

War Brings Huge Increase in United States Peanut Crop

THE peanut occupied such a humble position in the vegetable society of the nation a few years ago that it hardly could be mentioned seriously. But from its former debased plane it has leaped to a place of honor among the country's crops, as is shown by figures cited by F. S. Tisdale in an article contributed to *The Nation's Business*.

In 1908 the peanut yield was estimated to be worth \$12,000,000. A conservative valuation of the 1916 peanuts is \$56,000,000. The reason for the enormous increase in peanut acreage is that peanuts are being planted more and more on land formerly used to raise cotton, but where the cotton crop has been ruined by the boll weevil. This season the State of Texas alone planted 200,000 such acres. What has happened in Texas has been repeated on a smaller scale in the other Southern States.

Representatives of the Bureau of Plant Industry recently completed a tour of the peanut-growing districts, because the Government realizes that the

crop has suddenly become one of great importance and almost boundless possibilities. The figures indicate that the year's crop will be 50,250,000 bushels, and will, it is said, sell for about \$1.10 a bushel. This is quite a contrast to the situation in 1914, when the United States imported 44,549,789 pounds of nuts and 1,332,108 gallons of peanut oil from Marseilles, Delft, Hamburg, and other ports.

It was found that by slight readjustments of machinery, cottonseed plants could be turned into peanut oil factories. The superiority of peanut oil over the old product was emphasized by the willingness of the trade to pay 67 cents for a gallon of it, as against 65 cents for the cottonseed variety. Mill men experimented cautiously, with results so successful that the acreage in Texas increased more than 1,000 per cent. from 1915 to 1916. Fully three-quarters of the vast County of Comanche were taken from cotton and given over to the goober.

How much danger is there from over-production?

An expert's opinion on this subject is that there is little danger of surfeiting the world with peanut oil and cake, because the food value is such as to make a universal market for the product. Experiments are being made by the Government to discover the best uses for the peanut and to make it more popular with American kitchens. Dr. A. J. Le Clerc of the Chemistry Bureau of the Department of Agriculture recently began researches that are expected to produce a bread from peanut meal which in its value for food and in its tastiness will be the equal of any wheat bread. And the peanut bread is cheaper.

Ten cents' worth of peanuts are said to have in them as much nutriment as 20 cents' worth of porterhouse steak, 36 cents' worth of milk, or 13 cents' worth of potatoes. So rich are these nuts—which are really not nuts at all—that a dime's worth of them contains 120 grams of protein, more than is considered adequate for a day's consumption. Peanuts have a greater food value than wheat.

Their 33 to 37 per cent. of protein puts them into the distinguished class of the ever-ascending egg.

In a few localities the farmers are getting only 60 cents a bushel this year, but in sections of Texas they are reveling in a price of \$1.25. At 60 cents a planter, it is said, can make more from an average crop of peanuts than from a yield of 12-cent cotton. In 1912 the price of peanuts was around 30 cents a bushel. It is also pointed out that while many of the products of the cotton States—such as potatoes, cabbages, onions, and fruits—are of a perishable character, the cake and oil from peanuts scorn all climatic idiosyncrasies and bear with equanimity export trips to the most distant markets.

At the present prices there is said to be about \$10 more per acre in peanuts than in cotton. On the basis of one-third of a cotton bale to the acre, the lint and seed will yield about \$22, it is said.

So down in the cotton country they are saying that we are soon to see the rise of peanut barons.