

# The Commercial

WINNIPEG, DECEMBER 30, 1884.

## A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

As we enter upon the year 1885, and emerge from what has been a second year of depression, we people of Manitoba may well ask, are we entering upon what will prove a prosperous new year. We have certainly had a long enough period of tough times to make us skeptical about improvement for the future, and one hope after another having been coldly, if not rudely dispelled, our commercial skepticism is pardonable although not justifiable. A calm comparison of the present state and prospect of trade affairs compared with those of a year ago is not out of place now, and may not be without profit.

A year ago the trade community in Manitoba were feeling keenly the effects of a frozen crop of grain, and as 1883 passed out nothing but murmurs of discontent could be heard all over the province. Wholesale and retail merchants had on hand heavy stocks of goods, that should have been sold during the fall months, and some had what was much worse, heavy outstanding debts among a farming community, who were unable to pay. The latter half of 1883 had been one of commercial disaster all around, 140 houses in the Northwest having failed during the six months, and the year closed with an omnipresent fear of panic breaking over us. A blacker prospect a country could scarcely have to enter upon a new year with. During the early months of 1884 we found, that the prospect had not deceived us, and a time of pressure such as few of us have ever experienced, was maintained until spring opened up. The improvement which has taken place has been of that slow but sure nature, which indicates recovery from prostration, and shows to what a state of weakness we had been reduced.

As we enter upon 1885 the general state of trade in Manitoba is far from what we could wish it. That we have been blessed in 1884 by an abundant crop we cannot deny, but prices of farm products have been so low all over the world, that the benefits arising from such a crop are limited, compared with what they would otherwise be to this province, and doubtless much more so, than

most of us calculated. But an abundant crop has had, and will continue to have its good effects, as we will discover before that of 1885 comes to market. A year ago we had for export not much over 1,000,000 bushels of wheat, and the great bulk of that was more or less damaged by frost. At present the quantity still available for export must be over 3,000,000 bushels, we are therefore more than three times as rich in grain resources as we were a year ago, and will have much heavier exports during the early part of 1885, than during 1884. But on the other side, the close feeling of 1884 has stimulated the production of meats, dairy products, and other necessities, which were previously imported from the east or the United States, and in this manner our imports have been steadily falling off, while our exports have been on the increase. During 1885 it will not be necessary to import a single car load of beef, pork, butter or plain food of any description, unless it be products of more southern latitudes, which form but a small fraction of our consumption. In this manner our expenditure is steadily decreased, and we are daily becoming more self-supporting. Progress in that direction must soon free us from the dregs of depression, which we still suffer from, and if we be self-reliant, and measure our progress only in accordance with our power to develop our own resources, we must soon reach a state of prosperity the permanence of which will be a marked contrast to the excitement of booms. We have been too much accustomed like Micawber to depend upon something turning up outside of the proper range of provident calculation, which would relieve us from all difficulties, and it is only within the past year that the feeling of self-reliance has made any headway. The natural result is that we have made solid progress during the year, and will undoubtedly continue to do so during the coming one. The feeling of self-reliance has also gained ground in trade circles. Pressure from banks and other sources formerly depended on has developed the feeling, and greater trade safety has been the result. Mercantile liabilities are not much more than half as heavy as they were a year ago, so that trade starts into 1885 in a comparatively unburdened state.

Looking at the prospect now, we must acknowledge, that for Manitoba it is im-

mensely brighter than it was a year ago. We have, no doubt, some tight squares still before us, but we will find our lot and prospects brighten in proportion to the growth of the feeling of self-reliance, and if it is encouraged and stimulated, 1885 will no doubt be a happy and prosperous year.

## THE HOLIDAY TRADE.

In the general progress which has been made in all human institutions, people are liable to overlook the changes in the nature of the holiday trade, which has taken place during the present century or even since the grey beards of our own day were children.

Our grandfathers have told us of the visits of Santa Claus many years ago and judging from their testimony the waves of that annually welcome visitor have grown amazingly both in value and variety since their childhood. Then the Christmas trade benefitted only a few of the less important class of traders. The itinerant vendor of toys was then the most important dealer of the holiday time, while the costermonger, candy pedlar and other such migratory traders were his less important competitors. The retail merchant of the town or city looked forward to the holiday time as a period of business relaxation, and not unfrequently the bulk of these individuals closed their places of business and joined the general throng of idlers. Since then a great work of change has been going ceaselessly on. The holiday present has gradually spread over a wide area of goods, and one half of the manufacturing institutions of the civilized world have now a time of preparation, and frequently rushing activity before the holidays arrive. The hardware and cutlery branches figures largely in the supply, the textile manufacturer, the stationer, the jeweller, and a host of others assist to swell it. The skill of the inventor and the genius of the artist are both pressed into service, and their productions passed from one to another as tokens of the good will that rules among men during the festive season. The retail merchant is no longer an uninterested party in the traffic in these goods, but looks forward to the approach of Christmas as his time of harvest. He has superseded the pedlar, and costermonger, and these individuals no longer share to any extent in the holiday trade.

Among other changes which have been