

THE COTTON-PICKING SEASON.

BY A MISSIONARY IN THE SOUTH.

Protracted meetings among our people are now over. The cotton season opens up in full. Our cities are left "desolate." The country is made glad by the incomparable hilarity of the dusky cotton-picker. In former years only the poorer city Negroes spent much time in the "cotton-patch," but this year preachers, teachers, lawyers—nearly everybody—are in the cotton-fields. The very trying times have made all classes ready for any kind of honest toil.

To-day the schools opened with the smallest attendance for many years. Food and clothing must be secured even at the expense of moral hunger, mind starvation and spiritual death. The cotton-patch is no school of refinement. It has no lessons of morality to teach. Large families, and, what is worse, often several families go together, eating and sleeping in the

same rude one-roomed cabin. An instance comes to mind now of one of my own flock who lost all that is sacred to womanhood by cotton-patch corruption.

“Cotton is King,” they say ; but if I understand what “mine eyes behold,” whiskey is king in “cottondom.” All, or nearly all, who go, take their “morning eye-opener” with them, and some prefer the pure alcohol. There is some money in picking cotton, but it is a great pity that so many of our young girls have to seek such places of employment.

This is a time when our people need wholesome instruction. The more thrifty handle considerable money ; but, as a rule, before spring they will be running an account at the town grocery stores. It is well-nigh impossible to give these people by sermon or lecture just what they need. Many are afraid to listen to the plain talk they ought to have. It was rumored through the country round about that there was to be here a public discussion in which the colored Congregational preacher was going to affirm that lynching is wrong under all circumstances, and a colored school teacher was going to say that lynching is right under some circumstances. When it was heard in the country where I sometimes preach, one young man drove fifteen miles to tell me his father said, “Please don’t debate that subject.” He wanted me to preach down there again, and feared I could never come if I dared to engage in such a debate.
