

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, MAY 27, 1895.

THE MAY FROSTS.

Frost in the early part of May, in Canada and the bordering states to the south, are not remarkable. On the contrary they are looked for and as a rule do little, if any, harm. This year, however, conditions are somewhat exceptional, owing to the very advanced state of vegetation, and a vast amount of damage has been done in some sections by the May frosts. The season appears to have been much earlier than usual in the east as well as in the west. Reports from the fruit districts of Ontario say that the crops were about three weeks earlier than usual, owing to the warm, forcing weather during April. In the United States, both east and west, the same conditions prevailed. On this account, the frosts, which under ordinary circumstances would have done little damage, have been very destructive. In addition to the advanced state of vegetation, the early May frosts this year were more severe than usual and covered a larger area of country. They extended from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic coast, and south of the Canadian boundary from 500 to 1,000 miles.

In Canada no serious damage was done except in the fruit regions of Ontario. The grape crop in that province is very seriously hurt, but the full extent of the damage to this and other fruit crops is not yet known. It is feared, however, that there will be a serious shortage in several kinds of fruits, as a result of the frosts.

In the United States the destruction has been vastly greater than in Canada. The farther south the frost extended, it naturally follows the greater damage was done. In addition to the enormous destruction of fruits, estimated at millions, corn, flax, potatoes, vegetables, etc., were cut down. Private letters from as far south as central Iowa, would indicate that the frost was more severe there than in Manitoba, and as vegetation was more advanced there than here, the damage was very great.

In Manitoba it is not believed that the grain crops have been hurt, judging from the experience of previous years. Heavy grain crops have been harvested in some past years, notwithstanding that the crops were subjected to sharp frosts at an early stage in their growth. As regards grain crops, the subject can be dismissed without fear as to the result, so far as the May frosts are concerned. The early sown flax, however, has suffered considerably. This crop is not a very important one in Manitoba, the growing of flax being confined to a few sections. Last year there were about 25,000 acres of flax sown in Manitoba, but the area will be considerably larger this year. Considerable of the flax was not above ground at the time of the frost, and others who sowed early and had the crop cut down, are re-

seeding the land, it being early enough yet to sow flax.

Manitoba has practically no cultivated fruit crop, and therefore we have nothing to lose by the frosts in that line. The wild fruits, which are quite an item to the farmers in some sections, have no doubt been damaged, though some varieties may have escaped, as the wild fruits grow largely in wooded and shady locations, where vegetation is later in starting.

While Manitoba has escaped any damage worth mentioning from the early May frosts, it may be noted that the heavy advance in wheat of late has been largely due to the unfavorable weather conditions in the United States. If this advance holds until Manitoba farmers can market another crop, it will be a fine thing for them, and in this case the frosts will have proved a great advantage to them.

UNITED STATES INCOME TAX.

The income tax law which was adopted in the United States in connection with the last tariff revision, has been declared unconstitutional by the supreme court. The income tax measure was very unpopular from the start, and the news of the quashing of the bill will be received with pleasure by many. The most serious view of the case is the loss of revenue which will be brought about by the declaration of the supreme court. The income tax law was expected to recoup the revenue for the heavy loss brought about by the reduction of the customs duties at the time the tariff was overhauled and revised. The quashing of the law will therefore be a serious matter for the national finances, particularly at this time when heavy deficits are the rule. The deficit for the fiscal year of 1891 in the United States was over \$31,000,000. The present year shows a deficit every month, the total deficit for last year and this year to date now amounting to over \$51,000,000. The loss of the revenue expected from income tax is therefore unfortunate at the present time.

Flax as a Money-making Crop.

In looking over a farmers' journal in the Northwest recently I saw a statement from the pen of Prof. W. M. Hayes of St. Anthony Park, Minnesota, to the effect that "during a few years past flax has yielded more money per acre than any other small grain in the hard wheat districts of the Northwest. The coming season large production may materially lower prices, but the chances are that flax will yield more money per acre in 1895 than will wheat, oats or barley."

I am sure that flax will yield more money per acre if the elevator men will put in a flax brake and buy the flax straw from the farmer. This will be the means of bringing more money to the elevator man, as well as to the farmer for each acre of flax grown. Flax straw is a waste product and can usually be bought at a very low figure. It can be handled at a time when the elevator man has little else to do, so that all he gets out of it is clear gain. While in Wisconsin recently I met a representative of Foster & Williams, who make flax brakes, and as he was an enthusiastic champion of this branch of business for elevator men, I naturally became imbued with some of his ideas, and learned much about the business from him. Good

average straw will make 50 per cent. of coarse tow and about 83 per cent. of fine tow; the balance is offal and makes a good fuel. This fuel is sufficient to supply twice the power required to make the tow.

The longer the straw the better the tow it will make, so long, clean straw should command a premium. There is no fiber in the tops, all being in the stalk. Where flax is raised for the straw it is planted closely, about four bushels of seed being used to the acre; where it is sowed for seed, two or three pecks are used.

Three grades of tow are usually made—coarse, fine and medium. To make coarse tow the straw is run through the flax brake once. To make medium it is run through twice, and three times for fine tow.

The straw should be very dry and clean when put into the brake machine. During cold, sharp or dry, sunny weather is the best time to make tow. If the atmosphere is damp the heart of the fiber cannot be so easily broken out as in dry weather.

The freight rate is usually very low, the carriers being desirous of encouraging its use. Much of it has been shipped from North Dakota to Chicago for \$1 a ton or \$10 a carload. It is bulky and takes up much room. Considerable straw has been shipped from the West to Racine and there worked into tow and then shipped to Chicago and the East. This, of course, required baling twice. The trouble of breaking the baled straw apart and preparing it for the brake machine is considerable, and this labor, as well as the work of shipping, loading and handling, could be done away with if the country elevator man would prepare the tow for the upholsterer at home.

The straw and tow are very inflammable, and care should be taken to keep sparks and fire away from it. A Mr. Box owns an elevator and grist mill at Union Grove, Wis., where flax tow has been made for a number of years with a good profit and no loss by fire. Another tow mill is operated in connection with a grist mill at Frankville, Wis., beside railroad tracks. It has been running 15 years without loss by fire and at a good profit.

The farmer is usually paid \$1.50 to \$3 per ton for the flax straw delivered at elevator, and the elevator man usually gets \$20 to \$40 per ton for coarse tow, so he gets a good profit for his labor and use of capital. The market for tow is in all large cities where furniture is upholstered. There is always a good demand for it in the east, where no flax is grown. Furniture supply manufacturers are good buyers, and usually pay cash on delivery. They are not hard to do business with, but naturally and rightly object to much offal, shives or dirt.

To prepare the tow from the flax straw a flax brake is needed. This is easily operated, does not require skilled labour and requires about 8 to 12 horse-power to drive it, the amount of power depending upon the number of rolls used. The best work is done by a machine with 16 to 20 rolls with a beater or picker attached. It would require two men to operate one break machine—one feeder and one pitcher. A baling press is usually operated in connection with it. After a large quantity has been run through the breaks it is baled for shipment, three wires being used to bale it. A 14x18 press is usually used, that making a bale of convenient size for loading in car. A grain car usually carries 10 to 12 tons.

Lightbound, Ralston & Co., of Montreal, one of the oldest grocery firms in Canada, have gone into liquidation. They have been in deep water for a year past, having as will be recalled, then made an arrangement with creditors. The failure of this firm it is claimed is due to the persistent fight against what is termed the sugar trust.