

CONDITIONS IN THE WEST.

(Concluded from Page 5.)

sions, and there is very good reason to believe that Mr. Hoover is overlooking no bets where the interests of the United States are concerned, even though he is supposed to be acting in an international capacity.

The fact that France has discovered that she has a million tons more food stuffs than she reckoned on three months ago is another cog in the wheel of the puzzle as is also the large supplies of food stuffs on hand in France for the feeding of both the Canadian armies and which are to some extent becoming available for the civilian population now that these armies are being reduced.

There is, of course, the hope that conditions on this side will improve when once the task of feeding the countries other than France, Belgium and Italy has begun, but in the meantime conditions are decidedly chaotic and unsatisfactory.

OUR ANNUAL ASH HEAP.

According to the New York Journal of Commerce, the losses by fire in the United States and Canada during the calendar year 1918 reached the enormous sum of \$317,014,385. This is the largest amount for any one year in the history of the country, with the exception of 1906, the San Francisco conflagration year, when the total was \$459,710,000. The fire losses for the year just closed were approximately fifty million dollars in excess of those of the preceding year.

The average annual fire waste in the United States and Canada has been somewhat increased by the 1918 record. The aggregate fire losses for the past forty years, from 1879 to 1918 inclusive, reach the vast total of \$6,762,966,045, showing an average annual destruction of property to the value of \$169,074,151. The following table gives fire losses by years during the past forty years, and while there have been some

declines it will be noted that the increase in general is very marked. This, however, is largely if not wholly accounted for by the pronounced gain in the country's value of property exposed to fire hazard:

FIRE LOSSES DURING PAST FORTY YEARS YEARS AGGREGATE \$6,762,966,045.

1918.....	\$317,014,385	1898.....	\$119,650,500
1917.....	267,273,140	1897.....	110,319,650
1916.....	231,442,995	1896.....	115,655,500
1915.....	182,836,200	1895.....	129,835,700
1914.....	235,591,350	1894.....	128,246,400
1913.....	224,728,350	1893.....	156,445,875
1912.....	225,320,900	1892.....	151,516,000
1911.....	234,337,250	1891.....	143,764,000
1910.....	234,470,650	1890.....	108,893,700
1909.....	203,649,200	1889.....	123,046,800
1908.....	233,562,250	1888.....	110,885,600
1907.....	215,671,250	1887.....	120,283,000
1906.....	459,710,000	1886.....	104,924,700
1905.....	175,193,800	1885.....	102,818,700
1904.....	252,554,050	1884.....	110,008,600
1903.....	156,195,700	1883.....	110,149,000
1902.....	149,260,850	1882.....	84,505,000
1901.....	164,347,450	1881.....	81,280,000
1900.....	163,362,250	1880.....	74,643,400
1899.....	136,773,200	1879.....	77,703,700

Total for forty years.....\$6,762,966,045

BIG POTATO CROPS WITH ELECTRO-CULTURE.

Striking experiments in electroculture were carried out by the South Wales Electrical Power Distribution Company, during 1917 and 1918 on a two acre plot of ground near Pontypridd. As regarding ploughing and manuring, the whole plot was treated alike, but electroculture was applied to only a portion of the ground the remainder serving as a "control" for the purposes of comparison. Potatoes were planted under precisely similar conditions over the whole

area, and during 1917 the electrified portion yielded a crop heavier by 17.2 per cent than that of the control portion. In 1918 the increase out of electroculture was 12.6 per cent the reduction being explained on several grounds, such as that a smaller area of electric wires was used and that part of the controlled plot had had the benefit of electrification in the previous year. Experiments were also made with oats in an adjoining field, and although they were not carried out very thoroughly they point to an increase of 25 per cent in grain and 17 per cent in straw. On the potato patch the wires were first arranged as a 6 foot rectangular network supported on insulators 6 ft. 6 ins. from the ground; in August, 1917, the height was reduced to 5 feet. During the 1918 experiment the wires were spaced 9 ft. apart, with no cross wires and were kept about two foot above the haulms. The network was fed through a transformer and rectified with current at between 30,000 volts and 39,000 volts according to the degrees of weather; the amount of current taken varied from 2.5 milliamperes in dry and from 4 to 7 in wet weather during 1917, and from 0.35 to 0.8 during 1918. The apparatus never failed, even in the wettest of Welsh weather. On dark nights the wires could be seen glowing, and even the tips of the grass in the rectifier were touched with light. Insects seemed to avoid the wires, but occasionally they settled upon the networks, where they glowed and were electrocuted. Although the voltage is so high the current is so low that there is no danger to anything but insect life. Horses are extremely susceptible to electric shock, but one which broke into the network retired undamaged, although carrying a good deal of wire with him. These experiments confirm the promising claims made for this application of electricity to agriculture which is being carefully studied by a special sub-committee of the British Board of Agriculture.

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