

# FARMER AND PLANTER.

## ANTI-CASH RENT CRUSADE.

A Question that is Agitating the Land Owners and Tenants of Texas—The Situation from the Tenants' Standpoint.

DALLAS, Tex., Nov. 28.—No mutual protective movement in Texas has grown more rapidly or spread to larger limits in recent years than that now forming among the farm renters. This statement came from one of the leaders of the movement to substitute crop shares for cash rent. This leader, speaking of the movement, said: "These men have a lesser proportion of prosperity to show for their year's work in 1897 than any other of the population of this state. More than one-half the cultivated farm lands in Texas are under the rent system. The custom has been to lease the lands on the cash-rent basis, at a certain price per acre, to be paid in money by the tenant to the land owner. This system has proven disastrous for the tenant this year. Not one renter in fifty has so much as a dollar left to show for his year's industry. No matter how much land he may have cultivated, or how bountiful may have been the yield in his crops, the land owner and the merchant who has carried him for supplies have taken practically all he possessed in settlement of his debts; and perhaps they have not been fully settled at that. When the tenant states his side of the causes for this condition, conscientious, disinterested minds do not hesitate to conclude that his side is the only one there is with merit in it, and no one is surprised at the widespread agitation that the cash-rent system has so suddenly precipitated in Texas.

“Take this year’s experiences of the renters as an illustration of a condition that has long existed in the agricultural sections of the state, with unsatisfactory results for them at all times, but absolute disaster this year. The tenant farmer contracts with the land owner in the winter or spring, at an agreed price per acre, to be paid when the crops are harvested and marketed, the date of settlement usually being fixed for not later than October or November.

“The bargain is a clear and safe one for the land owner, but the tenant farmer is ‘going it blind.’ This year, when contracts were made, the ‘prosperity’ promises were ringing in the tenant farmer’s ears. He had visions of the high-priced cotton—not less than seven cents, and perhaps as much as ten cents per pound—for the crop of 1897. He contracted his cash-rent promises on the basis of this mental calculation. In the spring he pictured himself a man with a bank account to his credit in the fall; now he finds himself on the verge of pauperism, although he has been industrious and practiced self-denial in the matter of home economy all the season. He is desperate. The ten-cent cotton vision of the spring has changed to a five-cent cotton reality in the fall. The profits of his crop have not netted him more money than his cash-rent contract with his landlord calls for, and having paid his debt he finds himself ‘broke.’

"Collectively, the tenant farmer in Texas, during the last 60 days, has started on a gigantic crusade. He announces himself as a reformer. He has raised the banner of anti-cash rent. He has taken on his platform the time-honored aphorism: 'Self-preservation is the first law of nature.' Acting on this maxim, he has become active to the point of dangerous aggressiveness in certain instances. These instances are the individual exceptions to the course pursued by the collective tenantry. They have been characterized by whitecap outrages, in which a few men have been whipped, one or two shot, and numerous threats made in writing to poison wells and cisterns, to sow lands in Johnson grass and to burn buildings, in the event of cash-rent contracts being made in the future. But the bulk of the agitation in this tenant-farmer crusade has been conducted on higher and broader methods. It has been given the character of a living issue, a movement to attract public attention and enlist public sympathy. Mass meetings have been held in fully 100 farming communities. Organizations have been perfected on the anti-cash rent foundation, the general name adopted being the 'Cotton Growers' Protective association.' The policy generally adopted has been to indorse substituting the crop-share system for the cash-rent system. This would make the land owner a profit-and-loss partner with the tenant farmer. The rental terms offered are one-third the grain and one-fourth the cotton raised. This would make the land owner directly interested with the tenant farmer in procuring a top-notch price for the products when marketed, and stop the tendency to force the tenant farmer

into the market to sell at whatever price he could get in order to procure means with which to pay his landlord the money called for in the cash-rent contract. After settlement the tenant farmer would be more likely to have something beside poverty or pauperism as an asset.

"At many of these meetings resolutions have been adopted calling for state legislation to better the condition of the farm tenantry. One legislative relief usually demanded is the repeal of the law permitting the mortgaging of crops, stock and implements to procure credit with merchants. It is conceded by the advocates of repeal that it would, for a year or two work widespread hardship to the tenantry, but in the end it would prove a blessing. It would inaugurate economy in debt-contracting and stimulate the raising on the farm of many articles of living now purchased on credit at double prices from the tenant-carrying merchant, who, of necessity, is often very much of a Shylock.

"Land owners, for self-interest, have generally dictated to the tenant-farmer what the latter should raise on his rented land. They have confined the cultivation almost exclusively to cotton. This insures the land owner his rent money, even if the price of cotton is so low as to leave nothing for anything else. It is reasoned that cotton in Texas can be 'banked on' as a sure crop, year in and year out, whether other crops are failures or not. The land-owner cares little whether cotton is high or low. All he is interested in is his rent money. Cotton is always sure to bring him that much. Selfishness, totally devoid of philanthropy or progress, is his guide. This policy will explain to the outside world why so much cotton and so little grain is grown in Texas. It is

the true answer to the question so persistently propounded from the uninformed outside: 'Why doesn't Texas diversify its crops?' It is simply because the landowners, as a class will not permit the tenant-farmers to do it.

"But the tenant-farmer is beginning to have something to say under this head. At the Cotton Growers' Protective association meetings being held all over the state, among the resolutions usually adopted is one something like this:

"That the landlords be prevailed upon to permit us to so divide our crops as to plant not more than two-thirds of the land rented in cotton, that each renter be allowed to sow five acres of wheat to every 25 acres cultivated by him. If this policy can be made a general one it will not be long before Texas will at least double her grain-growing acreage.

"An erroneous impression prevails largely outside of Texas concerning the personnel of its tenant-farmers. The idea is that most of them are shiftless and thriftless negroes, who rent from rich land-owners and confine their energies to the hand-to-mouth limit. This is not the case. The great mass of the tenant-farmers of Texas, particularly in the rich and populous northern and central sections of the state, are sober, intelligent and industrious white men. They are not types of the natural-born nomad species, so familiar in early days, with decrepit prairie schooners, bone-factory teams and a long enrollment of 'yaller' dogs. They are good, average American citizens. But they, their wives and their children are pitiable representatives of poverty's partiality. None has a word

to say against Texas soil, Texas climate, Texas health or Texas management of public affairs. All have one grievance, however--'low cotton and cash rent.' They would go back and spend the winter in the old home in the old states. If the new movement for crop-share rent should be accepted by the landlords they would come back to Texas next spring; if it should not, they would stay away.

"The land-owners have not been heard from as a class on the demands of the tenants. They don't need to hurry. Crops don't grow in the winter. It is a long season till cotton-planting time in 1898. They have, as a rule, collected all the cash rent that was owing to them in 1897. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof' appears to be their motto. But if they do not heed the warnings going up from every county in Texas, the unripe threats of sowing Johnson grass and burning buildings may ripen into lawless action on the part of the more desperate element in the spring to come. Already Gov. Culberson has called on Attorney-General Crane for opinions on the laws covering threats made by white caps and kindred peace disturbers. This shows how seriously the situation is viewed through official eyes, under certain contingencies."

### Feed the Land and It Will Feed You.

The importance of having the greatest possible quantity of manure is generally understood by farmers, even when they fail to give proper attention to the matter. Every crop taken from the land, every pound of meat sold from the farm, represents an ascertainable amount of fertility withdrawn. And none will deny that we can not continue to draw from the soil without making returns, any more than we can draw on the bank without making deposits. The best blooded cow ever stabled could not furnish rich milk upon a diet of straw. Now the bank that never fails and can not be broken, is nature, and if we make the necessary deposits of fertilizing matter into the soil we can be sure of getting back the principal with good interest. A good crop of wheat—say 25 bushels—has taken out of the soil in the form of straw about 16 pounds nitrogen, 23.2 pounds potash and 10.4 pounds of phosphoric acid; in the form of grain 27 pounds nitrogen, 8.1 pounds potash and 12 pounds of phosphoric acid, making a total drain of 43 pounds nitrogen, 31.3 pounds potash and 22.4 pounds phosphoric acid. It will take three tons of good, unleached barnyard manure to restore these elements to the soil. Our richest soils can not endure such drains for many years without knowing it. Our uplands have, to a great extent, been so impoverished that it will cost the value of the land to restore them to their original vigor, and our wonderful bottoms, although frequently enriched by floods and clover, do not yield as heavy as when they were new. When farmers pay as much attention to raising the greatest quantity of manure of highest quality, it will be a comparatively easy matter to raise premium crops. Feed your land and it will feed you.—Indiana Observer