AN AGRICULTURAL RETROSPECT
(A Book Review)

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"Whenever you think you have a new idea, look up the Greeks and see which one expressed it best." This statement by an author whose name I do not now recall suggests one of the best of reasons for reading history. To read history helps to give us perspective and a proper feeling of humility.

We people whose lives and energies are devoted to the welfare of agriculture and country life would do our work better and serve our country more effectively if we knew more than most of us do about the important achievements and interesting lives of our predecessors. It is true that most of us have something of a habit of "reviewing the literature" before we publish the results of our inquiries, and this is as it should be. But comparatively few in our professional fraternity have made this habit include much of the literature of the beginnings of agriculture, even in America. One result of this is that many, perhaps most of us frequently have need to "look up the Greeks."

These are some of the thoughts suggested by a reading of "The Beginnings of Agriculture in America," a book written by Mr. Lyman Carrier of the Bureau of Plant Industry, and published in 1923 by the McGraw-Hill Book Co. The book is an agricultural retrospect which should be of interest and value to any American agricultural student who gives himself the pleasure of reading it. The author is an agronomist and the book is devoted chiefly, but by no means entirely, to subjects of agronomic interest.

Naturally, every member of the American Society of Agronomy is familiar with some of the material which the book contains, but much of the material is new to most of us. Any one of us might give himself a test on the following questions based on a few of the numerous subjects discussed in the book: When and where was alfalfa first grown in North America? What animals did the Indians domesticate? When was barbary eradication first suggested in America? What was Bristol Beer? How did the Indians clear land? When and where did Americans first try to grow cotton as a perennial and with what results? What is the origin of crab grass? When and where was the first American agricultural experiment station established? What American colonies tried communistic farming? What fertilizers, if any, did the Indians use? In what American colonies was irrigation practiced? To what extent did the Indians...