

COMMERCIAL CONDITIONS PREVAILING IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Consul-General Stowe of Cape Town, in a recent report to the State Department, thus outlines commercial conditions at present prevailing in South Africa:—

"Johannesburg, in the Transvaal, and Bloemfontein, in the Free State, are, to all intents and purposes, deserted cities. Johannesburg, the largest commercial centre in South Africa, has, so far as trade is concerned, ceased to exist. This once busy, bustling city producing monthly over fifteen tons of gold and yearly \$60,000,000 worth is silent. Up to this time goods have reached the Transvaal via Delagoa Bay, but it is not supposed that they will long be permitted to enter. The two republics must then live on their own resources. Their crops are ready for the sickle, but cannot be cut, as the men are off to the war. Prices are so high that the traders refrain from publishing the usual columns of 'market prices.' Large quantities of gold en route to seaports in this colony for shipment to England have been taken by the Boers. Representatives here of export commission houses of the United States are constantly booking and cabling large orders, particularly of food stuffs, but word comes from the canners of meat and fish, makers of flour, corn meal, etc., that they have about all they can do to supply the home demand, and are many weeks or months behind orders.

"From United States papers that reach me I gather that our manufacturers intend to withhold shipments to this country. The fear is expressed that the war would disrupt business for a time. War does disrupt business, but does not always curtail export trade or interrupt its progress. I agree that 'goods which are sent to South Africa from the United States are handled in many cases by English jobbers, who would of necessity be compelled to break off business relations with the natives in case of hostilities;' and that presents the question: Why should English jobbers take the agency for the whole of South Africa in any article? I regret to learn, and correctly, too, that several bills of goods sold by resident agents to merchants here have been held back, both on account of the war and the uncertainty of payment. I think this is poor policy. The credit of the leading merchants in the seaports of this colony cannot be materially affected by the war, and in several cases of which I am cognizant the goods which were sold and held back in the United States were sure of payment. The situation is so well set forth in an article from the 'British and South African Export Gazette' that I here insert it:—

"It is gratifying to note—the war notwithstanding—that there is no present need to urge a policy of forbearance towards South African firms on the part of creditors. It is generally and rightfully recognized that the present situation is altogether abnormal, and produced by causes essentially transitory. It is not a case where consideration may only delay, but not prevent, a final collapse, but the contrary. As a fact, conditions for prosperous trade are excellent, but

political circumstances in South Africa stand in the way of their immediate utilization. The essence of the present situation is patience. When the paralysis of trade is at an end, the vast sums of money locked up in bank coffers in South Africa, as well as those in this country which are ready to be launched as soon as reasonable securities are visible, will lubricate the wheels of a rebound of trade which will quickly change the present complexion of things. South Africa has before now successfully tided over worse times than these, and there is no reason to suppose that she will not be able to do so again.

"I make the statement in all candor that the war, even with all its horrors, will not cause imports from the United States to fall off. The thousands of mules, the millions of pounds of flour, wheat, corn, corn meal, sump and canned meats and fish brought into this country from England for war purposes which previously had been shipped from the United States to England added to the direct shipments from the United States to this country present a total that is extraordinary. What the shipments of United States products from England amount to we shall never know, as they enter duty free, and no record is kept of them at the custom houses. It must, however, be kept in mind that in some lines of goods from the United States which have in previous years found a valuable and ready market the decrease in imports will be decided. The total trade from the United States is maintained by the increase in food stuffs.

"The exodus of Uitlanders from the South African Republic and Orange Free State has, I believe, been unprecedented in history. Many of these people—the mining population, the bone and sinew of the country—have scattered over the world. Numbers of them, too poor to get out of the country, are subjects of charity in the cities of Cape Colony and Natal, and have to be fed. Some have funds for a few days or weeks, but will in time have to be supported by the public, and this in a country that cannot or does not produce the foodstuffs for its own people. The English army is fed with supplies from other countries, and while much of these may have originally come from the United States they reach here via England. The customs duties and railroad and telegraph revenues have fallen off. As the railroads and telegraphs are owned by the Government a very large source of Government support is lost, to say nothing of the employees thrown out of work."

BRITISH FOREIGN TRADE, 1899.

The British Trade and Navigation Returns for this year, from 1st January to 1st December, recently to hand, afford a remarkable exhibit of the continued expansion of the foreign trade of Great Britain. At no previous period when the old land was engaged in a serious war were the mercantile interests in so flourishing a state as they have been since the Boers invaded Natal. Nor was Great Britain ever engaged in a war that caused so little disturbance to its commerce, beyond the drawing off of steamers from their ordinary