The Irish Linen Industry

The Irish Agricultural Department recently issued in pamphlet form the papers read at the Industrial Con-jerence held in connection with the Cork Exhibition of 1902. Amongst the most interesting of these is a 'Sketch of the Flax, and Linen Industry of Ireland' by Mi. R. Lloyd Patterson, who says that the manufacture of linen was known and carried out in Ireland from the very dawn of history is abundantify moved by the man very dawn of history is abundantly proved by the num erous references to it in the works that have come down to us. Mr. Patterson quotes the following authentic in-cident: It is on record that when the Danes took Ban-gor, County Down, and despoiled the monastery there is the order of the monastery there gor, County Down, and despoiled the monastery there in the 9th and 10th centuries, and, later, at the sack-ing of Armagh by the English towards the end of the 12th century, part of the spoils of the victors at both places consisted of 'much fine linen,' of which material the robes and vestments of the lingher clergy were then composed, and at which period also the custom of wrap-ping the bodies of the dead in linen had already come into vogue in Irelana. This country may also have been an early exporter of linen, as it is recorded that at a robbery which took place at Winchester, in 1272, among the afficiency was some the articles stolen was some

Cloth of Ireland,

Cloth of Ireland, presumably, linen. It is, of course, unquestioned that the Irish linen industry received a great impetus by the sottlement of a number of French Huguenots in the country about the year 1699. A number of them made their home in Lisburn, and the modern development of the trade is supposed to date from that period. At an early stage of the industry there was specialisation here and there and certain districts acquired a celebrity for particular kinds of linen. Dublin was the headquarters of the white linen trade until 1783, when, after the estab-lishment of the linen trade in Bellast, we began to dis-pute with the capital its claim to the premici position. The modern development of the trade may be traced to the following chief causes.—(1) The introduction of spin-ming by machinery, and the subsequent introduction of wet spinning. (2) the application of the power foom to linen weaving; and (3) improvements in bleaching. Com-ing to local history, Mr. Patterson says. The beginners of the industry, as we know it in the North, of Ireland, were Messis Murland, of Castlewellan, County Down, who commenced spinning in 1828, and the Messis Mul-holland, or Belfast. In that year the cotion mill be-longing to the latter firm was buinted down, and, on its rebuilding, it was equipped and started as a flax mill Some years after Messis Mulholland s rebailding and new departure, Mr. Martin, of Killyleagh, followed then example in the erection of a flax mill in place of a burnt-down cotion mill, and other cotion mills were early converted to flax. So lucrative did mill spinning prove to its pioneers, and so rapidly did it 'catch on,' that by 1853, that is, 25 years from its commencement, prove to its pioneers, and so rapidly did it 'catch on,' that by 1853, that is, 25 years from its commencement, there were no lewer than 80 flax mills, containing

Half a Million Spindles,

Half a Million Spindles, in the North of Ireland Simultaneously with the rise of the new industry an old established one was dying out About the time that flax spinning was commenced in Ulster there were some 50 cotton mills in the province, available water power having been trequently an induce-ment to commerce. Of these there is only one-that at Springfield, Beltast-now working. This decline in cotton spinning had an important bearing on the earlier loss-tory of flax spinning, as the skilled operatives that were losing their employment in the former found it again in the latter—an immense advantage to employers as well as operatives—as to have had to train all the skilled labor required out of completely unitained material

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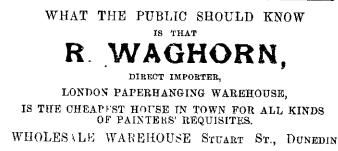
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would have been a tedious and serious matter. The 500,000 spindles of 1553 showed a net increase at the end of the century of about 338,000, the total being then es-timated at 838,582. Ten years after the close of the American War the maximum number of spindles at work in the North of Ireland was reached, and amounted to 924,817. Since then there has been a slightly downward tenbency; so that the total net decline during the past twenty-seven years is placed at 86,235 spindles. In about forty-five years Mr Patter-son recalls some forty mills silenced in Ireland, a num-ber which meludes mins at Detry, Coloraine, Larne, Lurgan, Dublin (3), "Limerick, Drogheda, Carrick-on-Suir, and other places. It is pointed out that in Scotland and some parts of the North of England there have been even greater fluctuations, the once im-portant flax spinning industry of Yorkshire being now almost extinct. The verdict of Mr. Patterson, how-ever, on the position of the linen trade as a whole is that, as compared with other countries, Ireland is more than holding her own that, as compared with other countries, more than holding her own



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