

## THE COTTON PLANTER

The cotton-picking season is a time of rejoicing in the entire South. To the black-skinned cotton pickers it means a certain amount of ready cash to be spent for brilliant-hued calico gowns for the women and pickaninnies, and to enable the men to indulge their appetite for gambling in their favorite game of craps. To the planter it means the reward of nine months of work, worry and uncertainty. To the country storekeeper it means a boom in business and a liquidation of considerable old indebtedness. To the cotton merchant in the large cities and seaports it means the squaring of accounts with the planter and the receipt of his cotton, which will be put on the market, and the merchant will reap the factor's profits. To the banks it means the taking up of notes by the merchant and the payment of the accrued interest. To the whole South it means more money, and consequently more prosperity. With cotton selling at ten cents a pound, and with a 9,000,000-bale crop, that means the distribution of \$450,000,000 in the cotton States. It costs about five cents to raise a pound of cotton. That leaves \$225,000,000 as clear profit for the planter. Is there any cause for wonder, then, that the whole South experienced an unprecedented thrill when, in the first years of the present century, the price of its main staple jumped from a figure that was below the cost of production to one yielding a profit—or, more properly speaking, a surplus—of one hundred per cent?

The nature of the contract between the negro picker and the planter depends altogether on the planter. It would not be safe to say that no two planters make the same kind of contract, because there are too many planters; but they vary greatly. The price of cotton, present and prospective, wields a great influence in the matter. A planter may have two thousand acres under cultivation. He plants in April and begins to harvest in September, finishing about January 1. But he must work from January to January. In the days of slavery ten acres to the hand was considered reasonable. In these days, with a steady migration of negroes to the large cities, and consequent scarcity on the plantations, they are more independent, and as the negro loves nothing better than idleness, it takes hard driving to make him do seven acres.

Some planters put their negroes on shares. If they are thrifty they assign them so many acres, according to the number of adults in the family, and, furnishing all the implements, mules, etc., needed in cultivation, divide the proceeds of the sale of the crop. That is what is known as a share contract. Others pay their hands fifty cents to a dollar a day. Some apply both methods. Others interject variations.

Some planters pay by the month, some every two weeks, and others every week. The best plan has been to pay by the week, because a negro has a short memory, and it is better to deal with him without disputing. The large plantations are supplied with commissary stores, where provisions and clothing are furnished the "hand" at reasonable rates, and settlement

day comes at the end of the picking season, or oftener, according to the rule of the plantation. Where there is a weekly or bi-weekly pay day, and the plantation is near a town, the hand can supply his wants at the country store.

The planter must be a man versed in many things. He must know how to feed his hands, to keep them in good health, and how to treat them when they get sick. He must also be a man possessed of a sense of justice, in order to settle the disputes which arise among them. The planter is a prince in his own domain, and every negro there must look to him as the supreme authority.