

The Commercial

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RAMBLING THOUGHTS.

Recently THE COMMERCIAL referred to the severe depression felt by the farmers of Great Britain on account of the unprecedentedly low prices of cereals. Though the effect of these low prices is not so keenly felt in the prairie grain country of Western Canada as it is in some other parts, yet it is felt quite severely. A great many of our settlers have been but a short time in the country—from a year upward—and they have not become thoroughly established here yet. Many of our settlers come in with but limited means, and it requires a few years, under favorable circumstances, to place them in a position to stand a season of adversity without some inconvenience, if not privation. That the past year has been a trying one to many of our farmers, there is no denying. There are of course a great many among those who have been some years in the country, who are in such a position of independence that they are not dependent upon the returns from a single season. The large number of Manitoba farmers who can afford to spend their holidays in a visit to their old homes in Eastern Canada, indicates that there are many so well to do that they need deny themselves nothing in reason, notwithstanding the low prices realized for their crop.

The year 1892, while one of rapid progress in some directions, cannot be regarded as a fairly satisfactory one, owing to the low price of cereals, as referred to above. Immigration has been much larger than in previous years, and a good class of settlers have come in to occupy our fruitful lands. Another indication of progress is the vastly increased quantity of land sold to new settlers, by the Canadian Pacific railway and other large land holders. Returns of immigration and land sales will be found on another page of this number of THE COMMERCIAL, and they may be consulted to show the prosperity enjoyed in this direction. New railways have been built, new industries established, and other signs of progress are apparent. But for all this, the year has not been a prosperous one for the farmers as a whole, and as agriculture is the basis of all progress, we must conclude that the year has not been a satisfactory one for the country at large. Again we are brought to consider the immediate cause, namely; the low price of cereals. The crops, in point of yield, have hardly been up to expectations, and a rather light crop coming in a year of low prices, is certain to be felt. This year the price of cereals has ruled so remarkably low, that the farmers have had very little return for their year's work.

A time of depression is sure to bring with it more or less agitation. People become restless, and cast about for excuses, we may call it, for the trouble. Many remarkable theories are likely to be put forward, as a cause of the depression, or as a means of cure. A reason of depression is the harvest time of the professional agitator. He will find many ready to

listen eagerly to his voice, and take up with his doctrines. In times of general prosperity, it is difficult to arouse people to protest against the heaviest artificial burdens which may be placed upon them. They will endure hindrances to progress for years without a murmur and will wait until a time of depression comes to demand a change.

Western Canada offers many advantages as a home for agricultural settlers, but we labor under a few drawbacks, the most severe, however, of which are capable of removal or mitigation, some being largely artificial. In this time of low prices for what we have to sell, these disadvantages will come more prominently to view. Considering the depression which is felt by many farmers in Manitoba, in consequence of the low price of cereals, there is really less agitation than might be expected. A number of letters from farmers have been appearing in the press of the province, in which some wise and some foolish things are said, bearing upon the present situation. Beyond this, however, no agitation has yet sprung up, though Manitoba people get the name abroad of being great agitators.

While an agitation of a boisterous nature is not desirable, there are certain lessons to be learned from the present situation, which should set our people thinking, with a view to correcting any drawbacks and burdens of a moveable nature, and improving our prospects for the future. If some of the existing evil conditions are corrected as a result of the depression, it will not have come in vain. One evil that stands out prominently is credit. Farmers buy altogether too freely on credit. This is one cause of a great many of the difficulties in which many farmers find themselves. It has ruined many. Some who would have succeeded had they been unable to obtain credit, have been overwhelmed with debt. The desire to get ahead fast and operate on a large scale, has induced many farmers to go into debt extensively for implements, etc., upon which they have been obliged to pay extravagant interests, which few ordinary mercantile businesses would stand. They have gone so deeply into debt, that in a time of depression they are driven to sore straits. Many a farmer can date his trouble to too free purchases on credit, in the expectancy of a continually prosperous future.

Tariff taxation is another artificial burden, which in this time of agricultural depression, lumes up as a monster which is sapping the earnings of the people. It has been with us for years, but its presence has seldom been so forcibly brought to view as at present. The farmers of Canada suffer from tariff taxation, and they apparently suffer willingly. They could remove the load if they chose to do so, but they simply do not so choose.

The geographical position of Manitoba and the Territories causes a drawback in the heavy freight rates upon our exports and imports. This is a drawback which is not removable, though we hope and believe its intensity will be considerably mitigated in the future. We cannot ship out our surplus products and bring in necessary merchandise for consumption, without paying freights thereon, and we can only hope for a continued reduction of rates, as has been the experience of the past, as the railway

facilities of the country become more complete. At present, the low price of cereals abroad makes the freight rate appear a greater burden than previously, and certainly the rate upon grain does seem high, when compared with the price received by the farmer. The cost of sending wheat, oats, barley, etc. from Manitoba to an ocean port, which varies from 54 to 59 cents per 100 pounds, according to the point of shipment, is overwhelming when compared with the price received by the farmer for the grain. At present values of cereals in export markets, the rate is practically prohibitory on all grains but wheat, and the margin to the farmer must be small indeed upon the latter. If the present low price of cereals should continue for a few years, a sharp reduction in freights will be absolutely necessary.

In practical agriculture THE COMMERCIAL does not profess to be an authority; but there is a commercial side to farming which is apparent to those not engaged in the calling. We have stated that the export of coarse and low grade grains is prohibited—we mean on a paying basis to the grower—by the freight rates and low prices abroad. There is a way, however, of turning such grain to good account, and that is to feed it to stock. Yet in the face of the abundance of cheap grain, a large number of cattle are marketed in a half prepared condition. This is a great loss to the farmer. With feed grains so cheap, the best return to the farmer from his stock should be in the fattening process, yet a large number of animals are marketed in a lean condition.

BRANDED "MANITOBA" FLOUR.

The placing of flour ground in Ontario mills upon the market as Manitoba flour, is quite a serious matter for western millers in these days of unprecedentedly low flour prices. Ontario millers are getting their wheat proportionately cheaper than Manitoba millers. The eastern millers are buying wheat at their mills at a price only about 10 to 12 cents per bushel lower than prices in Manitoba. When the freight rate from Manitoba points to eastern markets is added to the Manitoba product, there is a large balance in favor of the eastern miller. Manitoba flour, on account of its superior quality, however, commands a higher price than that manufactured from eastern wheats, and on this account western millers are able to dispose of their product in eastern markets. Manitoba flour will therefore sell in the market with Ontario flour, on its merit; but when the latter is put up and branded as Manitoba flour, the competition is placed upon an unfair basis. THE COMMERCIAL is informed that some flour dealers furnish sacks to eastern mills, which are branded as Manitoba flour. Of course there are eastern millers of established reputation, who grind Manitoba wheat for mixing; but there is no doubt considerable flour sold from unknown mills, and branded Manitoba, in the manufacture of which no Manitoba wheat whatever has been used. This is not only an unfair competition for western millers, but it also injures the general trade in Manitoba flour by giving a false impression as to the quality of the latter. The question is at present in the hands of the Winnipeg board of trade, with a view to securing a remedy, if possible, though this will be a difficult matter to do.