

BRITISH VS. UNITED STATES COTTON MANUFACTURING METHODS.

The following are extracts from the report of Thos. Ashton, the cotton commissioner, on Alfred Mosely's commission, which recently went to the United States to report on manufacturing methods in the two countries.

The system of working in the spinning and carding departments of the American mills is much different from what obtains in the English mills, and my opinion is that the advantage is on the side of the English system, both in respect to the cost and the quality of production—all other things being equal. The spinning mules are generally worked with one spinner to one pair of mules, and one back-boy to two and up to five mules, according to their length and the counts they spin. The back-boys attend to the creeling and sweeping and assist in cleaning the mules; their wages are paid by the spinners. There are doffers employed in the spinning-rooms, as well as starters-up in some of the mills to assist the spinners to get the mules in working order after the mules have been doffed. There are two doffers and one starter-up employed for seven to ten pairs of mules, in accordance with the length of the mules working and the counts they produce. There are also tubers employed, and they tube by hand; and two of these tubers follow the doffers in their work. All the yarn is spun on tubes, and the employers pay the wages of all the help, with the exception of the back-boys. In all cases the rovings are taken to the spinning mules, and they are put on the creels by a man who is employed for that purpose. The elevator man takes the rovings up to each room from the cardroom, and the same two men take away the empty bobbins from the spinning-rooms to the cardroom. The waste is taken from the spinning-room by the doffers to a place where it is weighed, and the elevator man then takes it down the hoist. The overseer in the spinning department attends to the wrapping of the cops and the weighing of the yarn, and has full management in the spinning-rooms, with power to discharge any person employed therein. There are also assistant overseers, termed second and third hands, who have to piece straps and bands and keep the mules in working condition, as well as make out all changes for the various counts of yarn produced.

Mule spinners are paid principally by piecework rates, set forth in the Fall River standard list of prices for mule spinning, but for finer counts than 50's twist or 37's twist prices are fixed by special agreement, which generally means the paying of standard wages. The New Bedford list provides for counts up to 120's.

The same piecework rates are paid for spinning whether the mules be new ones or old ones, and whether the mules run quick speeds or slow speeds; in fact, the spinning overseers can put what twist they think necessary in the yarn without altering the price paid for spinning. An attempt was made a few years ago to induce the corporations to pay by the turns per inch, but they refused to adopt such a course of payment. The spinners are paid by the weight of yarn spun, and they have the privilege of seeing their yarn sized, or weighed, at any time they require, and I was informed there was now very little trouble about the wrapping of their cops, as there was a strong feeling amongst the overseers to do right to both sides. . . . During the months of July and August, when the wind blows mostly from the south, the spinning is much affected for the worse, and the operatives describe these as the "dog days," as the winds take the twist out of the yarn, and they suffer more or less from the effects of the sticky nature of the atmosphere, which causes

the leather rollers to get damp, and extra turns are put in the yarn, so that spinners earn less wages and have to work harder during these troublesome times. The superintendents say that they use a better quality of cotton when the dry winds make their appearance, but the workpeople won't admit this to be true, and as a rule, the machinery is reduced in speed, and by this means they manage to tide over the difficulty which the dry winds create. Both the mill hands and their trade-union officials declare that the climatic influences, together with the strain of working to which they are subjected in the mills, are more injurious to health than is the case with the Lancashire operatives. . . . I was informed that the mortality amongst the cotton mill workers in the States was greater than it is amongst cotton mill workers in Lancashire, and my observations in the mills I visited led me to think there is plenty of truth in this statement. The operatives are pale and sallow-looking, and the pressure to which they have to submit in the heated rooms is certainly more trying to human endurance and health than most people have any real conception of.

Mr. Ashton says of the American system of spinning and carding that, taking the cost of wages with other results, there is no advantage in it over the Lancashire system. This opinion is confirmed by representatives of Lancashire cardroom operatives' associations to whom he submitted the details. There is, however, "one pressing feature about the system of working the American cotton mills, and that is, the superintendents believe in using a good class of cotton, and by this means they are enabled to run their machinery at quick speeds and get out very excellent results. They also act on the principle of having their material well carded and cleaned, and they provide the requisite machines for securing such a result, and by adopting this policy they produce good yarns and avoid making a deal of waste. One of the leading mill superintendents in New Bedford informed me that they made a practice of using three grades better cotton than was used in Lancashire for the spinning of the same counts of yarn, and this statement was confirmed by an experienced cotton buyer and seller with whom I had a long conversation about the American cotton industry generally. In going through the mills I was privileged to visit, I had no difficulty in satisfying myself that the most was being made out of every machine used, and that, with the class of cotton in use, the mill operatives were not being hurried in their work any more if as much as they are in the Lancashire mills, where a lower class of material is generally used. I frequently saw mill-workers sitting down and watching their machines at full work, everything going on all right.

The following figures show the relatively high wages earned by mule spinners in Massachusetts: For 37 pairs of mules at this mill there are a spinning overseer and four second hands, and their total wages amount to £17 19s. 3d. per week, thus showing that the spinners have plenty of assistance ready to be called in in case of breakdowns or other work required to be done by the kind of help referred to. Spinners earn £3 15s. per week, as against £1 12s. in Oldham on mules of a similar length. The total wages which would be paid for an overlooker and assistant in Oldham on a similar number of pairs of mules would be less than £6 per week. At another mill I found the spinning mules contained 1,120 spindles per mule, being equal to 93¼ dozens long, and spinning 95's pin cops with a 60 in. draw and 3 in. of roller motion, and the mules were running three draws in 55 seconds and producing 600 lb., or 25.4 hanks, per spindle per week. The wages paid on the one pair of mules were £6 19s. 6d. per week, as against £3 7s. in Oldham under the same conditions.