GRAPES IN SOUTH FLORIDA.

Paper prepared by O. R. Thacher, Avon Park, and read by the Secretary.

[SEE MINUTES PAGES 1 TO 5, ITEM 62.]

Mr. President and Members of the State Horticultural Society: Having been made one of the Committee on Grapes by our late lamented President, I feel I ought to contribute what I can, although but poorly qualified to give instruction on this subject.

In looking over such copies as I have of the proceedings of the annual meetings of our Society, I find that in 1892, grapes were considered exceedingly promising in South Florida. In the annual meeting of that year at Ormond, one gentleman said: "We propose to make it (the growing of grapes) a success;" it can be made just as much a success, and is just as sure as the orange." That was only five years ago. Then everything looked bright for profitable grape growing. In 1894 it was another story. Gentlemen told of their losses, of their failure to reap any profit from their shipments of fruit, and some expressed extreme disgust with the whole business. However, all appeared to agree that as fine grapes had been raised, and could be raised in South Florida as anywhere else without unusual difficulty, but facilities for their safe transportation to Northern markets were lacking. The Chairman of the Committee on Grapes that year reported that "not over one-half of the vineyards are being worked, and lack of remunerative prices is the cause." He further said: "There must be first-class, rapid refrigerator service at reasonable rates, or the grapes must be manufactured into wine."

In 1895 there does not appear to have been any discussion of grapes in the annual meeting of our Society. The overwhelming frost disaster which had befallen the great orange industry of the State overshadowed every other subject. In 1896 the brief chapter of experience on the subject of grapes revealed only losses to those who had invested in the growing of that fruit for market.

At the present date the growing of grapes in Florida, or in South Florida, at least, for the markets of the North, appears to have shrunk to very small proportions, and there are reports of vineyards being offered for sale at only a tithe of their cost. Must we conclude then, that there is no future for grape growing for market in Florida, or in South Florida? Is it too much to hope that, sometime in the future, quick and safe transportation will be provided for the most tender and perishable fruits, and that systematic distribution will be provided for, so that all parts of our country may be supplied with Florida grown grapes of excellent quality, delivered in perfect condition. This is a ques-
tion as to the future only. At present it seems that this cannot be accomplished.

But, surely, every man, who lives upon his own land in Florida, be it little or much, may provide himself and his family with as much of this healthful fruit in its season, as they can use, by only a little labor intelligently and promptly applied. If a man will only learn how, properly to care for his vines, and then attend to them in season as regularly and certainly as he goes to his daily meals, he can easily grow many kinds of as fine grapes as can be grown anywhere else in the open air.

One of my neighbors has a Niagara vineyard of some four acres, five years planted, located near his dwelling, on the top of a hill fifty or sixty feet higher than a beautiful lake, which it overlooks. The sand is very poor and very deep, the clay being not less than thirty feet below the surface. He was a practical gardener of many years' experience at the North, and has taken intelligent care of his vines. He has succeeded admirably in growing grapes, but not in making money out of them.

I have another neighbor, who has a small vineyard, planted for home use, on land equally as poor as the other. He has the Niagara, and also the Delaware, the Green Mountain, the Diamond, the Agawam, the Goethe, and several others. He thinks highly of the Green Mountain and Delaware. The Goethe is with him an especially strong grower, and seems to flourish as well in the poor sand as if in better soil. Still another neighbor finding wild grape vines growing vigorously out of the poor sand, among the pines upon the high hills surrounding our lakes, transplanted some of them to his yard, it being the same poor pine hill soil, and there grafted them to Niagara, Diamond and one Black Hamburg. They have all done well, the latter having now a large number of very fine bunches of fruit growing upon it, and the Diamond also showing fine, compact bunches and plenty of them.

Surrounding some of the lakes of southern Polk county, there are perhaps hundreds of acres of pine hill land upon which I have seen an abundance of wild grapes flourishing and fruiting. Now upon all such lands, and perhaps upon those grape roots as stocks, many of the best native grapes of the United States can, no doubt, be successfully grown. And everywhere throughout our State those who will, may, I believe, succeed in growing some good varieties of grapes. That old stand-by the scuppernong is not to be despised and must not be neglected.

Now, whether or not grapes can be grown for market at a profit, in Florida, I think this Society ought to encourage and urge upon all farmers and fruit growers and all who occupy the soil, the importance of growing a home supply of this health-giving fruit, the grape.