

Science Siftings

By 'VOLT.'

Hemp Industry in Manila.

As is generally known, the growth of hemp is the foremost industry of the Phillipines. The hemp plant belongs to the banana family, and Manila hemp thrives nowhere else in the world. The Phillipine fields supply the entire world with raw hemp for manufacture into rope and cordage. In view of these conditions one would naturally think that factories for working up the raw product are numerous. But such is not the case. It is very doubtful if there were more than a dozen rope-workers of any nature in existence when the Americans landed. And at present there is but one modern factory in Manila, that being owned and operated by Americans. A number of British firms, who have branch offices in Manila and agents throughout the provinces, do most of the buying and exporting. Exports aggregate anywhere from 200 to 300 millions of pounds annually. It is estimated that the average value of the total production is £6,000,000. Until a year ago hemp had always been stropped by hand—a slow and wasteful progress. It is cleaned by having a number of native laborers drag the stocks across a knife provided with iron teeth, thus separating the strands from the pulp. No sooner had the Americans arrived than the inventors commenced to devise means to do this work by machinery, getting out a better grade of hemp, wasting less, and accomplishing more in a given time. Several of these inventors have been successful, and the machines are now doing excellent work, thus increasing the output. The tensile strength of machine-stripped hemp is nearly 50 per cent. greater than that of hand-stripped.

The Dead Sea.

Undoubtedly one of the strangest things about the Dead Sea is the density of its waters. It contains 23 per cent. of solid matter, and is, bulk for bulk, heavier than the human body. Many believe that it is impossible to swim in this sea, and even in Jerusalem ridiculous fables are told as to the impossibility of bathing here, and how that no animals or vegetation can exist near its shores. As to the vegetation about its shores, this will be referred to later, but so far as swimming is concerned the excessive buoyancy of the water simply renders it difficult to make much headway, but a swim is both feasible and enjoyable. Care should be taken, however, not to let the water get into the eyes. Indeed, did Palestine belong to any other Power but Turkey, probably the northern shore of the Dead Sea would be a popular bathing-station. No doubt the chloride of magnesia, which enters so largely into the composition of the water, would be found to have medicinal and curative properties. Perhaps a better idea of the density of the water of this inland sea may be realised from the following statistics: In a ton of water from the Caspian Sea there are 11lb of salt; in the Baltic, 18lb; in the Black Sea, 26lb; the Atlantic, 31lb; in the English Channel, 72lb; in the Mediterranean, 85lb; in the Red Sea, 93lb; and in the Dead Sea, 187lb. Because of the saltness and bitterness of the waters, nothing lives in the Dead Sea, absence of life is emphasised by there being no living creatures on or around it, as, but for these small plains which have a small population, there are no towns or villages, consequently no birds are seen around or over it. This has appealed to the native's impressionable imagination, as he explains: 'God protect us where not a living creature praises God.' This has given rise to the fancy statement frequently met in books that the noxious gases escaping from the sea deal death to any bird attempting to fly across. The fact is the region is so utterly desolate, so hot, with so few inhabitants, and so arid and waterless, except at the points mentioned and the small oasis at Engedi, that neither birds nor creatures of any kind are met with except at those points, so widely separated, where water is found.

EIGHTY CLUB AND IRELAND'S CLAIMS

RELIGIOUS BOGEY SCOUTED

The Eighty Club's tour in Ireland terminated on September 30.

Before leaving Irish soil the hon. secretary of the Club sent the following telegram to Mr. Redmond:—

'Members of Eighty Club visiting Ireland ask me to say they return to England immeasurably strengthened in their convictions of the justice of Ireland's claim for an immediate grant of Home Rule. They are especially impressed by the growing amity between Catholics and Protestants.—R. C. Hawkin.'

The following are some impressions by members of the party:—

Lord Saye and Sele.—I am impressed by two things—Wherever we have gone in Ireland, outside Belfast, it has been very difficult to find people who do not want Home Rule; secondly, it has been very strongly impressed upon my mind that the idea that Catholics and Protestants are living at enmity with each other is untrue. I have been struck with the growing prosperity of Ireland under careful administration. I cannot help thinking that if the men on the spot governed that country its prosperity would further increase.

Mr. H. Carr-Gomm, M.P.—Ireland, formerly a self-governing nation, has now been ruled from London for over one hundred years. Latterly, it is true, she has prospered, and there is now a new spirit abroad in the land. Yet we have found everywhere urgent need for the creation of a sound and healthy state of public opinion. The lack of this is at the bottom of all Ireland's difficulties, and the remedy the restoration of an Irish Parliament, which will create in the Irish people a real sense of responsibility. Once this is done the fears and forebodings of Unionism will be forgotten, and both parties in Ireland will share equally in the successful development of this free and loyal country.

Mr. E. Crawshaw Williams, M.P.—I think that the tour has been a thorough success. . . . We have fired the first shots in a conflict which will be fierce and long and in which we should now be the better able to bear our part.

Mr. Winfrey, M.P.—I visited Ireland in 1887, at the time of the eviction scenes, and became a convinced Home Ruler then. My present visit has confirmed me in the faith. . . . I am satisfied that the Irish people have made the very best use of their local self-government, and that county and district councils are doing quite as effective work as in England. As for the religious bogey, that has never troubled me in the least. It is quite evident that at least half of the population in Ulster are Home Rulers. I come back prepared to vote for any Home Rule Bill which the Government in their wisdom think fit to introduce.

Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, M.P.—There are two remarkable features of the Ireland of to-day—(1) Ireland is visibly more prosperous than she was only a few years ago, and there is a far more friendly feeling among the people of the different religious and political creeds. . . . Given ample guarantees for conscience and property under the Home Rule Bill, I believe that Ulster could be persuaded to come into line. Has not Sir E. Carson already brought Belfast round to the support of a separate constitution (a Republican one apparently) for Ulster?

Sir John Benn, ex-M.P. for Devenport—This Eighty Club visit to Ireland has made clear to every member of the party that if the concession of domestic self-government is generously given the Irish people will be second to none of King George's subjects in loyalty to the Throne and devotion to the Empire. It is a libel on this beautiful country to say that Catholics and Protestants cannot and will not amalgamate for the common good. When the test question of Home Rule is settled the door will be opened for the best sons of Ireland, irrespective of creed, to serve her in every capacity.