

WATER FOR DOMESTIC PURPOSES
versus
WATER FOR IRRIGATION.

BY H. D. BARROWS.

A very important practical lesson in the uses of water in this semi-arid region of Southern California, may be learned from the actual experience of Los Angeles during the one hundred years and more of its existence as a municipality.

There are pioneers in considerable numbers still living who remember the time when there were many, many vineyards and orchards, big and little, extending throughout the level portions of the city from some distance up the river to the southern limits of the city, or to Jefferson Street and beyond.

There were the extensive vineyards of Andrew Boyle on the east side of the river, and of Matthew Keller, and of the Sainsevains and of Kohler & Frohling on the west side, each with their large wineries, to which the smaller vineyard owners delivered their bounteous crops each Fall. These grape crops were the principal source of income of large numbers of grape-farmers throughout the city, for the grape, in this "*land of little rain*" and of *abundant sunshine*," is extraordinarily prolific, under irrigation.

Citrus and deciduous orchards, on a large scale were cultivated within the city, profitably, aided by irrigation, for many years.

In the year 1858, Wm. Wolfskill planted an orange orchard of 2000 trees; and later, Andres Briswalter planted another of 2500 trees. These, with many smaller citrus, walnut, and other orchards, were profitably cultivated for many years or until, I think, sometime in the '90's, when the rapid increase of population required all the water of the river, especially in dry years, for domestic purposes; and the issue was squarely brought home to the people of the city: Shall we suffer in our homes for want of water, which can be brought to us economically in pipes, or shall we cut off its somewhat wasteful use in irrigation by open ditches?

The alternative was a severe one, and our orchardists met it at first with some flinching; but they quickly saw that not only was the absolute necessity of water for domestic use overwhelming as

against its use for irrigation, but that their land was worth more vastly for *homes* than it was for raising vegetables or even orange trees. And thereby they realized that, financially at least, they were fully compensated for what seemed a cruel thing to do, to chop down bearing orange orchards and dig up by the roots bearing vineyards.

In the early years of Los Angeles' history; when the settlers were few, there was plenty of water for all, both for domestic use and for irrigation; and nearly every householder had a garden, and eventually, a small vineyard and orchard, adjoining his home. The water was brought from the river in open ditches or *zanjas*; and gradually a general *zanja* system was created, extending throughout the level portions of the city, on which, for many years, during the *regimes* of Spanish rule (1781-1822), of Mexican rule (1822-1846), and for half a century of United States rule, the people largely depended for their water, and on which, their material comfort and prosperity, to a great degree depended. This system consisted, first, of the "*Zanja Madre*," and eight branches. *Zanja* number 8 was built by the Americans, I think, in the '60's, and crossed Spring Street near the site of the granite-front building now owned by Harris & Frank, but built years ago by the late Dr. Zahn.

Zanja number 7 supplied people living on the east side of the river.

I may be permitted to mention that I watered a vineyard of 29,000 vines, lying between the County Hospital and the river, during the two years, 1859-60, that I cultivated it. *Zanja* number 5 extended as far south as Jefferson Street, and supplied the people of that part of the city with water. The location of the other branches I was not so well acquainted with.

The cessation of irrigation by means of open ditches, in the city, caused by the prodigious increase of population in recent years, and the consequent and imperative demand for water for domestic use, have caused this entire *zanja* system to disappear almost as completely as if it never had existed; the cement conduit along the west side of Figueroa Street south of Washington, is, I think, the only vestige of it left.

When the Owens River water arrives it is believed that there will be, and that there will continue to be for many years, a big surplus beyond what will be needed for domestic purposes by the city; but if the people are wise they will never alienate *permanently*, any portions of it. Nor will they sell it *temporarily* to outsiders for irrigators only on the most carefully guarded provisions as to

reclamation whenever, if ever, the inhabitants of the city may need it for domestic use.

The water will have cost them too many millions to be lightly or carelessly alienated or lost control of, even temporarily. They will own it absolutely, and can dispose of it on whatever terms they may choose to impose.

With the aid of the immense reservoirs that are being constructed in connection with the aqueduct, it will be possible to so regulate the flow of the water that the city can insist on its own terms absolutely, as to conditions of sale to outsiders.

The merits of the "*indeterminate* franchise" so lucidly explained recently by Dr. Wilcox of New York, to our citizens, can be advantageously applied in the sale of surplus water for irrigation—irrigation being only a secondary object for which the aqueduct is being built—the primary object being to supply for all future time, the inhabitants of the city, with water for all their varied and imperative uses in their homes.

No sale of water should be made for irrigation, inside or outside the city, as its boundaries now exist or as they may hereafter be enlarged, except by contracts *indeterminate* as to time, and with careful provision against the possible acquisition of any "vested rights" whatsoever.

We should never forget that this is a semi-arid country, and that pure water and plenty of it, for domestic use, is one of the vital necessities for the existence here of animal and human life.