

**COUNTY OF SAN
DIEGO: THE ITALY OF
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649347933

County of San Diego: The Italy of Southern California by T. S. Van Dyke

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Cover @ 2017

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THE ITALY

OF

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By T. S. VAN DYKE,

Author of "SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA," "THE RIFLE, HORN
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NATIONAL CITY, CAL:
NATIONAL CITY RECORD STREAM PRINT.
1887.

MS 38309, 10.7

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CHAPTER I.

THE SOILS AND THEIR CULTIVATION.

SAN DIEGO Bay has been known to the world for centuries; San Diego City, for years; but San Diego County, for only a few months. It is but a few years since nearly all Southern California was generally believed to be a sandy desert, abounding in cactus, rattlesnakes and tarantulas, fit only for stock range, and worth very little even for that. It is but a short time since even the central part of California learned any better, and there are still many there who retain the same opinion. Until the isolation of San Diego County was broken a year ago, by the completion of the through line of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe R. R. system, it bore the same reputation in Southern California, that Southern California but a few years ago bore in the State at large. It was the most difficult of all the Southern counties to examine without spending far more time than the tourist or correspondent could spare. Its coast line like the Southern coast line in general, gave little indication of what lay beyond it, and seemed almost worthless without irrigation. The thousand springs and streams of its high mountain ranges, where the winter rains are always heavy and frequent, and where the snow often lies several feet deep for weeks, sank from sight in underground channels and deep beds of granite sand, miles back from the coast line. This gave all visitors, and even many residents along the coast, the impression that the county had no means of irrigation. Even those who knew there was plenty of water in the mountains could see little hope of making it available; for in the state of isolation from the world, in which the county so long lay, the values of land

would not justify the expense of gathering into one aqueduct several mountain streams, impounding with dams the waste waters of winter, and carrying the whole miles away to the thirsty lands along the coast. Moreover its arable lands were broken into a thousand hills and dales, rolled aloft in table lands, mountain valleys and parks, and scattered over a space larger than the state of New Jersey. This made it impossible for any one to see any considerable portion of it except by days of constant travel; whereas in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties the arable lands lay almost in a body, easily approached, easily traversed, pierced by several railroads, threaded by all the water courses of the county in a way that permitted the easy use of the waters, and underlaid in many places by artesian water at a trifling distance beneath the surface; all of which made their resources evident to the most careless or hasty inspection. In those counties most of the large ranchos or Mexican homestead grants in which the greater part of the good lands of Southern California were once held, were long since cut up and placed on the market; whereas in San Diego County to do so would ruin them for stock range, by admitting a few settlers, with little hope of selling enough, or at high enough prices to compensate for the loss. Consequently, the land-seeker found the best sections of the county all closed against him, while most of the good government land was already taken by those advance guards of civilization, who never fear isolation, hardships or privations.

No one can form a correct idea of the present values of Southern California lands, without knowing how the Californians themselves have changed their opinion of them within a few years. Nothing is more natural than for the new comer to fall into the old ideas, whereas it is from the new standpoint that he must examine everything.

Up to twelve or fifteen years ago the low bottom lands were deemed far the most valuable; the uplands or slopes being of little use except for stock range and the raising of hay and grain in winters of abundant rain. Even six years ago, although it was becoming generally known that the uplands were the best for vines and fruits, especially when irrigable, yet in the partition of the large ranchos the bottom land was still rated at from three to five times the value of the best uplands. Not only were the bottom lands deemed more valuable because the surface was nearer to water beneath, and more easily reached by water from the larger streams, but they

were considered the only really rich lands there were. The uplands being hard and dry were often nearly bare of grass, and what there was seemed small beside the luxuriant growth on the loose soil of the damp alluvial bottoms. In time it was found that the uplands needed only good plowing, and thorough cultivation to equal in production the best bottom lands; while the warmer nights in winter, cooler days in summer, their greater freedom from spring frosts, their broader view of the landscape and other advantages for picturesque homes, combined with a great superiority in the quality of nearly all fruits made them far better for nearly everything but corn, alfalfa and a few other products. The scale of values has been quite reversed; the uplands where irrigable, as most of them are in some way, being about the only lands now sought for fruit growing and attractive homes, while the low lands are used more for pasture or ordinary farming. For this purpose they are still very valuable, but it is a value that has close limits, while the uplands being sought by people of wealth in pursuit mainly of comfort and places fit for the raising of the choicest and most tender fruits, have a constantly rising value, the end of which none can foresee.

Another old time idea that has also gone to the lumber garret of the past, was the notion that land that cannot be irrigated is good for nothing but stock range. This idea was taken from the old Mexican residents who knew nothing of cultivation and depended solely for what few things they raised upon constant drenching of the land from a ditch. It was blindly followed for years by the Americans, who supposed that six or seven months of clear, warm weather would kill anything not rooted in wet ground. As long as water was abundant and cheap, the substitution of plenty of water for cultivation was so congenial to the tastes of the tired forty-niner, who had never bent his back for anything but gold, and whose dignity shrank from contact with a hoe, spade or plow, that, for many years, no farming or fruit growing was attempted, except upon irrigable lands. As population increased and irrigable lands became scarce, moist lands along the river bottoms were tried; but it was many a year before any one supposed that the dry uplands would raise anything. First, it was discovered that these would raise as good grain as the low lands, provided there was winter rain enough; while in winters of excessive rain they would raise better grain, and in some winters of moderate rainfall they would also do bet-