COMMODITIES

I. Commodities dependent Directly or Indirectly on Climate

A. Products of the Temperate Zone

233. WHEAT. This, the most valuable of all the grains of temperate climates, has been cultivated from the remotest antiquity. The remains discovered at the lake-dwellings of Switzerland belonging to the Neolithic period, or New Stone Age, show that at that time, long before the beginning of written history, as many as five different varieties of wheat were already in cultivation. The crop early acquired an important place as an object of agriculture in all parts of the temperate zone in the Old World where the climate was favourable to it, and gradually extended its domain at the expense of other crops which in certain regions were more easily grown, but which yielded a less valuable grain. Though **in the New World** wheat, like most other grain crops, was **unknown in the time of Columbus,** its cultivation has since spread there to such an extent that Europe now makes up by supplies obtained thence the greater part of her own deficiency in this cereal. In Australasia also this grain is now in general cultivation, and in fact there is no part of the world with a suitable climate and a sufficient population where wheat is still unknown.

234. A crop so valuable, so widespread, and so long in cultivation could not fail to exhibit a great number of **varieties** and to show the result of past care in improved quality. The varieties of wheat cultivated at the present day yield larger grains than those of the ancient lake-dwellings. The number of the varieties now grown is probably in a literal sense countless, new varieties constantly being produced. Very often these varieties, as in the case of other cultivated plants, manifest strong local preferences, and do not flourish except in particular regions. The seeds of English wheat fail in India ; and, on the other hand, the wheat-growing region of northern India, in which the crop has to ripen during the cool season (**1047, 1053**) before the advent of the scorching heats of summer, has developed varieties of wheat which ripen in a shorter period than those of colder climates, but which pine and dwindle when an attempt is made to grow them in England. It is still more important that varieties have been developed which ripen in the short summers of the Canadian north-west