

Much Has Been Written About Mr. Straus And Ecusta

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ed as life preservers for the wood. At long last the engineers developed a secret washing technique which unlocks the grip of wood and fiber, and lets gravity do the rest. Used in step with improved mechanical and chemical processes all down the line, this spelled success.

Just as the Straus engineers were reporting success the Straus agronomists were reporting failure.

Most of the flax grown in the United States is not the kind used for linen, but a type grown entirely for the linseed from which oil is pressed for paints and varnishes. The Straus agronomists wanted to develop a great supply of fiber flax. They tested soils, sought advice from state and Federal experts, had agents scour Europe for promising varieties. They planted 600 acres in South Carolina and for three years nursed it along. They tried smaller plantings in North Carolina, Virginia, Oregon, the Florida Everglades and the black belt of Alabama. On Maryland's Eastern Shore, they planted 50 plots each with a different fertilizer.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars went thus, and out of it all came nothing. Whatever the climate, whatever the soil, whatever the fertilizer or the farming practice, they couldn't get enough straw per acre to compete with the price of imported rags.

With grim determination, Straus turned from flax to hemp. He was making headway when a new Federal law intended to suppress marijuana gave hemp a black eye. Ignoring all advice, Straus then pointed his engineers at seed-flax straw, always considered useless. Flax farmers were harvesting the seed and spending time and money to get rid of the straw. But the Straus engineers took the processes they had developed for fiber flax and adapted them to seed flax straw. Straus triumphantly had some paper run off in his French mill and showed it to American cigarette makers. Munich was just a few months ahead. Big American cigarette manufacturers saw the point, and an American mill was built.

Water Is Important

Never was a mill site more carefully chosen. Everyone wanted it in North Carolina, which manufactures more than half of America's cigarettes, but some 60 locations were surveyed before selecting the broad, black corn bottoms where the Davidson River comes tumbling out of the tree-covered mile-high Pisgah National Forest. No one could get between this location and the government protected watershed. The water was analyzed and even sent to France for mill tests; it was found soft and free of minerals—iron, for example, would give cigarette paper a taste. Studies running back for decades were checked to prove that the Davidson River had withstood the worst drought in years.

Legal aspects were studied. The Federal Government controls navigable rivers and any steam flowing into them, hence controls the Tennessee and French Broad rivers—but not a stream twice-removed, like the Davidson which empties into French Broad. There was even research to pick a name. Scholars here and abroad dug up the Cherokee word "Ecusta," meaning "rippling water."

Construction of Ecusta's 17

buildings began in June, 1938. Eleven months later, French craftsmen arrived to teach mountaineers how to make cigarette paper. Most of Ecusta's workmen had never been employed in a mill of any type. Techniques and machinery new even to the French experts were being employed.

Here on a plateau half a mile high was the weirdest industrial school ever opened. One by one the machines were put in operation by the Frenchmen. Near by stood the pupils, and between the two groups were two French-Canadians and two French-speaking Americans. The Frenchmen worked, the mountaineers watched, and the interpreters explained. Swiftly they all learned together, blending the French art, handed down from family to family, with American factory methods. By August paper was coming off the machines in test batches. By September war was on and American cigarette paper was headed for American cigarette factories. All the "Big Five" among cigarette makers are using Ecusta paper, currently meeting one-third of the nation's needs. Production will be doubled by next Spring. Three other domestic mills are now producing cigarette paper from seed-flax straw.

Today the Frenchmen are gone and nine-tenths of Ecusta's 900 employees are from Carolina's mountain counties. In the refinery room you will find full-fledged journeymen who in 1939 were green as Pisgah. On the first anniversary of war, and of mill operation, ground was broken for a big addition. When expansion is completed next Summer 500 more men will be needed. Some of the tenders on the new paper machines will be men who have learned the art in two years instead of the traditional ten.

Straus's paper mill has given the whole region a lift. The nearby town of Brevard has had a small boom; a new theatre, an increase in auto sales, and even freshening up of church buildings. The county's bonds, once at 24 cents on the dollar, have now gone above 50.

But Ecusta's repercussions are more far-flung than that. Each day three to four railroad cars of fiber arrive from decortication plants in California and Minnesota. In the San Joaquin and Imperial valleys of California and over most of Minnesota, farmers have a new cash crop. This year, 147,000 tons of straw have been bought for cigarette paper. This will be increased in 1941.

Once A Loss, Now A Gain

Flax farmers are \$2.50 an acre ahead. They used to spend \$1.50 an acre to get rid of straw; now they get \$1 for it. But that is not all. Straus's agronomists are helping farmers increase their straw yields per acre. With the universities of Minnesota and California they are developing new strains. This is a matter of five to ten years, but already yields have been increased by improving farming practices. Farmers have been taught to sow their flax more thickly so the stalks support one another and thus grow taller, producing more straw. By demanding a straw clean of weeds the Straus experts got farmers to disc their fields; an extra yield of seed was an unexpected bonus for "keeping the fields black." This extra yield together with the extra acreage,

spells greater domestic production of flaxseed.

No one knows where all this will lead. Other fine papers, like those used for currency, can and may be made from flax straws rather than old linen rags. Further, success in cigarette paper has given added impetus to the use of flax in textiles. Much research, Federal, state and industrial, is being poured into this problem. Recently Georgia Tech engineers announced a new method of processing flax fiber for spinning.

Straus himself is trying to develop a third great flax-growing region so as not to have to lean altogether on Minnesota and California. Kansas and North Carolina are each possible regions, but several other states are also moving toward the same goal. And Straus researchers are working in still another significant direction: Trying to find industrial uses for the wood removed from the fibers. Four-fifths of the straw is wood. Plastics, wallboard, linoleum, fertilizer and powder can all be made from these "shives," but not economically as yet. Straus has turned flax into a double-duty crop and if anyone solves the shives problem, farmers can thank him for the triple play.

BRIEF SKETCH OF

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people were drawn to him by his charm and personality. He unfailingly picked the right men to help him find the road to success.

The romance attendant to the tobacco industry was not lost upon him. He fell in love with it.

Now came cigarette paper. He was equally at home with business both inside and outside the factory. The young man started selling cigarette paper.

Cigarettes were no longer a fad, to be smoked behind shaded windows. The industry had started in earnest and was here to stay.

Sales of paper were not large at first, but consumption steadily increased and the young man enjoyed his modest share in the growth.

Pretty soon came the need of a huge tobacco company to find a young man of talent to run their large cigarette paper mill in France. They found our young man. He became president of and ran this paper mill successfully for years.

In World War I, despite the enemy submarine campaign, he got cigarette paper to this country. Service to his customers could not be interrupted and it was not interrupted.

Later to become a pet, was the Endless Belt Corporation. Designed to make belts for use on the cigarette machine forming the paper around the tobacco, Endless Belt was a success from the start and today is working harder than ever producing belts for an ever-increasing demand.

At approximately the same time, another corporation was purchased, the Peerless Roll Leaf Company. This covered embossing of gold, silver and colors on any materials from candy boxes to Mah Jong tiles. Until this business was sold, due to pressure of work, it was a successful and profitable undertaking.

The consumption of cigarettes

increased by leaps and bounds. Here we follow our young man back to cork. It was discovered to have great insulating qualities. The hue and cry came for more cork, for cold storage pipes, for cold storage insulation for bottle stoppers and gaskets.

The Cork Import Corporation was born. With it the purchase of large interests in Spanish cork and cork came to this country.

Here, too, ability to make a sell his product based upon quality and service, found our young man now making another stone with a huge sales organization spider-webbed across the great country.

Maturity came to this man with it an uncanny gift of foresight which guided him through many strange and stormy waters.

He saw his future success in the tobacco world and promptly sold his cork interests, retaining only that part connected with cigarettes.

Cigarette sales had not shot up, but multiplied in mountainous quantities.

The cigarette paper company still directed by our man, now only supply the increased demands of its owners. This led him to seek a source of supply which he could not only buy but own outright, thus feeding increased demands of the large tobacco companies.

Thus came the birth of Ecusta Paper Corporation, an organization of the French type in which large interests were purchased. Requirements were almost fully satisfied.

The economic structure of the country collapsed. With the ensuing depression came the demand for cheaper "smokes." Ecusta Paper met this new demand by inventing and developing equipment and machinery to manufacture "roll your own" books. This increased demand for large quantities of paper and the ounce of production was squeezed out of the French mills.

Booklets for "roll your own" like the earlier cigarette, passed the fad stage and became a steady addition to the tobacco industry.

Our man made frequent trips to the French mills. His insatiable liking for cleanliness made him dissatisfied with the use of flax as a raw material for cigarette paper. The sources of this raw material came from unstable countries where no enterprise could be assured of hampered operations.

The need for a new raw material was essential. He was by famous research men and encouraged industrialists that could not be done. Our man met no defeat and plunged into the search for cigarette paper. Again

came out on top and a new material was conceived. Typical of a dead crop to the tail of a domestic industry was a crowning achievement. It was hailed throughout the country by chemurgists and another cementing alliance between farm and industry.

War clouds hung heavy about Foresight and vision told our man that if immediate steps were taken, all the work and hardship of many years would be lost possibly forever.

Young in mind and body he met the situation calmly and his decision to build the mill in all mills. This is the great

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