

Growers of Rice Owe Great Debt to Sol. Wright

IS DEVELOPER OF SEED THAT MEANS SALVATION OF THE LOUISIANA INDUSTRY

The rice farmer says that Sol Wright saved his industry.

The rice miller affirms that Sol Wright preserved rice as a profitable crop.

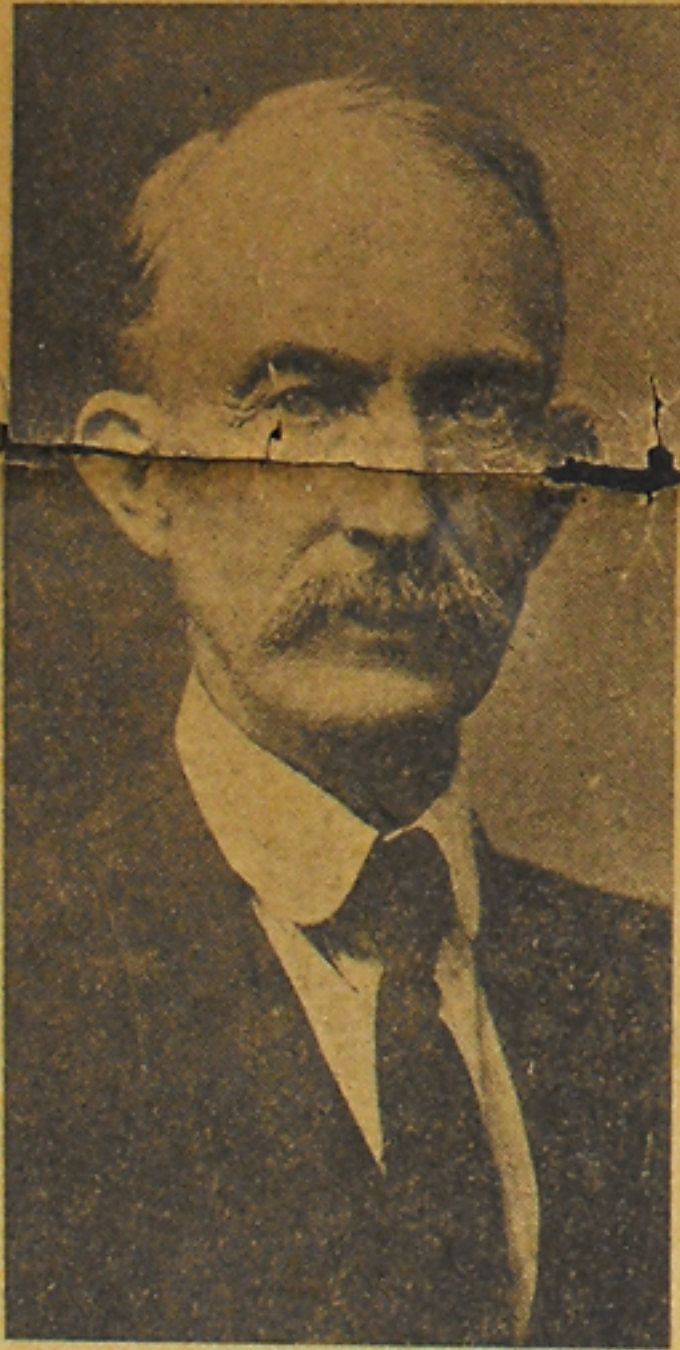
The Federal government, while pointing to its own work and willingness, admits that Sol Wright has accomplished more for rice than anybody else, and accounts for the fact on the ground that Sol Wright is a genius, who arises once in a century, and that his achievements are no disparagement of the orderly, systematic progress of scientific experiment.

Who is Sol Wright?

His unabridged name is Salmon L. Wright, sixty-two years of age, and he is a rice farmer, near Crowley. You can see him almost daily on the streets of the bustling town, medium in height, spare of build, wearing an overcoat before the weather makes it imperative, with thin graying mustache and his mild blue eyes curtaining dreams. And always he carries a little bouquet of rice in his hand. That rice is the symbol of the vision that absorbs him. He has always been eager to share his vision with the world, and he will expand upon it and expatiate upon it to whoever will listen. At first he was regarded as a crank, then as a savior, and it will not be many years before the fuller realization will make him wealthy, although he is still a comparatively poor man, for, so far, his discoveries have enriched others, rather than himself.

Born on Indiana Farm.

Sol Wright was born on an Indiana farm. When he approached manhood



SOL. WRIGHT.

he joined in the rush to the West. He had never enjoyed much schooling, he did not possess much means, but he was one of the most ardent students and lovers of nature, and when he started a wheat farm in Oregon he at once became devoted to the study of wheat. When the experts came around to form estimates of the crops they lingered to talk to Wright, for the gentle farmer always had some wonders to relate and show. When their reports were issued they were unconsciously tinged with Wright. He might have achieved for wheat what he has done for rice, but the cold climate was too much for him, and his health broke down. The doctors told him he would have to move, and he sold his last crop before it was grown. That came near being the only stroke of modern business of which the farmer sage ever was guilty. A terrible freeze came along and killed the crop, for which he had been paid. The purchaser was willing to accept his loss in good part, and it is doubtful if Mr. Wright could have refunded the money had he so desired. But he remained on the spot, showed the buyer how to take advantage of the plowing and other work that had been done, and assisted in the quick cultivation of a spring harvest, which reimbursed him for the disaster.

Then Mr. Wright came South and bought his rice farm, giving notes for part of the price. The first crop was so bountiful that he was able to pay off all his debt. That was twenty-four years ago, and he has never thought of leaving the land that was so generous to him in the crisis of his life. He also won back his health, under the sunny skies of Louisiana, and, although never robust, the gifts which the section bestowed upon him inspired him to pay back the blessings a hundred fold.

For years Mr. Wright was very little different from the farmers around him. His genius was unsuspected, and he laid no claim to any superior knowledge. His faculty was not of the meteoric kind that blazes a pathway with a brilliancy that makes men pause to marvel and pay tribute. He was the dreamer afield who solves the secret of nature, and, with reverent touch and infinite patience, follows almost invisible threads until the glory of the miracle is plain and the golden result is within the faithful lover's keeping. It was the tireless wooing of years that was rewarded by the development of the Blue Rose rice.

Mr. Wright's Find.

Before the perfection of that variety the rice grower was in despair. The land that had almost paid for itself every year yielded constantly diminishing harvests. Some said that was due to the failure to replenish the fertility of the soil, but the crude and even scientific re-builder, failed to restore former conditions. Dr. Knapp, the first great champion of the industry, obtained the aid of the United States in a quest for better seed, and did succeed in introducing several kinds that increased the harvest. But the seed deteriorated, various pests attacked the new breeds, and soon the planters were faced with the same hopeless fight. The government established its station, began experiments which will eventually improve the seed and land both, but in the meantime there was dire need for betterment.

About the only heartening prospect was the result being achieved with Japan rice, and it was this constant talk of Japan that supplied the spur Mr. Wright required in order to crystallize and concentrate his endeavor. Crystallize is the keynote of the quest that was pursued to victory. The crystal is the foundation of profit in rice growing. The crystal was the mirror of the Wright ideal.

When the cover of the grain of rice is removed and the grain exposed it is often found to be part chalky substance. This chalky portion leads to breakage and loss in milling. The crystal portion of the cereal, which is firm and resists the severest test in milling without breakage, makes the head rice, which regulates the main return from the crop. A barrel of rough Japan rice was calculated to yield eighty pounds of head rice, while Honduras most of the time only gave fifty pounds. It was a matter of seed selection and breeding that was beyond the ken of the ordinary planter. The old types had never been bred properly, and it was the bad breeding that caused the starchy, chalky grains that broke up badly in the milling process. The heads produced contained two types of rice, the chalky and the crystal. The chalky grain took after its chalky ancestors that were mixed with that type. The problem was to eliminate the chalk.

Named the Blue Rose.

Mr. Wright was no scientist. All he knew was nature. Breeding rice meant the same principle as propagating animals so as to perpetuate the finest qualifications and cover the thoroughbred lines. He had the clear understanding of his goal, and his intimacy with nature's methods was his only equipment for reaching it. He had his thoroughbred Italian bees before him, and because of his faith in the thoroughbred he could go among them unharmed and observe every stage of the purest scientific process they practiced. He noticed the most minute methods of nature's exercise in achieving the perfect growth. And then there was infinite patience, the indisputable symbol of genius. Night after night, though weary from the

long days toil, he sat beside his lamp with his sheaves before him. He laid open thousands of grains with his cramped fingers and carefully examined each grain. The grains that came nearest the standard he had in mind he laid aside and replanted next day. As soon as these produced new grains the latter were subjected to the same rigid scrutiny.

It requires only a few lines to detail the plodding pursuit and its purpose, and volumes could not describe the ecstasy of the one magnificent minute when the grain for which he had striven many months lay glistening in his palm, a tiny speck, full formed and clear crystal, destined to become the progenitor of a species without the defects and the drawbacks of those that had prevailed.

Even a story such as this has place for a mother-in-law. Mr. Wright is as proud of his family as of his greatest attainments. He attributes thoroughbred characteristics to his wife and to his children, and he has conferred their names upon the rices of the superior breeds he has evolved. His mother-in-law was on a visit to his farm when he was at the height of his momentous search, and each night as he bent over his magic grains, she was wont to rail him good naturedly about his absorbing task. On the fateful evening she had told him a story of a priest in the section who applied himself assiduously to the culture of roses. The cleric had produced many rare and fragrant beauties, and one of his parishioners, in a spirit intended to be sarcastic, asked him why he did not raise a blue rose.

"Ah, my dear friend," he responded, "if I could do that I would not have to remain your priest."

It was while half listening to the anecdote that the perfect grain revealed itself in his hand. Mr. Wright, trembling with the joy of triumph, extended his prize between his feverish fingers and exultantly exclaimed:

"Here is the rice I have been looking for, and you have named it for me."

So was the Blue Rose born. The unattainable had been reached.

Other Successes Follow.

But that was only the beginning. From that one grain, sown in the spring of 1909, there were 125,000 acres of Blue Rose rice harvested this season. One man and his own effort established the American mastery over Japan.

But the single grain was only the start of a time of trial that would have discouraged and defeated the average man. The progeny of the grain had to be nurtured and watched. From the stalks of subsequent fruition two of the perfect grains had to be gathered. One was planted and the other retained for comparison with the yield. Victory was not complete until resultant rice exactly matched the mother seed, and until every grain upon the stalk was uniform and true to type. And after the variety was thoroughly developed and permanency assured there were new difficulties. Mr. Wright's fate was not different from the experiences of Columbus and the long line of human benefactors. Many to whom he offered the seed regarded him as a crank whom it was not worth while even to humor. For he was poor and stood alone. Others were convinced by his confidence and claims, but they feared to hazard the cultivation. Rice had to be sold to the mills, and the mills had their grades for Japan and for Honduras rice. There was no grade for Blue Rose, and the mills might refuse to handle it at any price, so that the daring grower might pay high for his courage.

So the Blue Rose went begging, and at first Mr. Wright almost impoverished himself pushing his find.

Recognition came the next season, but almost too late for the pioneer. The Blue Rose not only made the highest yield per acre, but it stood the highest test in the mills. There was less waste and more clean product. A barrel of rough netted a hundred pounds of head rice, and commanded the highest price. Then there was a rush for Blue Rose, but the seed was mostly in other hands. Men who hesitated and scoffed paid \$9 a barrel for the new breed, and were glad to get it. It was hailed as the salvation of the

Louisiana industry. Japan was eliminated from Acadia, and wherever he rode, Mr. Wright's eyes were greeted with fields of bright, beautiful yellow, instead of the dark, weather-beaten hue which distinguished the former crops. The yield was 25 to 50 per cent greater. The stalk fuller and stiffer, and that not only made it easier to harvest but provided a succulent feed that will give impetus to cattle raising, although the agricultural experts say that it will not do for silage owing to the air in the cane, inducing fermentation too rapidly.

Blue Rose in Its Own.

When Blue Rose came into its own, planters enthusiastically laid the matter before the United States government. They thought that the national department should back the American rice developer to the extent of paying his expenses around various rice sections so that he could educate and supply the growers to their own advantage. The department ruled that such a move would be impossible, as it would be devoting the government's money to exploiting the sale of privately owned seed.

Frank A. Godchaux, president of the Louisiana Rice Milling Company, early became a convert. The large yield per acre, the large yield in the mill, he declared, would enable the State to combat the importation of foreign rice, always commanding a relatively higher price than the Japanese cereal, and he offered to place all his buyers and graders at the disposal of the father of Blue Rose, or even to buy his seed outright and dispose of it through the company's forces. The Southern Rice Growers' Association said that it had proved its supremacy planted beside every other variety, and upon every type of soil, and was the strongest weapon designed to keep foreign rice out of the country. The association offered to distribute all the seed of Mr. Wright's own raising. But as largely told, most of the seed was in other hands, because Mr. Wright could not win the needed support at the crucial period. Worse than that, others who raised his rice without his skill in selection and his conscientiousness in conformity to breed, disposed of seed in which quality had become mixed and the result was bound to be deterioration.

But both the rice farmers and Mr. Wright had learned their lessons, and the outlook is that the developer will eventually break the old rule and find fortune while he is still alive. The Blue Rose was not the limit of his vision. He has improved upon it. He has taken the Honduras rice in hand, and has bred it up into the Edith rice, with a little longer and thicker and more cylindrical shaped berry, clear and white, which will mill fifteen pounds more head to the barrel. He has perfected an early prolific, the very title of which proclaims its purpose.

And his effort along the avenue of crystal enhancement has brought about what he deemed his crowning achievement, the Louisiana Pearl. From a food viewpoint, he says, this will be the greatest rice in the world, with very heavy yield in field and mill, and the prospect for 115 pounds and more of head rice to the barrel, a figure deemed impossible heretofore.

Not On Market Yet.

Some of these seeds will not be on the market for a year or so, for Mr. Wright is beginning to think of his own financial welfare, though the gratification of improvement is his main pleasure, as well as making the State independent of foreign invasion and benefiting the people among whom he has made his home. They now have more faith in him, and his confidence in himself and them has risen in proportion. He now forms partnerships with the farmers who trust in him, furnishes them with the new seeds, and guides the cultivation, and when the crops come in there will be ample gain for both. Of course, as there are many planters in the new compact there will be larger reward for Mr. Wright.

In that way it will come about that the prophet will attain both honor and wealth in his own country. But nobody will begrudge him the success that all are sure will come, for he will have helped the country more than he has even demanded for himself.