

## The Wheat Supply of England.

At the beginning of the present century England produced her own food. In 1801 the population of Great Britain was only 10,500,000. The total estimated consumption of grain was for that population a little over 27,000,000 quarters, of which 1,500,000 quarters were imported from Russia, Prussia, the Netherlands, and the United States. Thus, by far the greater bulk of our corn was produced in these islands, and was sufficient to maintain their inhabitants without more than a severe pinching. There were, indeed, years in which the harvest was exceedingly bad, when the price of bread rose to heights which seem to us of to-day enormous—as, for instance, in 1812, when wheat stood at 12½s a quarter and the quartern loaf at 1s 6½d—but there never was a time when bread was unprocurable. It is none the less interesting to notice the effect which this high price produced upon the working classes, though here the introduction of machinery must be taken into account as a disturbing cause.

The "Annual Register" of 1812 tells us that "the uncommonly high price of provisions, occasioned by many concurrent causes (amongst which was the war with France), and by no means relieved by the product of the last harvest, has been the cause of petty riots in various parts of the kingdom." More than this, it appears to have been one of the causes to which the Luddite outbreak of 1812 must be ascribed, since Mr. Baines, then editor of Leeds Mercury, expressly states in his "History of the Wars of the French Revolution," that the Luddites made the dearth of bread one of their grievances. To pass over attacks on spinning or weaving mills, on April 14, 1812, men in clogs, the "Annual Register" tells us, raided the Sheffield potato market. On the 18th, says the same authority there were riots at Bristol, owing to the high price of provisions. Still earlier in the month, a mob at Carlisle endeavored to seize the stores of corn and potatoes there; on the 19th, the same mob seized large quantities of ham, bacon and flour. On the 20th, a large mob appropriated meal, flour and potatoes, at New Cross and Knot Mill, near Manchester. On August 18th, fresh riots at Sheffield are announced, when the mob compelled storekeepers to sell flour at 8s a stone, instead of 7s, the current price. On the 27th, we are told that the Luddites attacked a farmer near Huddersfield and obliged him to promise to reduce the price of his corn and milk. Finally, on September 5, came an attack on a corn mill at Brighouse.

We have carefully selected from the great mass of outrages which occurred in this year, those in which hunger seems to have been the motive, and it is probable that a close study would reveal many more such incidents. But these are enough to prove that the high price of food in our last war with France, at a time when we were all but self-sufficing, had the gravest effect upon the temper of the population of our large towns. It must be remembered that at this date—whether 1800 or 1812 matters not—we grew our own meat, eggs, butter, and vegetables.

In the course of time, after the war with France, came a great outcry against the Corn Laws, promoted mainly in the manufacturing districts. By the Corn Laws, as they stood in 1830, a duty of 2½s was imposed upon imported wheat when the price of English-grown wheat fell below 50s a quarter. This virtually prohibited importation at or below that figure. When English wheat fetched from 50s to 6d, and importation might then be said to be free, as the 6d was a negligible sum. The duty upon corn if we take the dogmatic view, was imposed in the selfish interest of the aristocratic and land-owning classes, who then governed the country; but there were other and sounder reasons. The statesmen of the last century felt that it was

inexpedient to permit this country to become solely dependent upon the sea. They deliberately, in the throes of our great struggle with France, sacrificed the fast-growing manufacturing interests to the larger welfare of the nation. They preferred power to opulence, and history, whilst it can not forget the terrible sufferings of the working class, may forgive them since the results of their policy brought manifest advantage to the inhabitants of the United Kingdom in after days. But when England was no longer beset by enemies the main argument for the Corn Laws had vanished. An age of peace (it seemed to those of that day of lasting peace) succeeded, and the cry of Lancashire, of Yorkshire, and of London for cheap bread could no longer be neglected. Put, in the memorable debates upon the Corn Laws in January and February, 1816, there were not a few voices of dissent raised. Prominent among these was Disraeli's, reminding the House of Commons of the scarcity of corn in 1812, of the rise in prices in that year, and of the fact that we could not import corn till we had gained the command of the sea. He concluded: "I want to know whether it would again be politic to incur such risks." He showed that the risks would be exaggerated by a decrease of cultivation at home. How far his words have been borne out statistics can best prove. The acre of wheat is shown by successive annual abstracts to be as follows:

	Acreage under wheat.	Population
1800, Great Britain only	3,220,000	10,500,000
1850, United Kingdom	3,065,000	34,620,000
1890 " "	2,483,000	37,481,000
1891 " "	2,393,000	37,797,000
1892 " "	2,298,000	39,106,000
1893 " "	1,955,000	38,440,000
1894 " "	1,826,000	38,786,000
1895 " "	1,500,000	39,180,000

Thus, while in 1800 we had ten acres under wheat to every 32 inhabitants, we now have ten to every 260, and it is not safe to prophesy that we have reached the end of the decline. Relatively to our population we produce one-eighth of the wheat which we produced in 1800, and meantime the average consumption per head has enormously increased. Our present consumption has been estimated at 480 lbs. of wheat a head. In that case we should require about 33,000,000 quarters. Now, in 1894, we grew in the United Kingdom only 7,220,000 quarters or less than one-fourth of our total consumption. Our imports were 16,300,000 quarters of wheat, and 4,780,000 quarters of flour; so that the grand total falls below the estimate which is certainly excessive. Still the alarming fact remains that only one-quarter of our bread supply is produced at home. In other words, for 90 days of the year we subsist upon English bread, for 275 upon foreign-imported.

Many of the political economists who have studied the question have uttered words of caution. None of the agitators for Corn Law repeal foresaw the result. McCulloch thought wheat could not go much below 50s a quarter and in the debate of 1846 Sir G. Clark ridiculed as absurd and untenable "the apprehension that from that quarter of the world (the United States) a supply of grain was to come in such exorbitant profusion as to glut the home market." No one expected the cheapening of transport, which has brought wheat to the English market at 2½ to 25s a quarter. No one imagined that a deadly blow was being struck at agriculture. But it is useless to dream of what might have been; the re-enactment of Corn Laws is outside practical politics. None the less it is a question for statesmen to consider whether our last few acres of wheat are to go and every crumb of our bread is to be drawn from abroad. It can not be doubted that England would have to pay very dearly for

her cheap corn should war come upon her in her present condition. A rise of 1s in the prices of the quartern loaf, which in August, 1812, stood at 1s 8d, instead of 8½ or 4d as to-day, is equivalent, in stress, to a tax of £180,000,000. Whether this country could continue to make head against a foreign enemy with the terrible suffering which such a rise would cause at home is at least questionable. Our national safety imperatively requires attention to be paid to this important point, quite apart from the demands made by the large agricultural population. In McCulloch's own words, "a country in which there is no considerable stock of grain in the barnyards of the farmers, or in the warehouses of the merchants, is in the most perilous situation that can be imagined." And these facts are better understood abroad than at home.—London Standard.

## Montreal Board of Trade.

The annual meeting of the Montreal Board of Trade was held on January 28. The president, James A. Cantlie, occupied the chair.

The secretary, George Hadrill, having read the notice convening the meeting, read the yearly report of the business of the past year. A discussion ensued by the members on different subjects, among which were the questions of the 2c city postage stamps, the insolvency law, and the taking of oaths, etc. The meeting then adjourned until Wednesday for the declaration of the result of the election of officers for the ensuing year. At the adjourned meeting the chairman announced that Robert Bickerdike was elected president by a vote of 475, against 378 for Mr. Cantlie. The newly elected council was then announced as follows: Robert Bickerdike, president; John Torrance, 1st. vice-president; John McKergow, 2nd. vice-president; Chas. F. Smith, treasurer. Council: Jas. Crathern, F. Wolferstan Thomas, David G. Thomson, David McFarlane, Wm. Nivin, Robt. MacKay, Jas. E. Rendell, Henry Miles, Wm. McNally, Charles Chaput, G. F. C. Smith, Chas. McLean. Board of Arbitration: Robt. Archer, E. L. Clarke, R. M. Esdaile, John Fairbairn, E. B. Greenshields, Chas. P. Hebert, Edgar Judge, G. M. Kinghorn, Jno. R. McLean, Ewan McLennan, David Robertson, W. Barclay Stephens.

## Montreal Corn Exchange.

The annual meeting of the Montreal Corn Exchange was held on January 29. In opening the meeting Mr. Craig expressed regret at the absence of the president, and called upon the secretary to read the report of the committee of management, after which a discussion ensued, A. G. McBean taking up the subject of shortages in grain, and urging the Corn Exchange to use their efforts in compelling the railway companies to take steps to obviate the evil, which hitherto they had refused to do.

The report of John Torrance, harbor commissioner, brought the remark from D. A. P. Watt, that he was opposed to the harbor commissioners inducing the government to indorse their bonds. The port of Montreal should, he said, be on the same footing as the port of Quebec, where the government had assumed the debt of \$5,000,000 without charging any interest. Considering that Montreal is far more important than Quebec, as a port, the government should do more. Mr. Watt also pointed out the desirability of reducing the harbor dues.

Edgar Judge was elected president by acclamation, W. A. Hastings, treasurer. Committee of Management—R. M. Esdaile, Alex. McFee, Adam G. Thomson, David Robertson, R. Peddie, E. F. Craig, and Lionel J. Smith. Board of Review—G. M. Kinghorn, chairman; Thomas A. Crane, A. G. McBean, Stewart Munn, A. J. Brice, and Alex. Mitchell.