COLORFUL SCENES IN COTTON FIELDS ARE FADING AWAY AS MACHINERY REPLACES ‘HANDS’

Cotton Is Still Louisiana’s Leading Crop; Grow Less Advised

Cotton is the undisputed monarch of Louisiana’s crops. This state produces nearly half of all the rice grown in this country, yet in 1928, the value of cotton and cotton seed was $78,390,000 or four times that of rice. Louisiana produces nearly all of the sugar cane grown in this country, yet the cotton crop is worth nearly five times as much. The same ratio will apply for 1930, the only difference being in lower prices for all of these crops. On the other hand, most of the other Southern states produce more cotton than Louisiana does, for in this state cotton is not the one big crop but rather one of the big crops. Most of it is grown in the northern part of the state and on the alluvial flats of the delta section of the Mississippi and of the Red river. Cotton is still the leading crop in the southern states, and is produced in all parts of the world. The United States, which is the world’s largest producer of cotton, is also the world’s largest consumer of cotton products.

Cottonseed is planted in the spring and is harvested in the fall. The plant, which looks more like a shrub, wants a long warm growing season as well as plenty of moisture. The cotton blossoms, white in color, turn into cotton bolls and when matured these bolls begin to open, exposing the cotton. At the present time, the cotton is picked by hand, by Negro labor, and the laborers work long hours. They pick up small parts of the cotton from the plant and put it into sacks that hang from their shoulders and drag on the ground after them.

Cotton’s perennial enemy is the boll weevil, an insect whose consuming ambition is to puncture the cotton boll until it dries up and drops off. Climatic conditions have much to do with the activities of this pest. Drouth and winter freezes are unfavorable to them. The insect thrives best in warm, wet summers and during mild winters. They are usually killed by the spraying of arsenate of lead on them.

Many Uses for Cotton

The pickled cotton is loaded into wagons and taken to the gin. There are from one to five gins in every cotton section. At the gin, the seed is separated from the cotton and the latter is put into presses and compressed into 500-pound bales. Some of the seed is held over for next year’s planting but most of it is sold to the cotton oil mills. The invention of 1794 of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney gave the cotton industry its greatest impulse, for before that time the seed was separated from the cotton by hand.

When we think of the utility of the cotton plant, we inevitably see clothes as its ultimate end. Yet the same cotton plant that is so important to the covering of our bodies also makes a generous contribution to our sustenance. We eat part of that same plant and the so-called lower animals also eat it. The cottonseed products industry is the reason. At these mills, the oil is pressed from the seed and is used for cooking and for food products.