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The Cold and the Cane

Numbers of our Louisiana sugar planters of the ancient regime were wont to maintain that severe cold spell in the month of January was rather beneficial than injurious to the cane crop. Of course this claim was partly based on the assumption that after such cold spell average normal conditions should prevail during the remainder of the winter, that the fall planting had been placed deep enough in the furrows to escape freezing, and that the seed cane had been properly put up and covered, whether in the old-style mat or the modern windrow.

The foundations for this theory among many of the old planters, which likewise held by numerous younger ones of this progressive era in cane culture, were that severe midwinter cold killed the above ground or surface eyes, which otherwise were apt to sprout first in the spring at the expense of the much more valuable deeply-rooted eyes which gave far more vigorous and heavy ratoons for the succeeding harvest. Next, according to the stated claim the midwinter seed cane was kept comparatively dormant, where its preservation was much more certain than with its untimely sprouting through warmth and the rotting of the germinated shoots under their deep covering. The last assumed benefit of a hard midwinter freeze, particularly after a rain, was in the more perfect pulverization or comminution of the soil-particles through the freezing expansion of the water in the ground.

The last assumption has passed the limits of theory among agriculturists of all conditions and kinds. The freezing of fallow or fall-plowed lands has long been practically known to increase their friability and capacity for atmospheric and moisture absorption, and to facilitate their work of cultivation to a considerable extent, this being notably the case with stiff lands.

While there have been numerous unreasonable and sensational newspaper reports as to the damage to our cane crop caused by the recent cold spell such reports are not likely to be the least warranted by the real conditions. In the post-bellum history of our Louisiana sugar industry we have had probably a score of January and February freezes just as severe as that of the third and fourth mornings of the present month; and within the past ten years we have been visited by several of greater severity.

In 1895 we had in the middle of February a foot of snow over New Orleans and the entire sugar region of Louisiana, under which the seed cane made good and a fair stubble crop was made in the majority of our sugar parishes. In 1899 the sugar region was visited by a blizzard on the 12th, 13th and 14th of Feb. in which the mercury went down to minus zero in the upper parishes of the sugar belt, and to plus 6 degrees in the parish of Plaquemines forty miles below this city.

Of course the sugar crop of this state was utterly destroyed, in the newspaper promptly after the unprecedented February blizzard of 1899. But strange to say most of the seed cane came safely through that hard ordeal

and, stranger to say the plant cane crop on numerous plantations of Plaquemines Parish have the heaviest tonnage to the acre ever known when harvested that year for the mill; and our Louisiana sugar crop has survived and extended further north in the twelve years that have gone since the advent and the passing of the coldest weather ever known in the State of Louisiana since the dawning of its colonial history more than two centuries ago.

That the snowstorm of 1895 and the blizzard of 1899 did temporary injury to our sugar crop goes without saying. Neither of them came anywhere near destroying it; and the damage sustained fell immeasurably below the fears of the public press and of the people most concerned.

Taking minus 00 in the Northern parishes of the sugar belt and plus 60 in the most southern parishes, and we strike a probable general average of 30 above Fahrenheit for the entire sugar region of this State in February 1899.

That general average is about 15 or 16 degrees below that of the recent January cold (and there have been numerous colder ones than that of last week, which have passed over the sugar region in midwinter causing little comment and far less anxiety among the people experienced in and directly connected with the sugar industry of this State.

The fact is that the severe cold spell of last week can neither be classed with the unexpected, the abnormal, nor the disastrous, as far as our sugar industry is concerned. In the sporting vernacular such conditions, which have been so often repeated, are "part of the game." They have come and gone with little or no subsequent effect, as the recent one will have if the subsequent winter prove favorable to the plant-cane and the stubble already in the ground, and to the seed cane lying snugly in the windrows with ample dirt-covering to protect it from a greater extreme of cold.

A normal winter from now to its end, and an early or fairly propitious spring; no one will know by the beginning of next May that the sugar region was visited by an average winter blizzard during the first two or three days of the year.

Perhaps it would be a waste of time to inform the newspaper farmers that the blizzard of last October, whose bad effects they so belittled, (even going so far as to claim that it was beneficial to the bud-killed and top-frozen cane affected), was incalculably more injurious to our sugar interests than that of last week could ever possibly be. That October cold wave cost the sugar planting business several million dollars, and destroyed the seed supply of men who recently commenced cane planting before it was cut.

With a good average planting and cultivating season from now until the next harvest time our recent January freeze is unlikely to have damaged to the extent of a dollar the sugar planters who have their fall planting, stubble and seed cane under the usual reasonable conditions to stand the severe cold usually prepared for with the coming of the midwinter.—The Louisiana Planter and Sugar Manufacturer.

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Wind-Power Drainage

In the new projects and enterprises now proposed or in process of operation in reclaiming and draining the millions of acres of our Louisiana Wet Lands recently purchased, or at present under negotiation, the problem of economical drainage must play a prominent part.

In some respects a large part of the Louisiana lowland under consideration is similar to that of Holland. The land surface is level, the area contains a considerable number of shallow lakes, the soil of most of it is composed of delta deposits, and part of that area is below the level of flood tides of the sea.

But in the comparison the Louisiana Wet Lands show two great advantages over the low lands of Holland. In normal high sea-tides the parts of the Louisiana marsh and swamp lands submergible are never immersed by more than a few inches, while those of Holland normally subjected to overflow from the tides of the North Sea by a greater number of feet. Hence the necessary tidal defenses of the Dutch dikes have been and must be many time as wide and high and probably a hundred times as costly as the levees required in Louisiana to keep the Gulf-tides off of the lowlands. In the case of the Louisiana lowlands an average size dredge-boat, moving at the rate of a mile progressively a month, and building levees at the cost of a few cents a cubic yard, may form perfect embankments to protect the lands from the normal sea-tides. While centuries of time and countless treasures of money have been required to construct the massive, stone-faced dikes that defend the low-lying fields and meadows of Holland against the flood-tides and storm waves of the boisterous and turbulent North Sea.

The other principal advantage of the Louisiana Wet Lands as compared with those of Holland lies in the infinitely superior fertility and natural productiveness of the former, which mostly lie around one of the greatest silt-bearing rivers of the world.

In the reclamation of our Louisiana Wet Lands, after they have been leveed and canalled, (to coin the latter word), artificial drainage must be the next imperative demand. There are numbers of modern steam-pumping appliances for moving enormous masses of water now being employed for drainage and irrigation in this State. Of the comparative superiority or economy of these more modern water-lifting machines the Louisiana Planter is not at present prepared to speak. Their direct and relative work is so marvelous in amount that months of close observation would be required to decide which was the best and cheapest of them. None of them ever constructed can exceed the capacity of the primitive old steam-driven water-wheel in lifting water four or five feet. But, as the foundation masonry of those most powerful old drainage plants costs nearly or quite as much as the modern pumping plants of a similar water-moving capacity, in considering artificial drainage, nowadays, the under-shot water-wheel is relegated to the past.

But, harking back to Holland again, the Dutch marabes, and
(Continued on second page.)

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26	"	"	N	"	25c	"	"
34	"	"	D	"	30c	"	"
42	"	"	D	"	35c	"	"
42	"	"	I	"	75c	"	"
58	"	"	D	"	45c	"	"
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Franklinton, Louisiana

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