

## *The Flax Industry in Ontario.*

*Awarded Third Prize at the Public Speaking Contest.*

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BY way of introducing my subject I would like to mention that at present the Canadian Government is endeavoring to encourage the growing of flax and more particularly the growing of fibre flax in Canada. A moist, cool climate with a long growing season is best adapted to the proper development of the fibre in the straw, and for this reason the United States and the Provinces of the Canadian North-West are not well suited to the purpose, though they do do grow large areas for seed only. Ontario, partly surrounded as it is by the Great Lakes, offers the closest approach to ideal conditions on the continent, and for this reason I chose as my subject "The Flax Industry in Ontario," rather than "The Flax Industry in America."

The plant is not a native, but was introduced by the early Irish and German settlers, who cultivated it and worked up the fibre within their own homes. Later, when the country became better settled, the business was specialized, and flax mills were established in various parts of the Province. About thirty-five or forty years ago, when the industry was in its most flourishing condition, there were upwards of sixty in operation. However, with the increasing prices of land and labor, it was steadily becoming more and more difficult to compete with the great flax growing countries of Europe, Ireland, Holland, Germany, Belgium, France, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, where wages are much

lower. Added to this was the fact that the Argentine and the Canadian North-West were annually increasing their production of seed, and this was helping to lower the price and render the business unprofitable for Ontario growers. As a result, in 1914, there were less than ten mills in operation. However, with the outbreak of the war, production in Europe was of a necessity greatly decreased, and the exportation of what was produced became out of the question. The entire North American Continent looked to Ontario for its supply of fibre, and prices began to soar, until last year linen mills were paying six to seven times the prices offered in 1913. Naturally enough, many of the old mills recommenced operations, and some new ones were established.

The time at my disposal is too limited to allow me to go into any great detail, but I shall endeavor to briefly describe the cultivation and handling of a crop of fibre flax. The seed is sown as early as possible, in order to give the young plants the benefits of the long cool spring days, and to have them well started before the hot weather sets in. It is sown at the rate of 1 1-4 to 1 1-2 bushels per acre, preferably on a friable clay loam that has been worked up to a fine state of tilth. As soon as the young plants are well up and have attained a height of three to five inches, all thistles and other weeds are removed. The presence of coarse heavy weeds makes the