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BUTLER ON KING COTTON

He Points Out Its Picturesque as
Well as Its Practical Side

[NOTE. The following is the first of the stories written for THE OUTLOOK by Mr. Bion H. Butler. We predict for the series great popularity, for they are rich in human interest and characterized by a style which is distinctly Mr. Butler's own.—EDITOR.]



WHEN YOU happen to wander out past the cotton fields at Pinehurst and see the stalks with still a little white cotton showing from a fugitive boll here and there the spectacle is interesting, but it does not suggest the splendor of that field in July when it is a mass of gorgeous blossom, nor in September when blossom and opening boll unite to make one of the prettiest sights the eye of man encounters. Cotton is peculiarly a crop of the southern United States. Climate precludes it from growing very far north of Pinehurst. Oddities of climate confine it to America except for a section of the Egyptian Nile country, a bit of India, and some scattered places here and there which are not of sufficient importance to count in the total crop. The dependence of the cotton-buying world is on the crop of the United States. About three pounds of every four come from the southern United States where is made not only the most cotton but also the prettiest. During the Civil War in the United States Great Britain tried every art to induce cotton growing within her own territory, as British mills suffered severely from a cotton famine while the American commerce was obstructed. But it was to no purpose. Other sections of the globe do not have the climate to make the American short staple cotton, which is the principal cotton of the industrial world.

Draw a line along the northern boundary of North Carolina. Continue the line westward to the center of Oklahoma. Turn southward through the middle of Texas to the Rio Grande, and you have included about all that counts in the cotton belt. And in that section you have set off a crop belt that is unique among the farming countries of the world. That limited area produces a single crop that is worth in a good year about a billion dollars. It has a practical monopoly of the production of that crop, at the same time lending a hand in the production of many of the other staple crops of the country. The cotton crop from that limited area affords the chief item of export of the commerce of the United States. No other one thing approaches cotton in the value of exports. It maintains the credit of this country abroad and gives a sure asset against which may be drawn a large account in the day when trade conditions demand foreign coin.

Cotton is the hostage which foreign nations must respect in the hour of hostility. Without American cotton Great Britain must send her soldiers to the field minus their Khaki uniforms. The impulsive German emperor would find him-

self in the same predicament in event of war with the United States. The country that goes to war with the United States must be content to fight in the nude and sleep without sheets or anything else on the bed. It cannot make a tent without American cotton, nor a sail for a ship. It cannot even find waste to wipe the grease from the shafts of the war ships. Besides being unique among the nations of the world in making a gigantic crop so exclusively on such a limited area, the southern states of America make their proportionate share of the other staple crops of the country. Over a hundred million acres is planted in corn each year in the United States. Of that vast acreage forty per cent. is planted in the South. The corn acreage of the South exceeds the cotton acreage, which has never yet reached as high as forty million acres, although that enormous scope of ground is due to be covered with cotton another year or so.

If you can imagine a strip of ground as long as from Pinehurst to Boston and as wide as from Fayetteville to Greensboro, or something over a hundred miles, all in one solid field of cotton, stalk and blossom, you have a comparison with the cotton crop of the South. Another strip of ground packed solid with corn, perhaps a little wider in its area, would indicate the corn crop of the southern states, but as the whole country shares in the corn crop it is not such a peculiar production. Other crops the South makes, lending a hand in all of the staples, furnishing early fruits and berries by the train load, garden stuff in unlimited quantities, most of the tobacco of the country, all of the rice that is raised in the United States, but nothing approaches cotton in its importance, and nowhere on earth does any other crop attain to such importance in any such restricted territory.

No other crop so essential to the welfare of the human race depends so absolutely on the one section as cotton does on the fringe of country around the Atlantic coast and on the gulf. No other crop that grows on a large scale is as spectacular as cotton. From the day when the odd shaped leaves break through the ground the cotton plant is attractive to the eye. Its deep green gives it a vigorous air. The leaf has an individuality. It grows rapidly and about ten weeks from planting the stalk begins to show blossoms. In this neighborhood we look for the first blossom about the last of June. The blossom is large, about two inches in diameter, of a delicate creamy color shading to a soft pink the second day, and then turning a deep red.

When field after field of cotton has begun to open freely in blossom there is no flower-show on earth to compare with it. Thousands and thousands of acres of blossoming cotton line the country roads from North Carolina to Mexico from the first of July to the coming of the frosts. Forty million acres of flower display, keeping open house through four months of the year, and in the extreme South considerably longer.