

COLONIAL REPORTS.—ANNUAL.

No. 193.

BAHAMAS.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1896.

(For Report for 1895, see No. 177.)

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty,
July 1897.



LONDON :
PRINTED FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE,
BY EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE,
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

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1897.

[C.—8279.—17.] Price $\frac{1}{2}d.$

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sweet potatoes, peas, and beans were reported from the islands of Exuma, Rum Cay, Watling's and San Salvador, causing temporary distress, which was relieved, where necessary, by forwarding supplies of food-stuffs from Nassau.

From the district of Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera, the largest fruit centre in the Bahamas, the pine-apple cultivation is reported to be increasing, although the average price received in the season of 1896 was only 33 cents per dozen.

At this price, however, large growers are able to make a substantial profit.

The cultivation of sisal plantations is abandoned in some places, whilst in others it is reported to be on the increase.

From the two plantations at Inagua only 50 tons of fibre were prepared and shipped in 1896, work being suspended owing to low market prices.

The Inagua Sisal Company, also, has a flourishing plantation of one thousand acres on the island of San Salvador, which gave employment to many people in that island during the year and so mitigated the effects which the drought would otherwise have had upon them by the destruction of their ground provisions.

Encouraged by this company working in their midst, small proprietors of land have planted out 250 acres in sisal, of which 100 acres were planted in the course of last year.

At Abaco, also, the "Sisal Fibre Company" continues operations on a plantation of 5,000 acres.

The prospects for this new industry are now becoming more defined, and although it has absolutely failed to fulfil the anticipations once formed for it there seems to be less reason to fear that it will die out altogether and some reason to hope that it may in time become a small but well-established industry, returning fair profits to those engaged in it and giving a much-needed variety to the Colonial products, which at present are all included in the sponge and fruit trades.

Postal and Telegraph Statistics.

The Superintendent of Telegraphs reports that the Government telegraph cable line from Nassau to Jupiter, Florida, continued in excellent condition throughout the year, as shown by the weekly electrical test and the every-day work performed.

During the winter season a reduction of 50 per cent. in the charges was made, which continued until April 15th, and the revenue of the department showed a considerable increase during those months.

The number of messages which were received and sent during the year was 2,833, of which 346 were exchanged with the United Kingdom and 2,337 with other places, and 150 were Government messages.

The receipts for the year amounted to 1,068*l.*, showing a decrease, as compared with the year 1895, of 336*l.*

The Post Office revenue for 1896 was (omitting fractions) 2,358*l.*, showing an increase of 420*l.* as compared with the receipts of 1895.

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The increase was occasioned by the increased sale of stamps, partly for postal purposes and partly to meet the demand from dealers and stamp collectors.

There was an increase of about 20 per cent, in the number of foreign postal packets in 1896.

The total number of postal packets passing through the Post Office was 294,356, which, as compared with the total for 1895, which was 245,897, shows an increase in 1896 of 48,459.

From the 7th February to 9th April 1896, a mail service was maintained between Palm Beach, Florida, and Nassau, and during that period 60,774 postal packets were received and despatched, whilst the number for the corresponding period of 1895 was only 37,823, showing an increase in the postal business, due to the increased postal facilities of that period, of 22,951.

J. S. CHURCHILL,
Colonial Secretary.

May 15, 1897.
