

Aloe Fibre.

(Extract from Report of H.M. Consul, through Sir E. Baring, Cairo, 17th February, 1892.)

The Aloe-fibre Industry of Somali Land.—In November, 1891, a bale of the fibre was sent to the Government at Bombay, and thence to England. The fibre was prepared in the roughest and rudest manner by ignorant Somalis, and compares favourably with the many new types from various countries, and is all very nice colour, and good strength, and clean. It was sold at the rate of £16 10s. per ton. The people will do nothing towards making a trade in the fibre; indeed, they have not the means to work it profitably, though they use it extensively themselves for ropes and other articles.

Manner in which the Fibre is prepared.—The plant is not cut, it is pulled out of the ground; the sharp points are cut off; the plant is then divided in two down the centre; the pieces are then beaten with a stick until they become soft. The fibre is then extracted by placing the divided plant between two pieces of wood, which are fastened tightly together, and the plant is pulled through them, leaving the fibre. This is then placed in the sun to dry for about half-an-hour. No water is used: the Somalis say that that blackens the fibre. The plant should be treated as soon as possible after being pulled up to prevent drying of the sap. If the aloe is left lying in the sun for a day or two it is ruined; it should be treated at once, under sheds.

(Extract from Reports of H.M. Consuls, Mr. Alex. Hosie, Wenchow, 24th January, 1890; Mr. P. Warren, Tainan, in Formosa, 6th March, 1891; and Mr. Charles Gardner, Hankow, 3rd March, 1891.

China.—In the Wenchow Province hemp was imported in 1889 to the value of £1,077. It is grown in Western China, and more especially in the province of Ssu-Ch'uan. There the stems, when ripe, are cut down, made into bundles, and carried from the fields to the house of the grower, where they are steeped in water, and the bark with the fibre removed by hand. Elsewhere a different method is practised. When the stems are ripe the peasant removes the bark in the field in a very simple, ingenious, and profitable manner: taking each stem about 6in. above ground between the thumb and fingers of both hands a few inches apart, he gives a smart push downwards and forwards, causing a compound fracture of the stem between his two hands; he then inserts the forefinger of his left hand in the fracture, and draws the bark downwards to the root, where it readily detaches itself. In the same way the remaining bark and upper part of the stem, which he holds in his right hand, are removed, and by a simple brush of the hand from the root-end of the bark upwards the leaves and stems are dislodged and the bark is ready for future manipulation. Another advantage of this system is, that the discarded leaves and stems remain on the field and help to manure the other two crops. An English acre produces 80,000 serviceable stems per crop. One man can decorticate 4,000 stems in the field in ten hours, and two men can extract 16lb. of clean dry fibre from the ribbons of these 4,000 stems in the same time—that is to say, three men will reap and extract the fibre on an acre in twenty days, producing 320lb. of fibre per crop ready for market. In Formosa the impossibility of preparing hemp on the spot without the aid of machinery, and the expense of conveyance to the port in a bulky and semi-prepared state, prevent them finding a market in foreign countries. In 1890 Tainan imported hemp bags to the value of £2,115 5s. In the Hankow District the hemp trade is expanding, also the rhea fibre.

APPENDIX C.—MISCELLANEOUS.

(Extract from Report of H.M. Consul at Manila, Mr. Alex. Gollan, 31st January and 14th February, 1891).

HEMP still holds its own as the most important article exported from the Philippines. The shipments in 1890 have been as follows:—

							Bales.
To Great Britain	...	...	...	...	...	...	341,993
To United States	...	...	...	...	...	...	131,226
To Australia	...	...	...	...	...	...	18,413
To other countries	...	...	...	...	...	...	14,523
							506,155
As against in 1889	...	...	...	...	...	...	568,571
Decrease in 1890	...	...	...	...	...	...	62,416

It takes eight bales to a ton, and the average price for the year may be stated at £34 10s. per ton f.o.b. The total value thus reached was about £2,150,000, or a little more than £1,000,000 under estimated values of the shipments for 1889, owing partly to diminished quantity shipped in 1890 and partly to lower prices which ruled in the latter year. The present estimated stock of hemp on hand amounts to 10,000 tons. The average price of hemp for the year 1890 was about £34 10s. per ton f.o.b., so that the total value of the 506,155 bales was about £2,150,000. These bales equal 63,270 tons. Of this quantity 18,413 were exported to Australia.

(Extract from Report by H.M. Consuls at St. Petersburg and Riga, Mr. John Mitchell and Mr. W. G. Wagstaff, dated 24th August, 1891; 9th March, 1891; and 5th March, 1892.)

The decay of the hemp trade in Russia is attributed to the growing competition it meets with from Italy, Manila, and other hems.

The Riga District.—A further falling-off in hemp seed is recorded. The hemp-seed crop of 1891 was about 40 per cent. under that of 1890. 373,490 quarters were sown in the sixty provinces of Russia, and yielded 720,977 quarters, or, after deducting seed, 6,953 tons. The quality of the crop