

THE COTTON CROP

The great cotton-growing region of the United States is in the South Atlantic and South Central States, commonly known as the "cotton belt," Missouri, Kansas, Arizona, Nevada and Utah being the only States out of these groups to report its culture to any extent. The total area covered is about 24,300,000 acres, from which about 1,400,000 farmers obtain 4,700,000,000 pounds, or 9,500,000 bales, of cotton, and nearly 4,600,000 tons of cotton seed annually. Texas is the most important cotton State, representing 28.7 per cent of the total area and 27.4 per cent of the total production, followed, in order, by Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Arkansas and Louisiana. The variety known as "sea island cotton" has been extensively cultivated on the islands off the coast of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, and to some extent on the coasts of these States. Experiments in recent years have shown that it can be grown inland to some advantage, which has greatly increased its production. At present the annual output is about 75,000 bales, nearly 317,500 acres being devoted to its culture, and over \$5,250,00 being realized from its sale.

The cost of raising cotton varies from three and one-half to twenty cents a pound. When it sells as low as five cents a pound it can not be raised profitably. The cost of production depends very much upon the yield per acre. Thus it is said that when a bale of cotton requires three acres of land for its production the cost is about eight and one-half cents a pound, including expenses of delivery, interest and taxes. When a bale is produced on two acres the cost is said to be about seven and one-half cents, and when a bale is obtained from one acre, about six and one-half cents.

While in commerce and in manufacturing the South is up to date and full of enterprise, the agricultural conditions of that section of the country remain in very much the same state in which they were before the Civil War. It is not that the cotton crop is not large. In the rather poor season of 1899, 10,000,000 bales were produced. Only, if the harvesting methods could be improved, the profits might be many times increased. No such conditions prevail with any other great crop. Again, no other crop demands a similar amount of unskilled labor. For one-quarter of the year, the work of five million negroes is required. Furthermore, it would be considered preposterous in the harvesting of any other crop to permit such waste. The proportion of cotton left in the field to rot is estimated at one million bales. Should a perfect cotton-picker ever be invented, harvesting methods would be so revolutionized that the effect on the negro might be portentous.