

THE WORK OF THE BRITISH COTTON-GROWING ASSOCIATION.

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EXECUTIVE COUNCIL.

It is almost a truism to state that the question of the future supply of cotton is by far the most important problem before the world at the present moment. In Lancashire the much-debated "fiscal" question has receded into the background before the dangerous situation of the cotton trade. This is not a mere local question affecting the interests of the merchants and manufacturers of England, or of the millions of people who are directly or indirectly dependent on the English cotton trade; nor is England the only manufacturing country which is suffering from short supplies. Germany, France, the United States and, in fact, every country where cotton is manufactured, are to-day feeling the evil effects of this shortage in cotton. The present high price may be partly due to short supplies and to the fact that consumption has overtaken production, and partly to a singularly daring speculative movement of a group of American speculators; but the violent fluctuations from week to week and, indeed, from day to day, rendering legitimate business almost an impossibility, and at best more or less of a gamble, are caused in large measure by the manipulations of speculators, who have taken advantage of the misfortunes of their fellow men. This is not the place to argue the moral side of the question, but one would hardly envy the men who are willing to cause untold misery and hardship on the toilers of the world, in order that they may gather together a few more hundreds of thousands of dollars.

It is now an admitted fact that, during recent years, production has not kept pace with the increase in consumption. This

has been due principally to the want of elasticity in the United States crop. Five years ago 23,000,000 acres produced 11,250,000 bales of cotton, and, although the acreage this last season is twenty-five per cent. larger, it is doubtful whether 10,250,000 bales have been produced, and there are many who believe that, for want of labor and other reasons, there is little probability of any large increase in the immediate future in the production of the United States. On the other hand, it has been estimated that the normal increase in the world's consumption of cotton is 400,000 bales a year. This increase will undoubtedly be checked by the high prices now ruling; for the majority of the consumers of cotton goods are the poorest of the poor, whose income does not reach a shilling a day, and a considerable time must elapse before they get accustomed to dearer goods. But, even allowing for this, it is quite evident that, unless new cotton-fields are opened up in other parts of the world, most of the mills of the world will have permanently to work on short time, and many of them will be closed entirely.

The seriousness of the situation has been fully grasped in Europe, and during the last two years movements have been commenced by England, Germany, France and other countries for extending the growth of cotton in their tropical possessions. These movements, though modest in the earlier stages, have during the last few months been considerably enlarged, as there is a growing determination to be independent of American speculators. Some time must elapse before appreciable results can be obtained; but most strenuous efforts are being made, and as far as can be judged at present there is every probability that Europe may some day be able to regard the success or failure of the United States cotton crop with comparative equanimity.

One of the most serious points connected with the shortage of cotton, and with the high price of cotton production, is the hardship which is entailed on the ultimate buyer, who will be compelled to restrict his purchases, to such an extent in the poorer parts of the world that he will literally have to go without clothing.

Of all these movements, the most important is the British one, for the field to be covered is much the largest. The movement originated at the annual dinner of the Chamber of Commerce of Oldham, the great Lancashire spinning centre, held in

January, 1901, when a discussion took place on the question of future supplies of cotton. A committee appointed on that occasion at once proceeded to make inquiries into the possibilities of cotton-growing in the British Empire. The report of this committee was completed in November, 1901, and its purport may be summed up in one sentence—that suitable cotton for the Lancashire trade could be grown in various parts of the British Empire. A meeting was held at the Manchester Chamber of Commerce on February 18th, 1902, when a large and representative committee was appointed. After several meetings, at which the question was fully discussed, on June 12th, 1902, the British Cotton-Growing Association was formally inaugurated, and it was decided to raise a guarantee fund of £50,000. Immediate steps were taken to gather information, and to initiate experiments in every part of the British Empire where cotton could be grown. These experiments have been so successful that it has now been decided, subject to the approval of the authorities, to constitute a large company under royal charter with an initial capital of £500,000. This company will absorb the original Association, and will carry on the work on the same lines, philanthropy worked on a commercial basis, and with the same objects, to promote the cultivation of cotton throughout the British Empire. No dividends are to be paid for five years; the surplus profits during that period, should there be any, are to be devoted to the cause of cotton-growing. The Association has a bright future before it; for the experiments already completed give every hope of ultimate success, and some of the shrewdest and most influential business men of Lancashire are at the head of the movement. Every possible assistance is also being given by the British Government. In his speech from the throne in opening Parliament on February 2nd last, His Majesty the King used the following words:

“The insufficiency of the supply of raw material upon which the great cotton industry of this country depends has inspired me with deep concern. I trust that the efforts which are being made in various parts of my Empire to increase the area under cultivation may be attended with a large measure of success.”

Such a recognition of the work of the Association sets it above all ordinary commercial ventures, and it is no exaggeration to

say that the deepest interest and enthusiasm have been aroused throughout the whole of the British Empire.

One of the first fields which attracted the attention of the committee was British India. With its vast area and enormous population, there is an immense field for work, and there is little doubt that the present production, about 3,000,000 bales of 500 pounds, could be largely increased. Unfortunately, from an English point of view, the quality of Indian cotton leaves much to be desired, for it is shorter in staple than the American product, and not of much use to the majority of Lancashire spinners, whose energies are devoted principally to spinning finer yarns, leaving the coarser trade to their competitors. This cotton question, however, is an international one; and an increase in the production of the shortest stapled cotton is desirable, provided it is of usable quality, and even if it is shipped to Lancashire's competitors, for it will relieve the demand on the next best grade, and the extra supply of the better quality so released will relieve the demand on the next grade higher, and so on. *Vice versa*, if there is an increased supply of the best Sea Island, the spinners who can utilize the same will not be forced on to the market for the next lower grade. In connection with this point, it should be mentioned that the most cordial relations exist between the British and Continental movements, for it is fully recognized on both sides that, in the present troubled waters, England, France and Germany are in the same boat and must help one another. One might go further and suggest that American spinners are equally interested in the development of cotton cultivation in spheres outside the United States; for, if it be true that there is little probability of an immediate large increase in the production of the Southern States, their only salvation also lies in the development of other cotton fields. One cannot emphasize too strongly the international importance of this movement for the development of new cotton-fields. One might liken the cotton supply to a cistern filled by several taps, and emptied by several; and it does not matter to the English, French or American taps which are emptying the cistern whether it is refilled by a German or Russian supply, so long as there is a sufficient quantity flowing in to replenish the water in the cistern.

In addition to an increase in the quantity of cotton grown in India, it is thought that by careful selection of seed, and by

paying more attention to improvement of the methods of cultivation, much could be done towards raising the quality of Indian cotton. It is proposed to establish model farms in the midst of the cotton-fields as object lessons for the education of the Indian ryot in the most modern methods of cultivation. If such farms were established, not only would they have a most valuable educational influence, but they would also be the means of providing the natives with improved and selected varieties of seed and would probably be more or less self-supporting. Representations have been made by the Association to the Indian Government, urging that government to take up the work, and these have been most favorably received. There is, indeed, every reason to hope that in a few years' time we shall not only obtain largely increased supplies from this part of the world, but also cotton of greatly improved quality.

It is almost an irony of fate that Lancashire should again have to turn her attention to the West Indies for cotton. More than a century ago 40,000 bales, or about half the total of England's requirements, were obtained from those islands. It was not until the year 1802 that the imports from the United States first exceeded those from the West Indies. In 1902, the total imports into England from her old sources of supply were less than 1,000 bales. This, however, will soon be changed. Large quantities of the best Sea Island seed have been distributed, and cash advances are being made to indigent planters who have been more or less ruined by beet-sugar. Some beautiful cotton has been grown and sold in Liverpool at prices ranging from eleven to sixteen cents a pound, and there is every probability that in two or three years from now the West Indies and British Guiana will produce at least 50,000 bales annually, and that England will consequently be entirely independent of Georgia and Carolina for her supplies of the best qualities of cotton.

Although the Association was to devote its funds to the encouragement of cotton cultivation in British possessions, it was felt that the protectorate which England exercised over Egypt and the Egyptian Soudan would justify the committee in considering that part of the world as being within the scope of their mandate. It was soon discovered that in Egypt proper no action was necessary. The cotton crop is a most remunerative one, especially at the present inflated prices, while the Egyptian

Government and the Egyptian people are fully alive to the advisability of increasing the cultivation of cotton as much as possible. The present Egyptian production of cotton is about 1,000,000 bales of 500 pounds, and it is estimated that the new Nile dam at Assouan will make it possible to put under cultivation an additional acreage of fifteen per cent. In the Soudan, however, there are very great possibilities; new land is being put under cotton there every day; and, when the railway is opened from Suakim to Berber, it will be possible to cultivate cotton at a profit, even so far up the river as Khartoum. Quite recently a new field has been discovered at Tokar on the Red Sea, where it is said that the land available is capable of growing a crop as large as the present growth of the whole of Egypt. There is, therefore, every reason to hope that, within the next five years, the Egyptian crop may increase by 1,000,000 or 1,500,000 bales of 500 pounds.

It is a curious fact that, heretofore, most attempts at the acclimatization of Egyptian cotton in other countries have ended in failure. It has generally been supposed that this was owing to the fact that this quality of cotton required artificial irrigation. Recent experiments in German East Africa, in British East Africa, and in British Central Africa (Nyassaland), however, show that this hypothesis is entirely unfounded; and some cotton grown in German territory from Egyptian seed was reported on by competent authorities as fully equal to the best Egyptian cotton.

In East Africa, the work has now passed the experimental stage; and from Nyassaland alone 3,000 bales of 500 pounds will be shipped this season. In this colony there is plenty of suitable land and a good supply of cheap labor—about a penny half-penny to two pence a day being the usual rate of pay. The climate is not unhealthy, and many Englishmen have been settled there for years, growing coffee and tobacco. They are now all turning on to cotton as fast as possible, aided by the British Cotton-Growing Association, which is supplying them with seed and ginning machinery, and giving them financial assistance towards clearing the land. It is possible that in Nyassaland alone 50,000 bales may be produced in the coming season, and there is every probability that in a few years' time East Africa may produce at least 1,000,000 bales of first-class cotton.

To turn from the east of the Dark Continent to the west, we come to a field which offers immense possibilities. There are even some who think that the day may come when American spinners will have to look to West Africa for a portion of their supplies. West Africa is divided up between England, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, the Congo Free State, and Liberia. The portion held by Germany is but small; the Germans are, however, pushing on the cultivation of cotton as fast as possible, and they have already achieved some most satisfactory results. The territory under the sway of France is enormous, and in it large experiments have already been commenced. British West Africa has an area in round figures of upwards of 500,000 square miles, and, were it possible to get only one-tenth of this area under cotton, we should obtain 30,000,000 acres, which, at the rate of only one-third of a bale to the acre, would give 10,000,000 bales of cotton. There is no reason why the whole of West Africa should not some day produce 20,000,000 bales of cotton, for, in addition to the enormous extent of land, there is a large supply of cheap labor—the usual rate being from fourpence to a shilling a day. It is estimated that in British West Africa alone there are at least 20,000,000 inhabitants. And last, but not least, land can be obtained for almost a nominal rent. If the native were cultivating for himself, he would pay no rent at all, or only some small tribute to the chief of the community. Compare this with the condition of affairs in the Southern States, where many of the cultivators have to part with one-third of their crop in payment of rent. It has justly been argued that, should there be a large increase in the production of cotton, of which there is every probability, and should the price in consequence fall to an unremunerative basis, cultivators will suffer severely. If this should be the case, so far as can be judged now, West Africa will some day be able to produce more cheaply than the Southern States, and it will be the American farmer, and not the West-African, who will suffer most by the fall in price.

It can easily be understood that, there being amongst British possessions a field with such immense possibilities, early attention was given to West Africa. The sympathies of the Government officials were enlisted, experts were sent out, and quantities of seed supplied. Some excellent cotton has been grown and sold in Liverpool at prices about one-third of a penny a pound below

middling American. The probability is that, with better cultivation, as good cotton can be grown in West Africa as in the Southern States; and some native varieties have been discovered, and are now being largely planted, which will exactly meet the needs of English spinners, as the staple is long and silky, and of a good white color, while the quality generally is decidedly better than average American. From the very commencement, the Association decided on a line of policy in West Africa which they have never abandoned, and which they still believe to be the best—viz., the ultimate establishment of cotton-growing as a *native industry*. The large plantation system for coffee and other articles in West Africa under white management has generally ended in failure, and there is no reason why cotton plantations should be more successful. To get the natives to take up cotton-growing largely will, however, take a long time, but it is the surest method in the end, as exemplified by the old West-African proverb: "Softly, softly catchee monkey." With the object, however, of expediting matters, large plantations of 10,000 acres are being commenced in several of the British West-African colonies. They will probably be barely self-supporting, but they will have an excellent educational effect, and will serve as seed farms and enable large experiments to be carried on in hybridization and selection of seed. It is quite impossible to forecast how soon one may expect an appreciable supply from West Africa; but there is no doubt that in from five to ten years from now it will become an important factor in the world's supply of cotton.

If any one has to regret the vastness of the British Empire, it is the working staff of the British Cotton-Growing Association, for not a day passes without letters arriving from all parts of the world—from Queensland, from Cyprus, from Rhodesia, from Borneo, from Fiji, from Burmah, and from the many territories which make up "the Empire on which the sun never sets"—requests for advice, for seed, for experts, for financial help, and so on. It is unnecessary here to go into further detail as to what is being done; let it suffice to say that, wherever cotton can be produced, it is either being grown, or steps are being taken to commence its cultivation; and it has now been proved that the British Empire can produce an ample amount of cotton of every quality for the needs of Lancashire.

It will be gathered from the above that the deepest interest has been aroused throughout the whole Empire, and that all are determined to put forth every possible effort in aid of England's greatest manufacturing industry—one might say *the* largest exporting industry of the world. This movement will have the double advantage of procuring ample supplies for Lancashire cotton-spinners, and at the same time of largely increasing the prosperity and purchasing power of the Colonies, with a resulting demand for manufactured goods. Though there has been much difference of opinion and much controversy in England recently on the question of Tariff Reform, on the common ground of cotton supply all parties have joined hands—Free-Traders, Freefooders, Tariff-Reformers, Fair Traders, Protectionists, Little Piggers, Whole Hoggers. This unanimity is largely due to a growing fear of the immense resources now at the disposal of a few individuals, and the consequent terrible power of dislocating any market or industry; and, for this reason, the British Cotton-Growing Association can afford to regard the powerful speculators who have recently been manipulating the cotton market as benefactors in disguise.

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