

SPANISH MOSS.

NOTHING more dismal, more melancholy, more woebegone, in the way of plant life, can be imagined than the so-called moss of Southern swamps. It hangs in long, gray rags and tatters and streamers from the whitened skeleton branches of dead trees, like the weather-beaten fragments of clothing half torn from their mouldering limbs; or it swings shadowy wreaths and drapings under the gloom of the live oak's dingy evergreen foliage, as though the latter had its soiled and shabby undergarments perpetually out to wash, but never clean. In daylight it droops and sways in the hot, tired breezes like an embodiment of southern listlessness and despondency. In the dusk its shadowy, trailing masses might be ghastly victims of the Ku Klux, strung up causelessly long years ago, storm-beaten and torn by buzzards ever since, and even yet finding no friendly hand to cut them down. At night one could take its forms writhing in the wind for any sort of uncanny visitant of earth—ghosts of the departed glories of slave-holding times, or spirits of disease and fever brooding over the pestilent waters of the swamps.

Southerners put this plant to use. If the grey outer coating is rotted off a tough, black fibre remains, looking very much like crinkled horsehair, and used for the same purposes. Many a Northern visitor in New Orleans during the past winter has found his bed not exactly one of down,—it was stuffed with moss.

It is really no moss at all, but a flowering plant though a leafless parasite. Botanists, curiously enough, put this dried up, thready plant in the same family with the succulent pine-apple, and flank it on each side with the banana and amaryllis families. This doleful inhabitant of southern swamps is a degenerate member of a generous race, a sad example of retrograde development, attenuated and ugly from its useless life as a blood-thirsty parasite.