

## Problems of the Textile Mills

**Shortage of Materials -- Prices Abnormally High -- Labour Difficulties**

"Difficult but prosperous" may be said to sum up the dry goods trade in Canada at this time very accurately. Canada is prosperous, and this prosperity is reflected in every branch of the textile industry. From the mills to the wholesale houses, as well as from the retailers, come reports of record sales and a greater volume of business than ever before. Our mills are everywhere working to capacity, straining every part of their organization to turn out the maximum amount of goods in a vain endeavor to meet the heavy demand coming from all parts of the country. Large orders are being placed by the wholesale houses, manufacturers and ladies' tailors, which added to tremendous Government contracts produce a demand far in excess of the available supply.

### Labour.

Unfortunately for the peace of mind of the mill owners, these happy conditions are tempered with several perplexing problems. Not the least of these is the labour question which, is becoming more and more difficult as the country is drained of men to recruit our overseas battalions and work in our munition factories. Wages are advancing in sympathy with the high figures paid to the munition workers, so that the scale of pay of an average mill is at present greatly in excess of rates before the war. As the harvest time draws near every inducement is made to tempt the mill operatives into the fields to help handle our enormous production of grain and cereals. This shortage is only temporary, however, and has come to be looked upon as an annual occurrence when the agricultural industry demands every available worker. The scarcity of labour varies considerably in the different parts of the Dominion, for while in the province of Ontario mills have to cope with very serious difficulties in the face of a general enlistment for overseas service, in Quebec the labour market is reported as ninety per cent. of normal. These conditions offer an excellent opportunity for the unemployed women of the country to come forward in the same spirit as have their sisters in Great Britain, and help put into practice the slogan, "Business as Usual."

### The Dyestuffs Problem.

Hardly second in importance to the labour problem is the scarcity of dyestuffs with which the textile manufacturers have to contend. In spite of great efforts and steady improvement on the part of the colour makers in Great Britain, the United States and Canada, dyes are only obtainable at exorbitant figures and cannot be guaranteed to give satisfaction. Advances in price of 500% are quite common, and certain chemicals which formerly sold at sixteen cents a pound, are now bringing \$3.00 to \$5.00. Reds are if anything the most difficult to procure as the necessary chemicals are bought up by the Government for the manufacture of high explosives. For this reason, as a glance at the new autumn goods will show, reds have been eliminated from the designs as much as possible and only such goods are offered to the public as the mills are capable of turning out under existing circumstances. In Canada indigos, greens and browns are very scarce and dear, and the delicate shades for challies and flowered materials are also difficult to produce. On the whole we seem to be progressing very satisfactorily with blacks and are turning out a very fair quality, black sufficient to supply our own requirements. The English manufacturers on the other hand are very short of blacks, and in some cases are asking the wholesale houses to buy the cloth in the grey and have it dyed at their own risk. The black that is being supplied at the present time has a decidedly brownish tinge, but according to recent advices a good jet black will be on the market in one or two months.

### Government Orders.

In addition to these two serious difficulties, the situation is further complicated by the demands made upon the mills by the Government. An enormous contract for canvas for kit bags or tents may be sufficient to keep several looms working for months at a time, using up all the raw materials on hand, and shoving aside ordinary domestic business. Thus orders from wholesale houses may be held up for months or cancelled.

### Raw Materials.

The prevailing scarcity of raw materials presents

another serious obstacle with which textile makers have to contend. Shortages and high prices are reported in every line, wool, cotton, linen and silk, the causes varying with the conditions in the primary markets, but the result being always lack of supplies for the mill owner. In touching upon the different raw materials that enter into the complete range of textiles, it will be understood the difficulties referred to affect the English or American makers to a far greater extent than the Canadian in proportion to their largest output.

### Woolens.

As the greatest advances have taken place in the wool market it is proposed to consider this article first. Canadian wools today have sold as high as 45 cents a pound which means with allowance for the various processes such as scouring, carding, etc., 90 cents to the manufacturer, as compared with 12 or 13 cents before the war. Imported wool is also very high as the shortage arises in the Australian market, from labour troubles and lack of transportation facilities. As the demand for wool for army outfitting purposes is of prime importance, by arrangement between Great Britain and Australia, an embargo has been placed on all wool from the colonies to neutral countries, and not a pound can be sold outside the Empire without official consent and a guarantee from the buyer that the consignment will not reach the enemy. The British Government has now commandeered all Scotch and Irish home grown wools as well and not a pound can be sold without Government license. This precaution naturally involves much red tape and consequent loss of time in making deliveries. The shortage of wool is becoming more stringent every day and dealers can only look ahead to higher prices than ever and more pronounced difficulties in obtaining their shipments.

### Cottons.

The cotton market is abnormal, but nevertheless the mills are able to obtain sufficient raw materials for all requirements. Raw cotton is now selling at 12, 13 and 14 cents as compared with as low as eight cents before the war. During the last year the market has remained fairly steady, fluctuations being within fifty points or half a cent a pound, but as the heavy demand is constantly increasing prospects are for further advances in the coming twelve months. This high range of prices is the outcome of the enormous quantities of raw cotton which is being used by the belligerents, chiefly for gun cotton and also for tents, kitbags and summer uniforms and so forth, as well as hospital supplies. It is only necessary to say that no less than 500 pounds of raw cotton are required to make extract sufficient to shoot one fifteen inch gun, to give an idea of the tremendous amounts that are being used by the warring nations. The end of the war will doubtless revolutionize the market, but for the time being prospects are for higher prices and diminished supplies.

### Linens.

The linen market is characterized by very similar conditions, for supplies are so short that mills that formerly handled pure linen articles only are now advertising "Compounds" or mixtures of linen and cotton. This scarcity originates with the lack of labour in Ireland which has curtailed production to a great extent, and the impossibility of obtaining deliveries from Russia. Two hundred steamers laden with flax have been held up in the Black Sea for some time. Several of these, however, have been able to make their way out recently, and by landing a certain amount of flax in Great Britain have temporarily relieved the situation. Of course, the German and Belgian production has been entirely eliminated which means a great deficit in the normal world's supply of flax. To add to the trials of the linen manufacturer, the British Government has commandeered all visible stock of flax in Great Britain and Ireland and for several months past not a pound has been procurable without official consent. One of the chief uses of linen for army purposes is for aeroplane wings as this material alone possesses the required strength and lightness. As a result of these conditions, a ton of flax now sells for £250 in the English market as compared with an ante-bellum price of £50.

### Silks.

The question of procuring the raw silk is not one of general interest in Canada as our silk trade con-

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Manufacturers of

**Textiles, Sail Duck, Bag Cloths**

and

**Seamless Bags**

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sists almost entirely in importing the finished product, except for certain branches of American manufacturing of silks and ribbons located in this country. Nevertheless a few words on existing conditions in the raw silk market will not be out of place here. As the French market is practically stagnant on account of lack of skilled labour, Switzerland now ranks with Japan in the silk producing and manufacturing industry. Although circumstances arising from the war have placed the silk markets of the world at their feet, the Swiss are hampered by many unavoidable difficulties and are therefore unable to take full advantage of this golden opportunity. The silk crop this year is disappointing being only about one third of last year's, and this, in conjunction with the difficulty of importing from Japan owing to poor transportation facilities, is considerably curtailing available supplies of raw material. In this connection the British blockade has been very disastrous to Swiss interests, as all merchandise going to and from Switzerland via Rotterdam has been stopped en route. At a recent meeting held in England, however, matters have been placed on a more satisfactory footing. The labour problem is also acute, as many former French, Italian and German residents of Switzerland have returned to their respective countries to serve in the armies.

### European Conditions.

Before terminating this review of present conditions it is necessary to consider the very serious situation prevailing in the belligerent countries as a direct result of the war. European mills have to face the same shortages and stringencies as the Canadian and American mills, with a completely disorganized labour market in addition. The skilled workers who formerly built up for England a textile industry second to none in quantity and quality, have now left the looms to the old men, women and children, and are serving with the colours on the field or working in the munition factories. Similar conditions, only to a more marked degree prevail in France, where the industrial output is now almost limited to domestic requirements. What the future will bring is difficult to predict, but at the present time prospects are distinctly discouraging with no hope of relief before the termination of hostilities and then Great Britain will do the manufacturing for all Europe for a time till France and Belgium get their factories, etc., rebuilt.

### POWER OF THE PRESS.

Some folks profess to think that newspaper articles and editorials are of little consequence in this world. Sometimes it is proved most decidedly to the contrary. Recently a New York paper commented on what it called the near-sightedness of the management of many soda fountains in insisting that patrons purchase a fountain check before ordering their "drink." The result was that many persons not knowing what they wanted bought ten-cent checks when they really desired a fifteen-cent beverage, so the fountain lost an opportunity to make five cents more. Soon after this comment was published a leading concern altered its system so that the drink was ordered before it was paid for. So, after all, there is some power in the press; maybe it can't make and unmake kings, but it can change the methods of a soda fountain, which is after all the most popular resort of a summer day.—The Wall Street Journal.

### WEEK

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