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THE QUALITY  
OF THE  
"WILD LANDS"  
OF  
LONG ISLAND  
EXAMINED, AND  
DETAILED EVIDENCES GIVEN  
OF THEIR  
VALUE,

TOGETHER WITH A REASONABLE CONJECTURE WHY THEY HAVE  
NOT BEEN IMPROVED.

With a comparative view of their Productiveness when contrasted with  
the Improved Lands located on the North and South of the Island.

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BY THOMAS SCHNEBLY,  
BROOKLYN, L. I.

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NEW YORK:

Printed at the "Sun" Book and Job Printing Office, 128 Fulton street.

1860.

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THE  
WILD LANDS OF LONG ISLAND,  
THEIR VALUE, &c.

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HAVING made repeated visits to "Long Island," both on the Northern and Southern border, and also through its "Centre," (or that portion generally designated the "Wild Wood Lands," through which the Long Island Rail Road passes,) from the superficial observations afforded me, in connection with the prevailing opinions entertained by residents, I gleaned, in my transient visits, an opinion *decidedly impressed*, with what "every body" seemed to admit, that "*the Lands* contiguous to the waters were all that was available on the Island for agricultural purposes."

In a recent visit, however, my explorations and examinations have been more extensive and thorough, and consequently more satisfactory and reliable; I have possessed myself with important "facts," which have materially changed my "*views*," and will go far to demonstrate the opinion expressed years since by distinguished scientific gentlemen, that "Long Island" is destined to be the "Garden Spot" of the State of New York.

According to the acknowledged and received opin-

ions of the old settlers of this territory, Long Island was originally inhabited by Indians, who ceded or sold their lands to the British Government in Colonial times, which was afterwards granted by "Patent" to different families, for services rendered, or on paying a small amount as an equivalent. The Patents conveying tracts of land from one mile to ten miles square.

The Island being thus mapped out by Patents, owned by different parties, whose possessions stretched from the waters on the North and South sides to the middle and wood lands in the centre, each owner becoming "the Lord of his Manor."

It seems all that the original proprietors cared for, was a beautiful country residence, signalized by a picturesque and romantic "water site," which very likely was at first only inhabited through the Summer season, or improved according to circumstances; that is, as much land as would subserve for domestic purposes was only cultivated, thus confining their "farming operations" to a few acres; whilst the great body of their lands, grown up with "heavy timber" and undergrowth almost impenetrable, and reaching for miles to the middle of the Island, were left uncultivated and unimproved in its native luxuriance for the "wild deer" to roam in, or the feathered songsters to mate and propagate and raise their young. As the "water sites" of the Island became more densely inhabited, enterprising residents parceled off tracts or lots of one thousand acres, more or less, of "wood land," and beginning at one end or side, would yearly cut thousands of "cord wood" for market, and by the time they reached the outer boundary or extreme side of said lots, that portion which they had commenced cutting on would reproduce another growth of smaller wood



ready for the axe. It is acknowledged by hundreds that in fifteen years the forest trees, after being cut, will, from their stumps and roots, re-produce a growth of wood sufficiently large to be cut again.

The inhabitants, thus farming their "manors," raising only enough of produce for their own use, and cutting timber from the "forests or wild lands," settled down into the conviction that they had clear land enough to work for home consumption, *which was all that was worth cultivating*, while the wood land from which they cut their wood was not fit for agricultural purposes, and consequently considered only capable of re-producing wood.

I believe this is the main reason why the lands on the middle of the Island, got into such *bad repute*, and thereby received the cognomen of "wild lands." This delusion may have continued until now, had not the Long Island Rail Road penetrated these forests and opened up to men of science and enterprise a tract of country, before little known or appreciated for its intrinsic value, both as to its geological structure or its agricultural or horticultural advantages.

The conviction that now arrests you, may be, that the proprietors of the Long Island Rail Road must have anticipated a large trade along their route. For the travel from and to Brooklyn, namely Greenport, when the road was first constructed, would hardly have compensated for their outlay; however, looking to the future, they have abided their time, and now they are beginning to reap the advantages resulting therefrom.

The Long Island Rail Road passes through the middle of these lands, and furnishes a quick and easy access to the cities of New York and Brooklyn, contain-

ing a million of population, and thus brings the markets within easy and quick reach, transferring fertilizers from the cities, and taking in the varied products of farm and gardens, beside the reclaiming of those lands, which until then lay entirely wild and unproductive. At any rate, if the Rail Road Company do not reap the advantages contemplated by building their road, the citizens of Brooklyn and New York should ever accord to them the meed of praise for opening to them an avenue of trade, which now yearly supplies a large portion of their marketing and provisions.

I will now entertain the proposition, generally, that all the territory of Long Island is susceptible of a high state of cultivation, and is as productive as any lands in the state of New York. Gen. John A. Dix, who at present presides in the Post Office of New York City, in his address before the New York Agricultural Society, October 7th, 1859, thus adverts to Long Island: "It stretches out from New York Harbor 130 miles into the Atlantic Ocean. A most extraordinary delusion has prevailed in regard to the productiveness of the central portion, and yet the surface soil of this whole region, with some inconsiderable exceptions, consists of a rich loam, from twenty to thirty inches in depth, easily cultivated and made highly productive, without immoderate manuring. Some of the best farms in the southern part of the State have during the last five years, been made in this condemned region, and it is shown by agricultural survey of the State, that the Island produces fourteen bushels of wheat to the acre, considerable beyond the average of the State, and very little less than that of the western district. In a very few places the gravel

with which the surface soil is underlaid, crops cut, but these localities are believed not to exceed two per cent. of the whole Island. Of all the districts of the State this has the finest summer climate, and the winters are mitigated and made temperate by the surrounding waters; close observations and successful experiment have dissipated misapprehensions in regard to its fertility. They have shown that its soil is warm, genial, and productive, and there is little hazard in predicting that it will at no distant time become the garden of the city of New York. As Gen. Dix remarks, "the soil is warm, genial, and productive," and which, in fact, overlays the whole Island, varying in depth from one to five feet, and has this peculiar feature, as a general rule, all over the Island. First there is the surface soil a foot or more deep, then sand and gravel intermixed with clay underneath. The soil is deepest on the centre, and grows thinner as you approach the water, which is the opposite of the received opinion that formerly prevailed and erroneously designated the middle, "wild or plain lands," because it was supposed the soil was not deep enough there to bear culture, and therefore as above detail was literally abandoned. A singular phenomena occurs in the undulations of the lands, that is, the soil is less fertile in depressions and always more alluvial and productive on the elevated surfaces. Silix is the prevailing ingredient in some sections, while a clayey loam prevails in other districts. On the north side, in the vicinity of Smithstown, pure sand is found, and also in Happaugh's Valley, but both localities are in a high state of cultivation. Since science has analyzed soils and disclosed their component parts, we at once understand the composition of plants, their nature,

the food they best thrive upon, and the degree in which they extract it from the soil. All soils, whatever their depth or richness, by constant wear in producing will eventually wear out, provided they are not restored, by the same amount of organic and inorganic matter which have entered into the organization of the crops removed. This is the universal law of compensation in every department of physical life. Return to the soil in manures and fertilizing substances, as much as you take from it, or you diminish the ability of your lands in producing, and sell their fertility in the crops you take off; this has been the experience of some few settlers in the middle or wild lands of Long Island. They have cleared a portion of territory, and in a year or two have worked their lands to death, simply because they took from the land all they could get, giving them no manures or fertilizers in return, as though they expected to enhance the price of their horses by making them labor without sufficient food to perpetuate their health and strength.

The different "Townships" have had large "tracts" of lands ceded to them, which still lay uncultivated as a common or pasture ground for the "village cattle." I will allude to the one contiguous to Hempstead, embracing a tract of some fifteen thousand acres, without fencing, but clothed with a heavy crop of grass. These upland meadows stretch from the ridge to the ocean entirely free from bush or tree, which is supposed to have been originally rooted and burned out by fires, and are very similar in appearance and product to what is denominated in New Jersey, the "meadows," which being covered by a vegetable mould, accumulating for years, assumes the appearance of "Turf," and being set on fire, will burn until every

vestage of stumps, under-growth, and roots and vegetable matter is cleared away to the clay stratum beneath and in a year or two thereafter grow up in meadow grass, as luxuriant and beautiful as the eye can contemplate or gaze upon. Individuals, like "Townships," who held lands by Patents, still possess them in their descendants. There is the "Nichols Patent, at West Islip, containing originally ten miles square, granted by the Colonial Governor Sir John Donagon, which, in fact, is owned by the descendants of the Nichols family still residing in that Township.

There is also the Willets, also Mr. J. M. Thompson, Mr. Mowbray, and Mr. Gibbens' Patent of twenty-five thousand acres, and others, land holders, who originally cared not to cultivate the whole of their lands, *nor desired any body else to improve them*, and consequently shut out all investigation, and while they lived amidst gorgeous scenery, a genial climate, and on a productive soil, were satisfied with cultivating a few acres to supply their wants, leaving the balance of their *territory* to unproductiveness, which in time, for that reason, became known as the Wild or Wood Lands of Long Island.

Going south from Hempstead, all along the margin of the Bay, you behold farms yielding heavy crops. Mr. Richard Higbie of West Islip, has a farm of 100 acres, which his forefathers for one hundred and fifty years, cultivated successively and successfully before him. He has this season entertained at his house over five hundred visitors, who resort to the Island for health, enjoyment in hunting, fishing, and good living. He raised all the vegetables, and more than he could consume, together with heavy crops of corn, rye, oats, wheat and grass besides.

A farm contiguous, owned by Mr. Udell, of five hundred acres, is a beautiful location; lands rich and productive; as is also the farm of three hundred acres owned by Dr. Wagstaff, which a few years since he purchased for sixty thousand dollars. I counted in a line in one of his fields twenty-five stacks of grain, averaging perhaps about one hundred bushels, the product of last harvest. Further south, you come to another "model farm" of five hundred acres, owned by Mr. Bergen. In his barn yard I counted over forty stacks of grain. His house cost him twenty-two thousand dollars; stabling, barns and fencing, ten thousand more, while he estimates the whole at sixty thousand dollars. He informed me that he laid out yearly one thousand dollars for manures, and that the product of his farm returned him ten thousand dollars annually. Mr. Bergen has north of his farm a large tract of the "wild or plain lands," and Mr. Udell accompanied me in his carriage to a farm in the wild lands of five hundred acres, about one hundred acres cleared, the balance in wood. This farm has been cultivated for years. He pointed out one field, which seven years since he covered with stable manure mixed with bone dust, and each successive year he has mowed a heavy crop of grass up to this season, when it yielded two tons to the acre. A corn field on the same farm looked as good and as luxuriant as any farmer could desire; and yet, he observed, "as I have plenty of land without this to cultivate, I would, or rather my son, who in fact it belongs to, would be willing to sell it for eight thousand dollars." "What," said I, "the whole tract of four hundred acres, with such evidences before you of what it can be made to produce," "why," said I, "the wood upon it," which was

pretty heavy timber, "would absolutely sell for half of the money." "I know that" said Mr. Udell, "but I would let it go anyhow at that price, rather than be bothered in attending to it, it is so far removed from my house." It was a section of land of about three miles long, a public road bounding the east side and a stream of water bounding the west; the stream had water power and sites sufficient for mill seats, or manufacturing purposes. I have detailed the above facts *to show the quality of the lands by their productiveness, on the south side of the Island*, and as I have introduced the reader to the "wild or wood lands," *I will examine their quality by the same rule, that is, their productiveness*, which will give a fair estimate of their value, susceptibility for improvement and culture. However, before I begin the contrast, I will state a conceded fact, that the lands on the north side of the Island are as good if not better, than the lands on the South or Bay side of the Island.

Besides Mr. Udell's farm, already cited, there is in the neighborhood of Deer Park Station, several farms, one of which I will allude to, belonging to Mr. Wilson, right in the "Wild Lands." It is as beautiful a tract of land as you could desire to look upon. He has about one hundred and fifty acres cleared. Indeed, he has just reclaimed another field of sixty acres, by the following process: He first cut down the scrub oaks and under-brush—which, when dry, is burned—then, with his oxen and plough, he breaks it up; then gathers roots and fibres, cross-ploughs it, again gathers up the roots, &c., and finishes it by a third cross ploughing, when the soil undergoing this pulverizing operation, becomes pliable, mellow, and ready for the seed. His wheat, corn, rye, oats, and vegetables, will com-

pare with any of the crops raised either north or south of him.

In the vicinity of Deer Park I had the curiosity of enquiring as to the product of their Peach Orchards, and was surprised at the various statements made by resident farmers in relation to the quantities raised. Messrs. Hawly, Smith, and Carman have an orchard of thirty acres, which, up to the time I was there, had produced one thousand baskets this season, which they sent by rail road to market, receiving \$2,00 net per basket, clear of all expense of picking, transportation and commission. They expected to pick another thousand baskets still in the orchard.‡

In consequence of the failure of the Peach crop in New Jersey this year, the Peaches sent from Long Island, no doubt, commanded a better price.

Other Peach orchards, owned by Mr. Henry Elatchly, Mr. John Weeks, Mr. Jesse Conklin, Mr. Oliver Sands, and others in that vicinity, daily sent by rail-road to market from two to three hundred baskets, in cars appropriated entirely for that purpose, shelved off to hold and transmit the Peaches without damage.

Further east, on the line of the Rail Road, is Lake-land Station. Considerable improvement has occurred; the forest trees and scrub oaks—in fact the wild lands are opening up too to the enterprise of those who will reap a rich reward for their outlay and labor.

The subject of these lands and their successful culture, was several years since brought before the public by Dr. E. F. Peck, who had or then resided on the Island, examined the soil carefully in these wilds, and earnestly urged their settlement and cultivation; and all the facts which we have seen and stated demonstrate the truth of the opinions advocated and pub-



lished by Dr. Peck in regard to the productive quality of these long neglected lands.

Mr. Young will show you a cranberry patch of one fourth of an acre, on which the cranberries lay so thick that they literally lay on top of each other all over the patch, and will yield, as is supposed, one pint to the square foot,

I visited a farm owned by Mr. Spence, whose land lay a quarter of a mile south of Waverly Station, on the Rail Road, and stretches in parallel lines three miles south to within one mile and a half of Patchogue. I think he has about five hundred acres, (part of a tract of nine hundred and sixty acres,) through the middle of which he has opened an avenue or road leading from his house on the south side to within a quarter of a mile of the Rail Road Station.— The above lands and those contiguous, were ceded by Patent to Mr. Winthrop, comprising an area of ten miles square for hunting grounds.

Mr. Spence has cleared within the last three years about twenty acres, and has raised corn at the rate of seventy-five bushels to the acre; oats fifty bushels to the acre; rye thirty bushels, and buckwheat twenty bushels. He has an onion patch, containing one acre, and it is the greatest curiosity I ever saw. They cover the ground as thick as they can lay, and from which I doubt not he will gather at least five hundred bushels. I make this assertion for this reason, one of his neighbors now has a patch of onions containing two roods, which last year was planted in onions, and brought eight bushels. He says his two roods or patch is as good this year as it was last, and that Mr. Spence's acre is better than his planting of this or last years' crop; consequently, as there is one hun-

dred and sixty roods in an acre, by multiplying it by four, it would give you the quantity or number of bushels on the acre belonging to Mr. Spence. He has a carrot patch, which he expects to get at the rate of a thousand bushels per acre; also a beet patch, which will yield as much. We dug up a number of hills of potatoes, when each hill turned out eight or ten large beautiful potatoes; and in answer to my question, "How many bushels do you expect from this acre?" Mr. Spence replied, "about two hundred and fifty bushels," which I thought was a fair estimate. Peas, beans, tomatoes, and melons, grow in any quantity and luxuriance, and of the best and largest size. I never saw a finer buckwheat field, which was the first crop put in the ground after breaking it up, with but one bag of Guano to the acre.

This Spring he planted a cranberry patch of an acre, which had not only taken root, and began to spread and cover the ground, but was producing the berry in all their perfection, and will partially compensate him by yielding berries this present season.

The fact is thus demonstrated that the cranberry will grow and produce on high ground or uplands without the necessary inundations subject to low marshy grounds, which was always thought essential to their luxuriant growth and production. Mr. Spence says he expects, when his cranberry patch is fully set and in full bearing, he will be able to gather yearly at least, if not more than one hundred bushels from the acre, which, averaging four dollars per bushel net, will be worth four hundred dollars; and, as it will not wear out, and requires no further attention after the first years' culture, what could be more profitable, or return a greater compensation to the Long

Island Farmer than to put down two or three acres of cranberries, particularly when their market value is so high, and they could sell at the same rate thousands of bushels for exportation.

Mr. Spence was clearing some ten acres while I was with him—the work does not seem to be laborious. They have something like a hoe, sharp at the edge like an axe, with which they cut the scrub oaks and pine and under-growth down, and let it lay until it dries, then set fire, when a blaze sweeps over the whole surface, consuming all that is laying upon it; next he ploughs it up with a team of oxen, which separates the matted roots, leaving only the larger stumps; he then gathers up the loosened roots, &c. burns them, and then cross-ploughs it again, burning the loose matter brought up to the surface; one more cross-ploughing prepares it for sewing or planting his crop; all after ploughings is easily performed.

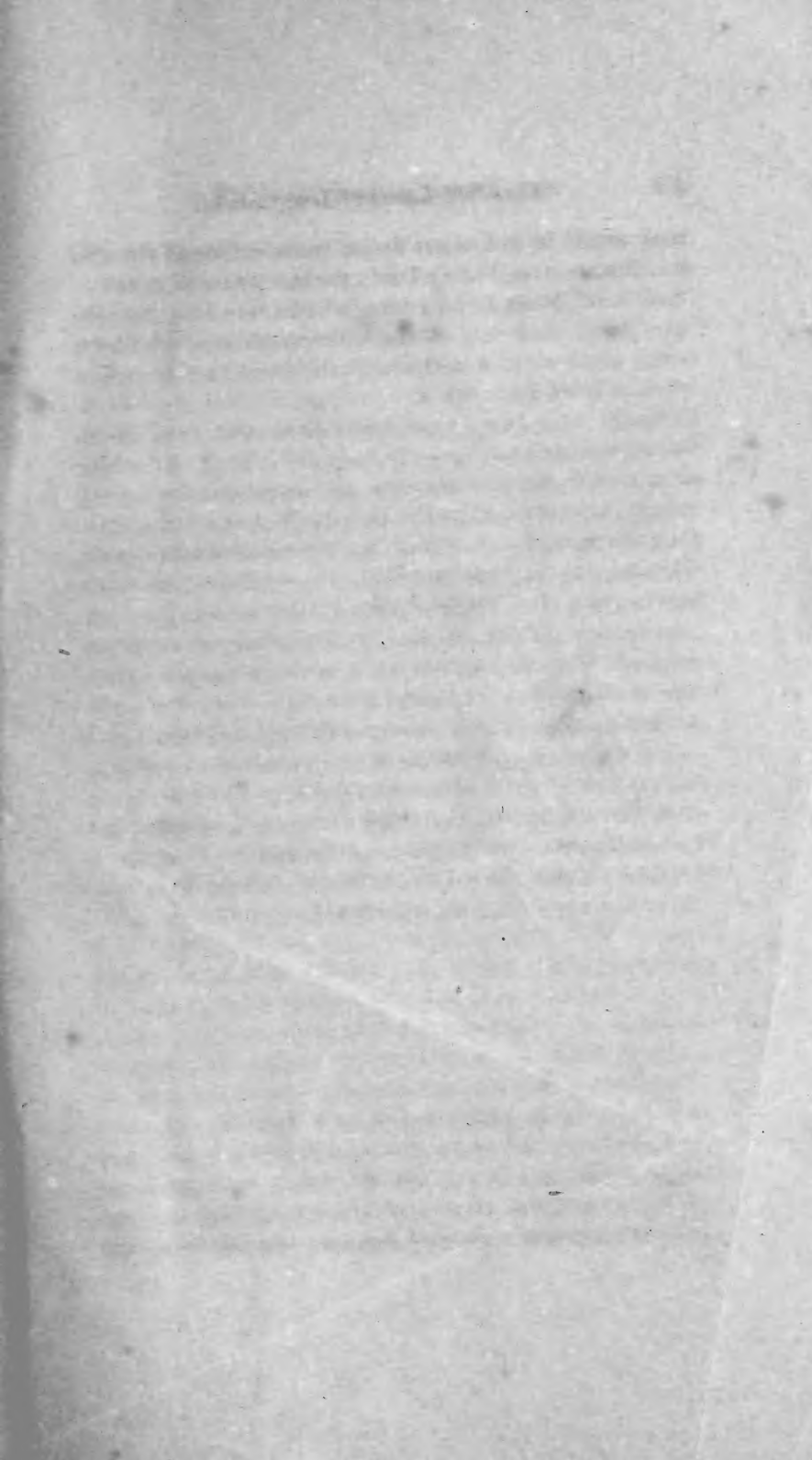
He and his overseer estimated the whole cost in my presence, for breaking up the land, per acre, and putting it in condition to be seeded down, and on a liberal computation made it reach ten dollars. I think this was an over estimate.

His well is thirty feet deep, the water is as soft and delicious as any water I ever tasted. The same may be said of the water all over the Island.

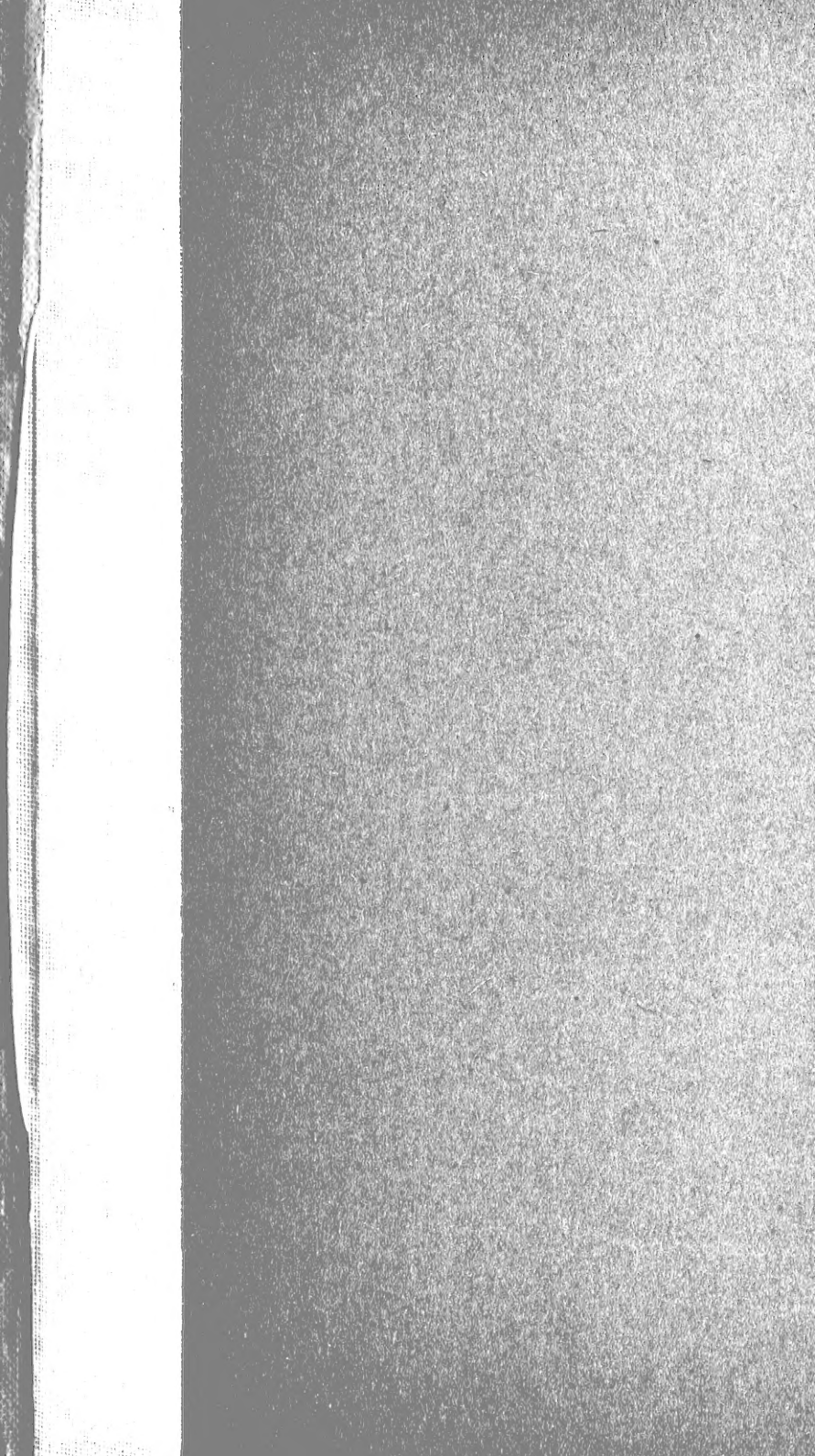
In my examination, and in the facts I have detailed, it is manifest that the “wild or wood lands” are just as susceptible of improvement, and their cultivation will yield as abundant crops, as any other portion of the Island; and it is a wonder to me that they have not long since been bought up and secured, at the nominal prices they now sell at, by thousands who desire a home, and who, did they now locate on the Isl-

and, would in five years be independent, or at the end of that term sell their lands for ten times as much as they cost them. Long Island will be, ere long, thickly populated, and realize the opinion of those who long since believed it would eventually become the garden spot of New York State.

Lands thus lying contiguous to the markets, afforded by the cities of Brooklyn and New York, and which actual culture demonstrate, are as productive as any other territory within the bounding of the State, having the advantage of Rail Road communication, both regular, expeditious. and cheap; and when those lands are selling from ten to thirty dollars an acre, according to location, there is not only an opportunity for capitalists to invest, but this is the propitious time for those to buy who can only afford to secure a few acres, upon easy and accommodating terms, when a year's delay may so enhance the value of the "Long Island Lands" as to effectually debar persons in moderate circumstances, from acquiring a desirable and comfortable home for themselves and families, on a territory where the climate is as delightful as the most healthy in the United States.







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