

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, APRIL 1, 1895.

CIVIC TAXATION.

That irrepensible question of civic taxation is again a matter of considerable agitation in Winnipeg. A deputation of Winnipeg retail merchants and others, recently waited upon the law amendments committee of the Manitoba legislature, and presented their grievances against the present system of taxation. So far as can be learned from the newspaper reports of the interview between the merchants and the law amendments committee, it would appear that the delegation had no definite plan of taxation to recommend to the legislature. While they spoke against the present system, they did not present any alternative system which they would prefer. It is true some of the delegates spoke in favor of going back to the old system of taxing stocks of merchandise and personal property, which was in force in Winnipeg previous to the adoption of the present system. Others of the delegation, however, expressed varying views, and were not in favor of going back to the old system. As the members of the delegation were therefore divided in their opinion, they could not, while expressing their dissatisfaction with the existing system, impress the members of the legislature before whom they appeared, with any clear idea as to what they wanted.

The present system of taxation in Winnipeg is contained in an act of the Manitoba legislature, passed in 1893. By this act personal property is exempt. Real estate and buildings are subject to taxation; also gas and water pipes, street railway tracks, telephone, telegraph and electric light poles and appliances are subjected to taxation the same as realty. A system of business tax is also provided, based on the capitalization of rental value of the premises occupied for business purposes. This business tax was established to supersede the system of taxing stocks of merchandise. It was the outcome of a great deal of public agitation and private research on the part of many citizens.

That the present system is a great improvement upon the old plan of taxation, The Commercial feels constrained to assert. That is a model system of taxation, entirely free from injustice, we cannot claim. The best that can be said is that it is a decided improvement upon the old system, and is much less liable to work injustice than under the old system. The change in the systems has made a considerable shifting of the burden of taxation and it is natural enough that those who have had their taxes increased should feel aggrieved. This however, is no proof that the new plan is not a change for the better. In fact, the increasing of taxation in some directions and the lessening of it in other cases, would be just as likely to indicate a more equitable system as the contrary.

That the plan of taxing merchandise stocks

is wrong in principle we are firmly convinced. At the same time, there are, no doubt, special cases of injustice under the present system, and an earnest effort should be made to compromise the varying interests, rather than think of reverting to the plan of taxing merchandise.

HANDLING PRODUCE.

Last week The Commercial referred to the subject of handling produce, pointing out that the custom of wholesale grocers handling produce in the Winnipeg market, had resulted in injury to the country merchants. The effect has been to increase competition, resulting in depressing prices, thus causing loss to country producers and shippers.

There is another way in which country shippers are unknowingly doing themselves an injury, in shipping produce to this market. We refer to the custom now so general of shipping direct to retailers. Many retail dealers in Winnipeg now receive shipments of produce direct from country merchants to such an extent that not only are their own wants supplied, but they have produce to 'ob to other dealers. This has the same effect as shipping to wholesale grocers, resulting in increased competition and cutting in prices. If the produce trade were confined to the regular produce dealers, there would in the first place be many fewer persons offering produce for sale in this market. The regular produce dealers, who make an exclusive or special business of this branch of trade, would be able to supply the local market, and the surplus they would ship to other markets. Where shipments are made to a large number of persons, who are not regularly in the produce trade, the stuff is all thrown on the local market. Those merchants who are not regularly in the produce trade, are not in a position to store and ship to outside points, and they are anxious to push the stuff off in the local market, to the detriment of prices. Thus we have a large number of persons offering produce in the local market, who are not in a position to handle on a large scale and ship out the surplus. By shipping to retail dealers and others not regularly engaged in the produce trade, the country merchants who deal in produce really assist in cutting prices and demoralizing the market against themselves. There is also the question of increased risk in sending to so many small dealers.

While on the produce question it is said that quite a number of country merchants went into the egg pickling business last summer, and these eggs found their way to this market during the past winter, sometimes mixed with fresh eggs. In some cases the pickling and mixing may have been done by farmers, and the eggs may have been shipped here just as they came from the farmers. In some cases, however, country dealers are known to have pickled considerable quantities of eggs, and the speculation has as a rule been an unprofitable one for them, the season having been an unfavorable one for limed eggs. Some of these pickled eggs are held yet by country retail merchants,

who have recently offered to ship to this market. Of course the eggs are now practically unsaleable. If The Commercial were asked for advice in this matter, we would advise country merchants to market their eggs on the same plan as we have always advised in regard to butter—that is, while they are fresh, accepting the market value at the time. The days of holding eggs as well as butter for a profitable winter market have evidently passed away.

NEED OF DRAINAGE.

The new drainage act under discussion in the Manitoba legislature, is generally regarded with approval. The question of drainage is a very urgent one. We want new settlers to occupy our vacant lands, and it is necessary to make these lands really desirable for settlement by providing drainage. Many settlers have been compelled to move from some districts, on account of lack of drainage facilities, and if we were to have a return of a few very wet seasons, a number of settlers who are now apparently comfortably located in some sections, would find themselves in very uncomfortable surroundings. Of course these remarks apply only to certain districts, but this does not lessen the urgent need of carrying out a comprehensive system of drainage. There are very large areas of land, particularly in the eastern parts of the province, which require drainage badly. The lands are of the best quality, but they cannot be settled to good advantage until drainage facilities are furnished. It would be nothing short of a great calamity to the province, if a series of wet years should set in, such as have been experienced in times past, before a thorough system of drainage has been provided. This question of drainage is really the most important matter for consideration in connection with the present movement to secure settlers for our vacant lands, and it is to be hoped that the work will be carried on energetically during the present year.

MARKETING SMALL HOGS

Quite a number of small hogs have been marketed in Winnipeg recently. These hogs are not desirable from a commercial point of view, as they are not wanted for packing purposes and they will not bring good prices. A few of these undesirable hogs injure the sale of a lot with which they may be mixed. The marketing of these small hogs must also be comparatively unprofitable to the farmer, especially at this time of year. In a grain country like Manitoba it would seem the more profitable plan to feed these animals until they had attained a better marketable condition. It may be that the farmers who are marketing these hogs have run short of grain and are not in a position to buy, or they may be in need of cash to buy implements and supplies to go on with their spring work. Necessity, of course, must govern cases. But where there is no urgent reason for disposing of the hogs it would be more profitable to the farmers to hold on to these small animals until they had attained a fair marketable condition.