

IS OUR COTTON MONOPOLY SECURE?

THE CONTINUED EFFORTS OF THE ENGLISH TO FIND PROFITABLE COTTON LANDS IN AFRICA AND ELSEWHERE ARE BUT REPETITIONS OF PREVIOUS EFFORTS—SOME HISTORICAL INSTANCES—THE OUTLOOK FOR AMERICAN COTTON FOR AN INDEFINITE TIME

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THE Royal British Cotton Association has for the last three years been making every endeavor to develop the English West African colonies into a cotton growing region. The British Government has just been petitioned to aid in this undertaking. At the same time a consular report from Manchester says:

"The Chinese government is encouraging the development of cotton growing in China. It is to some extent an old industry in that country, but the government, according to this report, realizes the shortcomings of the Chinese, and has encouraged Japanese to supervise the matter. The latter, it is said, will engage expert cotton growers from the United States and get them to look over the land, selecting that which might profitably be used for the growing of this important crop."

For half a century Englishmen have welcomed every project to break the practical monopoly which the Southern states have of the world's supply of raw cotton.

We have before us a bulky, time-worn volume, "Cotton is King: and Pro-Slavery Arguments," and one of the problems which engrossed the attention of its compilers was the effort that England was making half a century ago to free herself from dependence on slave-grown cotton. There are in this musty volume extracts from the London *Economist* of 1859 which—except for their direct references to slavery—might well have appeared yesterday. The editor of the *Economist* comments on the fact that Brazil, Egypt, and the West Indies all grew cotton, and might grow more, "but as an immediate and practical question of supply, it is confined to America and British India."

To India, he looked very hopefully. The situation, he says "invests the subject of Indian cotton growing with enormous interest. In some important respects the conditions of supply from India differ very much from those which attach to and determine the supply from America. In India there is no limit to the quantity of labor. There may be said to be little or none to the quantity of land. The obstacle is of another kind; it lies almost exclusively in lack of cheap transit." Therefore he finds "new hopes in the railways."

Writing later in 1859, the editor of the *Economist* lauded in the highest terms the continued efforts to make England independent of Southern cotton. He also lays stress on the opportunities in Africa. Missionaries from various sections believed that West Africa and the Niger countries would relieve the situation; and Lord Palmerston shared the enthusiastic faith that Great Britain would "find on the West Coast of Africa a most valuable supply of cotton; cotton districts more extensive than those of India." English manufacturers still hug the delusion that Africa and India will enable them—as their fathers and grandfathers fifty years ago hoped it would enable them—to get a large part of their raw cotton from the Old World.

During the Civil War when cotton production almost stopped in the South says the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "the cotton-growing resources of every part of the globe were tested to the utmost; and in the exhibition of 1862 the representatives of every country from which supplies might be expected met to concert measures for obtaining all that was wanted without the aid of America. The colo-

nies and dependencies of Great Britain, including India, seemed well able to grow all the cotton that could be required, whilst numerous other countries were ready to afford their co-operation. A powerful stimulus was thus given to the growth of cotton in all directions; a degree of activity and enterprise never witnessed before was seen in India, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Africa, the West Indies, Queensland, New South Wales, Peru, Brazil, and in short wherever cotton could be produced; and there seemed no room to doubt that in a short time there would be abundant supplies independently of America. But, ten years afterward, in the exhibition of 1872, which was specially devoted to cotton, a few only of the thirty-five countries which had sent their samples in 1862 again appeared, and these for the most part only to bear witness to disappointment and failure. America had re-entered the field of competition, and was rapidly gaining ground so as to be able to bid defiance to the world."

An even more vivid picture of the inducements to foreign competition which England held out during the Civil War period is given by the report of 1869 of the Cotton Commissioner of India. So immense were the profits that the Indian cotton farmers received, he says, that they committed all sorts of absurdities: "Silver plowshares and tires of solid silver for cartwheels made their appearance here and there; fancy prices were paid for bullocks of a favorite color or possessing some peculiarities of tail, and enormous sums were squandered on marriage ceremonies." And yet, in spite of the practical subsidies which were paid, and the energy with which the experiment was prosecuted, it was found impossible even with artificial inflation of prices to carry the Indian crop beyond 3,000,000 bales.

As to Africa, the experiments there have never been at any time anything but inglorious failures; and it is said that the cotton made in the Niger territory has cost 50 cents a pound. A West African correspondent of the London *Times* says that the much vaunted "colonies of Lagos, Southern Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and Gambia, under the most favorable circumstances will not be capable of producing more than 350,000 bales, and these figures will not be attained for many years, if ever."

It is not likely, of course, that all these at-

tempts to grow cotton outside the South will fail utterly; but what does seem sure is that the world's demand for cotton will grow much faster than the foreign supply, and that therefore our country will be called on in the future, as heretofore, for a constantly increasing crop.

The United States Department of Agriculture in its *Crop Reporter* for December, 1905, makes this conservative statement: "The organized efforts of powerful associations of cotton manufacturers in Great Britain, Germany, and France to establish and stimulate cotton production in the colonies of these countries, which began early in 1903 with a large capital subscribed for promotion, have so far resulted in no perceptible addition to the world's cotton crop, and there are no present indications of a competition of new fields of production which will materially affect the foreign market for the upland cotton of this country for many years."

Even more interesting is the opinion of the late Mr. Edward Atkinson, in 1903. During the Civil War Mr. Atkinson imported cotton from India, Egypt, China, West Africa, Peru and Brazil; and his conclusion is that nearly all the foreign cotton is as unsatisfactory in quality as it is deficient in quantity. None of the countries mentioned, he says, have a congenial climate such as ours.

The most striking testimony of all is the report of the Commissioners recently sent out by the British Government to investigate the cotton growing possibilities of East Africa, who reported that, "all efforts to raise cotton successfully elsewhere than in the Southern part of the United States have failed. This is the home of the cotton plant; and, if it will grow and fruit elsewhere to the extent that the staple shall have a substantial commercial value, the fact is yet to be demonstrated. It was experimented with under different suns during and after the American Civil War, and all the experiments failed. Providence has given the Southern farmer a monopoly of the indispensable cotton crop, and he need not take fright when the price soars and there are heard threats of turning Africa, Egypt, or other countries into cotton fields and making them furnish the world's supply."

But even if the South need not fear competition, is it going to be able to supply the increasing demand for cotton? Thirty years ago the South grew only 4,000,000 bales of cotton; twenty years ago 6,000,000 bales;

ten years ago, 8,000,000 bales; the last three crops have averaged more than 11,000,000.

Further, cotton is not only supplanting other fabrics, but the demand for the great Southern staple is increasing as a result of the constant raising of our standards of living and of comfort, and as a result of the advance of civilization.

"It is estimated," says the United States Department of Agriculture, "that of the world's population of 1,500,000,000, about 500,000,000 regularly wear clothes, about 750,000,000 are partially clothed, and 250,000,000 habitually go almost naked; and that to clothe the entire population of the world would require 42,000,000 bales of 500 pounds each." To meet this demand or half this demand the South must make great progress in cotton growing. We have yet a low aver-

age yield per acre; we are depending yet on mistreated soils; we are yet planting miserably selected seed; and we have inefficient tools and machinery.

By proper cultivation, by judicious selection of seed and the use of machinery, the land which now produces less than half a bale could be made to produce at least a bale to the acre. But, even if we do not double the yield, we have enough available idle land to make three times the present crop; for, in the cotton producing counties, only one acre in eleven is planted in cotton.

Our greatest monopoly, with its ten million shareholders and \$600,000,000 of annual product not only has little to fear from foreign competition but can look forward with confidence to being able to meet all the demands which the world shall make upon it.