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IN THE TOBACCO LANDS.

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DANVILLE, Virginia, Nov. 4th, 1896.



I AM on my way south to take a bird's-eye view of the industrial situation of the country. I propose to visit the chief centers of the United States and to give the facts as I find them. Notwithstanding the present hard times, we are said to be the wealthiest nation on the globe. I want to show where a great part of our wealth comes from and how we get it. My first travels have been in the great tobacco belts of Virginia and North Carolina. This region is filled with tobacco plantations. You see the square log cabins, known as tobacco barns, on every farm, and the farmers are now bringing in their crops in wagons to the great auction markets here. The tobacco raised here is some of the best of the world, and buyers from the different countries of Europe are stationed here the year round. The Danville loose tobacco market is the biggest of the kind in the world, and there is no market like it under the sun.

Before I describe it, let me give you some idea of what tobacco means to the United States. It is one of our great money crops, and it brings us millions of dollars in gold from Europe every year. It amounts at times to almost as much as the product of our gold mines. It 1893 it sold for more than \$39,000,000, and in 1894 about \$27,000,000. Of this last amount \$23,000,000 was sold to Europe, Asia, Africa and South America, and the most of it was composed of tobacco leaves packed up for shipment almost as they came from the farmer. Our tobacco crop comes from nearly every state and territory of the Union, and it is of a dozen or more different kinds. Some is especially fitted for export, some for plug, some for fine cut, some for the different varieties of smoking, and some for snuff. I saw at Durham, North Carolina, yesterday a snuff factory, which makes large quantities of snuff for the small dippers of the south. The tobacco is half rotted and mixed with other ingredients before it is ground into the titillating and toothsome product so largely in demand for rubbing with a chewed stick against the teeth. It is packed in ox bladders, in balls ranging in size from that of your

fist to that of your head, and sold by the ounce or pound. There is a smoking tobacco made in Louisiana, about fifty miles north of New Orleans, known as the perique tobacco, which is as black as your hat and almost as strong as aqua fortis. This is the finest tobacco made, for it is cured in its own juices, while other tobacco is mixed with all sorts of sweetening, and is sugared and salted and flavored to taste. The perique tobacco is sold chiefly in New Orleans. It is put up in rolls wrapped round with cords, and is said to grow sweeter as it grows older. It is very expensive, and is too strong for those who are not accustomed to use it. Smoking tobacco is grown almost everywhere, but there is a great difference in the quality and prices obtained. In the region where I am now writing, the finest of cigarette tobacco is produced, and hundreds of millions of the little white papered health-destroyers come from the soil of Virginia and the two Carolinas. The tobacco is mild, light and yellow, and it has a high flavor.

I had an idea until I came here that our tobacco was raised on big plantations, and I expected to find tobacco fields containing hundreds of acres. The fact is that the most of the crop comes from garden patches, and that the fields are small. The farmers estimate the size of their crop not by the acre, but by the hill. There are about 4,000 hills to the acre, and the man who has a half million hills of tobacco is a nabob. In the whole United States not much more than half a million acres are put in tobacco each year. The tobacco in most cases is but one of a number of crops raised on a farm. It is, however, like wheat in the north or cotton further south, the money crop, and the farmer depends upon it for his ready cash. It is a very expensive crop, and requires almost constant labor from planting in the early spring until about August or September, when it is cured for the market. I met at Durham, Colonel Walker, an old tobacco planter, and now the leading buyer for one of the biggest tobacco firms of the world, and asked him to tell me in simple language the story of tobacco, from the seed to the mouth of the consumer.

Said he: "Tobacco is a king among plants, and it requires royal treatment. The seed is no bigger than mustard seed, and the danger is in using too much seed rather than too little. I was talking not long ago with a farmer outside the tobacco districts about tobacco raising. He became interested and said: 'Well, I would like to raise a little tobacco, and I wish you would send me about a bushel of seed for a trial.' Why, a bushel of tobacco seed would plant the whole state of North Carolina. One

ounce of tobacco seed contains 340,000 seeds, and a single plant will produce seed enough for ten acres of hills. The seeds are so small that they have to be mixed with ashes or dirt before planting, in order not to sow them too thick."

"How are they planted," said I, "with a drill?"

"No," replied the veteran tobacco raiser, "they are sown by hand in a plant bed or hot bed, much like cabbage plants, and when the little sprouts come up they are pulled out and transplanted in hills, like cabbage or tomatoes. The making of the plant bed is not easy. The ground is covered with wood and burned so that the earth is roasted, and all of the insects and vegetable matter, seeds, etc., cooked out of it. It is manured heavily and after the seed is sown it is covered over with thin cloth, something like cheese cloth, to keep in the heat, and to keep out the insects. A plant bed twenty yards square will raise enough plants for 100,000 tobacco hills."

"After the plants are set out," Colonel Walker continued, "they have to be cultivated and watched. They are hilled up like potatoes, and the weeds are kept down. The plants grow to a height of three or four feet. The leaves branch out in all directions, and where each leaf joins the stalk suckers sprout out. These have to be pulled off again and again that all of the strength of the plant may go into the leaf, and for the same reason the top is cut off, in order that the plant may not go to seed. Every plant has to be examined night and morning, to see that worms and insects are not eating it. Man is by no means the only thing that likes a mouthful of tobacco. There are cut worms, who attack the plants, flees and beetles chew at it, and grasshoppers and crickets are fond of its juice. The worst enemy, however, is the horn worm, or tobacco worm. This comes from a moth, which can lay a thousand eggs in a night. The eggs are not bigger than mustard seeds, and they hatch in a few hours into worms of the thickness of a horse hair, and about one sixteenth of an inch long. They at once begin to eat tobacco, and within a week or so they are more than an inch in length and as big around as your little finger. A full-grown worm will eat up a tobacco leaf in a night, and if not watched they will destroy the crop."

"How is the crop harvested?" I asked. "This is done when the leaves begin to turn yellow. Some farmers strip the leaves from the stalk and string them on wires. Others cut off the stalks and string them on sticks, which are stuck in the ground. They are then carried to the tobacco barns and hung up to be cured. These barns are closed houses. Each has a set of flues and