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WHAT I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED

BY JOHN CLOSNER

The Achievements of a Pioneer Rio Grande Farmer,
Told in His Own Words and In His Own Way.

(EDITOR'S NOTE—Mr. Closner's recital of his farming experience in the lower Rio Grande Valley is fascinating; indeed, surpassingly so. Fifteen years ago he made his way into that wilderness, a poor man, but with the aid of the wonderfully fertile soil of that favored region and the life-giving waters of the Rio Grande, he is today one of the most substantial men in South Texas. He has demonstrated, beyond peradventure, the fact that the lower Rio Grande valley is the premier sugar cane and alfalfa country of the continent. Given the same intelligent energy, any other man can do what Mr. Closner has done, provided he goes to the Rio Grande Valley to do it.)

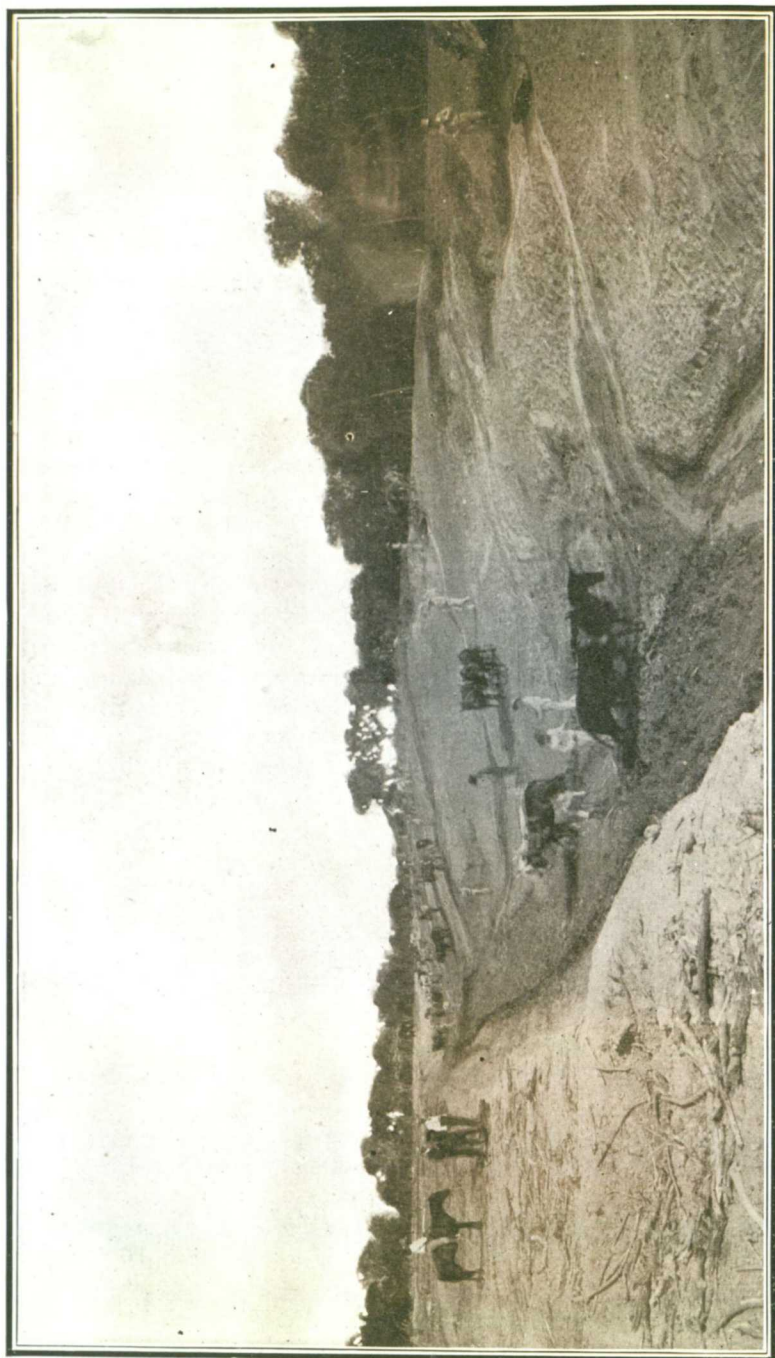


SCARCELY a day passes that I do not receive from one to a half dozen letters from strangers, usually farmers, making inquiries about this particular section of Texas. "How is your climate? what are the conditions making for health and sickness? what educational advantages does your county offer? what are the crops best adapted to the soil, and their probable yield?" etc., etc. These are sample questions contained in such letters and the kind that I have been trying to answer by personal letter during the past few months. But as time passes the task seems to grow; therefore, in justice to myself as well as for a clearer understanding of those interested in learning more about this wonderful country, and others who may care to know something of my own experience as a lower Rio Grande farmer, I have decided to address an open letter to all and every such inquirer; and everybody else with eyes and thoughts right now focused on this old, but newly discovered Eldorado, through the columns of your widely read magazine.

It is only natural that I should wish to preface this brief article with the statement that I am just a plain, every-day farmer, unused to the arts of dressing a subject in literary frills and furbelows.

A traveler, recently, in New Zealand, writing to a St. Louis paper, said that, to tell only the naked truth about the wonders of that far away land, of the marvelous fertility and richness of its soil, made more scoffers and skeptics than true believers. For instance, who is it that can or cares to swallow that writer's statement to the effect that 245 tons—tons, mind you! not mere bushels—was the yield in turnips from one acre of land. It is all right for me to say that I believe the story, having lived on the Lower Rio Grande, and seen things grow. I am a living witness of results, not in the matter of turnips, though, but in the production of onions and other growths equally as startling.

My personal experience as a farmer, in Hidalgo county, dates from the year 1894. At that time I purchased a few acres of land, of what at present forms a part of my "San Juan" plantation, located on the Rio Grande, six miles below the town of Hidalgo, the county seat. I farmed that year without irrigation, but the season proving fairly propitious, I succeeded far beyond my expectations. As an experiment I tried planting two acres in Irish potatoes and about as much land in Bermuda onions.



Constructing the Main Artery of the American Rio Grande Land and Irrigation Company's Irrigation System, a Syndicate which is Putting
100,000 Acres of Rio Grande Valley Land Under Canal.

The yield from both crops was simply enormous! There was no time for weighing and measuring. In those days railroads were not dreamed of in this part of the country, and my nearest market was Rio Grande City, 50 miles distant, and Brownsville, 60 miles away, in an opposite direction, was my next nearest. I shipped four large wagonloads of potatoes to Rio Grande City and a like quantity to Brownsville, while bushels upon bushels were given away to near neighbors. Yet, of all sold and given away, still more of them rotted; both potatoes and onions. The smell of decaying onions and potatoes pervaded the air around about San Juan for weeks.

The same year I planted about 40 acres in corn, in the same field. The average all over the field was about the same. I had one acre carefully



PHOTO BY WHEELUS

Easter Lillies in a Brownsville Garden.

measured and the corn therefrom gathered. This one acre turned out 76 barrels in the shuck, one barrel in the shuck equaling 56 pounds of shell corn. My watermelon crop was also very good, many of the melons weighing as much as 50 and 60 pounds, and deliciously sweet.

SUGAR.

The following year I installed a small irrigating plant and commenced the cultivation of sugar cane. My seed came from directly across the river from Hidalgo, in Mexico, and I planted, approximately, 12 acres. The acreage was gradually increased, year by year, until now I have about 300 acres under cultivation and irrigation.

For the first three years I was without facilities for making white sugar, and so made, or manufactured, Mexican piloncilla, commonly

called by the American but lately arrived, "peloncy." They are small, hard cakes, cone shaped, weighing about one pound each, and are made by pouring the hot syrup—liquid sugar—into clay molds. I found this crude process of making sugar, an inferior grade of brown sugar at that, tedious, vexatious, slow and entirely unsatisfactory, with but little profit to the maker. The fourth year, however, I was to the fore with new and up-to-date machinery for the manufacture of a high grade sugar.

During the past six years I have cut on an average 35 tons of cane to the acre, which means 6,500 pounds of refined sugar for each and every acre planted. From personal observation and experience as a grower of cane in the valley of the Rio Grande (of Hidalgo county), I deem it expedient, as well as profitable, to replant every six years, but not oftener. Deterioration in growth and saccharine matter commences surely, and is marked after the sixth year. The yield of sugar is greater from the second to fifth year of the cane's life, from one planting.

The cost of irrigating does not exceed five dollars per acre. I have never found it necessary to cut and "windrow" my cane on account of the cold and frosts. I marketed all my sugar at fair prices within a few miles of the mill, and could have disposed of much more.

ALFALFA.

I have planted and under cultivation at the present time about 300 acres of alfalfa. I cut it eight or nine times every year, which averages one ton per cutting the first two years. There is a gradual increase in the yield after the second year. It is in its prime from the fourth to twelfth year. From my crop, planted three and four years ago, I am cutting from $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons per acre per cutting. I find a ready sale for it at \$12.00 a ton, of 2,000 pounds, f. o. b. cars at MacAllen, on railroad, eight miles distant. I supply the local trade with quite a large quantity at the same price.

The cost of irrigating alfalfa is about two dollars more, an acre, than for cane. The profits are large, being from \$50 to \$60 an acre.

For the growing and curing of this wonderful stock food, no better section or portion of the world can be found than right here in Hidalgo county, in the valley of the Rio Grande. It would be mere repetition of a hackneyed, but nevertheless true, expression to say that there is no more fertile land on this side of the far famed valley of the Nile than ours, while climatic conditions make it the ideal spot for curing and saving this best of grasses. It is corn, fodder and oats all in one. With rains at infrequent intervals and the prevailing winds from the south-east—blowing fresh and cool from the gulf—is the making of that dry, rarefied quality of atmosphere for perfect curing. The original color, a bright, rich and life-like green, is retained in every bale cured and marketed.

CORN.

I have planted in corn about 125 acres. In the beginning of this article, I stated that I gathered from a single acre of non-irrigated land seventy-six bushels. Such yields are exceptional, however, even under favorable conditions. By irrigation I am certain of two crops a year, of forty to fifty bushels per acre, for each planting, one acre producing each year 80 to 100 bushels. I am unable to supply the local demand at 50 and 75 cents a bushel.

Of kaffir corn, sorghum and millet, I have been in the habit of putting in cultivation every year a few acres only, but with most flattering results, when irrigated. To mention the results for a single year of planting either of the last mentioned fodders would be doing violence to the reader's credulity.

It should be borne in mind that I am writing only of those things which have come under my own personal observation, statements of fact being backed by tests of practical experiment.

ONIONS.

There was planted on my San Juan place last year, thirty-three acres, more or less, of onions, of the Bermuda variety. The land was new, having been cleared, grubbed and plowed immediately prior to planting. I have not the figures at hand of the exact yield in pounds of the whole thirty-three acres, but the results from a single acre I do know. The ground was measured off and the onions that were gathered and weighed aggregated 25,000 pound. The entire crop realized a net profit of \$10,000. This statement is authentic and easy of verification. About all the difference, if any, in growing onions in Hidalgo county and elsewhere is, that Hidalgo makes more per acre, perhaps.

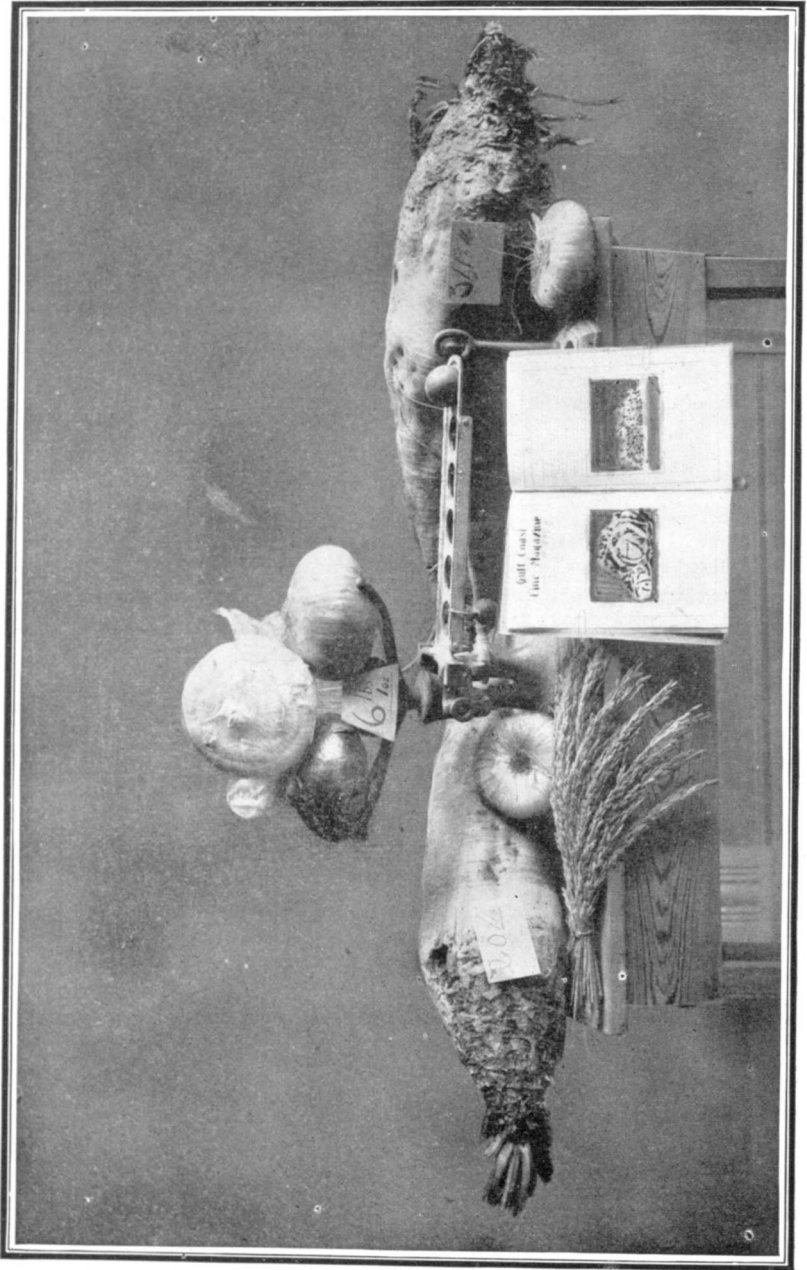
FRUITS AND NUTS.

I have in Smyrna figs five acres, pecans twenty acres, and twenty acres in walnuts and other nut trees. These are all plantings from trees 2 to 3 years old. They are in a most flourishing condition, and though planted as an experiment, at first, I am encouraged in the belief that I will soon have a little bonanza.

Four years ago I sold from one and a half acres of bananas \$300 worth of the fruit.

Certain crops, which I do not plant, such as cotton, beans, peas, sweet potatoes and peanuts, but which are raised by my neighbors, thrive exceedingly well, especially cotton. I dare say, the yield on the Rio Grande equals the biggest crops grown in the bottoms of the Brazos river, with the added merit of a better and finer staple, worth more by one cent the pound in all the markets of the world.

The cost of clearing river land here is about \$6.00 per acre. Our field labor is Mexican, and I consider it above fair. Good farm hands are plentiful at 50 cents per diem, the year round.



Prodigious Specimens of Southwest Texas Products.

The same river lands which were a drug on the market three and four years ago at 50 cents, 75 cents and \$1.00 an acre cannot be had today under \$10 and \$25.

As an evidence of the newly awakened power, of push and progress in the erstwhile sleepy valley of the old Rio Bravo, I have but to mention the fact that, less than three years since, there were only three pumping plants between Hidalgo and Brownsville, a distance of sixty miles. At present there are fourteen in number in operation and under construction. One of those under construction will have such vast pumping capacity as to all but stagger the human mind—270,000 gallons a minute! Think of it! A veritable river itself, bodily lifted, as it were, from the channel of the Rio Grande and made to run wheresoever the mind of man will, to make fruitful, to blossom and bloom as the roses of my fair lady's garden, thousands upon thousands of acres of what has been for centuries a desert waste!

In conclusion, I would say that for men possessed of modest means and filled with energy to do and perform things, there is health, a home and happiness in Hidalgo county for 10,000 of them and their families.

“EVIDENCE ENOUGH.”

An Irishman brought before the Justice of the Peace on a charge of vagrancy, was thus questioned:

“What trade do you follow?”

“Shure, yer honor, I'm a sailor,” Pat made answer.

“What! You a seafaring man? I doubt whether you were ever at sea in your life!” exclaimed the irate Justice.

“Shure, and does yer honor think I came over from Ireland in a wagin?” grinned Pat.

