

Fostering the Growing of Cotton

The paper on the cultivation of the Egyptian type of cotton in the Southwest, read at the Atlantic City meeting of the National Association of Cotton Manufacturers by Carl S. Schofield, of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, was of value for a number of reasons. First, because of the information it gave in detail regarding the best methods of producing this class of cotton in the United States. The grower of cotton will benefit directly; the cotton manufacturer indirectly by this information. In addition to this more or less direct benefit to the cotton trade, Mr. Schofield has rendered a valuable service by calling attention again to the fostering care bestowed on cotton growing by the government of the United States. For this reason alone the paper is worth reading even by those not specially interested in cotton growing or manufacturing.

From the time that the plan was formed about twelve years ago to grow Egyptian cotton in the Southwest, until the ginned cotton was baled and sold, there has not been a moment during which the government officials relaxed their vigilance in watching and caring for the infant industry. The Bureau of Plant Industry began experimenting in 1902. Nine years later "these experiments had reached a stage which seemed to justify the trial of this crop on a small scale by farmers". In the spring of 1912 seed was distributed by the Department to seventy-five farmers, a number of Indians, and twenty boys, the boys planting half an acre each with the cooperation of the Bureau; the nature of the soil was officially determined, and records of the yield from each acre were made; the rotation of crops was studied and the Bureau found that cotton did well after alfalfa, but should not follow sorghum or milo; the Bureau saw that the cotton was picked carefully and delivered to the gins free from trash; it found out, not only when picking began and ended, but when it should have ended; it carefully noted the supply of pickers in the different localities, the cost of picking and the difficulty encountered by

the pickers in making their way through the entangled plants growing on irrigated fields; the Bureau did not lose sight of the fact that no cash outlay for picking was necessary when the acreage per family was small, and the mother and children, as well as the father, picked the cotton; the length and strength of the staple were officially measured and recorded; the percentage of lint cotton obtained from seed cotton was determined to 1/10th of one per cent.; the Bureau officials noted the kind of gin used and the daily production; the density of the baled cotton, the kind of wrapping and the amount of tare were officially determined and, presumably, controlled; the price at which the cotton, either ginned or unginned, was sold are matters of official record; also the manner in which the cotton was collected at and shipped from assembling points, and the effect on the cost; when seed was sold for planting the price was reported to the Bureau, as it was when the sale was to the oil mill; as might be expected the cost of production was officially studied; details of cost were recorded with extreme precision, and the effect of tough sod of alfalfa and Bermuda grass on the cost of production was reported; after the impressive particulars as to cost, the Bureau of Plant Industry arrived at the now familiar official conclusion that "the cost varied between wide limits," that "it should be kept in mind that these figures (which were given) are merely approximations".

This review of the official care of cotton growing in the Southwest is necessarily incomplete. The information is given in greater detail in Mr. Schofield's paper and in many government bulletins issued from time to time. Attention is not called to the Bureau's work for the purpose either of criticising or commending this branch of government activity. Our object is to call attention to the manner in which the United States government is fostering the cotton growing industry. No child could be reared by mother or nurse with more tender and constant care and solicitude than has been

bestowed on the Egyptian cotton infant in the Southwest by the employes of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. And this fostering care has been done at untold expense. Mr. Schofield goes carefully into the cost of labor and irrigation water and is careful to state that interest has been omitted from his figures of the cost of production. But he makes no reference whatever to the cost of the government supervision that he describes in such great detail. It would be interesting to know how much money the Department of Agriculture had expended in bringing the Egyptian cotton growing industry to its present development, and how much lint cotton has been produced to date. Then a fair judgment could be formed as to whether the work is worth while.

We do not desire now, however, to criticize the work, either because of possible expense or because of the extent to which the government has assumed the control and guidance of this industry. Our sole object in calling attention to the matter is to show that the growing of cotton is being protected by the United States more directly and effectually than is the manufacture of cotton into goods, even though there is a tariff on goods and none on raw cotton. This elaborate and expensive system of direct support and protection is by no means confined to Egyptian cotton in the Southwest, but has for many years been applied to the entire cotton growing industry. The facts are given here in order to show that the boast of Southern politicians, that cotton growing is without protection from the government is a myth, a pretense, that has gone uncontradicted for far too long a time. As a matter of fact cotton growing has been the particular pet of the government, in striking contrast to some other branches of agriculture, wool growing, for example, which for years has had very little care and supervision from the federal government.

All the foregoing is without any intention to criticize this kind of direct protection to an industry. There is, however, a recent development in cotton growing that is not thus immune from adverse comment. The cotton planters have not been satisfied with this direct protection. They have not been

content with free trade in a commodity in the supply of which the climate and soil of the United States gives them a practical monopoly throughout the world. What they want is a cotton combine, which, regardless of the name it bears, will enable the cotton growers to control the supply and price of raw cotton. Their object was clearly exposed in a series of proclamations which began anonymously in the "Manchester Guardian" on Sept. 6, 1912. The six unsigned statements that appeared between that date and Oct. 25 were an amusing mixture of secrecy, professed frankness and flattery, designed to win the Lancashire spinners to a scheme of cooperation with the cotton planters, the following being typical extracts:

The authors of this announcement and the former one do not propose to disclose their names. It would serve no useful purpose and might possibly interfere with negotiations that are pending. . . .

The Lancashire spinner has many great qualifications. The skill and efficiency of the industry, the wisdom and liberality of the spinner's dealings with labor excite the admiration of the whole industrial world. . . .

It is for the planter and the spinner to put their heads together and devise a practicable plan of cooperation. . . .

The Southern Cotton Corporation hope to show how the expenses of the present system may be substantially reduced and in the end eliminated. Their representatives will be in Manchester again on Monday, and may be communicated with at Box T 99, "M/c Guardian" office.

In our October, 1912, issue we called attention to the articles in the "Guardian", summing up the matter in these words:

The danger involved in any grand scheme of cooperative warehousing and selling of cotton is that it will be the sure foundation for a gigantic cotton trust, oppressive to both producer and consumer, and which, if once well started, would certainly not stop at the mill gates.

After reading our October article, the men hiding behind "Box T 99, M/c Guardian" threw off their disguise and on November 1 issued a statement in the "Guardian" signed "George D. Wadley, president, Southern Cotton Corporation, which began as follows:

We had the honor to have our announcements in this column referred to by the "Textile World Record" of October. That journal sees in our proposals a sinister design to form a great cotton trust, and accuses us of decoying the guileless spinner with fair words about cooperation.