

COTTON GROWING WITHIN THE EMPIRE.

A survey of the work and prospects of the British Cotton Growing Association was given by J. Arthur Hutton, vice-president, before the Manchester Statistical Society, recently. Mr. Hutton said that the question of the future supply of cotton was not to be regarded as a local matter affecting the interests of merchants and manufacturers in England, or those of the millions of people directly or indirectly dependent upon the cotton trade, for hardly a country was unaffected by an insufficient supply of raw material. England was not the only country affected. Germany, France, and even the United States, were feeling the effects of this short supply, and the evil was aggravated by the unscrupulous operations of speculators. He did not think that legislation could remedy these evils. The normal annual increase in the consumption of cotton was about 400,000 to 500,000 bales, and if it continued, in ten years we should require an addition of 4,000,000 bales. The production of raw cotton had not increased so fast as the consumption. That was due to the want of elasticity in the United States production. The present supply of cotton was insufficient to keep the spindles of the world fully employed, and the cotton trade had developed into a scramble for the available supplies.

In dealing with the work already accomplished, he alluded to British India, and said that the quality of Indian cotton had deteriorated in the last ten years, no attempt having been made to select the best seed for planting purposes. The methods of cultivation, too, were primitive. The establishment of model farms in the cotton fields might remedy this. Representations had been made to the Government on the subject.

In the West Indies, it had been arranged that grants should be made to planters who wished to undertake the growth of cotton—so much when the land was planted, so much when the crop was partly grown, and a further amount on shipment. The cotton would be consigned to the association, and the surplus proceeds handed over to the planter. Formerly principal supplies came from the West Indies, and it was hoped we should again have a large supply of cotton from those islands.

In Egypt there was a want of labor and transport. The first difficulty time alone could overcome, but the Suakim-Berber Railway would solve the transport question. Recently a new field had been discovered near Tokar, on the Red Sea, and in that district there were large possibilities, and the land available was said to be capable of growing a crop as large as the present total Egyptian growth.

Nyasaland was one of the most promising fields. A considerable acreage had been put under cotton, and advances of £1,000 each were being given this year to two planters, under Government supervision, gins and other machinery being supplied. Two thousand acres would be put under cotton, and the crop would be sent to the association for sale, and the profit, less the advances and expenses, would go to the planters. It was said that one or two hundred thousand acres might be cultivated in 1905.

In Southern Nigeria a large tract of country was suitable for cotton-growing. Mr. Prince, an expert, cleared and cultivated a plantation of about fifty acres on the Niger river, near Ouitsha. This was sown with American seed, and a large sample had been sent home, and was just the cotton wanted in Lancashire; and if 1,000,000 bales of it were available every mill in Lancashire would to-day be running full time. One advantage Southern Nigeria possessed was that as natural waterways existed, no railways are necessary.

Northern Nigeria, with an area of over 300,000 square miles and 10,000,000 inhabitants, offered an enormous field cultivation, more so than any other of our West African possessions. The Haussas were intelligent and civilized, and a peaceful race, devoting their energies to agriculture and commerce. \$5,000,000 was, however, required to construct a railway connecting the interior with the Niger River.

It had been argued that if the association's efforts were successful, an over-production would result, and the price would fall so low as to make the cultivation of these new fields unprofitable. So far, however as long-stapled cotton was concerned, a substantial fall in prices would still leave an ample margin of profit. The main question was, could West Africa compete with the United States? On this point, while we could not yet tell to a fraction the cost of growing West African cotton, we did know that labor in West Africa was very much cheaper than in the States, for any amount could be had for 6d. to 1s. a day. Land could also be had at an almost nominal rent, and if cultivated by the native, as a rule, no rent at all was paid, except, perhaps, some small tribute to the chief of the community. On the other hand, in the United States a cash rental of 10s. to 20s. per annum per acre had to be paid, or when, as was mostly the case, the rent was paid in kind, about one-third was handed over for rent of the land and another third for the use of implements, fertilizers, etc., if provided by the landlord, leaving one-third for the farmer. Although in the States there were many plantations of considerable acreage, the bulk of the crop was grown on small farms, varying in size from a few acres up to twenty acres. Larger farms were the exception. These small farmers could not afford to wait until the crop was harvested. They had to get credit from the local stores or mortgage their growing crops. This and the rent was a very heavy tax on the cultivator, and a serious addition to the price of cotton. On the other hand it was the opinion of every West African governor to whom the question was submitted, that cotton growing could be carried on without any such advances. Messrs. Neely and Prince, both gentlemen brought up in American cotton fields, and accustomed to the credit system, also confirmed these opinions. Under these circumstances, he, Mr. Hutton, was firmly convinced, that West Africa would soon be able to grow cotton much more cheaply than America, and should production overtake consumption, it was the American farmer who would suffer by the fall in price, and not the West African.

22 22 22

New Zealand flax is now used in Canada for the manufacture of binder twine. Up till recently the fibre has been going to Canada, via London, but owing to the low freight freights most of the material is now sent to Vancouver. Recently a firm shipped from Wellington 450 bales to Sydney for trans-shipment to the next steamer for British Columbia, and a week later the same firm despatched another lot via Auckland and Fiji to catch the same steamer.—Textile Mercury, Manchester.

The Cosmos Cotton Co., Yarmouth, N.S., has filed a suit for \$10,000 damages against the Alabama Great Southern Railway, for shortage. Cotton shipped to them from J. H. Coughlin, Birmingham, Ala., purporting to weigh 52,000 pounds, weighed only half that amount on delivery. Bill of lading for \$5,400 was paid by the complainants. J. H. Coughlin failed several months ago, and firms all over the world have charged that he shipped them short weight cotton. Coughlin was recently indicted. Several other firms have filed actions similar to that taken by the Cosmos Company.