

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT WILL GROW IN THE EVERGLADES.



SO MANY plants will grow in the Everglades when drainage is complete that a book and not one or two articles would have to be written to cover the subject and do it justice. The growing of things is, of course, the purpose of all reclamation, and upon this alone depends the future value of the land. *This Everglade land when drained, owing to its favorable location, will produce a greater variety of crops than any other land in the United States of America.* We know of many things which have been successfully grown on the edge of the Everglades already, but think of the hundreds of useful plants now growing in other parts of the world which have yet to be introduced and tested!

Let me say at the start that this Everglade drainage question is no question at all; it is a question only in the minds of doubting Thomases, who are prejudiced, who are ignorant or who are born knockers and who belittle every project in which they have no hand and out of which they can make no rake-off. We need not go to Europe for examples of successful works of a similar nature. The Dutch in fact would smile at such a project. They are making farm lands out of such places as Biscayne Bay. They reclaim places below the level of the sea. They pump the water out. Look over the great irrigation projects of our West, or better still the banked lands of the Mississippi Valley where huge and costly levees hold our mightiest river in check. The overflow of Okeechobee is insignificant compared with the floodwaters of the great river which drains a third of this whole country.

The first product for our consideration on Everglade soils

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should be forage. Few countries can be highly and wholly successful in an agricultural way without being able to raise sufficient food for farm animals of all kinds. Aside from the expense of feeding these animals on hay and grain brought from a distance, they are necessary for the maintenance of soil fertility and the conversion of roughage into manure, which is an expensive and to some extent an imported article. Enough vegetables are wasted to feed many pigs. The fertilizer bill is the main item of expense.

In the West alfalfa means corn, alfalfa and corn mean hogs and cattle and horses; these in turn mean fertility, money, prosperity and happiness.

There seems to me to be only one great work in this world; all other aims are subsidiary to it; it is the production of happy and prosperous homes. Every man who honestly works to that end is a benefactor to mankind. The men who reclaim waste land, the men who introduce valuable plants from foreign lands, the men who by selection improve varieties and increase productiveness, the men who devise means for combating plant diseases, in fact the men who in any way increase the productivity of the soil in proportion to the labor expended thereon are doing a great work for all time. They may be long forgotten, but the effects of their labors will roll down the ages for all time to come. All other movements are insignificant compared with the one great movement of producing the largest amount of food and shelter for our people with the minimum amount of labor outlay.

In the matter of forage for animal feed, velvet beans, cowpeas, beggarweed and grasses and other legumes are already common. The Indians have successfully grown corn for many years on islands in the Everglades, and the green corn dance has always been to them an important event. In places in the Everglades where vegetables have been recently grown there are oats waist high with good heavy heads, having sprung from seed in the manure used for fertilizer or from oats, accidentally scattered by the horses while eating their mess. There is no stronger hay than oats cured in the milk, and in the land where

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I was bred farmers all said that animals fed on fodder of this kind needed no grain. And why should oats not thrive? The winter climate of Florida is not unlike the summer climate of Northern regions where oats are abundantly produced.

The soil has never been inoculated with the bacteroid of red clover, yet in places red clover may be seen in full flower, having sprung from the seed from baled hay. This same baled hay brings in many weeds from the North, and the Canada thistle and other noxious weeds may be already seen in the vegetable patches on the Glades.



STATE CANAL IN THE EVERGLADES, FOR DRAINAGE, IRRIGATION AND TRANSPORTATION.

Remove the water from the Glades, plant forage crops, keep animals, convert all roughage and waste products into manure and the agricultural future of this whole region will be assured for all time to come. Farming seldom succeeds without manure, work and sense. The maintenance of soil fertility and the con-

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trol of plant diseases are the two main agricultural problems throughout the world.

It does not make any difference where you live, says Gleanings in *Bee Culture*, alfalfa can be made to grow all the way from Maine to Florida. Here are the directions boiled down from the *Ohio Farmer*, written by Willis O. Wing, the great authority on the subject of alfalfa:

"Please do not make a mystery of alfalfa-growing any longer. It is such a simple matter that one can write all the rules needed in small space. Here they are: Drain the water out; let the air into the soil; fill the land with lime if nature did not do it; get humus into it—stable manure or some vegetable matter to rot and promote the life of bacteria there. Put in plenty of phosphorus. Sow good seed, with a little inoculated soil. Lime brings alfalfa. Alfalfa brings corn. Corn brings money, homes, pianos and education for farm boys."

As to the production of vegetables nothing need be said, since it is hard to name a common garden variety which will not thrive on the glades.

As to the production of rice, sugarcane and tobacco the prospects are not so bright for the *small* farmer. They will no doubt all grow well in the Everglades region. In the case of rice considerable capital is necessary in order to compete with Texas and Louisiana, where machinery has materially lessened the cost of production. There is a large rice eating population throughout the world, and although the price may be low the demand is unlimited.

The development of sugar estates requires much capital, but the system of sugar production may change. Experiments along this line are now in progress in Cuba. The plan is to shred the cane, drying it and baling it with the sugar in it. In this form it is shipped to northern refineries. Thus handled they are able to get more sugar out of it and the bagasse which is left is fit for the manufacture of a coarse grade of paper. If this new system proves successful one farmer or at most half a dozen farmers could afford the necessary machinery and raise

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cane profitably even if there is not a big sugar factory in the vicinity.

Tobacco will no doubt grow in the Everglades, but I have never seen it tried to any extent. It is quite possible that it might be successful and yield a leaf of superior quality or something out of the ordinary like the Perique of Louisiana.

Cotton may also prove a valuable crop. The climate surely suits it and I have seen it growing elsewhere on soils of a similar nature.

Bananas may be successfully grown. The Cavendish variety seems best suited for the purpose. There need never be starvation in a region where bananas will grow. It is certainly one of the most wonderful food producers of the world. It has been grown successfully and of delicious flavor on the edge of the glades for years. It continually produces food from the same root and after the bunch is cut the chickens will completely consume the succulent stem and leaves.

The Everglades will grow many of the vegetables and forage crops of the North in midwinter, and in addition a long list of tropical trees, fruits and vegetables which cannot be grown elsewhere in our country, some of which are well known, but many kinds have yet to be tested. In another article I will mention some of the most promising of these, since in addition to food many of these tropical plants yield medicines, gums, perfumes, dyes, tanning materials, cabinet woods, etc., of more or less value to mankind.

All that part of Florida south of Ft. Lauderdale is tropical and has a tropical flora. It is the only part of the United States where the mango, avocado, sapodilla, anonas, etc., thrive and although many of these tropical fruits ripen in the summer time, they may be preserved no doubt into midwinter by cold storage.

The territory toward Cape Sable (Lower Glades) is still a wild and unreclaimed region. Its development has just begun, although its possibilities may be unlimited. The whole country needs people and capital, coupled with active enterprise. The tide is moving Southward and it is human nature to follow the crowd. Some will not stay and some will not succeed. Home-

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sickness has killed more soldiers than bullets. Some people cannot cut loose from old associations and are not fitted for the life of pioneers. Others love it and are stimulated and improved by it. Only a certain percentage can succeed at agriculture, anyway, anywhere, since although it is the most important, it is at the same time the most intricate of all professions. One must also have foresight and business ability to fight against soulless transportation companies and tricky middlemen. If one cannot prosper in agriculture in Southern Florida, there is little hope elsewhere in this line.

The newcomer cannot freeze to death, and unless hampered by illness and dire misfortune he cannot starve, because wild in the woods is *comptie* or *coontie*, a plant which yields a starch equal in quality to sago. This still serves people in remote districts and was at one time the mainstay of the settler. The waters teem with fish, and poultry thrives.

Although in the beginning there may be isolation and discomfort, the man who works can make a living and a home such as cannot be made elsewhere in the United States in the same length of time and with the same amount of capital.

One thing is certain, if one is in search of a tropical climate and a place to grow tropical crops, he will settle in Southern Florida or go out of the United States, and if he goes out of the United States he will have to face conditions and people with which he is not familiar, and to which he can never become wholly reconciled and there will always lurk in him a desire to return to his country and his kind.