

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, APRIL 22, 1895.

THE DECIMAL SYSTEM.

The Association of Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom, the greatest commercial conference in Great Britain, at their recent annual meeting, adopted a resolution unanimously in favor of the decimal system of weights and measures. A committee has been appointed by the British Parliament to consider the question of the adoption of the decimal system. It is also worthy of note that a commission has been appointed at Washington, to consider the advisability of introducing the decimal system of weights and measures in the United States. No doubt the investigation of the question will lead to the adoption of the decimal system in each of these countries. If the system is adopted by Great Britain and the United States, it practically means that it will become the universal system of the civilized world.

It is one of the mysteries that the decimal system was not long ago adopted by all progressive commercial countries. Nothing can appear more ridiculous than the systems, or rather lack of system in computing weights and measures in Great Britain and the United States. In Great Britain there is a great difference in the custom of different markets, and this is also true in Canada and the United States. In one market, for instance, 84 lbs. make a bushel of oats, while in another market a bushel of this grain is only 32 lbs. In London grain is reckoned by the quarter, and in Liverpool by the hundred weight. These differences cause a great deal of annoyance and confusion, and often make quotations very misleading, owing to lack of knowledge of the peculiar requirements of each market.

The remedy for this is the general adoption of the decimal system by the civilized world. It is the common sense system, and though a little inconvenience would be caused at first, it would be only temporary. The trade would very soon accustom itself to the new order of things. Any temporary inconvenience from the adoption of the decimal system, would be made up many times over by the vast superiority of the new system. Germany and some other European countries have adopted the decimal system, with apparently very little inconvenience even at the outset, and it only remains for Great Britain and the United States to follow suit, to make the system practically universal.

RAINY LAKE GOLD FIELDS.

The discoveries made in the Rainy Lake gold district last season are likely to attract a great deal of attention to this near-by mining country this year. Now that the season for prospecting is opening, we may expect quite an influx of mining experts and capitalists within a short time. The first discoveries of gold were made on the United States side of

the Rainy river, but by far the most valuable finds made last summer were located in Canadian territory. In fact, the result of last season's operations would indicate that the Rainy Lake mineral country is practically in Canadian territory, and with the adjoining Lake of the Woods district, forms a vast and rich mineral district all in Canada.

Capitalists and mining experts who may wish to visit these gold districts, will be interested in learning something of the routes by which they may reach the districts. The only way to reach either the Rainy Lake or Lake of the Woods district is by the Canadian Pacific Railway. This applies to the country on the United States as well as to the Canadian side of the boundary. Visitors to the district can come to Winnipeg by any of the railways from the south and west and from here they can take the Canadian Pacific Railway to Rat Portage on the Lake of the Woods, 183 miles east of Winnipeg. At Rat Portage steamers can be taken to any point on the Lake of the Woods and Rainy river. Visitors coming from the east can take the Canadian Pacific Railway direct to Rat Portage. A steamer will leave Duluth three times each week for Fort Arthur, on Lake Superior, where the Canadian Pacific Railway can be taken direct for Rat Portage. Rat Portage, the door to the mining country, can therefore be reached in a few hours direct by rail from either Winnipeg to the west or from Port Arthur on the east. In addition to the fleet of steamers on the Lake of the Woods, two new steamers have been built at Rat Portage this winter for the Lake and Rainy river trade. Navigation is expected to open on the Lake of the Woods in a few days.

HIDES, LEATHER, BOOTS AND SHOES ADVANCING.

The remarkable advance in the price of hides is one of the most interesting features of the commercial situation at the moment. Hides have been a very depressed commodity for a long time, but they have now experienced a steady advance since early last winter, until prices are up 100 per cent and more. What is more remarkable about the advance is, that it has come at a time when hides are at a minimum value, intrinsically. In the winter and spring hides are not worth as much to the tanner, pound for pound, as in the summer, as the extra weight of hair carried in the winter represents quite a loss in weight. Hides are also grubby and carry considerable foreign matter in the form of adhering manure in the spring, though, of course, allowance is made for this in inspecting.

The advance in hides is due to actual scarcity, and the scarcity of beef cattle explains to a considerable extent why it is that hides are scarce. At the three great slaughter markets of Chicago, Kansas City and Omaha, there is a shortage of 227,000 head of cattle, for the first three months of this year, as compared with the same period of last year, and the shortage this year is much greater when compared with the first three

months of either 1893 or 1892. At Boston, a leading hide market, prices have advanced over 100 per cent. The Winnipeg market shows the full advance made elsewhere. A year ago 2½ cents per pound was quoted here for No. 1 cows, while this week 5 cents is offered for No. 1 cured stock.

The advance in hides must, of course, lead to a similar advance in leather prices, and this in turn will develop higher prices for manufactures of leather, such as boots and shoes, etc. Leather did not at first follow the advance in hides sharply, but leather is now advancing rapidly. Boot and shoe manufacturers are also beginning to give notice of advances in their prices, and prices for fall goods in this branch will show a considerable advance no doubt.

It would seem probable that the high prices of hides will hold out for some time as the high price of beef will operate to curtail the consumption of beef in favor of other meat foods, or until the supply of cattle increases sufficiently to reduce prices again. The price of hides, however, seems to have reached almost a dangerous height.

The leather industry in Canada has been one of the most depressed branches for years, and the advance in hides did not help the tanners any, many of them having closed up rather than buy bear hides. Now that the advance has set in in leather, however, tanners who have held any stocks will be able to make good money.

HIGHER PRICES FOR CATTLE.

If an improvement in prices is an indication of better times, prospects ahead should be bright. Several staple commodities have recently experienced almost a remarkable advance in prices. These are crude petroleum, hides and beef cattle. The advance in these raw materials will affect other lines, as, for instance, the big advance in hides will affect leather, boots and shoes and leather manufactures generally.

The advance in beef has gone on to such an extent that it has led to a rumor that a combine had been formed by the packers to "boom" prices. There does not, however, seem to be any good reason for suspecting anything in the nature of a combine. On the contrary, the advance appears to have come from natural causes. The immediate cause appears to have been the short corn and fodder crops in several of the western states last year. A good many cattle were, no doubt, crowded to market prematurely, while the number of cattle fed for the market in the great corn states has been much less than usual. It is also said that hard times has led to a shrinkage of the ranching interests in the great grazing regions of the western and southwestern states, thus further reducing the supply of cattle.

The price of beef has advanced to such an extent that it has been necessary to advance the price of canned meats, and some of the packing houses at the western centres have closed down in consequence of the increased cost of beef. The advance in beef has been