

occasion on which Lord Beaconsfield struck an audience with surprise and alarm by suggesting that the general movements of British trade were represented with tolerable fidelity by the fluctuations in chemicals, a doctrine which though possessing in a marked degree the charm of novelty was terribly deficient in point of accuracy. It is possible that Sir John following in the path laid down by the great British statesman, and ambitious to equally distinguish himself as an authority on matters pertaining to trade and commerce, had been eagerly watching the fluctuations in quinine or the activity in Epsom salts, and took these as his guide. Whether it be so or not it cannot be denied that Sir John in his references to the country's commercial position shot aside the mark. "Facts are stubborn chiefs and wanna ding" is a trite old saying, and if the premier had studied up the record of the year's business he would have thought a second time before expressing himself as he did. Spurts of activity in some departments there have been in the course of the past year, but the merest tyro in the study of commercial matters cannot but have noticed the absence of that sound tone and vigorous health which beget confidence. Failures have been both numerous and heavy. Speculation has run riot and speculation has also obtruded accidentally its noxious form. The record of commercial disaster in the Dominion for 1883 throws into the shade that of any of the three previous years. In 1880, at which time the country was emerging from the critical period of 1878 and 1879 the total number of failures was 907 with liabilities of \$7,988,077. In the following year there were only 635 insolvencies, the liabilities amounting to \$5,751,207. In 1882 insolvencies in number amounted to 787 and the liabilities were \$8,587,657. But in 1883 what do we find? The number of failures aggregated 1384 with liabilities of \$15,949,361 or well on to double that of the previous year. Taking the province of Manitoba and the Northwest apart we find that in 1882 there were only 28 failures, and the total of liabilities amounted to \$290,900, with assets of \$221,800. For 1883 Dun, Wiman's record shows that there were 232 failures during that year, an increase of nearly 750 per cent. The total liabilities of these insolvents were \$2,869,500, while their assets amounted to only \$1,938,000.

The decline in value of bank stocks is another feature of the year's history which the Premier must have overlooked. All stocks have suffered great depreciation, some of the most active closing the year eight, ten, and even twenty and thirty per cent lower than they opened it. Canada, fortunately, or unfortunately, is not alone in this position, for our neighbors across the line show a record of disaster even worse, the depreciation in the value of stocks in that country during the year amounting to hundreds of millions. And the end does not seem to be yet, for we notice that Eastern manufacturers are in many cases reducing wages, and in some instances have closed down altogether, until the results of over-production are got rid of. We have had an unexampled era of prosperity. The rewards of success have been reaped; now the penalties of inactivity are being endured. Periods of weakness and of strength; of activity and of lethargy, must come in the natural course of things, and it is for those who are at the helm to so guide the ship of State that she may bestweather the storm when it comes. But in order to successfully steer it is essential that the pilot know well the course he has to navigate, and be thoroughly posted in the actual condition of things. Judging from Sir John's remarks he has not carefully studied the chart of commerce and finance, and we commend the figures given above to his attention. He is no doubt an almost indispensable factor in the politics of the country, but when he tackles commercial affairs we are afraid that he is not infallible, but rather liable to err. At least it is evidently not his forte.

DAMAGED GRAIN.

During the few months that have elapsed since the harvesting of the grain crop in Manitoba and the Northwest loud and bitter complaints have resounded throughout the length and breadth of the land, the alleged grievance being that grain buyers and millers were taking an undue advantage of the farmers in paying for wheat, damaged by frost, a less price than it was actually worth. Political wire pullers and chronic agitators took up the cry, and the newspapers, with black letter headings, in which the word "Monopoly," generally qualified by the strongest adjectives in the vocabulary, was ever a prominent feature, helped to fan the flame of discontent to the utmost of their ability. That the outcry thus raised against grain handlers was to a large extent unnecessary and unwarranted, must be patent to every right thinking mind that is prepared to consider the question from an unbiased standpoint. This may seem a strong statement to make in the face of the fact that during the past few weeks the price paid for frozen wheat has been steadily advancing, while the market value of good sound grain has been as steadily declining in the markets of the world. It is possible that early in the

season farmers did not get for their frozen wheat what it was actually worth. But the position of those who undertook to purchase the grain in its damaged condition must also be considered. A little enquiry into the matter reveals the fact that this was the first season in which either miller or grain buyers were called upon to handle frozen wheat at all. They had had experience with musty grain, smutty grain, and last year with an abundance of wet grain, and the result of their handling the latter was not of a very satisfactory character, as our readers well know. But frozen grain was to them an entirely new commodity to deal with. They were at first unable to estimate what its value could be in the Eastern markets, or for milling purposes, and like men engaged in any other branch of business, they proceeded with caution. They also put on their wisest looks, desirous of preserving an appearance of being able to pass a competent judgment upon its merits, and unwilling to acknowledge their ignorance of what could actually be done with the grain in its damaged state. After a thorough test had been made, and it was discovered that although not fully up to the standard of sound grain, it still possessed good milling qualities, the margin between the value of No. 1 hard and wheat not too much hurt by frost gradually decreased. It reminds one of the time when Fife wheat was first introduced into the Eastern provinces of the Dominion. The millers at first eyed it very suspiciously, declaring that it was so hard that they could not grind it to advantage, and that they could not produce from it a quality of flour equal to that obtained from the softer varieties of grain, which were then generally grown in the country. Now no other variety than the formerly despised Fife wheat is more eagerly sought after for milling purposes. Of course, we do not mean to infer from this comparison that wheat damaged by frost will ever take the place of sound grain, but it only serves to show that millers and grain buyers, as well as every one else, have often a great deal to gain by experience.

Many people say that the farmers in this country have much to learn in regard to grain growing, and even the COMMERCIAL has pointed out more than once that they are a long way from being possessed of agricultural omniscience. The results of the past season have shown that they are not the only class of the community in such a position, but that millers and grain buyers have also had a chance to profit by the misfortunes which befell our last season's crop, and probably it was only the businesslike caution of the latter which prevented them from paying as dearly for their experience as the farmers. But it is to be hoped that it will be a long time before either class are again called upon to fall back upon experience for suggestions in regard to handling damaged grain.