

The Chronicle

Banking, Insurance & Finance.

ESTABLISHED JANUARY, 1881

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PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY

Vol. XXIX. No 13.

MONTREAL, MARCH 26, 1909.

Single Copy - - 10c
Annual Subscription, \$2.00

THE SHIFTING OF PRICES.

THE temptation to "talk special-correspondently," as Kipling somewhere puts it, is not always resisted by writers on economics and trade—even university professors. So that the sender of a mere newspaper despatch may surely be forgiven the local colour added to a new-old story illustrating marked changes in commodity values during recent years.

A certain western farmer—so the story goes—recently registered a kick when asked \$40 for a set of harness similar to one that had been regularly sold for \$35 a few years earlier. Upon the matter being looked up, it was found that the storekeeper's books showed a \$35 set of harness to have been sold for 70 bushels of wheat. Whereupon, the dealer told the farmer that if he would bring in the same amount of wheat now he would give him a double harness, single harness, saddle, set of fly nets, buggy whip, curry comb, brush, and \$1 in money.

THE DAY OF THE FARMER.

AS the above-mentioned storekeeper is also village post-master and county Solon, there can be no need to check the details of his calculations—though some personal equation of special-correspondently obtusism should, perhaps, be allowed for. At any rate, the incident is quite in line with what everyone now recognizes—except some farmers. Namely, that economic and trade changes of recent years have greatly contributed to the enriching of agriculturists.

Time was, when the grumbling murmur of "no money in farming" had much of truth in it on this continent. For a series of years the production of agriculture in North America tended to outstrip the production of non-farm industries. In 1894, wheat at times sold in New York at less than 55 cents—as contrasted with \$1.10 to \$1.25 during recent weeks. Of course, it is to be taken into account that wheat everywhere were freely reduced last summer

in the expectation of large harvests. But the world's wheat crop of 1908 turned out to be only a moderate one—being generally estimated at around 3,175,000,000 bushels. This was but 30,000,000 bushels more than the crop of 1907, and considerably less than that of 1906.

But temporary conditions will not account for the whole of recent price-increase. It is due in large measure to the circumstance that, for the past decade and more, the relative expansion of agriculture has been less marked than the unprecedented growth of industrial and commercial centres of population.

HUSBANDMAN OR DESPOILER.

NOT a few observers incline to the view that we have entered permanently upon an era of good prices for farm products throughout the world. Others point out that increased prices must tend to bring about a movement "back to the land" which will relatively increase agricultural activity. But, for years to come, there is little likelihood of other than good prices ruling—from the farmer's viewpoint. Certainly there is small probability of cheap wheat during 1909—though present speculative quotations are scarcely likely to hold.

Meanwhile the Canadian West, with wheat well over the dollar mark, rejoices in present good fortune—and hopes for a bumper crop to come. But it is to be feared that high prices for wheat are not contributing to carefulness in cultivation. The Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture frankly criticizes the farmers of that province. The "world's last West" should have applied to it the most approved methods of cultivation—mere "wheat-mining" must steadily deplete productivity. There is still too much truth, east and west, in what the hermit-observer Thoreau said of the New England farmer a half century ago—that he is too often a despoiler of Nature rather than her husbandman.