

THE DOMESTICATION OF FUR-BEARING ANIMALS.

BY A MEMBER OF THE NORTH WEST COUNCIL.

Canada possesses the last remaining fur reserve of the world, and three quarters of the finer furs which are annually sold in the great marts of London and Leipsic come from Northern Canada and Behring's sea. Unfortunately, while the demand is constantly increasing, the supply from natural causes is constantly decreasing, and, unless efforts are made to preserve and increase them, society must soon forego several of these inimitable articles of comfort and luxury. Now that the price of an ordinary Buffalo robe has advanced from five dollars to thirty, we begin to understand our loss, and if the fashion does not soon change in the matter of South Sea seal the ladies must soon fall back on mink, once so fashionable, and so nearly exterminated owing to that fact—they are at present enjoying that immunity from destruction which a decrease of value from seven dollars to one gives.

Here it may be mentioned *en passant* that an ingenious American once made a fortune out of what he called a "Minkery," which was simply a fenced enclosure through which a brook ran and where the minks were fed with the offal of slaughter houses. Rough as this experiment was it was a success, and the writer has reason to know that the otter and beaver may be domesticated and thus increased and made a source of profit to the experimentalist, while the ease with which the brown and black bear may be similarly dealt with is well known. It is likely too that the fisher, one of the least known but most valuable of Canadian furs, may be similarly treated. The hunter of these animals kill indiscriminately the male, female and their young, and the larger predatory animals follows man's cruel and uneconomic example, while the breeder of those animals would, in his own interest, only kill off the excess of males.

Valuable and interesting information bearing on these matters was obtained by the Senate Natural Food Products Committee of last session, and from this I quote Professor Bell, of the Geological Survey, on the "Domestication of the Beaver."

"The beaver is another animal which might be domesticated with advantage. It is an animal of which the Indians understand the nature already, whereas sheep, pigs and cattle are strangers to them. They look upon these animals when they first see them as we would on creatures from Africa. I have seen Indians as much interested on first seeing sheep and pigs for instance as our boys would be on first seeing buffalo. But they know the habit of the beavers, and these are easily domesticated. They can be domesticated in one season, and they afford better food than either beef or mutton. They produce one litter each year and increase very rapidly in numbers.

"Q. I take it for granted that their skins would be an additional source of profit to those Indians? A. Yes, and the black variety being the most valuable, could be propagated to the exclusion of the others. The Indian would make enough from the sale of one black beaver skin to enable him to buy a considerable quantity of food.

"Q. Can you give the Committee an idea of the price black beaver skins would bring? A. In the best markets black beaver now sells for \$15 or upwards. Common beaver is worth from \$5 to \$9 at the present time."

It is still easier, if the experiment is made near a lake or stream, to domesticate the otter, for they show great affectionateness. They follow their master, play with his children, and if allowed to fish for themselves may be taught to do so for the household, and they are happy in being stroked like a kitten in the summer and apparently in winter, when they dislike

the warmth of a house, attaining the same sensation as the fuel-heat by their singular habit of sliding down an icy bank.

In the case of the marten, black and silver foxes, breeding and protection may, as in the case of the mink, be obtained; but domestication like the beaver, otter and seal seems impossible.

The larger question of the domestication of the bison, buffalo and musk ox is still more important, and Major Bedson, Warden of the Manitoba Penitentiary, who gave most valuable evidence before the Senate Food Committee, seems to have settled the question of the first of these after 10 years of elaborate, intelligent and successful experiment, showing clearly first, that the animal will increase when domesticated, also that the hybrid is better for food purposes than the original, and strange to say, yields a more valuable, because more evenly furred, robe than that of his wild progenitor. Similar experiments remain to be made with the wood buffalo, the animal once nearly as numerous in northern woody districts as the American bison (Prairie Buffalo) were on the Saskatchewan and Assiniboia prairies, and the musk ox, his more northern neighbor. Little is known of the latter, and possibly his sub-Arctic habitat will prevent much being done with him; but it will be seen, from valuable information given by Chief factor Moberly to the Senate last session, that there yet remains of these wood buffaloes two large bands which should be protected at once, and reserved for trial purposes on northern ranches, the animal being larger and the robe more valuable than the southern variety. Until lately they were believed to be extinct, but I quote Mr. Moberly's report as follows:—

"Buffalo (Wood).—At present a band is still alive between the Saskatchewan and Athabasca Rivers, they keep on the mountains between Lac La Biche and Fort McMurray. Probably about 200 are still alive. Another band are between the Athabasca and Peace Rivers; they keep on the Thickwood and Birch Mountains and are about 300 strong. Another band are on the mountains between the Peace River and the Laird River and are scattered through the mountains from the Salt River to the foot of the Rocky Mountains and number probably 700 strong.

And quite recently, Honorable James Turner, Senator, of Hamilton, who has taken much interest in this matter, received conclusive, corroborative testimony. It is greatly to be hoped that the Ranchmen of the North West will devote to these fine animals the painstaking efforts which have given to Major Bedson so complete a success.

WALTER R. BOWN.

MONTREAL MARKETS.

MONTREAL, 21st Dec., 1887.

BOOTS AND SHOES AND LEATHER.—Fair orders are in for shoes, but manufacturers have not yet begun any active cutting, nor will the factories be very busy till after the holidays, and then Feb'y. 4th and March 4th, being the heavy days in the shoe trade for the payment of fall purchases, there will be a holding back in the shipping of orders till it is seen how money comes in on these dates. Leather still continues dull, and with full stocks all round prices rule on the weak side, the advance in green hides not having given any tone to the market. We quote:—Spanish sole, B. A. No. 1, 24 to 25c.; do. No. 2, B. A., 20 to 22c.; No. 1 Ordinary Spanish 21 to 23c.; No. 2 do., 19 to 21c.; No. 1 China, 20 to 21c.; No. 2, 18 to 19c.; Hemlock Slaughter, No. 1, 24 to 27c.; oak sole, 41 to 45c.; Waxed Upper, light and medium, 33 to 37c.; ditto, heavy 31 to 35c.; Grained 34 to 37c.; Scotch grained 36 to 42c.; Splits large 16 to 26c.; do. small 12 to 18c.; Calf-splits, 32 to 33c.; Calfskins, (35 to 46 lbs.), 55 to 70c.; Imitation French Calf skins 75 to 85c.; Russet Sheepskins Linings, 30 to 40c.; Harness 24 to 33c.; Buffed Cow, 12 to 15c.; Pebbled Cow, 11 to 15c.; Rough 23 to 26c.; Russet and Bridle, 54 to 55c.

DRUGS AND CHEMICALS.—Business is reported as being very fair in a jobbing way. In prices there are no very striking changes. Bleaching powder is in great scarcity and firmly held at quotations, borax advancing, quinine also continues to gain in strength, while opium shows further decline, glycerine is firmer and likely to go higher; oil of peppermint is recovering from late weakness and oil of lemon also shows some additional strength. We quote:—Sal Soda 95c. to \$1.00; Bi-Carb Soda \$2.40 to \$2.50; Soda Ash, per 100 lbs., \$1.70 to \$1.80; Bichromate of Potash, per 100 lbs., \$11 to \$13.00; Borax, refined, 9½ to 11c.; Cream Tartar crystals, 36 to 38c.; do. ground, 38 to 40c.; Tartaric Acid crystal 53 to 55c.; do. powder, 55 to 60c.; Citric Acid, 80 to 85c.; Caustic Soda, white, \$2.40 to \$2.60; Sugar of Lead, 10 to 11c.; Bleaching Powder, \$2.50 to \$2.60; Alum, \$1.65 to \$1.70; Copperas, per 100 lbs., 90c. to \$1.00; Flowers Sulphur, per 100 lbs., \$2.60 to \$2.75; Roll Sulphur, \$2.00 to \$2.25; Sulphate of Copper, \$4.75 to \$5.00; Epsom Salts, \$1.25 to \$1.40; Saltpetre \$8.75 to \$9.25; American Quinine, 65 to 70c.; German Quinine, 65 to 70c.; Howard's Quinine, 70 to 80c.; Opium, \$5.25 to \$5.75; Morphine, \$2.50 to \$2.75; Gum Arabic sorts, 80 to 90c.; White, \$1 to \$1.25; Carbolic Acid, 55 to 60c.; Iodide Potassium, \$4.00 to 4.25 per lb.; Iodine, \$5.50 to \$6.00; Iodoform, \$5.75 to \$6.00. Prices for essential oils are: Oil lemon \$2.00 to \$2.50; oil bergamot \$3.00 to \$3.50; Orange, \$3.50; oil peppermint, \$3.50 to \$4.50; Glycerine 27 to 30c.; Senna, 15 to 25c. for ordinary. English Camphor, 40c. American do. 35c. Insect powder 70 to 80c.

HIDES.—Green hides have sold higher, owing to some large tanners having gone to the butchers and buying direct at 7c. for No. 1, and the regular proportion for Nos. 2 and 3. Calfskins as before at 8c.; lambskins 70 to 75c.

FURS.—The open season thus far has not been favorable to the retail trade, and the demand from this source for raw furs is about over. The prospects for the European trade are not improved from what they were several weeks ago. The returns of quantities of skins to be offered at the January and March sales London, show an increase in all lines of from 10 to 50%; the increase being specially noticeable in beaver, lynx, marten, mink, red fox and otter. Receipts of raw pelts are fair, but in view of above facts, it can be readily understood that the competition among buyers is not very keen. We quote for prime skins:—Beaver, \$3.50 to \$4.00 per lb.; bear, \$10.00 to \$14.00; cub do., \$4.00 to \$7.00; fisher, \$5; red fox, \$1.00; cross do., \$2 to \$5; lynx, \$2 to \$3.00; marten, 70c. to 90c.; mink, 75c. to \$1.00; fall muskrat 8c., winter muskrat, 12c.; raccoon, 25c., 50c., and 75c.; skunk, 25c., 50c., 75c. and \$1.00; otter \$8.00 to \$12.00.

GROCERIES.—Orders are reported as good for the season. Sugars show a further gain in firmness, more especially in yellows, the lowest

Commercial.

STOCKS IN MONTREAL.

MONTREAL, Dec. 21st, 1887.

Stocks.	Highest.	Lowest.	Total.	Sellers.	Buyers.	Average.
Montreal	210	205	1325	2094	279	237
Ontario	13	108	.....	111	108	115
Peoples	110	100	35	110	105	99
Molson	140	130	42	1374	1314	147
Toronto	102	186	135	192	187	212
Jac. Cartier	85	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Merchants	121	118	214	131	120	1384
Commerce	111	174	1920	111	111	124
Union	95	87	.....	.....	.....	92
Montreal Tel.	93	904	460	93	924	109
Rich. & Ont.	443	444	355	45	444	63
City Passenger	230	220	.....	230	220	255
Gas	1994	184	57	1984	1984	220
C. Pacific R. R.	614	60	1910	614	604	674
N. W. Land	55	45	255	53	.....	60