

Colonial Cotton and Wheat Growing

By Henry J. Monson

IN presence of the persistant shortage in the supply of cotton, the raw material of our greatest industry, and of the increasing price of wheat, I venture to call attention to a method favoured by some of the greatest cotton manufacturers of this country, which would at the same time relieve Lancashire of its subjection to the American cotton market, with its speculative corners, and tend very considerably to increase the supply of wheat, by opening up new regions for its cultivation. That method is, in a word, the direction of British capital towards the cultivation of cotton in Egypt, the Sudan, British East Africa, West Africa, and part of South Africa, together with an extension of the area under cultivation in British India. From my personal experience in Egypt it is clear to me that the cotton crop can be advantageously cultivated in rotation with wheat, a proceeding whereby the enlightened British investor would bestow an inestimable benefit upon the producing classes in his own country in the form of cheap and abundant raw material for their greatest industry, and of an increased food-supply for the working population.

The time has come when we must look for other sources of supply, not merely for cotton, which has reached an international crisis in the history of that industry, but also of the wheat-supply of Europe. The rise in the price of breadstuffs, together with the enhanced price of cotton, constitutes a heavy tax upon the earnings of our labour population. Capable observers are convinced that this tax can be considerably reduced in both directions by utilising opportunities which lie ready to our hands, by diverting into a new channel the spare capital of Great Britain which seeks investment abroad and thereby laying the basis of a great future for our chief industry.

The importance of the problem with which we have to deal is indicated in some remarks made on July 27, 1910, by the Rt. Hon. Alfred Emmott on the official reception of Indian

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and Lancashire cotton spinners and manufacturers at the India Office :

“ You must know that the export trade in manufactured cotton goods from this country is the greatest export trade in manufactured goods of any kind from any country in the world. Our total exports of manufactured cotton goods during the last five years have varied from £92,000,000 to £110,000,000 sterling in value. They represent almost one-third of our total exports of manufactured goods. They equal almost half of the total value of manufactured goods exported from Germany, and come within £20,000,000 of the total of manufactured goods exported from France. Our exports of cotton goods represent a vast trade, and that trade is at the present moment in great difficulty, if not in absolute danger, because of the shortage of the supply of the raw material of the industry. The high price of cotton at the moment, and the extreme scarcity of the cotton even apart from its price, have rendered inevitable the running of short time, or, in many cases, a complete stoppage. Employers are losing vast sums of money owing to the unprofitable trade, and employés are losing a considerable portion of the wages which they are able to earn when the mills are running full time.”

On the same occasion Mr. Macara, President of the International Federation of Master Cotton Spinners and Manufacturers, observed :

“ The cotton industry of the world has not for many years been in a more serious condition than it is in at the present time, largely due to the shortage and consequent high price of the raw material, the result being an enormous reduction in the consumption of cotton goods and in employment for the mills.

“ Having taken part in eight International Cotton Congresses during the past six years, the interdependence of the nations of the world, in carrying on this industry, has been forcibly brought home to me, as well as the helplessness of any single nation attempting to cope with the many problems which have to be solved in connection with its conduct.”

In the year 1908-9 the world's cotton crop was, according to Jones's Handbook, 22,467,000 bales, made up as follows : America, 13,829,000 ; India, 4,655,000 ; Egypt, 910,000 ; Brazil and other countries, 3,063,000 bales.

In the year ending August 1910 the consumption in different countries was as follows :

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Great Britain	3,053,545 bales
Germany	1,664,426 „
France	920,172 „
Russia	1,432,774 „
India	1,498,669 „
Japan	1,241,000 „
America	4,707,000 „

The foregoing figures show a decline as compared with those for 1906 on the part of Great Britain, Germany, and France. At an earlier period, from 1891-2 to 1901-2, for which Mr. J. Howard Reed gives particulars in his pamphlet recently issued on *Cotton Growing within the British Empire*, there was an increase of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. in the British consumption, while that on the continent of Europe was 31 per cent., and in America $60\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. The increase in the British percentage in the decade which he selected, according to Mr. Howard Reed, barely kept pace with the population. The effect of the general shortage is clearly shown in some remarks by Mr. Arno Schmidt, Secretary of the International Federation of Master Spinners' and Manufacturers' Associations, in his report dated September 27, 1910 :

“GREAT BRITAIN.—Twenty-six firms, representing 688,705 spindles, report that they have given up cotton spinning. The completion of several new mills has been postponed indefinitely. The consumption of American cotton is 106,086 bales less than the previous year, during which over forty million spindles stopped for seven weeks owing to a lock-out. The reduced consumption of all kinds of cotton this year is 99,999 bales ; moreover, it has been ascertained that the trade has been on considerably coarser counts, which means that a larger weight of cotton has been used per spindle. These facts prove conclusively the extent of the short time worked during the past twelve months.”

England consumes about one-fifth of the total world's production of cotton, and in order to be quite sure of having her mills fully supplied, requires to keep 8,000,000 acres under cotton every year. She now consumes half of the Egyptian crop, half of the American, and one-third of the Indian crop. The total number of bales from different British possessions, such as Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, North and South Nigeria, Africa, Uganda, Nyassaland, Portuguese East Africa, the West Indies, British Guiana, Natal, Australia, and sundry small districts, only amounts to 26,595 bales out of the total of about

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5,000,000 bales required. As a matter of fact, however, if cotton cultivation in India, Egypt, the Sudan, and other parts of Africa were fully developed, the supply would suffice to keep all the English cotton mills working full time.

As a matter of fact, however, as was evidenced by the statement of French and other representatives at the Seventh International Congress of Master Cotton Spinners in June 1910, other European countries are suffering from the same shortage in supplies and high prices as our cotton industry. Yet, as Mr. Alexander J. Kusnetzoff, a Russian delegate at that Congress, stated: "The cotton industry is progressing with gigantic strides. Technical improvements," he added, "reduce the cost of production of yarns and cloth, whilst progress in the means of transit opens up new markets for the sale of cotton goods. The consumption of cotton will be constantly on the increase if one remembers that of the 1,500,000,000 inhabitants of this earth there are only 500,000,000 completely clothed, while 750,000,000 are partly clothed, and 250,000,000 do not possess any clothing whatsoever. In order to provide clothing for the whole of humanity we would require an annual production of at least 42,000,000 bales of cotton, *i.e.* about $15\frac{1}{2}$ lb. for every human being."

If Russia develops the cotton-growing districts in Turkestan she will be able to produce more than is required by her own mills, and will have a surplus left for other countries. On the basis of the foregoing calculation of $15\frac{1}{2}$ lb. for every human being, we find that about 1,500,000 bales would be required for the population of the United Kingdom.

Let us now consider the state of the cotton areas in the British Empire and the necessary expenditure for bringing them into a condition to supply all the cotton required by this country. In Egypt the area at present under cotton is about 1,506,290 acres, which could be extended to 2,570,000, yielding an estimated crop of about 1,980,000 bales. For the last six years, however, the yield per acre has declined, owing to deterioration of seed, infiltration, over-supply of surface-water, cotton-worm, boll-worm, deterioration of the soil, the use of artificial manures, and change in the climate.

A great part of this deficient yield is due to the neglect of the essential requirements of agriculture. The old native method of merely scratching the soil has been allowed too long unchecked, with the result that the cotton plant has developed very poor roots.

The excess of salt in the manures at present supplied has

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had a very damaging effect on the growth of cotton. Indeed, the Master Cotton Spinners' and Manufacturers' Associations have urged the Egyptian Government to form an Agricultural Department; a suggestion which has just been carried into effect, but unfortunately about a dozen years too late, and at a moment when it is quite inadequate as a remedy for an evil that has been allowed to take root. One of the tasks awaiting any powerful Departmental Council entrusted with the agricultural regeneration of Egypt would be prohibition of substances containing salt as manure for the land. Furthermore, all drainage lakes would have to be dried up and main drains made throughout the country.

The ploughing for the purpose of cotton growing would have to be done with a modern plough which would penetrate to a sufficient depth, while strict control should be exercised over the use of irrigation water and advice given to the agricultural population.

The absence of some such measures as I have indicated for the improvement of Egyptian agriculture deprives us of the long fine staple at a moderate price which is such a great desideratum of the cotton manufacturer. For this purpose it is necessary to have men of adequate technical knowledge and experience whose position will give them an authority sufficient to overcome the inertia both of the native cultivators and of the larger landowners.

It is highly regrettable, after the enormous amount spent on the Assouan dam and irrigation works generally, that the yield of cotton should within the last few years have fallen from over five to under three kantars per acre—a crop that cannot pay at the price of £2 per kantar and which consequently precludes cultivation.

The Sudan is a country which would pay well for an expenditure of up to £5,000,000 sterling in the way of capital. It is probable that it would yield 1,000,000 bales of cotton annually, which, together with those supplied by India and British possessions in Africa, would render Lancashire independent of American supplies. Altogether about £20,000,000 sterling would be required to develop British cotton areas to such an extent as to render our manufacturers independent of America. The expenditure of that sum upon those areas would have an enormous result in the expansion of trade in many directions.

As a matter of fact, other countries such as Russia, Germany, France, Belgium, and Japan seem to be developing their possessions far more rapidly than Great Britain, a result probably

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due to a lack of knowledge of the subject, notwithstanding the excellent propaganda work done by the British Cotton Growers' Association of Manchester.

What is really required as a first step towards this important measure of providing for the future of our greatest industry, and for an expanding supply of food for our working population, is a movement to bring pressure on the Government to investigate the subject of the growth of cotton in British Africa and our Asiatic possessions. A Commission of investigation appointed by the Government for that purpose might well be composed as follows :

One spinner, one cotton ginner, one irrigation engineer, six agriculturists (three selected from Egypt and three from India), one botanist, one agricultural chemist (the secretary of the Co-operative Union), one banker, one barrister, one shipping merchant, one railway engineer. This Commission would travel through Egypt to the Lakes into Central Africa, from there to Durban, thence to India, returning by Turkestan to Syria and the Euphrates.

The valuable report which would be made as the result of such a tour would enable both the trade and the country to realise the requirements of the situation and show the best way of investing the national capital for this great development of national trade.

Apart from the work of this Commission in British territory and protectorates, attention might be paid to the task of encouraging the cultivation of cotton, for instance, in Asia Minor, a region presenting a large field for the purpose, which has only been slightly worked by the Germans.

English capital might also be advantageously directed towards encouraging cultivation in Russian Central Asia, which alone may be reckoned capable of an annual yield of some 10,000,000 bales of cotton. Altogether the quantity that would require to be produced in Africa and Asia may be estimated for the immediate future as about 20,000,000 bales per annum.

In connection with the cultivation of this enormous crop of cotton it is necessary to alternate the growth of wheat and other crops on the same land for export and use. For instance, wheat, beans, clover, and other crops should alternate with the cotton, wheat being sown on an average once in a three-year course of rotation. The result of this system would be obviously an immense addition to the world's supply of food-stuffs.

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Indeed, I have estimated that at the average American yield of about fifteen bushels to the acre this rotation on the cotton belts suggested, when in a cultivated condition, would produce all the wheat required for the European race.

Wherever we turn in Africa or in Asia, we find that the soil suitable for the growth of cotton is also, in the matter of climate and water, suitable for that of wheat.

Lancashire spinners can put an end to American corners and their own dependence on American cotton as soon as they press the Government to take active measures in this direction. France has already given them an example, and shows far more determination than this country in the effort to free herself from the American yoke.

In Africa the land must be cultivated by the native peasant, in Egypt by the fellaheen, while the capital must be provided by a large company which can take up at least 50,000 acres. European emigrants are not suitable either for Asia or for Africa, what is required being capital, with experts to supervise its expenditure. At present England annually spends nearly £31,000,000 sterling for the purchase of American cotton, and about £4,300,000 for the purchase of Egyptian cotton. These sums do not in any way tend to promote the cultivation of wheat as would be the case if the Lancashire spinners were to invest their capital for the cultivation of cotton in British Africa and Asia. That is the fault of the Lancashire spinners. Thus they have to pay a high price for Egyptian cotton, while their neglect to secure a more advantageous arrangement is also very bad for Egypt, where it encourages disgracefully dirty and careless cultivation. Sixpence per pound would be a good price to the grower of Egyptian cotton, but with the interest of money lent on the crops by the native and Greek middlemen, ginning, transport, baling, and other expenses, together with shipping, another sixpence has to be added to it, making the price on arrival at Liverpool a shilling per pound.

In the long run it is the British public that has to pay for this unorganised and expensive way of trading which goes on year after year without exciting any question. It is this slovenly system and not Free Trade which is responsible for much of the difficulty of the cotton industry.

If the export of cotton is to be considered, as I believe, as paying about half the cost of food imports estimated at £247,000,000, how is it that we have not a special department to deal with those two important trades? As shown in this article, cotton and wheat may be closely related by being grown

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on the same land in rotation, together with numerous other crops, such as beans, sugar-cane, lentils, onions, tomatoes, earth-nuts, and rice, all of which are imported by this country.

In conclusion, I would again impress upon my fellow-countrymen the desirability of directing their investments outside the United Kingdom into quarters where they would be calculated to improve the trade of Great Britain and to enhance the welfare of its inhabitants. A thorough organisation of all the business of investment and its inspiration by an enlightened public spirit would do much to check reckless emigration, and with the spread of sound commercial knowledge would, I am convinced, greatly improve the relative commercial standing of this great Empire, which, through Free Trade, has, in spite of careless and slack methods, succeeded in maintaining her extraordinary primacy among the great manufacturing and trading nations of the earth.