

THE JOURNAL
OF THE
Board of Arts and Manufactures
FOR UPPER CANADA.

AUGUST, 1863.

CULTIVATION AND MANUFACTURE OF
FLAX AND HEMP IN CANADA.*

The natural history and commercial value of Flax and Hemp are so little known, and, consequently, so little appreciated in Canada, that the farmers in the Province will receive the statement that next to cotton, flax is the most important and the most extensively used textile fabric in the world, with some degree of cautious reserve and perhaps, incredulity. But if the assertion that flax, as a material for textile fabrics, can be shown to occupy a position of paramount national importance, provokes surprise, surprise may grow into astonishment, and doubt be transformed into absolute unbelief, until removed by those stubborn things, facts, when it is added that the seed of flax, in the refuse form of oil cake to be used as food for cattle, commands such an enormous sale in Europe that its value there is represented by tens of millions of dollars annually, with a rapidly increasing demand.

Now that "King Cotton" has been dethroned amidst one of the most heartrending and stupendous struggles between contending millions of one and the same people, and the most wide-spread suffering, arising from the mere arrest of one branch of human industry, that the world has ever seen, flax is re-asserting her claim with unrivalled pretensions, to be considered the first in importance of all the countless gifts of God won from the vegetable kingdom for the use of mankind, not included within the class of food products.

This claim does not rest alone on the fitness of the material for the purposes of a textile fabric which shall supply the place of cotton, it appeals, as an instrument for increasing indefinitely the industry and wealth of the country, to the fostering care of philanthropists, statesmen and governments, in a manner and with a force which cannot be urged by any rival claimant.

Cotton has gained its supremacy at the expense of the unrequited toil and hopeless life of the slave. Now that the dawn of a brighter day for the slave is at hand, slow coming but surely advancing, there is every reason to believe that the beautiful and delicate exotic, which has attained its marvellous

preëminence by the unhallowed toil of millions of human creatures, will be compelled gradually to assume its place among the productions of free labour, and surrender the proud position it has usurped, at the cost of inexpressible suffering and sorrow, to its rival flax, which accommodates itself to all the climates of the temperate zone, and does not refuse to yield profitable harvests within the limits of sub-arctic and sub-tropical climates.

Flax has been cultivated and manufactured in various parts of the world throughout historic times. Those wonderful records of Egypt's civilization, the tombs and catacombs in the neighbourhood of Thebes and other great ruined cities in the valley of the Nile, show how extensively flax was cultivated by the Egyptians more than four thousand years ago; and since the time when Isaiah Ezekiel and Solomon recorded the praises of the "spindle" and "distaff" down even to modern times, flax has always been one of the most prominent and powerful sources of human industry and progress.

It may excite some surprise that this beautiful plant should have taken such wide-spread root from the frigid zones to the tropics, adapting itself apparently to all vicissitudes of climate, and flourishing under the burning sun of India as well as in the sub-arctic provinces of European Russia and Norway. In order to understand this apparent anomaly it is essential to bear in mind that flax is cultivated either for its fibre alone or for its seed alone, or for both of these products; and the special object of its extensive cultivation is mainly determined by climate.

Flax is cultivated for the seed alone in Turkey, India, and until recently, in many parts of the United States.

It is cultivated for the fibre alone, or chiefly for the fibre, in Ireland and some parts of Belgium.

It is cultivated for both fibre and seed in Great Britain, Continental Europe, Egypt, the United States, and to a small extent in Canada in both divisions of the Province.

Historical Notice of the Cultivation of Flax and Hemp in Canada.

The earliest reliable notices of the cultivation of flax in Canada are contained in the Paris Documents.*

In 1719, or nearly a century since, a long period, by the way, in the history of Canadian agriculture, the quantity of flax produced in Lower Canada was 45,970 lbs.. Two years later, the returns, according to the same documents, give 54,650 lb. of flax as the produce of the country. In 1734 the number of pounds of flax seed produced was 92,246,

* This article, by the Editor, was published in the *British American Magazine* for August: it will be concluded in the September number.

* Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York.