

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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DOCUMENTS

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THE LEGISLATURE

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE,

DURING ITS SESSIONS

A. D. 1842.

AUGUSTA:

SMITH & Co., PRINTERS TO THE STATE.

1842.

TWENTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE.

NO. 47.]

[SENATE.

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,

IN RELATION TO THE

BOUNTY ON SILK.

[Wm. R. SMITH & Co.....Printers to the State.]

R E P O R T .

THE committee on agriculture, to which was referred the petition of Luther Carey and others, praying the Legislature to increase the bounty on Silk ; also to grant a bounty on the production of Mulberry trees, have had the same under consideration, and ask leave to submit the following

R E P O R T :

The successful results, which have attended the various experiments in producing the mulberry tree, in the rearing of the silk worm, and in the whole art of growing and making silk, have sufficiently proved, that Maine may become a silk growing State. Several varieties of the mulberry tree are well adapted to our soil, and will endure the severe rigor of our long winters unharmed. There are numerous thrifty nurseries of this tree, in the older parts of the State, and the interest in this culture is daily extending itself in the community. It attains to a great age and size, and is worthy to be cultivated as an ornamental and shade tree in addition to its more "intrinsic value."

The silk worm is easily raised, is healthier, and spins a more durable and a better thread in our northern climate, than when reared and fostered in a milder zone. It toils and spins during the entire period of its existence, and arrays itself in a beautiful buff robe, the production of its own industry, vieing in beauty of costume with the gayest ephemerals of fashion.

Silk, not many years since, was numbered with the luxuries which are the exclusive possession of the opulent, and was worn only by the queens of the earth, or by those of their subjects, who could vie with princesses in the possession of wealth and the enjoyment of its appliances. It is now, very generally worn by our whole population, and our American queens, our female sovereigns, the princesses "by hereditary succession," and "rulers by divine right," of their divine charms, daily present themselves to the admiring view clad in silken array.

The silk culture, is among the pleasantest, most profitable, and healthful of all occupations. It is emphatically "an out door business," and during the period of gathering the leaves from the mulberry and supplying the worms with food, performed in the most delightful season of the year, forms a delightful employment for children and young persons, and may easily occupy the hours, and release the painful tedium of persons in infirm health. All its labor is light, pleasant and instructive, and those

who engage in it, are in the perpetual pursuit and the constant reception of pleasure and profit, in addition to the acquisition of useful knowledge it ever imparts. It is a constant school for those employed in it, and forms a permanent and a constantly increasing supply to the means which are employed, *for the education of the whole people.*

The silk culture should be introduced into the pauper establishments of the State, and the attention of town authorities should be called to it. Nurseries of the mulberry might easily be reared on all our "poor farms," and from the avails of gathering the leaves, and supplying the worms with food for their labor, the aged and infirm, as well as the young, might be assisted in supplying for themselves a comfortable and happy support.

The committee refer with pleasure to the specimens of sewing silk, which have been submitted for their examination, the production of the skill of captain John Dillingham, of Turner, Oxford county. The sample consists of five skeins, of the colors, red, blue-black, light blue, green, and yellow. The colors are good and the thread of a fine and even texture, and for beauty of appearance and strength, it will compare favorably with the sewing silks imported from France and Italy.

From the papers submitted to the committee, it is stated that captain Dillingham has a nursery of the mulberry, consisting of some eight thousand trees,

all in a healthy and vigorous state. From the foliage of these trees, he has, the past season, fed eighty thousand silk worms. From cocoons, which the worms have produced, he has reeled and spun twenty pounds of silk, which he has converted into sewing silk, and manufactured into cloth, amounting to fifteen yards, suitable for ladies' dresses and for gentlemen's vests, together with a tolerable assortment of suspenders, hose, gloves, &c. All this has been done, and the manufacture perfected, in its several varieties, in his own house, and by members of his own family. It is added, that by another year, the amount of the production will be doubled.

Captain Dillingham, together with his son, has invented, and put in operation by water power, a machine that reels the silk from the cocoon, and skeins and twists the perfect thread at one and the same operation. It is described as a curious and valuable piece of mechanism, discovering great ingenuity in its construction, and its general use will effect a great saving of labor in the production of sewing silk.

The committee, after mature deliberation, have come to the conclusion that legislation, on the petitions, for a bounty from the State, on the raising of mulberry trees and the production of silk is, at the present time, inexpedient. The State has incorporated and endowed agricultural societies, in various of the counties, and it is believed that these socie-

ties are the proper source to which application for a bounty on silk should be made. These, by instituting inquiries, and imparting information by the means of the newspaper press, would afford a healthy and perpetual encouragement. The amount of stimulus in money, and the means of its application would be better ascertained, and more considerately and beneficially applied, by the county agricultural societies, than it could possibly be by the State. Legislative bounties, for the most part, operate merely as quack quickeners, bestowed without proper intelligence, applied upon partial consideration, and productive only of imperfect results.

Intelligence and information are more needed, and would prove a better and more healthy stimulus for the production of silk, than gifts of money, under the delusive name of bounty from the State. Those who first engage in any new undertaking, and whose spirit of liberal enterprise impels them to test by actual experiment, improvements in agriculture and the arts, are for the most part, men of superior intelligence and possessed of the requisite means and the required information for the profitable prosecution of their laudable undertakings. It is a little singular that such men, so capacitated by taste and inclination, should, from personal diffidence and the fear of obtruding their own good deeds upon the public notice, suffer even the successful results of numerous experiments to remain

pent up within the confines of their own domestic sphere. Such benefactors of our race, who in the shades of retirement are inducing benefits upon humanity, which far surpass the proudest achievements of kings and conquerors, should no longer, through a mistaken modesty, withhold from an interested public the avails of their experience. The silk grower, of all men, should not wait to be inquired off in relation to the results of his experiments in his instructive and profitable occupation. He should not secrete his light under a bushel, and obscure its grateful rays; but place it on that convenient elevation, where its cheerful beams may *en-light-en* and guide all beholders in the path of pure pleasure and profitable acquirements.

It is from the experience of successful pioneers, that the judgment of the public is to be formed; and the published statements of Captain Dillingham and of gentleman in various parts of the State, in relation to their success in rearing the mulberry, and in manufacturing silk, given to the reading public, through the newspaper press, would be productive of immediate advantage to the interest in which they have so enthusiastically engaged, and for the promotion of which, they have so generously contributed their time and their money.

In the multiplicity of interests, and the variety of engagements, which perpetually occupy the public mind, those who would direct to new channels of

profit, must not be surprised to find that their benevolent plans are often questioned, their promised utility neglected, and their authors derided. The brow of the public benefactor is oftener pierced with the chaplet of thorns, than encircled with the wreath of laurel. Neglect, in most instances, goes before honor. Yet this consideration should not discourage those whose benevolent occupation it is, “to make *two* blades of grass grow where but *one* grew before.” “By time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes satin.”

In view of these considerations, the committee would recommend to the petitioners for an additional bounty on silk, and a bounty on the production of mulberry trees, to make known their claims to the county agricultural societies, where they can be assured of proper consideration, and will receive the deserved reward; and report action by the Legislature on these petitions, inexpedient.

THOMAS C. LANE, per order.

STATE OF MAINE.

IN SENATE, March 11, 1842.

ORDERED, That 300 copies of the foregoing Report be printed
for the use of the Legislature.

(Extract from the Journal.)

Attest,

JERE HASKELL, *Secretary.*