

#### LINEN MANUFACTURE

Until very recently, the attempts to establish linen manufacture as an industry in the United States were spasmodic and unsuccessful. The reason is to be found in the fact that no fibre is produced here suitable for spinning. This difficulty greatly hampers the manufacturers. Although a large quantity of flax is grown here, its cultivation is for the seed rather than the fibre. Hence, not until American farmers find it profitable to raise the raw material will the linen industry obtain a firm foothold in the United States. As a consequence, the eighteen American establishments engaged in linen manufacture depend almost entirely upon foreign importations for the raw material. But though the industry is not extensive, giving employ-

ment, as it does, to less than 4,000 wage-earners, the prospects are, at present, brighter than at any past time. There is a promise of profit to the manufacturer who can supply the demand for linen carpet-yarns; for the vast quantities of linen thread needed in the shoe industry; and for the almost unlimited demand for towels. As a matter of fact, American manufacturers have found profit in the three fields just mentioned ever since 1897, when the tariff rates were readjusted, the duty on yarns being lowered to a revenue basis, and the duty on manufactured goods raised. Towelling, the most promising product, is now made in many of the large cotton mills.

The fact still remains that the manufacturer of the general run of linen products, finds his margin of profit small and precarious, and the market for his goods limited. The processes of manufacture require great skill and care, and are, therefore, costly. The market is narrow, because of the greater demand for articles of cotton, wool and silk, especially in the hundreds of uses to which ordinary cloth is put. Thus the linen manufacturer is limited to the products for which linen is indispensable—fine fabrics for the dining table, thread and twine where strength is required, and for the best quality of towelling.

At the present time flax is largely grown in the United States for seed, the straw, of inferior quality, when used at all, going to the tow mills or the paper mills, and being worth from one to eight dollars a ton, the average in different sections being not more than from two to four dollars. In the older States, the area under present cultivation is very small and steadily decreasing; in the newer States, or States where agriculture is being pushed steadily westward from year to year, the area under cultivation about holds its own one season with another. Cultivation for fibre is beginning to attract attention, however, and the Department of Agriculture is trying to re-establish this important industry.