

THE JOURNAL  
OF THE  
Board of Arts and Manufactures  
FOR UPPER CANADA.

APRIL, 1865.

THE COMMERCIAL INTEREST IN FLAX.

(COMMUNICATED.)

It has been stated that in Upper Canada 10,000 acres of flax were grown in the year 1864, and that 50,000 acres will be grown this year; this, at the rate of 12 bushels of seed per acre, at \$1 50 per bushel, and 300 lbs. of fibre per acre, valued at from \$8 to \$10, per 100 lbs.,\* would realize the sum of \$2,250,000, by which farmers and others will be largely benefited; but not near to that extent which might be accomplished by a more improved system of cultivating and preparing the crop. The prices of flax in Ireland at present range from 49s. to 72s. stig. per cwt. of 112lbs.; and some lots of their very worst flax brings 30s. per cwt., or about as much as is stated to be the average of Canadian flax. 300 lbs. of fibre per acre is given as the average for Canada, 650 lbs. per acre for Ireland. In fact, the quantity is more than double, the rate of price is double, and the same extent of ground sown in Ireland produces from three to four times the amount of money it would do in Canada. This is not the fault of Canadian soil or climate, for it will grow flax equal to the best Irish; it is altogether owing to the systems of cultivation and preparation of the crop. The quantity of seed per acre sown in Canada has been proved by experience both in Ireland and other parts of Europe, to be quite insufficient. The quality of the seed sown is also much inferior to that sown in Ireland—it is the produce of coarse, short branchy flax, much superior no doubt to the United States seed, but much inferior to European. It is grown in Canada year after year, "like begetting like;" and the mode of preparation in usual practice is also calculated to give nothing but an inferior quality of fibre; in fact Canada is growing and preparing flax after the old systems which were long in use in Ireland, but have been abandoned generally during the last twenty years. It would be well that this subject should be considered, not merely by farmers but by the commercial interests.

When flax had risen to a high figure in Europe in the early part of the present century, any one in Ireland could make a profit by the growth of flax, of a quality no better than that now produced in Canada, but prices fell, and the growth of flax in Ireland gradually became less and less. In 1813, 52,014 acres were grown, and in 1815 it had increased to 148,124 acres, but the European wars being ended by the battle of Waterloo, checked the upward tendency of prices, and flax becoming a less profitable crop, in 1816 only 93,665; in 1822, 76,809; in 1847, 53,312; and in 1848, 54,000 acres of flax were grown in Ireland. We then again find flax growing extending in that country; in 1849, 60,000; 1850, 91,000; 1862, 150,070; 1863, 214,661; and in 1864, 300,944 acres. For many years after 1815, the Irish were unable to compete with the Belgians and others more skilled in the cultivation and preparation of flax, and owing to the increased demand caused by the introduction of spinning mills into Ireland, they were unable to get a sufficiency of their own home-grown flax, when some clear-sighted practical man set about to discover how the evil could be remedied. The ROYAL FLAX IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY was formed, enquiries were set on foot, and it was soon discovered that the reason why Irish farmers could not grow flax to compete with the Belgian, was simply because of the superior skill of the latter. Instructors were procured and sent amongst the farmers, pointing out to them the most approved methods at every stage of the business. The value of this is evidenced in the fact that flax is now grown there fully equal to the best Belgian; and though the population of that Island has decreased about three millions since 1846, we find its cultivation of flax has extended from 54,000 in 1848, to 300,944 acres in 1864. In these figures and facts there is an important lesson for Canada. There are many who may be startled by the assertion that the sum of \$2,250,000, which will be the value of the farmers' crop of this year at the rates here estimated, is little more than one-half of what might be obtained by the adoption of more improved systems of cultivation, and by the proper selection of seed for sowing; for the produce of fibre now estimated at 300 lbs. could easily be increased to the Irish average of 650 lbs. per acre, or even to equal some of the prime Irish crops, which have reached the rate of 900 or even 1,000 lbs. per acre. By thus increasing the quantity of fibre, no doubt the profits of the seed crop would be lessened, but not abandoned. The saving of the seed is at present a great object in the economy of careful and skillful Irish flax growers, though until lately they neglected to take advantage of this branch of profit.

\* The rates adopted by Mr. Donaldson in his Report made to the Committee on Agriculture in July last.