

1938

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Recommended Citation

Sutton, Kathleen. "You Should See Shettles." *New Mexico Quarterly* 8, 2 (1938). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol8/iss2/10>

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You Should See Shettles

By KATHLEEN SUTTON

WHEN SMALL bales of a strange looking hay labelled *Kudzu* appeared on display in every bank in north Alabama, my naturally energetic curiosity was stirred to action. Which ultimately brought me to Mr. Pruitt, head of the soil conservation program in Limestone Valley.

"Kudzu," he explained enthusiastically, "prevents soil erosion, which is pretty bad in this non-porous red clay around here. It also makes good hay. If you like, I'll take you out and show you our whole program in this section."

Mr. Pruitt is a slight, earnest young man not so long out of agricultural college at Auburn. We drove out the highway, soon turning off on the narrow red roads that wind through endless acres of corn and cotton interspersed with small stretches of timber and pasture land. Without his mentioning it, I was impressed that in some fields the corn stood about ten feet high, while in others it was barely three. Likewise, the cotton in some instances was thick with the snowy bolls, while other showed the growth gone mostly to foliage.

"That's the difference between the farmers who co-operated with us and those who didn't," Mr. Pruitt explained. "Notice in those healthy fields how the rows follow the natural curve of the slope. That's what we call contour plowing. The farmers hate it because it's more trouble; they are used to plowing straight."

"Then why—?" I asked, feeling stupid.

"It keeps the rains from washing straight down the slope and gulying it out. The water runs along the rows, the overflow caught by the terracing—that's those grassy mounds separating the rows every twelve feet or so—but the main stream is directed into a natural ravine emptying into timberland if convenient. Otherwise it goes into the road gullies."

He paused, a brooding expression darkening his face. "The trouble with emptying it into the road gullies is that it wears them down sometimes twelve or fourteen feet. That puts the road pretty high up. On this slick day it's mighty easy to skid off into the gully—which isn't so good."

I could see that. Even on a dry road, those formidable gullies on either side were slightly nerve wracking. Tactfully I pointed out a field of exceptionally tall corn. He admitted it was a good stand. "But you should see Shettles' corn! He's been interplanting with *crotalaria* now for two years."

"Shettles?" I asked curiously.

"Yeah. *Crotalaria* is a lagume we sow between rows. It reseeds itself and is a soil builder. You see, bacteria store nitrogen in the roots and—"

"But Shettles," I persisted. "Who is he?"

"A nigger around here. He owns forty acres, and he's one of the best citizens we have, black or white. If more farmers were like him this would soon be the richest land in the state. He's done everything we told him, and the trouble is to keep him *from* working. That's unusual you know—for a nigger."

I inquired if he had difficulty in getting the farmers to follow his program. "The worst trouble," he said, "is with the tenant farmers—the share croppers. They don't own the land and they don't care what happens to it in the next twenty years. The landlords co-operate to the extent of telling us to go ahead, and providing fertilizer and tools—but they don't show any real interest in the tenants who go right back to planting cotton when we aren't looking."

We drove on, Mr. Pruitt continuing to point out examples of strip planting, crop rotation, and hills taken out of cultivation entirely, drilled with seedling slash or loblolly pine, or graceful black locust. "This is a little north for slash," he said, "but we find it does all right. We're planting it in anticipation of the paper industry. Loblolly's for

timber, and black locust is used for fence posts. In thirty years we should have good forests along here."

He was quiet a moment, a look of sadness again crossing his face. "Sometimes," he brooded, "we've drilled a whole hill with slash pine and one of those share croppers has come along and plowed it all under and sowed cotton."

"But Shettles—he wouldn't do that, would he?"

He brightened instantly. "I wish you could see that Shettles working black locust. He hoes it like it was cotton. And he's got the best field of kudzu hay around here. For two years he's done everything we told him—and his cotton! I wish you could see his cotton!"

I was intensely interested in this Shettles. A negro who does everything he is told for two years bears investigation. I inquired if he lived near enough for us to pay him a call. Mr. Pruitt was as delighted as a small boy asked to show off his pet dog. We turned off on an even narrower road winding gently up a hill. Half-way up, he pointed out a deep, ugly looking red gully. "That's soil erosion at its worst," he said. "But Shettles has planted kudzu in a place just as bad as that, and it is nearly healed over already. The tangled roots spread the water and hold the soil."

All the way up I heard of the wonders Shettles had performed under the supervision of Mr. Pruitt. He was the "workingest" negro in Alabama, and his farm, which had been practically ruined by erosion, was now one of the most productive in the valley. Shettles, it would seem, didn't care whether he grew cotton or soy beans, just so long as he kept busy plowing and sowing and working his fields. Whatever failure or discouragement Mr. Pruitt had met with elsewhere was obviously more than compensated for by Shettles' whole-hearted co-operation.

I could scarcely restrain my eagerness to meet Shettles, when at last we drove up before an unpainted shack with a sagging front porch railed by a row of scraggly ferns growing in lard pails. A husky looking young negro sprawled on the plank step, asleep.

"Where's Shettles?" Mr. Pruitt called to him.

The negro yawned widely and sat up. "He inside sleepin'," he said at last. "Y'all want I should call him?"

Mr. Pruitt looked rather peculiar. "Tell him I want to see him."

In a few moments a middle-aged negro, wearing patched overalls and a grin spread from ear to ear, appeared. "Mr. Pruitt, I sho' am proud you come by to see me t'day. Howdy, Mist'ess. I jest about fixin' to leave hyere."

"Leave!" I exclaimed incredulously. "Why, Shettles, Mr. Pruitt has been telling me what a fine worker you are and how splendid your farm in coming along."

He grinned even more widely. "Yas'm, hit sho' is. But Mr. Pruitt, he done fooled me too much. He say whin I sign my name to dat coperatin' paper, dat I jest leave hit all to him an' he gits me de bestest farm in Alabama. He ain't say nothin' about all dat turracin' I gotta do dat break a man's back twell he cain't hardly move."

"But the terracing saved your cotton field, didn't it?" Mr. Pruitt interrupted hastily. "Haven't you got the biggest yield you've ever had?"

"Yassuh. But I ain't got de strengf to pick hit. An' Dozie—dat's my wife," he explained to me, "she say she done wore out plowin' and hoein' all summer on dat black locus', an' effen she gonna pick cotton too I gots to cook de soup. Soup cookin' ain't no job fo' a man, an' I fixin' to lease de farm to Walter yonder and split on de gover'ment cash money an' go up de country to Washin'ton. Dozie, she got kinfolks dere."

Mr. Pruitt's face was crimson, and he waved his arms excitedly. "But you can't go way off to Washington, Shettles. You'd die away from this farm. You'd always be wondering about your cotton crop and—"

"Yassuh, dat's what de doctor done tol' me. But Dozie, she gittin de change ob life, an' she cain't wuk like she could. She say she gits so hot she fall flat in de fiel'. An' dis

mawnin' she tuk a hard whuppin' whin she step in a waspes nest. She in de house now wif her ankle all swoll up."

"But Shettles, with all this fine stand of corn and cotton—"

"Yassuh, Mr. Pruitt, but cotton sellin' fo' nine cents, an' I 'clare fo' de Lawd, hit costes me all o' dat to grow hit. An' I done broke my back an' got me a nervous misery all ober my body turracin' like you tol' me. Wiv Doxie plumb wore out now, I reckon I lease de farm like I said an' go up to Washin'ton. Mr. Roosevelt, he don' 'want no turracin' done up dere too, do he?"

To Beauty

By GEORGE ST. CLAIR

I have seen Beauty in the rainbow's arch,
 And felt it in the sunset's fading rose;
 Have heard it in the loud waves' trampling march,
 And where still quiet water gently flows:
 Color and light and sound have been to me
 Water and food to help sustain this life;
 A keen and never-failing ecstasy,
 A solace in our dreadful rush and strife:
 The modest violet's faintly perfumed breath,
 The splendor of the summer's full-blown flower,
 The pallor of the lily near its death,
 Colors that shift and change each changing hour:
 These may I joy in till I sink to rest,
 Knowing that Beauty gave me of her best.