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JAPANESE TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Present and Future

By

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3. Manufactures of Hemp, Jute and Similar Products

GENERAL SURVEY. The first attempt at production on a large scale under modern conditions dates back to 1886 and synchronised with the development of other branches of the textile industry. A glance at the later history of the industry, however, reveals that development was greatly circumscribed because of a restricted peace-time demand. In time of war, military requirements stimulate a sudden rise in demand, which compels the existing companies to extend their plants, while new companies are formed in rapid succession. With the termination of hostilities, however, the demand returning to normal, the industry finds itself faced with a serious situation, necessitating drastic readjustment. This alternating cycle of activity and depression has been witnessed in the successive wars which Japan fought in the past, namely, the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War and the World War. The long and serious struggle for recovery, which the industry made after each short period of feverish activity, has been greater than in any other industry.

The industry as described here refers to that branch of the textile industry which employs as its raw material, flax, ramie, jute and Manila hemp. So far as manufacture is concerned, this industry may be divided into two main groups, the one principally manufacturing hemp and flax products, and the other producing goods from ramie.

Under the circumstances, it was found necessary, after the close of the World War, to envisage measures for the regulation of production. With the present rigid enforcement of control in the form of a trust under the Teikoku Seima Company, fears of a recurrence of the disturbed conditions of past years have been greatly alleviated. However, the blow that the industry received from the post-war economic reaction was so severe that, in spite of the recent industrial activity, this industry is far from having achieved a complete recovery, and the improvement is slow when compared with the rapid advance in other branches of the textile industry.

The first factory for ramie dates back to 1899, when the Nippon Senshi Company (the present Osaka factory of the Teikoku Seima Company) was established. Later, in the Taisho era, new companies were formed in rapid succession owing to the World War, but during the period of depression following the war, most of them went into liquidation. At present there are eight ramie factories in Japan, the most important of which is the Toyo Tsaito Company.

The jute industry originated early in 1890, but in view of the retarding influence of the post-war depression, and also from the lack of a sufficient supply of material, its development has not been very marked.

PRODUCTION. Except Hokkaido flax which is scarcely sufficient to cover the home demand, Japan draws most of the raw materials from abroad. Chosen produces several times as much raw hemp and ramie as Japan proper, and the production of jute fibre in Taiwan is worthy of mention.

In view of the heavy annual fluctuation in the ramie crop in China, the cultivation of ramie in Japan proper has been greatly stimulated, while the sudden development of ramie plantations under Japanese management in Davao, in the Philippine Islands, deserves mention. The future outlook of flax plantations in Manchoukuo is also very promising.

The Philippines, British India and China are the most important sources of raw materials for the industry. Manila hemp is, of course, imported from the Philippines, jute from British India, and ramie from China.

Excerpt from pages 289-291