

straw difficult to handle during subsequent operations, and any one who has pulled flax can tell you that it is hard work at best, but becomes doubly so if there are many thistles.

When the first leaves begin to drop from about the base of the stem and the stem turns a pale yellow color is the proper time to harvest. Up to the present, pulling by hand has proved the only satisfactory method of harvesting. Mechanical pullers have from time to time been invented and put on the market, but they all had such serious deficiencies that none ever came into extensive use. The threshing is done with a special machine which will remove the seed from the sheaf without cutting the band. This avoids unnecessary cutting up and tangling of the straw. Retting is the next step in the process and may be done either by steeping the straw in large tanks or vats of water, or, else, by spreading it out in thin even rows on sod fields, and allowing it to ret by the action of the dew and rain. The purpose is to render the bast or fibre easily separated from the woody portion by bringing about a decomposition of the gummy matter which holds them together. When this has been accomplished, the fibre is easily removed by scutching, and is packed into bales and shipped to the spinning mills to be bleached, spun into thread, and finally woven into linen.

Considerable capital is necessary to grow flax on a large scale. In most industries a finished product is put on the market, and receipts are forthcoming almost as soon as operations are commenced, but not so with the Flax Industry. Outlays commence in the spring with the

renting of the land and the sowing of the seed. They continue through the summer and early fall months, since the workmen must be paid regularly for the harvesting and threshing. Not until October do the first receipts from the sale of the seed appear, then follows another long period of heavy expenditures. Retting and scutching generally occupies the fall and winter months and it is March or April before the fibre can be disposed of.

Considerable financial risk is also involved. Frosts in the early spring or prolonged drought during the growing season may render the crop a total failure. In the case of the ordinary farmer, if the grain crop fails he has the hay, roots and corn to fall back on. His income is not derived entirely from the one source, but the flax grower has so to speak, "all his eggs in one basket."

The labor question is, however, without a doubt the most difficult problem with which the flax grower has to contend. The matter of obtaining sufficient help would not be nearly so serious if steady employment could be offered the year round, but the greatest part of the work unfortunately comes just at harvest when there is likely to be but little help available. There is, not a great deal of work to be done in the spring, and once the crop has been harvested and removed from the fields, a much smaller number of men can perform all the necessary labor. Then, too, a large part of the work is of a necessity performed out of doors, and rain and adverse weather conditions mean lost time to the men and higher wages must be paid in order to compete