

The Weekly Directory.

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The Southern Farmers' Prospects Fifteen Years Ago.

The Elon College Monthly for March 1895, published the following article under title: "The Present Condition of the Southern Farmer; the Causes and Remedy for the South." And it is supposed to set forth pretty near correct the conditions as they were then, although the writer, then a student in the College, gives no other clue to her right to speak on this subject than sign herself "A Farmer's Daughter", at the end of the article. The increase of more than seven million dollars in the bank deposits in North Carolina during the past year, and a similar increase in this form of wealth in other Southern States during the corresponding period, and all this increase largely due to the prosperity of the farmer, indicates a striking contrast in the condition of the Southern farmer in 1895 and 1910. The article is as follows:

"There is no one who has failed to notice the gloom and dejection that overshadow the countenance of almost every Southern farmer. The cry of 'hard times' has been heard throughout the land for years, but at no time has that cry been louder, or has it been uttered by more voices, than at present. The majority of farmers are in debt, but it is almost impossible for them to conceal these debts. The farms are now under a mortgage, while many once bright and happy homes have been taken from their owners—the mortgages have been foreclosed. The creditors were compelled to receive payment, and there was no other alternative save to take the home, the only possession of an honest and once prosperous family, and leave the silver-haired father and mother, with the children, to become hirelings. In some places the farm-houses are deserted, and the occupants flock to the towns and cities. Those who still hold their homesteads are so financially embarrassed that they have no longer the means to beautify their homes, but time and tempest continually make the houses and surroundings look more desolate from year to year.

They who once ranked socially among the elite of the rural districts, who were ignorant of the want of money, who were able to keep their children in school from eight to ten months in the year, who when called upon to contribute to charitable purposes never failed to give of their abundance, they who for

the greater part of their life never knew what it was to owe a penny,—it is such as these who are now so dejected, who seem to have almost despaired of ever being able to overcome the financial obstacles, upon whose faces care and anxiety have made deeper furrows in one sleepless night than time would make in a year, and to whom life seems but a bitter, weary thing.

One can scarcely suppress the tears as he listens to the venerable old farmer—he who has done so much for his community and his fellow-men—tell of the weary nights in which the eyes barely closed for pondering and planning how to pay his debts, educate his children, and sustain the honor of his family. Oftentimes the goddess of Dreamland—like the god of the priests of Baal—seems to be deaf to his cry, or to have gone on a pilgrimage.

In many a home the mother who once had hired help, now, in order to share her husband's burdens, even though old age renders her unequal to the task, yet in her nobleness and faithfulness to the man she loved in better days, takes upon herself the work of the servants; and though the farmer insists that she shall have hired help, she will not accept it, but feels that while life lasts she must be a help-meet to him. If you are inclined to think this only a fancy picture, visit if you will, the various farm houses, become intimate with the occupants, let them feel that you sympathize with them, and then you will listen only a little while to their tale of care and misfortune before you will realize that it is no fancy painting, but one of sternest reality.

Seeing the present condition of the farmer to be thus, the question necessarily arises as to the cause of this financial depression. There is evidently something wrong, and distressingly so. It appears that the causes are many and of various kinds. The farmer seems somewhat in error, while the millionaire and the Government are also in the wrong. And first, let us notice wherein the farmer himself is to blame.

Our first censure is that he has failed to use sufficient fore-thought and far-sightedness. When Southern farmers learned that they could buy meat cheaper than they could raise and sell it, they thought that they could raise cotton and buy their meat, and thus be the gainers. As some one has remarked, "they had their smoke-house in the West." But the price of cotton has fallen, they have accumulated debts for the bacon, and now after the debts have been made and many homes mortgaged, they see their mistake. And it has been the same way with other farm products. The farmer put all his work and time on the "money crop," as he termed it, and seemed forgetful that he really needed less of the money crop than any other kind. The food crop is what he most needs, for what the farmer expends for other things than those consumed at the table is but very small in comparison to the food bill. Had cotton always remained at fifteen or twenty dollars a hundred, then could he have better afforded to plant the greater part of the acreage in cotton; but it were useless to say that he didn't do it.

Again, the farmer instead of making his own fertilizers bought guano of but little value at a large price. And in many instances when the cotton had been gathered it took nearly all to pay

the guano bill. And this brings us to the farmer's ignorance of the soil, and of the chemical constituents necessary to make the soil fertile.

Surely no one needs to know the elements of the soil, and how to supply the chemicals that are lacking and that are so necessary to certain kinds of vegetation, as the farmer; and yet he is the very man who knows least about it. The wonder seems to be that he has been as successful as he has, when he is so deficient in such essential knowledge. How on earth, when he does not know what the land and plant require, does he know what kind of fertilizer to buy? Nothing seems more foolish than the idea of one guano being adapted to all soils and to all products. Very probably in a majority of cases the guano renders the land less fertile, and even kills it.

On nearly all the plantations, there may be seen field after field of cotton, the stalks so little and spindling that it looks as if it would take five or ten acres to yield one bale. This, again, is an evidence of the farmer's ignorance—but this time, of political economy. Certainly he ought to know that if he would put all the fertilizers on one acre and make it produce a bale that he would save much time and labor, for it takes as much plowing and hoeing for an acre of cotton on poor land that yields so little, as it does on rich land that yields abundantly, while the harvesting is about the same in each instance. If the farmer would plant more of the food products, less cotton, make his own fertilizers, and raise his own pork and beef, he would find himself much more independent, and less encumbered with so many debts.

Again, many farmers spend more for luxuries than is necessary, and especially do some spend too much for whiskey and tobacco. It is said that the laboring classes now spend \$600,000,000 annually in saloons. And it is a fact that some actually spend their shillings for tobacco and whiskey when they have not sufficient food or clothing.

The present credit financial system serves to make worse the farmer's condition. One will often buy more on a credit than he would for cash. In many instances farmers have bought on a credit during the spring and summer, and then at the close of the fall it has taken nearly if not quite, all his harvest to pay up his debts.

The Southern farmer is sadly deficient in educational acquirements. He is incapable of judiciously transacting his business affairs, and may thus be defrauded by money-seekers. His lack of education unfits him to fill public offices, and for this reason he is oppressed by being under legislation controlled by men who have no interest in the farmer, save as they can increase their own wealth at his expense. It is said that our late Congresses have not contained enough farmers from the Northern States to constitute the committees on Agriculture, and that our national law-makers have known so little about what would promote the prosperity of the farmers that they have favored measures that have greatly injured agriculture.

Another cause of depression is unjust and heavy taxation. Often when the farmer has made a short crop it has taken such a proportion of the net proceeds to pay his taxes as would be startling to many of the wealthier citizens. Were the taxes equitable and necessary it would

be different, but when, for example, the people are taxed to support so many pensioners, some of whom probably never witnessed a battle, then it is time for the oppressed to clamor forth. In the Treasury vaults, May 1st, '91, there was nearly \$281,000,000 in gold coin and bullion, and \$387,000,000 in silver bullion. And it is a shame for the Government to tax its people so heavily when the vaults are so replete, even to almost bursting open.

In connection with this may be noticed the high protective tariff. The people are well aware of how unjustly they have been treated by manufacturers and those who think only of selfish ends, and are willing to impoverish the many for the enriching of the few. The arguments of protectionists are weak, and only of weight among the less educated. It was a dastardly act when a tariff was put on tin, to protect the tin industry of the Union, and at the same time not a pound of tin being manufactured in the United States.

Another of evil to the agriculturist is the exorbitant transportation rates. Although his produce may be fairly plentiful, yet by the time such high charges are paid for transportation the net income is very materially decreased. And when he sells to buyers within wagon-reach of his farm, of course they have to reckon the cost of shipment and pay accordingly, and thus the price of his produce is grievously low.

Speculation also greatly diminishes the prices of the farmer's products. There is no doubt but that this influences the market more than any other one thing. Indeed it is one of the most harmful and abominable evils that infest our country. The harm that the millionaire can do in a few weeks is scarcely conceivable. Sometimes wicked billionaires withdraw

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