

# The Commercial

WINNIPEG, SEPTEMBER 29, 1896.

## OUR INLAND WATERS.

It is reported that the Dominion government will improve the navigation of the Rainy river. This is a very good move. There is a long stretch of navigable water which can be opened up in that region by a very moderate expenditure. This movement on the part of the government is also encouraging as indicating a change of the federal policy in regard to western waterways. The action, or rather inaction, of the Dominion in the past in regard to western waterways, has been most discouraging. We have here in the West some grand water stretches, which could be opened up at a very moderate cost. This country needs improved transportation facilities and in no direction can such magnificent results be obtained from a comparatively insignificant outlay, as in opening up our natural waterways. The neglect of the federal government in the past in this matter has been a source of great loss to the West and has greatly retarded the development of the country. It is to be hoped the proposed improvement of the Rainy river is only the first move in a general policy looking to the improvement of the other great western waterways. We may mention the Red river, the Saskatchewan, and lakes Manitoba and Winnipegosis as among the great water stretches, the early development of which is greatly to be desired. An expenditure of two or three million dollars on these lakes and rivers would open up one of the grandest systems of inland navigation in the world.

## COAL PRICES AND HOW TO REDUCE THEM.

The heavy advance in the price of coal previously referred to by The Commercial in our weekly market reports, is a serious matter for the people of Manitoba. In Winnipeg Pennsylvania hard coal sold last winter at \$8.50 per ton. The price is now \$10 per ton and there is very little reason to expect any reduction. The local dealers are in no wise accountable for the advance. The wholesale price of Pennsylvania coal in the east has been advanced altogether \$1.85 per ton from the lowest point ruling about a year ago, compared with an advance of \$1.50 per ton here, so that the advance in the local trade is not as great as has taken place at first hands. This shows that the local dealers are not profiting any by the higher prices now ruling here.

We have of course several varieties of native coal, which are all used to some extent, but the Pennsylvania coal has heretofore been the principal quality consumed in this market. Some of the native coals are of good quality, but the difficulty with these coals is that they are all mined long distances from the principal consuming markets, and are thus subject to a long railway haul, which has made them about as costly here, in proportion to intrinsic value, as the Pennsylvania article. This year, however, owing to the

advance in the price of the imported coal, the consumption of native western coals will no doubt be much greater than in any previous year.

The present high price of coal in the Winnipeg market should lead people to consider if there is any practical plan by which the drawback can be overcome. We have an abundance of coal in the western portion of our own country. Can any plan be devised by which the coal may be distributed to the people at a reasonable cost? The Commercial has no hesitation in saying that it is possible to lay coal from the west down in Winnipeg at a cost of under \$2 per ton. If this is true it is certainly a matter of far-reaching importance to the people of Winnipeg.

In this number of The Commercial there are two little items in our editorial columns which may be referred to in this connection. One of these items states that Pennsylvania coal is quoted wholesale in San Francisco at \$10 per ton. This coal is transported by water all the way around the continent of South America and up the Pacific coast to San Francisco. Welsh coal is sold in San Francisco as low as \$8 per ton. This brings forcibly to view the value of water transportation. The other item in this issue of The Commercial refers to the desirability of opening up our inland waters. We have it within our power to open up a water route between Winnipeg and the western coal fields by which the coal could be laid down at our doors at a trifling cost, in comparison with present prices.

Along the upper portion of the North Saskatchewan river there are many seams of coal, some of very good quality, suitable for steam and domestic purposes. This coal is hauled by teams several miles from one mine and shipped in car lots as far as Calgary, nearly 200 miles distant by rail, where it has sold to a considerable extent in competition with the coals obtained at points west of Calgary. The usual price of the coals mined in the Edmonton district is about \$1 per ton at the mines. In some cases it has sold at 75 cents per ton. We have a natural waterway between Winnipeg and Edmonton, which at very moderate cost could be so developed as to be capable of accommodating and unlimited amount of traffic.

The coal, we have said, exists in several places right at the bank of the river. By the development of this waterway it could be loaded directly from the mines into the boats and transported through to Winnipeg. There are two routes available for the transportation of the coal. One would be down the Saskatchewan river to Lake Winnipeg, thence up Lake Winnipeg and the Red river to the city. The improvement of the St. Andrew's rapids near Winnipeg and some improvements in the Saskatchewan river would be necessary. With the exception of the Grand rapids near Lake Winnipeg, the Saskatchewan river is navigable for light draft steamers all the way to Edmonton, though some improvements to the channel of the river are necessary to render the traffic safe.

Another route would be to connect the Saskatchewan with Lake Winnipegosis, the latter with Lake Manitoba and connect Lake

Manitoba again with the Assiniboine river and thence down the river to Winnipeg. This route is claimed to be perfectly practicable, at a very moderate expenditure. The latter route would avoid the liability to storms such as occur on a large body of water like Lake Winnipeg.

Pennsylvania coal has been carried from Lake Erie ports to Duluth at very low prices. A Buffalo paper to hand this week quotes 20 cents per ton to Duluth and 25 cents to Fort William. Compare this with the railway rate of \$3.00 per ton from Duluth or Fort William to Winnipeg. Again we have forced to our attention the great value of water transportation. Why could not coal be transported from Edmonton to Winnipeg at about the same cost as from Buffalo or Erie to Duluth or Fort William, provided our water route were opened up? The distance in either case is much about the same, but a hundred miles or so difference would not materially alter the cost in water transportation. Our inland route could be navigated by a much less costly style of craft, and would be free from severe storms such as are felt on the great lakes. There is no question as to the practicability of the route, and none of the improvements required to develop this great waterway would be very costly, by either the Lake Winnipeg or the Lake Manitoba routes. The south branch of the Saskatchewan could be developed via the same routes, to bring coal from the Lethbridge and Medicine Hat mines.

This is not a visionary scheme. These rivers and lakes are all navigable and have been navigated for years, and are capable of improvement by a very moderate expenditure, such as would render them of unestimable value to this country. Think of coal placed on boats on the Saskatchewan at 75 cents per ton, and transported to Winnipeg at a rate of 25 cents a ton, making it cost \$1 per ton laid down here. Double the amount and say it could be laid down here at a cost of \$2 per ton. Double it again making it \$4 per ton, and the price would still be far below any similar coal now sold here. Certainly this is a matter which is worthy of careful investigation. The main thing necessary is an estimate of the cost of developing the alternate routes and the importance of the matter is such that this should be obtained as early as possible.

## THE GRAIN GRADES.

The new ministers at Ottawa have certainly shown great incapacity in proposing to change the grain grades right in the middle of the season. The grain trade has been seriously hampered in the past by frequent changes in the official regulations, but this proposal to change the grades, after the new crop had begun to move, is one of the most ridiculous things yet done in connection with grain trade matters. It is preposterous that the government should undertake to change the grades at such an unusual season, without even giving the grain trade any previous notice. The new crop is now moving and is being inspected according to last year's grades. Dealers have their connections made abroad and have been working under the belief that no change would be made. To ring in