

The Textile Reconstruction of France*

Conditions in the Department Du Nord Before the War

By ALFRED RENOARD

AT the present moment three-fourths of the Department Du Nord, France, are in the hands of the Germans. Industrial life has not only disappeared from the whole region, but a large number of industrial establishments, the working-stock they had, the raw materials they contained, the whole supply of manufactured goods are entirely gone; either because they have been ruined through the continuous bombardments, or because the raw materials and goods have been requisitioned against valueless receipts, or the working-stock has been carried away to Germany; or finally, because the machinery stripped of its copper parts by the enemy is nothing but a heap of iron, or a useless molten mass. Whatever the cause made be, all this no longer exists and will surely have to be replaced after the war.

An industrial district, like Le Nord, that stands at the top of the textile industry in France, and which, therefore, can be considered one of the most important textile centers of the world, does not give up its predominance easily and will want to resume the high position which it held before the war. One must reckon with the possibility that there will be some failures, but they will be few and will only be temporary. The textile industry belongs to the life of the inhabitants and will remain in it, and could not be exterminated.

Under these conditions it seems to us that there will be a great opportunity for the United States in the replacing of machines in the establishments that have been stripped of their equipment: Preparatory machines for cotton and wool, spinning and twining machines for the two industries, power looms, knitting machines, apparatus for dyeing, bleaching and finishing, etc. As soon as the war is ended, the manufacturers of these districts will need not only such equipment, but also parts for the quick

restoration of damaged machinery, for the supply of which America will have a good chance. To be sure, the construction engineers of England, France and Switzerland, will not fail to place themselves in line, but in the first two countries a large number of textile machine shops have most of their men occupied with the manufacture of war munitions, and after the war will be so overrun with orders as to be unable to fill them promptly, and will be obliged to delay their deliveries indefinitely. Besides one must take it for granted that, for a certain number of years at least, German engineers will be systematically barred from French business. Many of these concerns will surely install themselves in Switzerland, and put on a Swiss label; several have already taken such steps. But they will intentionally lose precious time in making an installation, and this will not help to secure a new clientage for them. Moreover, the French mill owners are warned, and associations have already been formed to meet this eventuality and to unmask such rascals. On the other hand, the United States engineers are perfectly prepared to place themselves in the foremost ranks with a large number of machines, and will then have (we repeat it) an important place as suppliers of the French clientage that knows how to value a good and reasonably priced construction, the quick delivery of the machinery ordered, and, last but not least, has retained a deep sympathy for the American people.

CONDITIONS BEFORE THE WAR

The textile industry is beyond dispute the most important of all those of the district of the North. It embraces, in fact, the manufacture of all common fibers: Wool, cotton, flax, hemp, jute, and even silk, since one establishment of great importance in Roubaix has specialized in the spinning of schappe, or silk waste. The district of the North may be divided into two large divisions, which are quite distinct: that of the flax industry and that of the woolen industry, while the cotton industry is spread over both regions, though more concentrated in some places than in others.

LILLE THE LINEN CENTER

First rank in the flax industry is held by Lille, the capital of the province. It possessed before the war three-fourths of the 500,000 spindles and more than one-third of the 22,000 power looms and the 22,000 hand-looms that were in all

France. The city itself had 108 textile mills of different kinds, the smaller places around Lille all together about 100. One of the specialties of Lille is the manufacture of linen sewing thread, the manufacturers of which have formed a syndicate for the purpose of guarding the interests of this special industry. Lille is also the seat of the very ancient association, "Comité Linier de France," whose purpose it is to watch over the interests of the industry which it represents and to improve the cultivation and manufacture of flax.

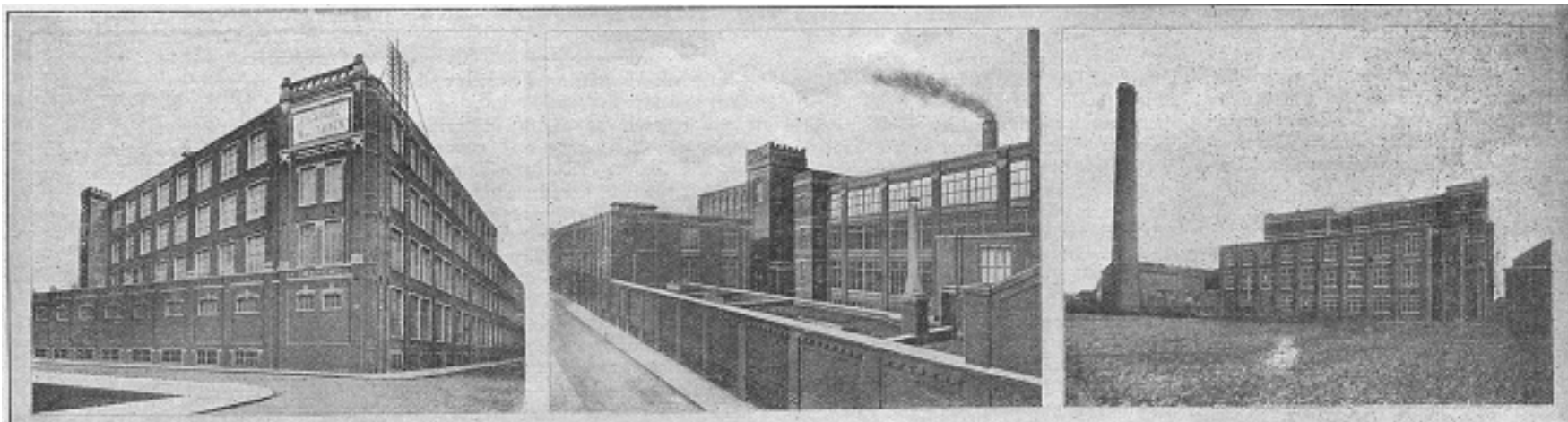
Another important center is Armentieres with 64 different flax mills; Dunkirk, the seat of the jute and canvas manufacture, with 12 mills. Chambray and vicinity with 53 mills, and Valenciennes with 16 mills represent principally the manufacture of batistes, lawn, and handkerchiefs. Tulle and laces are manufactured in Cadry with 216 mills and Inchy with 85 mills. We will also mention that the textile industries have a number of technical institutions of a high order: Societe Industrielle, the Industrial Institute in Lille, and the Professional School at Armentieres.

WOOL INDUSTRY IN ROUBAIX-TOURCOING

The center of the woolen industry is Roubaix, where just before the war about 40,000,000 pieces of textile fabrics with a value of about 350,000,000 francs were produced, and the total amount of business transacted was not below one billion francs. Of hardly less importance is its close neighbor, Tourcoing, with over 100 different mills, to which must be added a very large number of smaller mills nearby. Tourcoing is also the seat of the industrial and commercial society for the protection of the interests of the district and of a professional school; in Roubaix are three industrial schools. Also Fourmies with its adjacent villages is worth mentioning as an important center of the woolen industry. It need scarcely be said that there is hardly a single textile fabric that is not manufactured in this great industrial district.

(To be continued)

* This is the first of a series of articles by Alfred Renouard, a French textile authority, writing exclusively for TEXTILE WORLD JOURNAL. After describing the importance of the north of France as a textile center prior to the war, the author will describe the damaged condition of the mills in that territory at present, and will demonstrate the business possibility that will be presented to American manufacturers of textile machinery and mill supplies after the war when the reconstruction and re-equipment of these plants are started.



1. COTTON SPINNING MILL OF HENRI LOYER AT LILLE

2. COTTON SPINNING MILL OF WALLAERT BROS. AT LILLE

3. COTTON SPINNING MILL OF F. DELASALLE AT NARAIS DE LOMME