

AGRICULTURE IN GERMAN SOUTH-WEST AFRICA.

As the writer made, last April and May, a journey through German South-West Africa, a short account of his observations as to the agricultural potentialities of this region may be of interest at the present moment.

Boundaries and Agreements.

German South-West Africa is bounded on the north by Portuguese West Africa, on the west by the Atlantic Ocean, on the south by the Orange River, and on the east by the Kalahari Desert. The eastern border touches the territory of the Union of South Africa for 400 miles along the desolate district of Gordonia, and then for another 600 miles it impinges on the Bechuanaland Protectorate, which is still under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Government; and finally reaches the Zambesi and Rhodesia by throwing out a curious tongue of land called the Caprivi concession. Thus Germany had free access to the Zambesi by the International Agreement of 1890, which gave her "a strip of territory which shall at no point be less than 20 English miles in width." By the same agreement the sphere of influence reserved to Germany was bounded: "To the south by a line commencing at the mouth of the Orange River, and ascending the north bank of that river to the point of its intersection by the 20th degree of east longitude."

In international agreements where rivers are concerned it is usual for boundary lines to run in mid-stream. But here the agreement expressly mentions a line "ascending the north bank of that river," which means that the German settlers in that region were cut off from the most precious thing in Africa—water. In the German country there are large patches of rich soil along the north bank suitable for orange growing, lucerne, and ostriches, but the Government discouraged settlement in this part of the country, doubtless owing to the above clause.

Area and Population.

The area of this vast country is 322,450 square miles, or, in other words, it is more than six times the size of England, or a little larger than the combined area of the Cape and Natal. The European population in 1913 was stated to be 14,816. I was informed that the total native population was about 80,000, and

that was also approximately the number of natives who had perished in the wars with the German troops due either to wounds, famine, or disease. Most people think of this country as a barren waste, but that is a great mistake. It is a land of enormous agricultural and mineral potentialities, and destined in the near future to become one of the finest ranching countries in the world. The curse of South Africa at the present time is the large holding which is uncultivated and overstocked. No provision is made for winter feeding and the preservation of ensilage, and, consequently, the farmers and stock-owners continually complain of the poorness of the land and the dryness of the season. This evil is to be seen in an appalling degree in the German country.

At Windhuk, the capital, I was told that it was quite common for a settler with 20,000 acres of land to send in a petition that both he and his cattle were starving, and that he must at once receive another block of 20,000 acres or he would clear out of the country. In many cases the Government weakly complied, and accordingly farms of 40,000 to 50,000 acres are the rule, and closer settlement has been rendered impossible. The reader will be better able to grasp the full significance of these figures when I mention that in this huge country there are only 1,400 farmers, for the benefit of whom a Land Bank has recently been established, backed by the Reichstag, with a capital ranging from 10,000,000 (£491,700) to 100,000,000 marks.

The Agricultural Zones.

Next a note on the different agricultural zones. In German South-West Africa we may think of three agricultural zones or farming belts. The southern zone extends from the Orange River to Rehoboth. The second, or central zone, runs from Rehoboth to Omaruru; while the third, or northern zone, extends from Omaruru to the border of Amboland. In the first zone the rainfall averages 200 millimètres (7 inches per annum, approximately). Here we find a great variety of soil, but much of it is of a brackish or alkaline nature. The dominant grass is the Bushman grass, which, however, is inclined to be thin and patchy owing to the severe droughts which prevail. Nevertheless, there are numerous fodder and salt bushes which the stock feed upon, and, in the Kalahari region, the sweet Tsamma melon is also found.

In the second, or central, zone the rainfall averages 400 millimètres per annum (15 inches approximately). This country is similar to the Bush and High Veld lands of the Transvaal. It is well supplied with rich sweet grass and valuable native bushes. Camel-thorn trees of great age are found in large numbers in the

dried-up river-beds. The most elevated portion of the Colony lies in this zone, which is excellent alike for cattle, sheep, and horses. In the third, or northern, zone the rainfall varies from 500 to 700 millimètres (20 to 27 inches approximately). The eastern portion of this belt, which consists of flat, loamy plains, is specially suited to agricultural operations; while in the north-eastern part, which extends into Rhodesia, there are good rains and much grass. This is a region eminently suited for semi-tropical cultures, but, unfortunately, in certain parts horse-sickness and malarial fever are still fairly common. With cultivation, drainage, and closer settlement, however, these troubles will entirely disappear.

The Windy Corner.

Windhuk, which, being interpreted, means the Windy Corner, is the capital, and the seat of the administration. It is a lovely town, nestling amongst tree-clad mountains, like a pearl set in royal purple. You can reach the Windy Corner from the Golden City (Johannesburg) in seven days' hard travelling overland, using train, motor-car, and Cape cart. Windhuk lies 237 miles inland, and the express train, which travelled three times per week, took one day to Swakopmund, the chief town on the sea. It stands at an elevation of 1,700 metres (5,578 feet). Here there are hot springs, handsome buildings, and a huge wireless station, which can speak with Berlin.

Keetmanshoop is a picturesque village right in the heart of the arid zone. The red-tiled roofs and the yellow sand reminded me of some ancient Spanish town situated amongst the sierras. As is well known, Swakopmund and Luderitz Bay are both seaport towns. The former is the more important, and is literally tied to the sand dunes of the shore. It possesses fine buildings, a wireless station, and abuts on the British territory of Walfish Bay. This town has been termed "the place where it never rains," owing to the small annual rainfall. Luderitzbucht (Bay of Luderitz) is mainly of historic interest. It is connected by rail with Keetmanshoop and Windhuk, and here the British Consul was accustomed to reside. The value of diamonds produced from this vicinity for the year 1913 was £2,153,230.