

## INDUSTRIES THAT FAILED.

THEY DID NOT REVOLUTIONIZE THE COUNTRY'S PURSUITS, AFTER ALL.

THE SILKWORM AND HIS VICISSITUDES—HOW SORGHUM WAS TO CHANGE THE SUGAR MARKET—TEA CULTURE'S BRIEF CAREER.

Thus far, according to the reports from the several places where the industry has been established, beet-sugar making seems to be enjoying prosperity. The wave of enthusiasm which started it and has kept it going has not yet dashed against any breakwater of discouragement, and many confident predictions have been made which, if fulfilled, insure for the new occupation a remarkable wealth-producing career. And yet the whole proceeding, with its enthusiasm, preparations and forecasts, recalls to the minds of those whose memories reach back half a century, more or less, many similar attempts that are recorded now under the head of projects which failed. New industries which were to revolutionize the country's pursuits have been started in high hopes, over and over again, only to drop quietly out of sight after a little, unremembered except by those who lost money in the unsuccessful ventures. One of the most ancient and persistent of these enterprises, which has been revived often enough to linger still in the memory of middle-aged persons, is the raising of silkworms and the making of silk. It is over two hundred years since this industry first tried to naturalize itself on American soil, and it is further from prosperity to-day than it was in Colonial times!

It is first mentioned as being pursued in this country about the middle of the seventeenth century. At that time it was confined to Virginia, and tradition has it that the raw silk for the coronation robes of Charles II, in 1690, was sent to England from that colony. Apparently this effort was too much for the Virginians, or, which is probably the true explanation, tobacco-raising proved more profitable than silkworm culture, for there is no further record of silk from the Old Dominion. In 1732 the industry took another lease of life in Georgia, where extensive grants of land were made on the condition that one hundred white mulberry trees should be planted to every ten acres of cleared ground. The silkworms thrived abundantly for many years, and it is worth noting that Georgia marked the high tide of prosperity for the industry in this country. In 1759 ten thousand pounds of raw silk were exported to England, and it is stated that nearly double this quantity was sent over in one year shortly afterward. Then began the reign of King Cotton, and the poor silkworm curled up and died on his shrivelled mulberry-leaf. The last silk exportation from Georgia was made in 1790 and it was about that time that the big "filature" in Savannah (which in its latter years had indeed been used as a hotel), was torn down.

### SENTIMENT AND SILK CULTURE.

A few years before this several enthusiastic persons in New-England made determined efforts to establish silk culture here. Among its advocates was Dr. Jared Elliot, of Connecticut, who, however, appeared to be chiefly concerned in promoting the planting of groves of mulberry trees. Besides the various utilitarian reasons in favor of the trees he added this unique recommendation:

"Such groves are proper places for retirement, study and meditation. This will have weight with those who love contemplation, those who are wise and good."

Whether under Dr. Elliot's patronage or under that of some one else, the trees were planted and the worms raised in Connecticut, beginning about the year 1760. Those engaged in the occupation stuck to it with commendable Yankee persistence, but after three-quarters of a century of existence it died a natural death. Pennsylvania and New-Jersey began the culture of silk in 1771, but it was "interrupted by the Revolution," and never resumed.

It was about the year 1820 that the great silkworm fever of this century started. One of its first manifestations was the boom that at once took place in the mulberry tree business. Speculators, imagining that the raising of silkworms was to be the leading industry of the country, imported the tree known as *Morus multicaulis* from France in immense numbers. Certain persons obtained a monopoly of the trees, and they were sold to the silkworm raisers at prices ranging from \$25 to \$500 a hundred. But the new occupation failed, as it had invariably done before, and in 1829 there was a sudden collapse of the mulberry boom. The once prized trees were offered to the farmers at \$1 a hundred "for pea-brush," and did not always find takers at that.

There have been protests ever since at intervals against the neglect of silk culture. In 1841 an Italian named Tinelli spoke in favor of it at the American Institute Fair of that year. He said it had been "proved with almost mathematical precision" that America could not only dispense with foreign silk, but could supply European markets, and that the production of silk in this country was "destined to fill the dangerous deficits in public economy caused by speculation and extravagance." And yet after fifty-six years the United States has not supplied the European markets to any appreciable extent with silk, nor filled up the deficits in the Treasury with that fabric! Mr. Tinelli remarked at the same time that there had already been "gigantic progress," and the chief thing needed then was a protective duty on imported silk.

Throughout the fifties, sixties and seventies

there were many magazine articles on the subject of silk culture, written generally by persons who were enthusiasts in the matter and who laid the blame for the 1839 failure upon the iniquitous speculation in and monopoly of mulberry trees.

All of these writers were remarkably hopeful for the future, however, and the first published note on the other side seems to have been struck in 1880, when a writer remarked that the silkworm industry in America had been merely a series of attempts and failures, and that it was suitable only to densely populated countries where labor was cheap.

But the pursuit which had undergone so many alternate revivals and hardships was destined to experience one more flicker of the spark of its life. In 1886 the Agricultural Department established a filature at Washington for the reeling of silk from American cocoons. Associations for silk-raising were formed in Kansas and California, and there was a Woman's Silk Culture Association in Philadelphia. In the same year, 1886, Congress voted an annual appropriation of \$15,000 to enable the associations to buy the cocoons direct from the farmers, reel them and sell them to the manufacturers. But the project could not be made to give any promise of great success, and in 1892 the appropriation was discontinued. Silk culture once more dropped gently into oblivion, and up to date it has not emerged for another term of activity.

### A USE FOR SORGHUM.

The history of sorghum, while it must be considered another record of failure, nevertheless has a redeeming feature in these latter days. If people made wry faces and declined to take a fancy to sorghum sugar and molasses, their cattle and horses at least did not refuse to eat the sorghum stalks. The plant, where it still flourishes, is now used almost exclusively as fodder for live stock. But in the early days of its career in this country it was destined to turn the sugar market completely upside down. Ordinary cane sugar would become an unconsidered trifle when compared to the new kind, and the Louisiana sugar-cane plantations would pale into insignificance beside the great sorghum fields of the North and West. It was in 1854 that the first seeds of the Chinese sorgho plant, twenty-one varieties in all, were received at the United States Patent Office, and distributed thence throughout the country. The plant, which strongly resembles Indian corn, was found to grow admirably wherever corn did, and farmers took up its cultivation with eagerness. By 1860 the industry had increased so greatly that over seven million gallons of sorghum molasses were made that year, Iowa being the largest producer, with Illinois and Indiana next. It was easier, however, to make the molasses than to crystallize the juice into sugar, and much literature was published at this time advocating various methods for accomplishing the "sugaring" to the best advantage. Another and more serious trouble, referred to above, was the fact that the sorghum products had a peculiar and, to most persons, an extremely unpleasant taste. During the war the South cultivated sorghum to a considerable extent. General Sherman mentioned that the destruction of sorghum products which he accomplished in the course of his march to the sea was an effective means of distressing the enemy.

Sorghum continued to figure prominently in the agricultural reports for several years, and from time to time experts came forward with advice as to how the disagreeable sorghum taste might be eliminated from the sugar. The enthusiasm was still "on" in 1880, when it was predicted that within five years from that time all the sugar needed in the United States would be raised by American farmers. Furthermore, some people thought it likely that within ten years more would be exported annually than had ever been imported. In the face of this sanguine forecast the figures of the last Agricultural Report, that of 1896, are interesting. In that year the United States imported 3,895,338,557 pounds of sugar, over one billion pounds of which came from Cuba. The American farmers had fallen about four billion pounds short of their duty in supplying the country, not to mention the matter of export. Not even a reference to sorghum appears in the report.

### TEA CULTURE.

Tea culture in the United States deserves a word in closing, though it never had the extended trials which were granted to silk and sorghum. The idea was first broached in 1854 or 1855, and in 1857 the Government commissioned Robert Fortune, the English author and botanist, who had spent many years in China, to send to the United States Patent Office from that country specimens of tea seeds and young plants. These arrived in good condition, and in August, 1859, over fifty thousand fine tea plants were growing in the United States Propagating Garden, at Washington. In the Agricultural Report for that year considerable space was devoted to tea, with reasons why it could be raised successfully in America, and in the 1860 report there was a long article by Spencer Bonsall, of Philadelphia, the title of which ran thus:

"Tea: Its Culture and Manufacture, with Directions for the Soil, Character of Climate, etc., Adapted to the Culture of the Plant in the United States; from Practical Experience Acquired by a Residence of Six Years in Assam."

South Carolina seems to have been the only State which cared to try the tea experiment, and the results were shortlived and unsatisfactory. In a year or two no mention of tea appeared in the Agricultural Reports, and the project was added to the retired list. It is not believed that it has ever since been revived.

## PLAYS FOR HOLIDAYS.

A STRANGE LACK OF CHRISTMAS PIECES.

NO LACK, HOWEVER, OF LIGHT AND AMUSING WORKS ON THE LOCAL STAGE.

The managers of New-York theatres seem to have forgotten that Christmas is coming. There is not a single attraction advertised for this week that seems to have been designed and created expressly for the holidays. That could not happen in London, where they manage these things so much better. Or is it in France, that they manage these things so much better? In London they always have pantomimes for the holidays. It is not quite clear what the pantomime has to do with Christmas, except that all right-minded people then feel inclined to let go their seriousness and be children for a little while, and to enjoy with the enjoyment of children; that mummings are time-honored accompaniments of Christmas, and that the pantomime is a form of nonsensical mummery which fulfills the desired conditions.

The Christmas pantomime has always shown the fragility of the exotic in America. It has never gained a firm hold on the popular mind. There are persons living right here in New-York to-day who would stare at you and would not under-



GRACE FILKINS.

"The Royal Box," Fifth Avenue Theatre.

stand if you tried to convince them that they were any the worse off for not seeing a pantomime in the course of the holidays. Yet, though the public is so lamentably unconscious of the necessity for it, it usually happens that some entertainment with a tendency in the direction of the pantomime appears in New-York about Christmas time, so that those who do recognize that it is right to go to one can feel that they are doing their best to preserve an ancient institution. When there is no pantomime there is sometimes a fairy play, which is the next thing to it, and when there is no fairy play there is sometimes a gorgeous spectacle, which is nothing at all of the kind. There is not even a barnyard play, with a Christmas dinner in it. There are, of course, works of a light order on the local stage at the present moment, plays with dancing and frivolity in them, and, in some cases, with something like cleverness and genuine amusing quality. Probably it will all fall out so that the Christmas amusement-seekers will not go home feeling dull or disappointed.

There is "The Ballet Girl," which has not been tried yet, but will be tried this week at the Manhattan Theatre. The list of musical farces named after girls who support themselves in various ways still stretches out, and this is another of them. The book is by James T. Tanner, and the lyrics are written by Adrian Ross. The music is composed by Carl Kiebert.

The ballet girl who is put in to give the name to the play is Violette, of the Folies Theatre, Paris. She and her lover, Lord Comarthy, make their way to a quiet country village in Holland, where they intend to be married. Comarthy is the son of the Earl of Kilbeggan, who has come to the same place for reasons of his own. For he is hunting an heiress, and she is staying here. She is Miss Nita Vanderkoop, an American. The Earl has asked her father for her hand, and he, like a good American father, has referred him to the girl herself, and he is now seeking her, never having seen her. But Nita has fallen in love with the Dutch village, has determined to stay there, and is wearing the dress of a village girl. Before he finds her the Earl sees Violette's baggage, notes the V on it, supposes that Violette is Miss Vanderkoop, and begins making love to her. They misunderstand each other, of course, and he thinks that she is consenting to be married to him, while she supposes that he is merely agreeing to her marriage with his son.

Then arrives the manager of the Paris theatre and hurries Violette away for rehearsals. He is overjoyed that she should be engaged to the Earl, as he thinks that it will be an excellent advertisement. The scene is then transferred to Paris. All the characters gather on the stage of the theatre, for one reason and another. Nita has a lover of her own, a painter, who has been engaged to design posters for the theatre. When

he learns that she is an heiress he supposes that she is beyond him, but she spreads a report that her father has lost all his money. Upon this the artist asks her hand and gets it, and then learns, according to the good old custom, that the money remains firm.

Speaking of light pieces, "The Belle of New-York" comes back to the Casino for this week only. It will spend Christmas here, and pass on, giving way to the new production of "The Telephone Girl" (another of the list of wage-earning young women of the stage), which will occur a week from to-morrow. "The Belle of New-York" will be presented with practically the same cast as when it was last seen here.

Or, if a greater predominance of music is wanted to cheer the evenings of waiting, while Christmas carries till the last day of the week, it may be found in "The Highwayman," at the Broadway Theatre. This latest work of Messrs. De Koven and Smith has been received with evidences of welcome there, and it bids fair to become one of the recognized standard attractions of the season.

Light new comedy and the brightest of old comedy are to be alternated at Daly's Theatre, in observance of the first of the holiday weeks. For the second of them a return of "The Geisha" is proposed. This week "Number Nine; or, the Lady of Ostend," will be played on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings, and "The Taming of the Shrew" will have a few more performances, probably the last of this season, with Miss Ada Rehan as Katherine, on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings, and Wednesday and Saturday afternoons.

A more serious turn of affairs will be found at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, where Charles Coghlan will appear in his own play, "The Royal Box." The story concerns an intrigue between an actor named Clarence and Countess Helen, the wife of a Swedish Ambassador. The Prince of Wales (the Prince of Wales of 1810) is also mixed up in it. The actor dines with the Count, the Countess and the Prince, the Countess comes to visit him in his dressing-room, she and her husband and the Prince see him play Romeo from the royal box, the actor finds his feelings too much for him, and publicly denounces the Prince, and finally departs for America on a tour for professional purposes, for his health and for the health of the Prince, the Count, the Countess, and the Kingdom of Great Britain generally. Miss Grace Filkins is the leading woman of Mr. Coghlan's company, and his daughter, Miss Gertrude Coghlan, is also a member of it.

Perhaps Nat Goodwin might justly assert that his play, "An American Citizen," which is nearing the end of its long run at the Knickerbocker Theatre, is, after all, the most appropriate play for Christmas that is now in town, for it certainly has a scene which is understood to pass on Christmas Eve, with attendant promise of peace and goodwill, and it has a grimy boy who talks about "holly and mislingtoe." It is a small fragment of recognition of the season, but it is all that the theatres of New-York together have to show.

There is some exhibition of Scottish austerity in "The Little Minister," which Miss Maude Adams is still playing to overflowing houses at the Garrick Theatre, but it is lightened with enough humor to give it the cheer appropriate to the season, and this production is not likely to suffer more than any other because of the holiday time.

### ONE TRAIT OF YANKEE INVENTIONS.

From Invention.

A French engineer who has been on a tour of inspection in the States was not impressed by the big things of the country. "I shall report to my Government," says he, "that the biggest things in America are the little things. The French people are experts in domestic economy, and live comfortably by saving what average families in the States throw away. But Americans are, on the other hand, experts in industrial economy. They make money by saving wastage in business and lose some of it by wastage in domestic economy. The attention paid to small details in big works is amazing to me; I have visited some establishments where I believe that the profits are made not in the manufacture proper, but in the saving of materials and labor by close attention to details that are with us unconsidered trifles. For example, I saw a little grindstone in operation at a big works automatically sharpening lathe and planer tools. This machine costs probably as much as a hundred of our ordinary grindstones cost, but I see that it automatically grinds all the tools for three hundred high-priced mechanics, and it only works a few hours each day. The skilled mechanics in our country frequently stop their regular work to grind their own tools, and then they do it imperfectly. In the States tools are all accurately ground to the best shape by the machine, so that they do more and better work on this account in a given time. I believe that that machine has brains—the brains of the inventor—and it has no doubt revolutionized work of this kind in American machine shops. This is but one case out of many that I have noted."

The visitor correctly defined a peculiar characteristic of American inventive genius. The great engineering undertakings, the immense manufacturing establishments and the leviathan machinery are, of course, most conspicuous and impressive; but these big things are comparatively few in number, while the novel improvements in little things—usually classed as "Yankee notions"—are legion, and each one contributes its mite toward the general sum of prosperity of the business of the country.

### BEGINNING TO TAKE NOTICE.

From The Cincinnati Enquirer.

John—So you really think you have some chance of winning her, do you?

Henry—Oh, yes; I feel quite encouraged. She has begun to find fault with my looks.