

In Ireland markets are held once a week in the towns, and so near together are they in the north of Ireland, that almost every farmer has markets that he could go to and return from on every day in the week. These markets are well attended by buyers, always ready to purchase more than they can get; and such is the anxiety of buyers to get the flax, that they are to be found daily driving from the house of one farmer and one scutchmill to another, to pick it up before it goes to market. Flax spinners and merchants have their buyers out in all markets, neither distance nor expense deters them; and if any one man in Canada were known to have ten tons of scutched flax for sale, there are speculators in the north of Ireland who would not hesitate to send buyers out all the way to Canada to purchase it.

Mills for spinning, weaving, and oil crushing belong to the more advanced stages of the manufacture of flax—their profits are well known to be great, and capital and enterprize will always be anxious to erect such where the raw material can be got abundant, and self-interest will always provide these where they will be profitable. The erection of factories for the preparation and scutching of flax require a much less amount of capital, and they are proportionately more profitable; but, their profits have not been fully understood in Canada, and thus the erection of them has been too long delayed. This is a subject which requires especial attention by farmers, mechanics, merchants and capitalists—they may in this matter act individually or in concert. The latter would be much the better plan—the project could by it be carried out more successfully and profitably, and with little capital drawn from each.

The erection of factories for the preparation and scutching of flax, are essentially necessary to promote its cultivation. In Belgium, where labour is abundant and cheap, these operations are carried on by manual labour. In Ireland, also, much of it is done by manual labour, though the factory system is rapidly introducing itself there, as it has done also in many places in France, Belgium, and England; it being found that the various processes can be carried out with greater economy than by manual labour, unless where the latter is at a low price, or supplied by the farmers' family at times when they would otherwise be idle.

Before capital is invested in any speculation, and more particularly in one involving the erection of buildings and the purchase of machinery, the questions proper to be asked are:—Will the business pay? How much profit will it pay? And how long will it continue to bring in a profit?

The two first questions more properly belong to a detailed prospectus, by which it can easily be shown that such a speculation would pay a profit of 20 per cent. on the paid-up capital, in addition to the benefits conferred on the public, the flax-growers, and those who would be employed. But we will for the present pass on, without entering into the details of those matters, and discuss the question,—How long will it continue to bring in a profit?

The failure of the potatoe crop in Ireland was thought, at the time, to be a calamity for which there was no relief; but it proved a blessing, in stirring up farmers to seek a more profitable crop in its stead. So may the failure of the wheat crop confer lasting benefits on the farmers of Canada, by teaching them not to put too much dependence in grain crops as a source of profit, and inducing them to give place, in their rotation of crops, to flax. Farmers are proverbially a cautious class of men, and the great caution with which they are gradually getting into flax growing is some evidence of their knowing its value, and that they are determined to continue growing it. But there are some who, perhaps, imagine that if the wheat crop returns to its former health, they will abandon the growth of flax. We do not think so. If they but once taste the sweets of the profits of flax, they will be very reluctant to part with them, for it is a much more profitable crop than either wheat or barley.

There are others who, perhaps, think that the restoration of peace in the American States may lead to consequences which will cause farmers to be unable to grow flax profitably, and that then, of course, it will cease, and capital expended in factories and machinery would be lost. This is, in truth, the great question. There is no doubt but the American civil war has influenced the increased price of flax; but it was not the only cause operating to bring it into favour in late years, for, before the war was thought of, an increased demand for flax had sprung up, owing to its own individual merits. The supply of all kinds of raw materials for textile fabrics had not kept pace with the demand, and those interested in their manufacture were looking around with anxiety to discover from whence they might obtain a supply. The Great International Exhibition, held in London, in 1851, had done much to set on foot a spirit of inquiry, and to make the value of flax better understood than it had ever been before. This state of affairs was well described in a small volume, "Flax *versus* Cotton," published in 1853, written by Mr. G. G. Dodd, who seems to have fully understood the subject. He writes:—