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How Cotton Growing Could Make the South Rich



VIEW ON COTTON FARM OF W. A. SIMPKINS.

"DID you ever realize that the Southern farmer has the greatest 'cinch' in all history?" asked President Charles Barrett the other day; and he went on to point out that we can not only grow all the great staple crops that farmers grow anywhere else, but we have a virtual monopoly of cotton, the greatest money-crop in all the world. With such conditions Southern farmers should indeed be among the richest and most contented farmers on earth. That they are not is not the fault of the crop, or of the land they live in, but of the wrong methods that they have followed.

Let us "suppose," as the children say, for a little while. In the first place, let us suppose that every farmer in the Cotton Belt would begin this year a systematic rotation of his crops; that he would plant at least one-third his land to legume crops; that he would feed these crops, along with his corn and stover and cottonseed meal to live stock, and return the manure from the stock to his soil. Let us suppose that he would begin to take care of his soil, to study its needs and to labor for its enrichment; that he would, as fast as possible, fill it with humus, drain or terrace it if necessary, get rid of stumps and ditches and other obstacles that hinder successful cultivation with improved implements and more stock. Let us suppose that each acre planted to cotton this year would be well plowed and thoroughly pulverized before planting time; that the seed would be of the best obtainable strains; that the fertilizer applied to the crop would be chosen with special reference to the crop needs on that particular soil; that cultivation would begin with a weeder or light harrow before the grass started and would be kept up till late in the season; that the land would be sown in a cover crop next fall, and next year's cotton crop planted on land where a leguminous crop had grown this year. Let us suppose that these things were kept up for ten years, or even five years.

At the end of that time would the South, in your opinion, be a poorer or a richer country than it now is; would cotton farmers live in better houses, or poorer ones; would they have more money than today, or less; would refinement and culture and progress and aspiration be more or less in evidence than at present?

Every farmer in the Cotton Belt is not going to do these things; but why should not every reader of this paper, so far as is in his power, work towards this ideal? With first consideration given always to the upbuilding of the soil, with due attention given to food and feed crops and the growing of live stock, with a careful, painstaking study of the great problems of soil preparation, seed selection, fertilization and cultivation, with every acre in cotton made to produce just the largest yield practicable, cotton is bound to be a profitable crop—a wonderfully profitable crop, bringing wealth untold to the men who grow it, and despite boll weevils, bad seasons, speculators, and the chronically shiftless and indifferent, making the South the fairest and richest agricultural land upon which the sunshine falls.

Let every Progressive Farmer and Gazette reader have for his motto this year: The greatest profit from every acre of cotton grown, with enough food and feed crops, and enough live stock to make me a free man in the fall, whether prices are high or low.