put two pictures on one plate, and how many times I have fired with the cap on.

"Thus I sat looking, observing, and shooting, yesterday, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. in the train on the Mojava. I quartered a plate and secured (so I shall allege) four characteristic views, each showing the desert yucca, which is in some places so abundant as to give rise to such names as 'Palmdale' on the desert depôts. It is some compensation when you live in a desert depôt to have it named 'Palmdale' in black letters a foot high.

"This yucca\* does bear some resemblance to a small palm. At first, as a seedling, it appears like a green porcupine in the sand—a diminutive Spanish Bayonets. Instead, however, of remaining terrestrial, it slowly mounts upward on a pillar clothed with reflexed leaves, which finally branches like a stag's horn, each branch terminating in a growth resembling the aforesaid green porcupine. True to the yucca tribe, it bears its flowers in panicles. These yuccas seldom reach twenty feet in height, and are the only plants on the desert that exceed a foot or two in altitude. Why these plants should have a human appearance is hard to say, but they do. In their prime they are erect, and proud looking, but they die pathetically—droop and hang limp. I saw one that had been uprooted, and the roots were like scores of wires passing, I know not how deep, into the sand.

"Imagine the sage-brush alkaline desert we know so well, to be diversified by these yuccas, and by cacti of a branching digitate kind; with no birds except a solitary buzzard at some depôt; and no animal life except one squirrel and a herd of cattle near the single artesian well; then you have the Mojava as I saw it yesterday.

\* *Yucca brevifolia*.