

MECHANICAL METHODS OF HANDLING COTTON

The mechanical process of harvesting cotton not yet having been entirely perfected, a fantastic experiment was tried on some plantations near Natchez, Mississippi. Monkeys were trained to act as pickers. But the great problem can hardly be said to have been solved by them.

There is, however, a machine which does the work of picking, with a certain amount of success. It is the Mason Cotton Picker. This machine runs astride of a cotton row. As it proceeds, two vertical cylinders revolve. There are fingers which go around with the cylinders, revolving at the same time on their own axes, by a mechanical device. The fingers are punched so that little teeth stand up from their surface, "engaging" the cotton. This motion is reversed at a certain point, and the picked cotton is carried to a bag by a "conveyor." To pick the seed-cotton contained in a bale weighing five hundred pounds, costs from seven dollars and one-half to fifteen dollars. An enormous saving might be effected here. Although the Mason machine picks cotton in a remarkable way, yet the cleaning of the cotton after the picking remains, forming a large item of expense.

The moment the seed-cotton reaches the gin, different conditions prevail, the negro no longer being so prominent. The science of ginning, pressing, and marketing the cotton has reached an extraordinary degree of development. Eli Whitney was the best friend the industrial South ever had. The roller compress, turning out the round bale, instead of the square bale produced by the former compresses, is attracting a good deal of attention, something of a war raging between the two interests. By either system, the bale takes up about half the space afforded by the use of the ancient methods, with the advantages of being more easily handled, involving less danger from fire, and greater resistance to the weather. The saving in freight and insurance has been incalculable. And there is less risk from deterioration, in case the farmer desires to retain the baled cotton in his possession.