

between his own estate and his neighbor's, tries
a notion" in the old-time farmer's head:

"Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself.

To persuade our neighbor to say it "for himself" is surely
the most considerable task of all. Its exacting conditions
are apparent to the farmer in Home Burial:

We could have some arrangement
By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off
Anything special you're a mind to name.
Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.
Two that don't love can't live together without them.
But two that do can't live together with them.

'Massacring Whites' in Arkansas

By WALTER F. WHITE

EARLY in October the report was spread broadcast in
this country that Negroes in Phillips County, Arkansas,
had organized to massacre the whites. A group of Negro
farmers, members of the Progressive Farmers and House-
hold Union of America, were charged with having plotted
insurrection, with "night riding," with the intention to
take over the land of the white men after the owners had
been massacred. Investigation has thrown a searching light
upon these stories and has revealed that the Negro farmers
had organized not to massacre, but to protest by peaceful
and legal means against vicious exploitation by unscrupu-
lous landowners and their agents.

On October 1, W. D. Adkins, a special agent of the Mis-
souri Pacific Railroad, in company with Charles Pratt, a
deputy sheriff, and a Negro trusty were driving past a
Negro church near Hoop Spur, a small community in Phil-
lips County. According to Pratt, persons in the church
fired without cause on the party, killing Adkins and wound-
ing Pratt. According to testimony of persons in the church,
however, Adkins and Pratt fired into the church, apparently
to frighten the Negroes gathered. The fire was returned
with the casualties noted. Whatever the facts may be, this
incident started four days of rioting. Negroes were dis-
armed and arrested, while their arms were given to whites
who hastened to the community from Mississippi, Arkansas,
and Tennessee; Federal troops were called from Camp Pike;
Negroes who had taken refuge in the canebrakes were
hunted down and killed; and the final death roll showed five
whites and twenty-five Negroes killed, although some place
the Negro fatalities as high as one hundred.

According to the facts gathered on the scene, the purpose
and plan of the organization was as follows: The Progres-
sive Farmers and Household Union of America came into
being in order to combat a system of exploitation known as
"share-cropping," which has served for half a century as a
convenient means of gaining wealth by many whites with-
out the inconvenient necessity of working. This system will
be described later. Organized at Winchester, Drew County,
the articles of incorporation were drawn by Williamson and
Williamson of Monticello, white men and ex-slaveholders.
These articles were filed in due legal form with the county
clerk at Winchester, the county seat. Branches or lodges
were to be formed in other communities, and it was hoped
that the movement would spread to all parts of the South,
as the economic exploitation pictured below existed in
all of them. The Farmers Union was in the form of a fra-
ternal organization or secret order because the State tax
for such an organization is much lower than for any other
and because the veil of secrecy with passwords and grips

and insignia appealed to the untutored minds of most of
the members. Each male member was to pay \$1.50 and each
female fifty cents. The money thus collected was to go into
a common fund to be used to employ a lawyer to make a
test *in court* of cases where Negroes were unable to secure
settlements.

A careful examination of the literature of the organiza-
tion does not reveal the "dastardly" plot which has been
charged. The organization was declared to be for the pur-
pose of "advancing the intellectual, material, moral, spiritual,
and financial interests of the Negro race." Applicants for
membership had to answer under oath such questions as
"Do you believe in God?" "Do you attend church?" "Do
you believe in courts?" and "Will you defend this Govern-
ment and her Constitution at all times?" There is nothing
in any of the literature seen or published which indicates
any other motive than that of aspiring towards the securing
of relief from exploitation.

A "Committee of Seven" composed of white citizens of
Helena held hearings for the purpose of determining the
facts in the case. At least two members of that commit-
tee are plantation owners themselves. According to two
sources of information, when suspects were brought before
this committee they were seated in a chair charged with elec-
tricity. If the Negroes did not talk as freely as the Com-
mittee wished, the current was turned on until they did so.
This committee has declared that it secured many confes-
sions from Negro suspects, but so far as could be learned
none of the details of these confessions has been published.

The cause of the Phillips County trouble, according to
Governor Charles H. Brough, was the circulation of what he
considers incendiary Negro publications like *The Crisis*, the
official organ of the National Association for the Advance-
ment of Colored People. Having been a professor of eco-
nomics for seventeen years before becoming Governor, it
is incredible that he is ignorant of the exploitation of Ne-
groes in his State. It is also reasonable to believe that
Governor Brough should know that no publication would
have much chance of creating unrest and discontent among
contented, justly treated people. A further fact for con-
sideration is that 78.6 per cent. of the population of Phil-
lips County is Negro—the actual figures being: white, 7,176;
colored, 26,354. With the whites outnumbered almost four
to one, it appears that the fatalities would have been differ-
ently proportioned if a well-planned murder plot had ex-
isted among the Negroes.

Now, as to the facts regarding the share-cropping system
which caused the alleged "massacre." Theoretically, under
the system the owner furnishes the land, the share-cropper

the labor, and at the end of the year the crop is divided share and share alike. From the share-cropper's portion is deducted the amount received by him in supplies during the year, in most cases these supplies being "taken up" either at a plantation store or commissary, or from a merchant designated by the owner or his agent. In practice the system for the past fifty years has worked out in such manner that the crop, when gathered, is taken by the landowner and sold by him, and settlement is made with the share-cropper whenever and at whatever terms the landowner chooses to give. Instead of an itemized statement of the supplies received, in most cases only a statement of the total is given. Since there is an unwritten law which is rigidly observed that no Negro can leave a plantation until his debt is paid, the owner, by padding the accounts of Negroes to the point where the "balance due" always exceeds the value of the crop, can assure his labor supply for the following year.

Of this system, W. T. B. Williams says in a report of the United States Department of Labor on "Negro Migration in 1916-17," published in 1919: "Many of the Negro tenants feel that it makes little difference what part of the crop is promised them, the white man gets it all anyway." Of the plan of many owners of taking all of the cotton seed, *The Charlotte Observer* says: "If, as it is represented, it is the custom of the farmers not to divide the cotton seed with the Negro tenant, then a hitherto undiscussed cause of grievance is brought to light and reveals an injustice to the Negro that no landowner can defend." An average bale of cotton weighs five hundred pounds, the price at this writing being about forty-three cents per pound. For every bale there is about one half-ton of seed, which brings between \$68 and \$70 per ton.

A white Southerner writing in *The Memphis Commercial Appeal* of January 26, 1919, frankly states:

In certain parts of the South men who consider themselves men of honor and would exact a bloody expiation of one who should characterize them as common cheats do not hesitate to boast that they rob the Negroes by purchasing their cotton at prices that are larcenous, by selling goods to them at extortionate figures and even by padding their accounts with a view of keeping them always in debt. Men of this stripe have been known to lament that in the last two years the Negroes have been so prosperous that it has not been possible to filch from them all they make.

A protest from a Negro against tactics of this kind is met with a threat of force. Justice at the hands of a white jury in sections where this practice obtains is inconceivable. Even an attempt to carry the matter into the courts is usually provocative of violence.

While the conditions described are not universal, they are typical, especially in the delta regions where large plantations prevail. If they are to be remedied, we of the South must clear our minds of cant and realize that they do exist.

So much for the general system. A few instances of how the system works in Arkansas taken from actual court records and from conversation with share-croppers, owners, and agents will give an idea of what Negroes suffer and desire to end. Organization was imperative, for there have been numerous lynchings when Negroes have dared to protest as individuals against such practices.

One case that is specially clear because of the contrast is that of two Negro share-croppers, one of whom rented from a white landlord and the other from a colored one. Both made fourteen bales of cotton, and each was entitled to seven bales as his share. For convenience the first farmer

will be known as A; the second as B. In A's family were seven members, two of them infants. In B's there were five, all adults. A's landlord took all his cotton seed and declared that he had sold the cotton at fourteen cents per pound, although cotton in the open market was at that time selling at twenty-eight cents. A received \$490 and was presented with a bill for supplies of \$853, leaving him in debt the following year to the extent of \$363, which was reduced to \$340 when his landlord with great magnanimity "allowed" him \$23 as he "is a good nigger and needs encouragement."

B sold his cotton, and with the seed received \$1,214.50 for it, to which was added \$187.50 for 150 bushels of corn which he had raised in addition to the cotton. B's bill for supplies for the year was \$175, although he received more supplies and of a better quality than A. He thus cleared \$1,227, while A came out \$340 in debt. A's landlord went to B's and told him that he had to change his method "or we won't be able to handle these niggers around here."

Another case was that of a colored man who had made a crop worth \$1,260, received goods actually valued at \$23.50, and was told when he asked for a settlement: "Get the hell out of here. You have taken up all that's coming to you, and I don't make settlements with niggers anyhow." In 1918 in Ashley County a Negro made a crop of which his share was \$1,661.38. He "took up" during the year goods valued at not over \$250. At the end of the year he was given \$326, and informed that the balance (\$1,335.38) had been taken up at the plantation store. With what he had received he hired a lawyer to bring suit. He lost the case. Prices charged when statements are given are equally outrageous. Some of the actual cases found were as follows: a Negro was charged \$58 for four bushels of cotton seed and a sack, the actual value being \$4.20; another had to pay \$50 for two secondhand plows, which cost when new \$16 each; a third was charged \$52.60 for having nine small articles of furniture moved by freight less than one hundred miles; still another paid \$3.50 for a pair of rope plow lines which cost thirty cents in the open market. Many cases equally flagrant could be given, but the above are enough to illustrate the system. It was this sort of exploitation that the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America was seeking to combat in a legal and legitimate manner.

On November 2, the Negroes arrested were brought to trial in Helena, the county seat of Phillips County, where, because of the intense feeling, there was practically no chance of an unbiased and fair trial. According to the press dispatches, counsel for the defense was assigned by the court; no change of venue was asked; no Negroes were impanelled for jury duty (although Negroes outnumber whites four to one in Phillips County); no witnesses were called to testify for the defense. The first five defendants, charged with murder in the first degree, were jointly tried, the jury returning a verdict of guilty in exactly seven minutes after retiring, and the defendants were jointly sentenced to electrocution on December 27. In five days a total of twelve men were sentenced to death and eighty others were sentenced to prison terms ranging from one to twenty-one years. Gov. Brough on November 28 announced that he would postpone the executions to allow appeals to be filed in behalf of the condemned men. Unless the result of these appeals is a removal of the death penalty twenty Negroes will meet death, additional victims of American denial of rudimentary justice to 12,000,000 of its citizens because of their color.