

DEAR SIR,—

Bushy Park, 1st August, 1895.

In reply to yours asking for information about sugar-beet. I have always thought highly of it as a valuable industry, and calculated to be of great benefit to Tasmania. Difficult to find words sufficiently expressive enough. I think you will find in the records of the House that Hon. T. D. Chapman took great interest in it and there is a bonus of £2,000 for the makers of tons. The Hon. W. Crosby can tell you a lot about it and my moving in the matter. We have a fine crop, and all stocks do well on it. If you can only get the people to unite and carry it out. Mr. Gill can give you a lot of valuable information.

J. C. Von Stieglitz, Esq., M.H.A.

Yours truly,

EBENEZER SHOORBRIDGE.

SIR,—

Sydney, 15th August, 1895.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 25th ultimo, which I have been unable to answer at an earlier date, owing to my absence in Queensland, from where I have just returned.

In reference to your questions *re* the sugar industry, I find I can only answer them in a very incomplete manner; to do otherwise would mean the writing of a very lengthy report. Verbal evidence would have been more useful to the object in view, as it would have allowed me to enlighten your Committee on the whole question submitted to them.

I will now answer your questions in the order they are put to me:—

1. Will you erect a mill in Tasmania?—A company will erect a large mill in Tasmania on the following conditions: (a.) That the full supply of suitable roots will be guaranteed from the first season. (b.) That the Government will allow the free importation of the manufacturing plant. (c.) That the present price of sugar shall not seriously decline in the meantime. (d.) That the farmers themselves subscribe 20 per cent. of the capital of the company, as I consider it an essential condition of success that the farmers should have a serious interest in the concern; however, every facility would be given to them to acquire that interest, which would be paid principally with their supply of roots, and divided over a suitable period.

2. What would be the approximate cost of such mill?—I reckon that the cost of the factory would not be less than £75,000. In reference to this matter, I beg to observe that beet-sugar manufacturing plant suitable to Australian conditions must be designed on totally different lines from even the most perfect establishments of Europe. The small population of these colonies and a return to prosperity may cause at a certain moment a scarcity of labour which must be foreseen. The economy in labour must be carried on much further than has ever been done before, and I have designed a plan of a factory to meet that necessity. The drawback of the proposed innovations is that they will increase the cost of the plant; however, compensation would be found for it if the Government will allow the free importation of the plant.

3. Quantity of beet such mill would utilise per annum?—About 45,000 tons.

4. Price per ton for beet at 14 and 15 per cent.?—At the present price of sugar the 14-per-cent. roots would be worth £14 a ton delivered at the factory, and 1s. 6d. would be paid for every degree above. The same amounts would be deducted for every degree below 14 per cent., and the manufacturer would have the option of refusing roots below 12 per cent. The price paid for the roots would increase with the price of sugar.

I have, &c.,

C. VAN DE VELDE.

Henry T. Maning, Esq., Clerk of the House, Hobart.

DEAR SIR,—

Holbrook Place, Hobart, 15th August, 1895.

As you requested, I give you in writing the substance of our conversation of this morning on the subject of the sugar-beet industry in France.

I lived from 1875 to 1882 in the midst of some of the best beet-growing country in France on the confines of the Departments of the Aisne and the Oise, and in the neighbourhood of some large beet-sugar factories. The beet grown on my property I used to sell to one of these factories. The usual plan was to make contracts to plant an area of land with a fixed maximum and minimum of acreage for a given number of years with a named sort of beet, or with seed provided by the factory, all the produce of which is to be taken. A standard price was fixed for beet of a given richness or percentage of saccharine matter, and the price actually paid varied as the beet proved richer or poorer than the standard. The seller could have the analyses made checked if he wished. He had to deliver the roots to the factory, and to take the pulp back from it. He was restricted in the use of manures to those deriving their nitrogenous constituents from nitrate of soda and not from sulphate of ammonia, as the latter interferes with the success of some of the processes in sugar-making. I do not remember any other conditions as to cultivation.

The country generally in my neighbourhood overlaid sandstone grit and oolite. The soils preferred for beet-growing were medium quality, comparatively porous, and well-drained land. This was—at least, occasionally—very deeply ploughed. As you are aware, the saccharine matter is chiefly found in the buried part of the root, but it does not do to earth over the whole of the root, as a considerable part must be exposed to the action of the sun and air to develop or ripen the sugar.

I have seen much land in Tasmania which to all appearance is well adapted for beet-growing. As for climate, beet needs sufficient moisture in its early stages to develop it, and for the last six weeks a good deal of sun to ripen the sugar. At this time a frosty morning followed by a fine day does anything but harm.