

The Commercial

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HAIL INSURANCE.

A somewhat novel bill has been brought before the Manitoba Legislature, relating to protection against loss from hail. The bill asks for an amendment to the Municipal Act, providing for the establishment of a fund to be raised by taxation, to insure against hail storms. The idea is to allow municipalities to pass a by-law, which shall be submitted to a vote of the electors, providing for the raising of the fund. If the by-law is carried, the council will then levy a tax upon the assessable property of the municipality, which tax is not to exceed ten mills in the dollar in any one year. The fund so raised shall be set apart for paying losses from hail storms. It will be readily seen that this plan of hail insurance is open to several objections. For instance, all property owners of a municipality wherein the by-law might be put in force, would be obliged to pay their share of the tax, though perhaps requiring no protection from hail. It is reasonable to suppose that in all municipalities there are many property owners who are not farmers, and who would have no crops liable to be damaged or destroyed by hail. Again, farmers do not all have the same acreage under crop, in proportion to the value of their property. The farmer who devoted his attention chiefly to stock, and who gave little or no attention to grain crops, would be obliged to pay his full share of the tax to protect his neighbor who had a large grain acreage. There is another important objection which can be taken to the proposed plan. Municipalities are usually but limited in area. Hail storms, though never serious taking the country as a whole, are often very destructive to limited areas. The per centage required to afford protection against hail, when spread around the country at large, would be very small, but almost every season there are small districts wherein great damage is done from hail storms. Now, if each municipality, limited in area as it is, is obliged to depend upon itself for protection, it will probably not infrequently happen that the ten mills rate will in certain years afford very little protection from serious loss. In order to overcome the limited area ob-

jection, the bill provides that municipalities may combine under the proposed act. It can be surmised, however, that there would be many difficulties in the way of forming a combination of municipalities to such end.

The only fair plan of hail insurance to the property owner, would appear to be to adopt the same system as in fire insurance, namely: that the person receiving the protection should alone pay the premium, and that the amount of the premium should be measured in proportion to the risk. This could be arranged in hail insurance by a premium at so much per acre on the different crops actually sown. A system of hail insurance by regularly organized insurance companies would be preferable to this proposed municipal plan, and it is a matter for wonder that some more general move has not been made to provide such insurance. The annual losses from hail storms, though unimportant in the aggregate, are often very severe upon individuals and limited sections, and some easy and reliable system of insurance against such losses should be provided. Taking Manitoba as a whole and scattering the risks throughout the province, the premiums upon such insurance should be very trifling to the individual farmer, whilst the aggregate of insured property would undoubtedly be very large. Experience has shown that some reliable and easily arranged system of hail insurance is a necessity in this country. If an official plan of hail insurance is to be provided, a provincial system would seem very much preferable to the proposed municipal scheme, as under a provincial plan the two principal objections to the municipal system already noted, could be obviated. The limited area objection would be overcome, and instead of assessing all property pro rata, a fund could be provided by either a voluntary insurance, or a compulsory tax at so much per acre of the different cereals, levied directly upon the owners of the crops. Such compulsory tax might be objected to by some as unfair, but it would certainly be far less open to the charge of injustice, than is the idea contained in the proposed municipal system of hail insurance, under which a compulsory tax would be levied upon the property of persons who grow little or no grain crops, solely for the benefit of those whose attention is given to grain growing.

BRITISH COLUMBIA RAILWAYS.

British Columbia has two important railway schemes on hand at present, which are intended to connect with United States roads. The oldest of these schemes has been agitated for some time, and has heretofore suffered from the disallowance policy of the Dominion Government. This is the road proposed to run south from New Westminster to Puget Sound points. The Seattle, Lake Shore & Eastern railway company is now building a road northward from Seattle, Washington Territory, toward the boundary. A considerable portion of this road is now under construction, and it is expected the road will be completed to the boundary by the close of the present year. From the boundary to Westminster, where the road would connect with the C. P. Ry., the distance is but thirteen miles. The completion of this road will connect all the Pacific coast railways, and give a through all rail route from British Columbia to Mexico.

The other scheme for connection with the United States roads is of more recent date, its having come prominently to the front during the last few months. In this scheme Victoria and Vancouver Island are chiefly interested. The idea is to extend a branch of the Pacific coast system of railways through Washington Territory, on the west side of Puget Sound, to a point on the straits of Juan de Fuca, at or about Port Angeles. The straits at this point is about ten miles wide. The Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway would be extended to a point on the coast opposite Port Angeles, and it is proposed to ferry the trains across and in this way connect the two roads. It is claimed that the scheme is a perfectly feasible one. If carried out, this plan would give Victoria and the Island railway all rail connection with the Pacific coast railway system. The railway ferry system is, it is well known, frequently adopted in crossing large streams, as in the case of the St. Clair, Detroit and St. Lawrence rivers in Eastern Canada, and it should work to even better advantage in crossing the straits of Fuca, where there will be freedom from the ice drawback, such as is at times encountered on the rivers named. The people of Victoria are of course delighted over the prospect of having their island isolation broken in this way. A bill providing for the extension of the Island railway to Beecher bay, opposite Port Angeles, has passed