

FLOUR EXPORT TO ENGLAND

(An American's Experience)

Mr. A. M. Davis, the American special agent sent over to England to study the flour export subject, writes home to Washington as follows:—

"At present there are in Great Britain and Ireland about 1,500 flour mills of all classes. Of these, 1,000 may be said to produce five-sixths of all the flour made in the Kingdom. The large mills are located at the more important ports of entry and number about 45 or 50. Eight of these mills have capacity, to produce from 100 to 250 sacks of flour per hour. Since a sack of flour is reckoned at 280 lbs., and as most of the mills of large capacity consider 24 hours as a day of operation, the capacity for output of flour can be placed at from 3,500 to 8,500 barrels per day for these eight large mills, and they thus compare favorably in capacity with the large milling plants in the United States. Some 40 other mills are rated at 25 to 50 sacks per hour, equal to 800 to 1,600 barrels daily capacity. The remaining mills scattered throughout the Kingdom, while of much less capacity, are in most cases very substantial concerns with old and well-established trade, grinding for the most part on wheat grown in the Kingdom, but to a considerable extent blending with their product, when conditions justify, American or other flour suitable for improving the quality of their product. The practice of blending flours of various character to improve the general result is one that has been carried on to a large extent by many English mills for many years. For this purpose American Hard wheat flours, particularly Spring wheat flours on account of their strength, were some years ago in great demand, and are still used, but to a much less extent.

The imports of wheat into the United Kingdom for 1907 were 97,168,800 cwt. of 112 lbs. each, equal to, say, 181,400,000 bushels of 60 lbs. each; and for the six-year period ending 1907 averaged 172,000,000 bushels, as against three-fourths that quantity for the periods ending with 1901 and 1895, while for the six years ending 1889 they were but little more than half the quantity imported in the last period ending 1907. Thus while Great Britain's imports of wheat have steadily increased with the growth of population and the increased per capita consumption of flour, the imports of flour have not increased. The conclusion is that the home mills, while not employed to the full extent of their capacity, have made a very creditable showing.

To properly understand the case a study of underlying conditions in the habits of the consumers must be made. There is a reason why so much flour is imported, and there is good ground for hope that the volume of imports can be largely increased. The British miller will not sit idly by while the work is going on, nor will the task of regaining lost trade be an easy one for American mills. But the trade is here, and can be had as the result of well-directed effort systematically followed up. This may seem a strong assertion to many who are familiar only with the aspect of the case from an American view point; but, with due consideration given to all the circumstances attending this complicated proposition, I feel sure of the truth of the statement.

The science of flour milling, as practised here and possibly unexcelled by mills located in other lands, is handicapped now and probably always will be by lack of such regular and excellent supplies of raw material as are found at our mill doors in the United States. True, the English miller may have the pick of the world's wheat crop, such as it is, after it gets here and after the mixing houses at the ports of origin have had their turn at it, and their profit out of it. Not all the mixing of wheat is done in the United States. The wheat shippers the world over are none too particular to send out the best

of their products. The best is valuable, before shipment, to bring up the grade of the poorer qualities of wheat. Against this practice the British miller has always to contend. In this respect his troubles are not likely to grow less as time goes on and the art of wheat mixing improves. Just now he is getting choice wheat from Argentina because, perhaps, there is so little poor wheat to be had from that country of the present crop. But the crop will not always be 62 to 64 lb. wheat, sound and dry, as it happens to be this year.

The poor wheat of any country must be marketed, and it is only natural that the poorest of a surplus crop should somehow work its way into the country's exports. At any rate it generally does. The imports now offering from Russia and India certainly show to one versed in wheat the fine hand of the port blender of grains.

Probably much more than one-half England's population are users of baker's bread regularly, and bread is used as food to an extent greater by one-third than in the United States.

The coast mills of England are located mostly in this southern section. London, of course, furnishes the greater part of the demand for flour since its population (in Greater London,) is near 7,000,000. Fully 9,000,000 people are supplied with bread, or flour by the mills and bakeries in and round London within a radius of 40 miles from the city. London's weekly consumption of flour is placed at 130,000 sacks of 280 lbs. each, equal to 180,000 barrels. Of this the metropolitan mills, or those immediately within the city, supply 50,000 sacks, or, say, 70,000 barrels. The nearby mills, located within 30 or 40 miles, supply 40,000 sacks, say 55,000 barrels. There is thus left a requirement of 40,000 sacks, or 55,000 barrels, weekly to be supplied by foreign mills.

The incentive that spurs on the local mills to such active efforts for trade is the knowledge that to displace the foreign flour means nearly double the business for them that they are now doing. American mills must awaken to the situation, and either by concerted effort or special, individual work protect their present share in the imported flour, or it will only be a question of time when foreign purchases of flour for the London market will be a thing of the past. As one large importer remarked to me, "the imports of flour will continue only so long as the present generation of importers continue in the business in which they are engaged and which, perforce, they must continue because they are too far along in life to venture into other lines. There are no new accessions to the ranks of importers. The young men are taking up other lines more promising of profit and with a better future." This statement is pretty generally confirmed, and impresses me as being in line with the apparent condition. Thus there is emphasized the need now of such work on the part of American millers as will promise additional trade and also retain that which they now have.

The field for effort is with the bakers, who should be educated to continue their old time practice of doing their own blending of such high-class American flours as will produce better bread and more of it to the pound than can be made from the mill-blended flours made from the mixture of wheat to which the local mills are limited."—The Miller.

Short and stout, the Christmas visitor was amusing the children of the house by a display of ambidexterity. He wrote easily with either hand, and, after completing a difficult drawing with his left hand, he said, "There is nothing I can do with my right hand that I cannot do with my left." "There is," retorted Minnie, aged eight, "just try and put your left hand in your right hand trousers pocket."