

A Revolution in Cotton

The Machine Picker Opens Up an Era of Greater Struggle

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The harvest of 1936 will see the introduction of a mechanical cotton picker that will complete a revolution which has long been under way.

The practical use of the picker means the end of the long struggle between the machine and King Cotton.

It means an even fiercer competitive struggle between the machine and the serfs of King Cotton. The arithmetic of machine economics under capitalism condemns Negro and white sharecroppers to lower and lower standards of living.

In a socialist economy, the victory of the machine over King Cotton would set free the serfs of King Cotton. Under capitalism, the introduction of the mechanical picker spells starvation for the masses now chained to cotton.

Thousands and thousands of croppers and laborers will be forced off the land. They will huddle together in the rural areas of the South, pools of humanity stranded by capitalism. They will spill over into the southern metropolitan areas, New Orleans, Memphis,

Atlanta, Little Rock and Birmingham. There will be a profound intensification of all the social and racial problems which the contradictions of capitalism have created in the South.

There will be a profound alteration in the cotton map. The petty landlords of the Old South will fall by the wayside; and land which cotton should never have claimed will be turned back to the pines. In the Mississippi Delta the process of mechanization will be heightened and the plantation system will, more clearly than today, stand revealed as a system of capitalist industrial agriculture. The Southwest, still young to cotton, will make even further spurts, but will be compelled more than ever to keep one eye trained on Brazil and on the other cotton-producing countries.

Cotton creates problems which capitalism cannot solve. These problems are foreign and domestic. The mechanical picker will increase the intensity of these problems and introduce new and insoluble contradictions—insoluble as long as capitalism lasts.—THE EDITORS.

ANCIENT Egypt and India harvested their cotton by hand. Along the valley of the Nile, in the shadow of the pyramids, serfs bent their backs, harvesting cotton, boll by boll, with their fingers.

The march of time has transferred the bulk of the world's cotton harvest to modern America. The valley of the Mississippi bisects the most mechanically-advanced nation on earth, but the cotton harvest is unchanged. In the shadow of great industrial developments, Negro and white sharecroppers, the modern serfs, bend their backs—and cotton still begins its journey into world trade through human fingers.

The grains—corn, hay and unnumbered minor crops—have submitted to the machine. The production maps of those crops have slowly changed as lower costs attracted production into geographic areas suitable to mechanization. Cotton harvesting alone has resisted the machine.

Millions of dollars spent on experimental work since the Iron Age began have failed to conquer cotton. Way back in 1850 the first cotton pickers began to appear. Machines were actually tried out. Some of these monstrosities were so heavy that planks had to be laid in the fields to prevent them from sinking in the soft earth. Those that followed were extremely complicated, heavy and costly. They failed in the acid test of picking more cotton per hour at less cost per pound than human fingers could pick under the share-

cropping system in the South. Thus generation followed generation and cotton remained a slave crop.

Out of the foggy background of these defeats, the Rust brothers of Memphis, Tennessee, have finally materialized a practical mechanical picker. Unlike its predecessors, their modern steel trailer-type machine is simple and compact, and weighs no more than a modern automobile.

The Rust brothers picked cotton in their youth. Like other southern children, they too became slaves of King Cotton. They hated picking cotton for half a cent a pound. The endless job of dragging their picking bags along the row in the hot sun forged in them a stubborn determination to build a machine that would banish slavery from the cotton patch.

In spite of poverty and the long history of failures which had created a tradition that the cotton harvest would never be mechanized, they persisted. The development of their machine and the fact that they have held on to their patents is a story in itself. The end of the story is that their company, the Southern Harvester Co., Inc., has at last been adequately financed. The steel dies are cut for stamping out machines on a mass-production basis next fall, priced at \$1,000 each.

A new machine can be perfected only after it leaves the laboratory and is subjected to the incalculable stresses and strains

of actual field performance. Consequently, the Rust brothers are building ten pickers for field trials in the harvest of 1935. Practical field operation of these test machines in as many counties will uncover the mechanical "bugs" that inevitably appear. Many of these "bugs" have been eliminated because the Rust brothers have already spent years testing their work in the field.

The International Harvester Company and others have experimental cotton pickers in their laboratories, but the Rust machine is unquestionably the simplest and most practical of all mechanical pickers—so simple and practical that the Director of the Mississippi Delta Experiment Station enthusiastically predicts almost immediate perfection.

The picking principle of their steel spindles was developed by the Rust brothers from their memory of Grandmother Rust as she moistened her fingers before twisting the cotton lint and winding it into thread on her spinning wheel.

The cotton picker is built on a light steel chassis which runs on pneumatic rubber-tired wheels. It is pulled and powered by any standard row-type tractor. The picking unit of the machine is hung on the chassis and is controlled by a lever. An operator who sits on top of the picker can guide the picking unit even along crooked rows by swinging the lever from side to side. Through the picking unit runs a broad endless belt, studded with steel spindles which are really only steel wires moistened as they pass by wet sponges. The belt moves around in an opposite direction to the travel of the machine. It brings the spindles, revolving at high speed, into contact with the cotton plant. With uncanny precision they select the open bolls, wrapping the lint around the steel fingers which are carried to the back of the machine by the belt. There the cotton lint is automatically removed from the spindles and blown through a pipe into a bag hung on the machine.

This steel robot will pick 1,000 pounds of cotton every hour, against the average of 10 pounds per hour picked by man. It will pick 12,000 pounds per day, against 120 pounds per man, at a cost of about 16 cents per hundred, against 50 cents per hundred paid to man.

Now for the first time the Machine Age challenges the traditional slavery of the cotton harvest. What will be the effects of the machine on the serfs of King Cotton?

THE Rust brothers may control their company, but they cannot control the effects of their machine on society. Under

the capitalist system, science and invention are the chattels of the "boss men," available only to those who can capitalize and exploit them for profit.

The big "boss men" will capitalize the cotton-picking machine and evict the croppers whom it displaces. The more numerous small "boss men" will drive down the standards of living of their cropper families. Instead of breaking the chains that bind sharecroppers to soil slavery, capitalism forces them into a vicious competition with the very machine that should set them free.

True, the production map of cotton, like those of the other major crops, will change. Eventually the bulk of the world's crop will be machine-picked cotton. Cotton, like wheat, will flow into areas with suitable climate and soils that at the same time offer great level acreages that can readily be organized for mechanized mass production. The effects of the cotton picker upon cotton will follow the history of wheat production after the introduction of the binder. But while the course and tempo of these changes may be compared to wheat, we must remember that in spite of wheat's headstart on cotton, its wider adaptability and the greater ease with which it can be mechanized, wheat is still cut with a scythe on many mountain farms in the United States, and hand labor is still competing in the wheat fields of the world with the combine-harvester-thresher.

The technical conquest of the cotton plant consumed a century. It will take as long as the profit system lasts to eliminate human slavery completely from the cotton patches of the world.

The leather whip of the slave driver or

the whip of debt in the hands of more polite and distant creditors, forces human beings to unbelievable limits. The human body is also a marvelous mechanism, more flexible and enduring than steel. Steel wears and rusts—man starves and finally revolts.

The Civil War shook the foundations of the Bourbons. It drove the old masters into bankruptcy and placed the new "boss men" in the big houses on the old plantations. Slave quarters became cropper cabins, spotted over the plantation. The slaves became cropper serfs and cotton continued its accustomed primitive demands for human labor.

After a century of capitalist development, cotton is still predominantly a slave crop. The new master may be landlord, manager or he may be the agent of a distant bank or insurance company; the slaves are now sharecroppers or agricultural laborers, both white and Negro. Separated only by narrow roads, Negro and white cropper families plant, chop and pick cotton.

Yet these equally exploited families are wedged apart by the space of a fictitious race prejudice. From the cradle to the grave, the white child is imbued with the myth of "white superiority." With this weapon the "boss men" of the South have kept their cotton serfs in subjection. Any protest by Negroes is met by the terror of the lynch gang. Any protest by whites is answered by the suave statement, "If you don't like it, there are plenty of niggers to take your place."

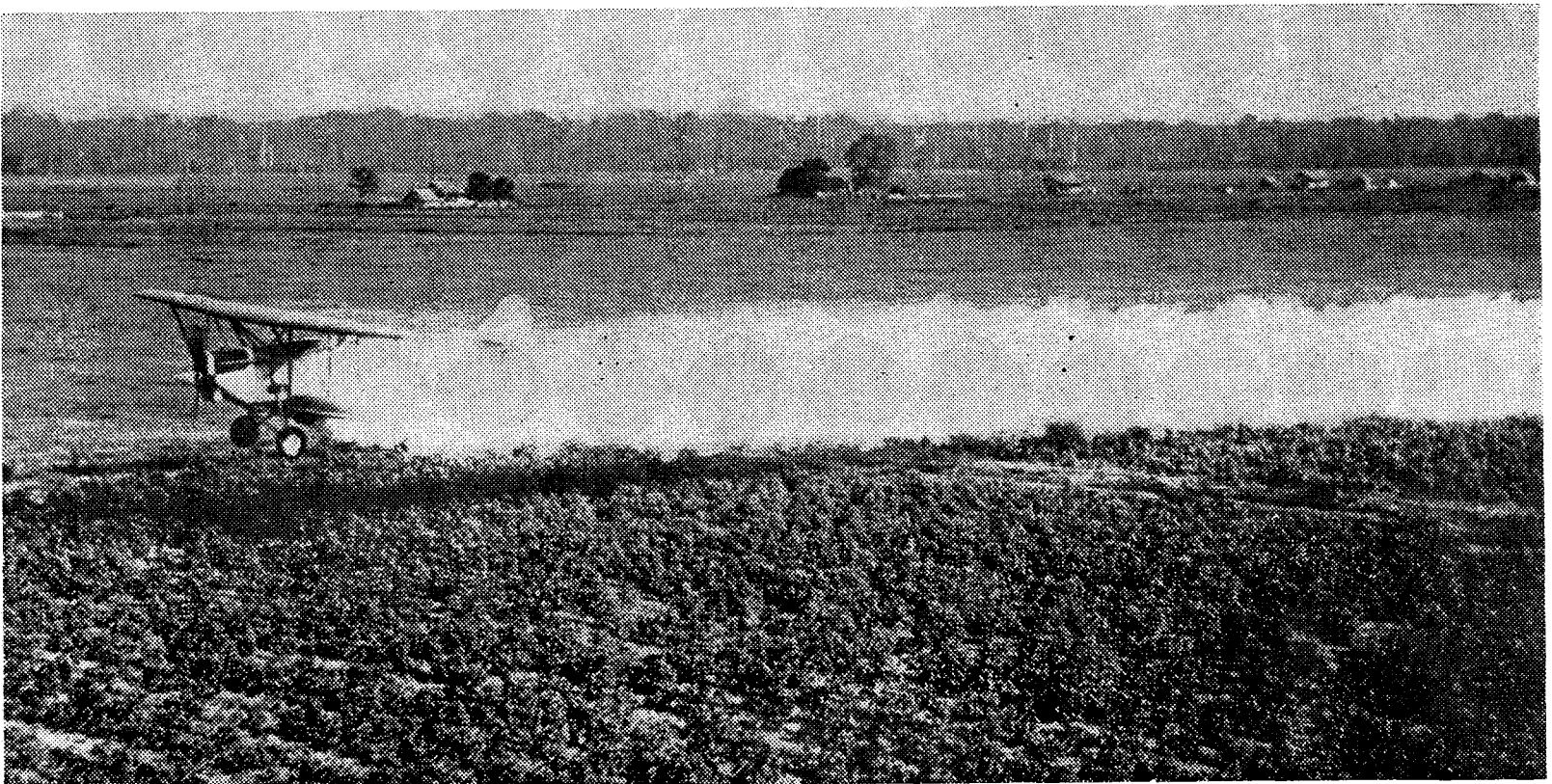
Although tobacco, rice and sugar claim small areas as their own, cotton dominates the rural South from North Carolina to the Gulf and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rio Grande. The ten states within

these boundaries produce 98 percent of American cotton and well over 50 percent of the entire world cotton crop. Even steel in Birmingham has not yet dethroned King Cotton.

We must not get the idea, however, that "the South" is one uniform cotton patch. It varies in soil, climate and topography. These geographic differences separate the South into three distinct cotton "belts." The rolling, worn-out lands of the Atlantic Coast states constitute the "Old South." The long, centrally-located area up and down the Mississippi River is known as "the Delta." Farther west, the drier, level, plains-like country of Texas and Oklahoma mark off "the Southwest."

These natural differences have affected the systems of farm organization and the forms of exploitation of the cotton serfs. In the Old South, the small landlord predominates; this is the *cropper* belt. In the Delta, rich, level and valuable lands have encouraged a larger plantation form; this is the true *plantation* belt. Conditions in the Southwest have given rise to a more independent and extensive system of farm organization. The thinly-settled lands demand migratory labor, for unlike the cropper patches, the southwest cotton farm is not restricted by the family's capacity at picking time. Thus, in terms of King Cotton's serfs, the Southwest is the *migratory labor* belt.

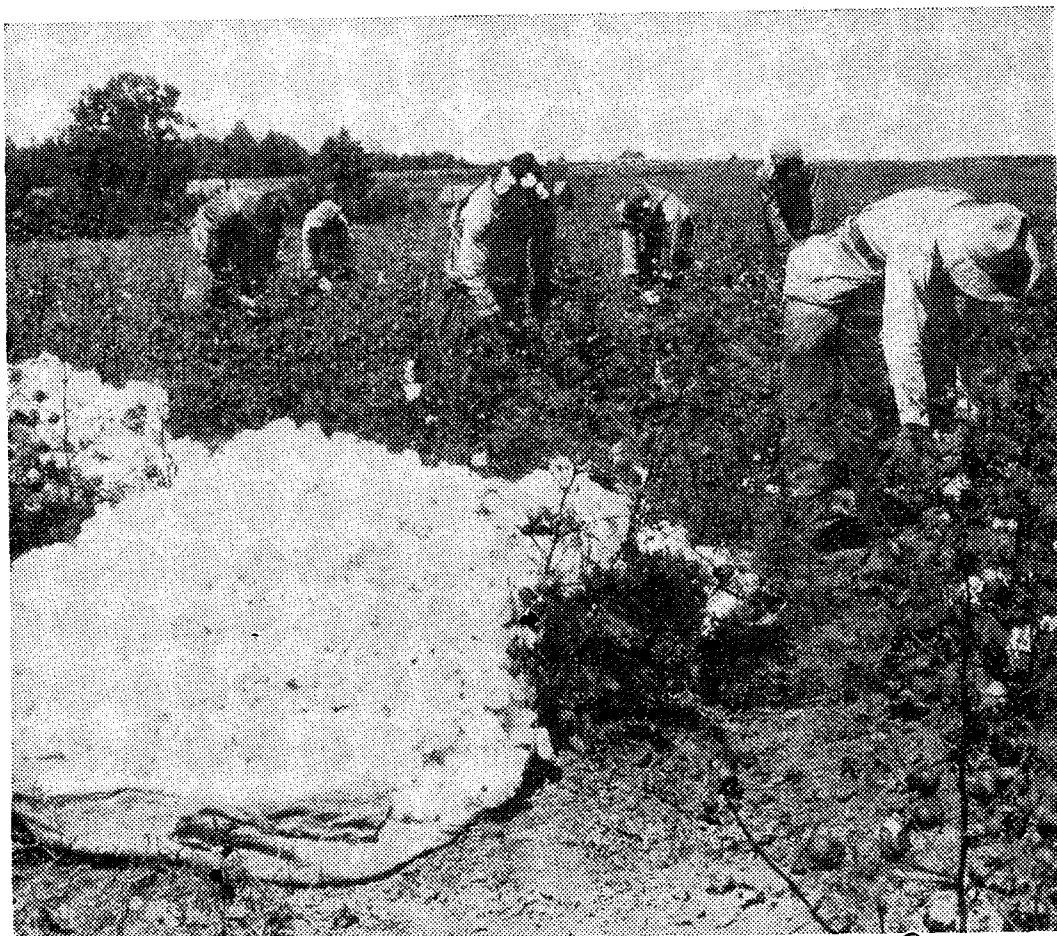
The differences between the cotton belts of the South have been reflected in the tempo of technical changes in cotton farming. The emergence of the mechanical picker does not start a revolution; it merely completes a process that has been slowly seeping into cotton culture.



THE NEW WAY—DUSTING BY AIRPLANE

Inf

These changes in technique will be helped or hindered by the natural factors in the three cotton belts. The drier level areas of Texas attracted cotton production by offering cheaper costs and freedom from the boll weevil. This flow of cotton production westward was accelerated after the row-type tractor had demonstrated that it could profitably banish mules from southern cotton patches just as it had banished horses from northern corn fields. A study made by the Mississippi Delta Experiment Station (Bulletin 298) shows that the introduction of a row-type tractor system saves more than \$6 per acre. But always the absolute need for human fingers to pick the cotton slowed down radical changes. Here and there isolated cases appear where plantation owners have kicked out their croppers and reorganized production with tractors operated by hired help. Despite savings resulting from this pre-picking mechanization, these big landlords have had to pay 30 percent of total costs of production when they follow their less progressive neighbors at harvest time and revert to the primitive methods of biblical days. In addition, they do not control the lives of many croppers and so must compete or wait for labor at the risk of loss in quality and price.



THE OLD WAY—PICKING BY HAND

Int'l

ONCE the dominant producing area of the world, the Old South has gradually been forced to surrender its place to the better-favored Delta and Southwest.

Erosion annually washes millions of tons of top soil from this area into the Gulf of Mexico. Cotton should never have replaced the virgin pine on the hillsides of the Old South. The rising costs of fertilizers to balance soil losses and the laborious technique of terracing made necessary in fighting erosion in the cotton patches, have closed the profit gap between cost and price. These natural handicaps have all been intensified since the world crisis reduced demand and prices for cotton.

The desperate and stubborn resistance of the smaller landlords against the economic crumbling of their business meant sharper and sharper attacks upon the living standards of their sharecroppers.

At first, cropper furnishing, i.e., store credits, were cut down. Later the Republican Hoover Administration tried to save the landlords with Intermediate Bank Credits; Federal Seed and Feed Loans; and even Red Cross funds were used to substitute for furnishing.

Under the Democratic Roosevelt Administration, the A.A.A. reduction program has succeeded in pegging prices and putting some money in the landlords' pockets as rental payments for acres taken out of production or plowed under. But the powers-that-be neglected the human factor. Benefit payments went to the landlord. Eviction came to the cropper. It is estimated that 250,000 cropper families have thus been stirred into

local migrations toward the southern towns, searching for relief.

On the edges of these towns the poor help the poor, taking them into already crowded cabins, worse than city slums. In this way these rural refugees are at least within walking distance of the relief stations. Their miserable existence is eked out by occasional employment on relief jobs at the lowest wage rates in the country.

In some cases croppers remain in cabins on the abandoned acres, desperately attempting an unfamiliar subsistence farming. What will happen to these "surplus" families when winter comes and with it the fulfillment of the President's threat to "quit this business of relief"? No one in the South dares to prophesy. The essence of the New Deal's relief program for these forgotten and dispossessed people is "slave or starve."

The petty capitalists and landlords wage their battle against bankruptcy by ruthlessly lowering the croppers' living standards to starvation levels. In spite of these "economies" in production, the Old South's proportionate share of the American cotton crop has steadily declined.

In the period from 1903 to 1907, the Old South produced 41 percent of the U.S. cotton crop. By 1932 its percentage had shrunk to 24.5 percent. This gradual flow, mainly to the Southwest, was interrupted by the severe drouth in Texas in 1933 and 1934. But the writing on the wall is evident: the cotton picker will only hasten

the decline of the Old South's position in the cotton world.

Anyone who goes West from the Old South to the Mississippi Delta notices at once great differences. Unlike the rolling red and gray soils of the Piedmont, the Delta soils are black and fertile. The plantations are much larger. The cotton itself is more luxuriant and, as a matter of fact, produces a longer staple lint which brings a premium of one or two cents more per pound than the cotton in the Old South. More important than these, from the point of view of the cropper, is the difference in the plantation itself.

The big corporation plantations also have their "croppers." But they are no longer aggregates of loosely-combined tenant farms. Instead, everything is centrally planned and managed.

From an airplane, one looks down upon fields of cotton, miles long. The entire plantation area appears as a single farm, cut only by roads necessary to its operation. In the center, the great warehouses, gins, offices, stores and railroad station are bunched and give the appearance of a small town. Plant-breeding stations are maintained. Great fields, the acres rented to Uncle Sam, are devoted to large-scale forage crop production, harvested with the most up-to-date motorized equipment. The big plantation has actually become an industrial farm with a highly specialized personnel of skilled and unskilled labor.

IN THE absence of a mechanical picker, typical big corporation plantations have tried to solve the problem of wedding modern technique to primitive hand labor in a single organization by modifying the sharecropper system. Central management, mechanization of cotton production up to harvest, in fact, all the "boss-man's" science and efficiency, enabled him to reduce the area allotted to cropper families and increase the area operated by the plantation as such.

On these big plantations, the actual status of the croppers is more nearly that of day laborers. Yet the United States Census connives with the corporations in maintaining that these serfs are "tenant farmers."

As material proof of this fiction, southern "boss men" exhibit the cabin in the cotton. But the cropper's "farm" surrounding the cabin is now marked off only by a few hills of corn that are planted after the extensive field operations are completed. The hills of corn mark the area which the cropper's family chops and picks, and on which his share of the plantation crop is based.

The surplus labor of the cropper's entire family is used in the operations of the big plantation area. Thus, during part of the time the cropper is actually working by the day. For a day that extends from "can see to can't see" he is given credit or scrip for 50 cents, good only at the plantation store. There "Mr. Clerk" does the same arithmetic on the cropper's day-labor account that he and generations of clerks before him have performed upon the accounts against a cropper's share of the cotton crop. The answer is always the same—the cropper still owes his landlord more labor for a store bill. For on these plantations the modern serf is compelled to deal at his master's store and to pay prices 20 to 40 percent higher than prices in the nearest town.

The evolution of modern technique in the pre-picker era reached its peak on the big Delta plantations in their fight against the boll weevil. Dusting with arsenate of lime is the accepted practice in fighting this insect. When the boll weevil first invaded the United States, the "boss men" found it both uncertain and costly to delegate the job to the individual cropper. Croppers had little experience and less understanding of the scientific necessity for an even and thorough coverage of the cotton plant. Much of the material was wasted and precious time was lost before all the plants were fully protected.

Driven by crop losses and high costs, dusting passed through a rapid evolution: from hand, to mule, to tractor—and finally, to airplane. While one man is dusting two acres, a man and a mule will cover eight acres and a tractor outfit thirty acres. The airplane covers one thousand acres during the same period! From these figures it can be seen that the airplane eliminates thousands of hours of man labor; and what is more important to the big "boss men" of the plantations, it is done more thoroughly and quickly. Damage is stopped overnight and the saving in mate-

rials alone actually pays for the cost of airplane dusting.

In the same period that the Old South was surrendering its share of the American crop to Texas, the Delta states were maintaining their share of approximately 27 percent. The fertile alluvial soils of the Delta plantations, with good culture, yield an average of 300 to 400 pounds per acre. Intensification of cotton agriculture by scientific plant breeding has led not only to the development of the plantation organization and applied technique already described, but also expresses itself in the fact that 500 pounds of lint cotton can now be obtained from 100 pounds of seed cotton. This is a tremendous increase and indicates that there has been an intensification of production per man rather than an increase in the yield per acre. In spite of these advances in modern technique, the necessity of picking cotton by hand has forced the Delta "boss men" to maintain hundreds of thousands of cotton serfs.

In the Delta towns on a Saturday night, thousands of milling Negroes remind you that you are in the heart of the Black Belt. At the same time, the sight of an occasional white man, always with a gun on his hip, leads you to think of northern industrial company towns.

When the picker comes to the Delta and completes the broken circle of mechanization, we can look for a rapid displacement of these Negro serfs. These company towns will harbor stranded populations in the same way that coal-mining towns found the miners stranded when coal was hit by competition with the oil industry and by the world crisis.

The southwest cotton belt owes its early expansion to its climate and level topography which help toward bigger acreages per man. These factors also offer a natural setting for low-cost mechanized production.

During the period 1903 to 1907, Texas production equalled the Delta's share of the U. S. crop. At that time Texas production averaged 24 percent of the U. S. crop. Semi-mechanized methods and hired-labor organizations of cotton farms stepped up the process and began its expansion into the plains country. By 1932, Texas alone was producing 35 percent of the U. S. crop.

These West Texas lands were hit by the droughts of 1933 and 1934 and the flow from the Old South to Texas was temporarily interrupted; but the long-time trend of production towards the 10 million acres of potential cotton lands in Texas is inevitable.

Already the southwest cotton farmer has departed from the old sharecropper system. The cotton farms in Texas are more nearly like those of northern farms. Negro farmers, croppers and laborers are in the minority. White owners, mortgaged owners and cash tenants are the common types. Even the extensive corporation plantations are organized in big units of white tenants operating machinery. These big units until recently have been entirely dependent upon the great reser-

voirs of migratory labor in Mexico. Thousands of Mexican families annually start a trek across the border in their rattle-trap automobiles, moving into Texas, following the harvest north into Oklahoma as the season progresses.

But the southwest cotton farmers have not waited for the mechanical cotton picker. In their search for cheaper costs of production for their short staple cotton, a simple device known as a "cotton sled" was developed. The "cotton sled" is little more than a box on wheels, the front end of which is open and attached to a metal comb. When this is dragged along the row it actually combs the mature plant and snaps off the bolls.

From this primitive beginning, the Texas Experiment Station and the John Deere Machine Company have evolved a more elaborate but no more expensive apparatus known as the "cotton stripper." The principle is the same as that of the sled. While it does a better job, it still mixes the snapped bolls with trash, sticks and dirt, which, together with the bolls, must be cleaned before ginning is possible.

In the process of mechanization, no single machine, not even a cotton picker, completes the process. The plant breeder is called upon to produce a plant that matures its crop uniformly and carries the bolls where the machine can reach them. For "strippers" this was of prime importance. The ginning industry was called upon to invent cleaners and driers to prepare and clean the stripped product. The "stripper" itself was the simplest problem of all.

Although the "stripper" is a compromise between hand picking and mechanical picking, it has proved itself in competition with hand labor. Nevertheless, it is a makeshift, for it adds several operations to the processing of the raw seed cotton. The mechanical picker, on the other hand, delivers cotton into the bag ready for the gin, as clean as if picked by hand. Just as surely as the wheat binder gave way to the combine-harvester which eliminated three or four handlings of the wheat crop, so the mechanical picker will displace "cotton sleds" and "strippers."

AS SCIENCE and invention continued their persistent attack to make cotton independent of hand labor, cotton was pushed into new territory further and further away from the sharecropping system. The mechanical picker now begins to push cotton into new frontiers even beyond the horizons of migratory labor.

The mechanical cotton picker's greatest threat to the Old South lies in the fact that it opens the door of new areas for cotton producers. At the same time it portends a future struggle between the United States and heretofore unused foreign acreages which can now challenge dominance of the world market by American cotton.

Inquiries concerning price and shipment have already come to the Rust brothers from planters in Egypt, India, Australia and

Brazil. When the first shipload of pickers rides down to Rio, the battle for exports will be on. All the factors which so far have affected competition between our three domestic cotton belts will be intensified. This struggle for world trade will peg prices at levels that only the most favored areas can hope to meet at a profit.

Normally the United States planted 40,000,000 acres of cotton, producing an average crop of 14,000,000 bales. We used to export 55 percent of this crop, nearly 8,000,000 bales. Fifteen million acres were cut out by the A.A.A. program in an attempt to meet the lessened demand due to the world crisis. Foreign countries sprang into competition with American cotton, increasing their production as we decreased ours.

The United States exports shrank from 8,500,000 bales in 1933 to 5,700,000 bales in 1934, a decrease of almost 32 percent. This same decline continues into 1935. Comparing the figures for the period from August, 1934 to July, 1935, inclusive, with the same period in 1933-34, we have a further decline of 36 percent.

Just as Texas has been absorbing a proportionate share of the U.S. crop as a whole from the Old South, the export figures show that foreign countries have already begun to take a larger and larger proportion of the world market from the United States.

The struggling petty capitalists of the Old South blame Texas for their decline, and complain that the A.A.A. has put Texas in a favored position. Better entrenched corporation-plantation men in the Delta, sensing the potential competition of the southwest, also ask restriction of expansion in Texas to perpetuate their present stability. Now Texas must look askance at Brazil. For Brazilian cotton patches have of necessity been tied to the fringes of its small population which is near a few coast cities. In an area greater than the continental United States, Brazil has millions of fertile acres as yet unbroken. The mechanical cotton picker now makes it possible fully to capitalize this virgin territory.

If we compare the cost of picking cotton with the Rust machine to that of picking by hand, we get some idea of the tempo of the machine's introduction. The machine will pick 1,000 pounds per hour. The acreage covered is dependent upon the rate of yield. Although the average American yield is nearer 200 pounds of lint per acre, the plantations most likely to introduce the picker immediately are the large, high-producing farms. The following comparisons are therefore based on a 3,000 acre plantation in the Delta, yielding approximately 400 pounds of lint per acre. As the lint, the raw cotton, is only one-third of the seed cotton, a yield of 400 pounds of lint equals 1,200 pounds of seed cotton per acre. The total poundage which must be picked on such a plantation is thus 3,600,000.

If the landlord pays his labor 50 cents per

hundred pounds, the total cost of picking 3,000 acres by hand would be \$18,000. This is the rate plantation managers claim they pay as a "minimum." The Mississippi Delta Experiment Station in its Bulletin No. 298 shows that by squeezing down the "human factor" costs, some plantations might harvest the same area for \$16,000.

All machine costs should be compared with this total. It costs \$1 per hour to operate the tractor and cotton picker. Based upon operation of 12 hours per day, at 1,000 pounds of seed cotton per hour, the machine will pick 12,000 pounds of seed cotton for \$12. To pick the crop of our 3,000-acre sample plantation will require 300 machine days at \$12 a day—a total cost of \$3,600.

BUT it is obvious that one machine cannot work a full year as the picking season should be limited to 75 days, and good farm practice requires the shortest possible harvest season. Therefore, to insure the crop, a 3,000 acre plantation would need to install four machines. Depreciation on four machines costing \$1,000 each would amount to \$1,400, if we take the high depreciation rate of 35 percent. Cost of field operation plus depreciation gives a total of \$5,000. This compares with \$16,000 for hand picking, at which scale labor receives the lowest wages.

This saving of \$11,000 is not the full story. Savings in field operations up to the harvest season also favor the tractor over the cropper and mule method. As already stated, the difference is more than \$6 per acre. In cases where the mechanization of the harvest induces the mechanization of production, a 3,000 acre plantation would show an additional saving of \$18,000. If this figure be added to the \$11,000 saved in picking, the increased annual earnings on a 3,000 acre plantation would be almost \$29,000.

This is not just dull arithmetic. It is the arithmetic of technical advance in agriculture in spite of capitalism's contradictory and unplanned dog-eat-dog system. But because it is also linked with the expansion of capitalism into agriculture, it spells a vicious attack upon all those who toil in the cotton fields.

Finance capital is already loaded with sub-marginal cotton lands. Decreasing cotton exports and the prospect of immediate mechanization reduce to the vanishing point the chance of selling these rolling and eroded lands in the open market.

Out of this impasse has come a miraculous conversion of finance capital. It now appears as the spearhead of the campaign against the system of share-cropping tenancy which formerly paid it dividends. Its crocodile tears have won the hearts of a substantial number of liberals who have joined in backing the Bankhead Farmers' Home Bill (S. 2367). These liberals know that this measure will bale out the banks and insurance companies who, under its terms, are to sell their sub-marginal lands to Uncle Sam.

The liberals justify their strange bed-

fellows by claiming that they "see at last the liberation of the Negro and white sharecroppers from their traditional serfdom."

Actually, the Bankhead Bill, if it becomes law, will be the means by which both Negro and white croppers will be settled on sub-marginal lands of the poorest quality. At the same time as their real masters are taking full advantage of the new possibilities for mechanization and low-cost production elsewhere, the erstwhile croppers will be compelled to fish, hunt and eat acorns, because the primitive tools and poor land will eliminate them from commercial production. With these overwhelming disadvantages to face, these forgotten men will still be expected not only to grub a living for themselves and their families, but also to pay installments with interest, for a period up to sixty years, on the money which Uncle Sam advanced to the banks and insurance companies.

As tenants and croppers, these serfs have been unable to stay out of debt. Yet it is pretended that under the new regime they will somehow be able to make a living and also pay for the land. It is obvious, except perhaps to the liberals, that they will be unable to maintain such a pace.

The liberals insist that the government will exercise a real and honest guardianship over its new wards. The truth is that the new relationship means that Uncle Sam will be the new landlord. This is peonage on a grand scale.

And even so, the new peons will not be free of the old yokes of serfdom. The same "boss men" and "riders" who today crack the whip for the masters of the serfs will crack the whip for the government which is forcing the serfs into peonage. Organized into Bankhead committees, these tyrants will compel the debt-ridden "owners" of the land to work whenever itinerant employment offers—whether it be to scab in nearby towns or to do odd jobs on local plantations. The government will have to be paid, in cash.

The liberals, oddly enough, have failed to emphasize the fact that even after years of such payments the new "owners" will lose their land whenever payments cease.

Is there any doubt that the "boss men" of the South are planning to chain huge reservoirs of cheap potential and scab labor to the land? This scheme will complete the cycle of misery for the masses who produce cotton. From chattel slavery to sharecropper serfdom—they will enter the degradation of peonage on a grand scale.

The serfs, however, are showing no disposition to become peons. Even before the introduction of the machine commercially, they have begun their movement away from serfdom towards freedom. Recent events in Alabama show that they are capable of courageous and intelligent struggle. Whether the sharecroppers remain in the rural South or whether the machine starts them in motion towards the cities, these struggles will continue until capitalism is overthrown.

Lessons

SAUL GREEN

ALL the night the flies had been buzzing busily about the man who now swayed so gently in the slight breeze. Contorted though the face was with its bulging eyes and protruding tongue and purple hue, the patient resignation to an ultimate destiny was clearly traced. The pain of the strangling rope had only served to bring it into sharper relief. Sunlight, shimmering the lazy morning clouds, dappled the branches of the tree with golden blobs and lent warmth to the cold man who swayed so easily. So gently did the man pivot and swing, the busy flies were not disturbed.

It had once been a handsome body, strong, beautifully proportioned. The length of brown hemp, with its relentless tightening, had braced the muscles into tens of knobby little bunches and though they no longer rippled beneath the smooth brown skin, told a mute tale of the strength that once was their's. Slender hands were still clenched as in that terrible moment when the thousands and one fires had rushed from his burst lungs to the scalding blood pouring over his brain and the day had become night forever.

Richard Lee was twenty-three years old when he died under the tree. But twenty-three years is a long time to live when you are a Negro and the Southland is your home. When the whites hate you and poverty is your path and your schooling teaches of dregs and despair. It is a long time to live when you are born resented and grow older resented because your skin is brown and your nose is flat and your lips are thick.

Does it matter which state, which city, which county Richard is a part of? It is the South—with its huge cotton fields and spreading tobacco plantations; with its colonels and its ladies; with its chivalry and its mint juleps; with its Jim Crowism and its lynchings.

Richard is not an individual, he is black, a nigger and perhaps not even that because while he was still being carried in his mother's belly, a white man, civilized, had crudely raped her on a clump of bush. He kicked her afterward because her swollen belly had interfered with his pleasure.

But Richard was born whole, without a blemish, a Negro. He never knew his father. His mother told him that once they had been very hungry, not plain hungry like now, but very hungry and Pap tried to beg some food. But he couldn't get any so he tried to steal some and got caught. Well, he was sent to the jail and that was the last she ever saw of him.

Till he was four years old, Richard never

remarked his difference from others. Of course, his skin was colored differently from that of Tommy Driggs or Willy Penner and other white children with whom he played occasionally. But the wonder of that was never really impressed upon him until The Incident.

Somewhere he found a stone with peculiar markings, like a dog on his haunches begging. Proudly he displayed his treasure to Tommy Driggs. Tommy was intrigued, impressed and covetous. He put the stone in his pocket and made a face at Richard. Richard protested and was punched in the mouth for his trouble.

"Dirty nigger . . ." he was told.

The taste of his own blood did strange things to Richard. His fists flew out and there was some mighty heaving and pushing between the two. He was always a big boy, this Richard of ours (remember the muscles as he swayed under the tree?). Young Driggs followed him all the way home.

Laugh, laugh, you great big South. Ridiculous, wasn't it? The filthy little black dared rail against a system he was not yet aware of? Ho! That was funny all right. It was time now he began to learn and you'd teach him, the black bastard. That night you opened the big Primer and showed him his first lesson. He never forgot it.

The moon lent its magic to the night. It was a glorious evening with thousands of stars blinking sleepily in the sky. The air was filled with the scent of musk and dew, the trees rustled with contentment as the soft wind kissed their leaves. A night for lovers and dreams. The screams of Richard melted into nothingness and were unnoticed mid such beauty.

The drafty shack where he lived with his mother was suddenly filled with people, whites. The elder Driggs was blazing with anger as he thrust forward his son who sported a black eye. The bosom of Mrs. Driggs heaved with righteous indignation. Her boy manhandled by a black. Horrible. . . .

"Where's your nigger?" Driggs roared at the cringing mother. "Where is he, damn your black soul?"

Richard was brought forth cringing. Driggs' foot caught him in the pit of the stomach. "Whush. . . ." Richard gasped as he slammed against the flimsy wall. Details aren't necessary, are they? When the shack was finally cleared, a colored woman sat on the dirt floor, her legs drawn beneath her. Slowly her body rocked as she crooned comforting little things to the broken body of Richard clasped to her breast. Some distance removed, Tommy Driggs was showing his father the funny rock with the

marks of a begging dog. The South declared a recess from school. The lesson had been taught.

SO he grows, Richard boy, the fellow that is destined for the tree. He learns the minor lessons with amazing rapidity; the lessons that teach of gnawing, constant hunger, of open hatred, of ignorance and of work. Oh yes, one must work, Richard learns. Watch the adeptness with which Richard picks the cotton, tends the tobacco stalks, heaves the bales, cleans spittoons, working, working. Of course he's paid. He's no longer a slave. Lincoln took care of that. Richard is paid his three or four or five dollars, good American money, each and every week he works. It makes his body strong, this work, strong so we can remember the muscles under the tree.

Richard is seventeen years old with six more left to live before he learns everything and graduates. Fate is tiredly sketching his face. It is not a difficult task for the artist, but such a monotonous one. There are so many Richards to sketch. He merely makes the eyes tired, the smile large. Those tired eyes, that passive resignation to destiny. A whole philosophy is instilled within them. A little work, a little gin, a little women, and a lot of death. But on with the lessons; we mustn't lag now. A bird is singing on that tree.

He and Booker Johnson had been close friends. Booker was only Richard with another name. They had tilled the fields together, gotten drunk together, had the same women. But Booker made a bad mistake. He attempted to organize the workers in the mill. Perhaps his activities were leading to a strike or an increase in pay or a decrease in hours and his bosses objected. Who knows, but anyway he made a very messy corpse. A damn fool, wasn't he?

Richard plods on, Booker's foolishness erased from his mind. He falls in love. This tender emotion is dispassionate enough to enter any body, even the black one of Richard's. Look at him, the big booby. He sulks over his mush, is strangely dumbstruck in her presence. He brings her silly little gifts. He struts his manhood before her. He kisses, even fondles her. It is strange, no, how those thick lips you abhor can whisper magic in her ears? Just like the white man, the civilized white man. He even married her.

It was on his twenty-second birthday. There was no plush-laid alter or elaborately-gowned priest. No choir of blended voices sang blessings. There was no honeymoon. Richard took Agnes to the town clerk, laid down the required fee to hear that sleepy