



Handling The Farmers' Grain Crop

By E. HUGHES



Wheat for the millions engages a very large proportion of the population of the three western provinces. From the breaking of the prairie till the bread is on the table of the consumer every movement and process has more or less interest to the man who tills the soil. Nearest to the tiller is the man who gives him the money reward of his labor. If this reward is disappointing, it is natural that the tiller should scrutinize the proceedings of and demand explanation from the buyer.

The average grain dealer has always been ready with excuses which, for a time at least, have silenced if they have not satisfied the man who thought too large a toll was taken from him.

A grain exchange is simply a market localized and as such, is a benefit, an actual necessity to commerce in cereals or any other commodity. In this market all grain dealers congregated naturally and from it came prices of grain which ruled those paid at elevators throughout the country. When the latter were unsatisfactory, agitators could not find terms too strong to denounce the Grain Exchange, which was supposed to be a place where schemes for the robbing of the farmer were incubated. The courts were appealed to and such a dust kicked up that few people knew any more about the question than they did before.

Now the members controlling the grain exchange were engaged in two separate occupations. First those who purchased the grain outright, manufactured it into flour, or exported beyond Fort William or Port Arthur. Second those who received grain shipments for sale on commission and put up each consignment in the Grain Exchange market to receive the best bid to be had. The first, for convenience, may be called the elevator interests, for they nearly all owned elevators and all belonged to the Grain Dealers' Grain Co., the second may be called the commission men.

A great deal of confusion of ideas has originated through ignorance of the above distinction. To have the Grain Exchange blamed for the misdeeds of one section only, has been of immense advantage to that section. The same section being in the majority in the exchange, compelled that body as a whole, to bear the odium which should only attach to themselves. The elevator interests combined to have one price paid at each station by all their

buyers and, as a commission man was not allowed to share his commission with a local buyer, or engage such a buyer at less than a substantial salary, the price on the street was at the discretion of the elevator interests. Of what they did to the farmer the story is too stale to repeat here. It was a good large plum to have the say as to what each wagon load was to cost. Had it not been for the loading platform, and the commission man on the Grain Exchange, there would have been cut each week by the elevator interests a large and luscious melon instead.

In the court trials the Grain Grower's Company took foremost part in an attack on the grain exchange and the rank and file of the farmers did then and do still continue to blame the Grain Exchange for a condition for which it is not responsible and over which it has no control.

The commission man's business was done after this fashion. He first bought a seat in the Grain Exchange and furnished a bond for honest dealing with his consignors before he might solicit business. A farmer shipped a car of wheat to Fort William or Port Arthur and gave instructions on the shipping bill, that a certain commission man was to handle his wheat. The shipping bill was mailed to this commission man who would send to the farmer at once about half of the value of the wheat. He then procured a sample and a report of the government inspector or as the car passed Winnipeg. On the cars arrival at the Lake port it was weighed and a warehouse receipt for the quantity of grain with record of the freight and charges was sent to the commission man. When instructed to sell he went to the open exchange and offered the wheat to the highest bidder. When sold an account sales was rendered showing the day hour and minute that it was sold and to whom. Balance of sale price was remitted at once. For this service a charge was made of one cent per bushel. This was the very business in which the Grain Growers' Company was engaged, as members of the Exchange too. Yet they allowed the Exchange to be blamed for all the ills the farm was called upon to bear, knowing full well that the accusation was unjust.

On the platform, by letter and through flamboyant advertisements, the farmers were admonished by the Grain Growers' Company to consign their wheat to

"their own company" which was no more the "own company" of the non-shareholders than the C. P.R. is. Posing as the only friend of the farmer, a commission firm not able or willing to do any more for the farmer than any other commission firm, stood by while their competitors were discredited in the minds of the whole country.

In business circles it would be considered reprehensible, on the part of a commission man, to use wheat consigned to him for speculation, or to attempt to manipulate the market with it. It has been asserted that the Grain Growers' Company has done this. It might be claimed that it is done with the interests of the consignors in view. Granted that it is does the ordinary farmer understand that this is being done? Is the Grain Growers' Company strong enough, wise enough to manipulate the market successfully when the strongest and shrewdest men in the world have come to grief in the same game?

An overwhelming majority of the people in this western country is with the farmer in this grain controversy and they will stand for pretty nearly anything that may serve his interest but they have seen many "farmers' friends," well intentioned and otherwise, get the farmers into endless trouble. Unwise entanglements at the present juncture may antagonize valuable influences that might be enlisted in the farmers' problems for all time.

The leaders in the Grain Growers' Association are the managers of the Grain Co. In the former capacity they aspire to be

legislators and general business regulators. They are amateurs all through. As we have no professionals in this country devoted to the last two occupations there is no objection to the personnel up to date; but for the future we must shortly look for action in which the interests of the whole community are inseparably involved.

It is also the concern of every citizen that the farmer should not involve himself in a business that is in the hands of any but competent and experienced men—experts in fact. It is also the concern of good citizens that the parties assuming to work in the farmers' interests be above-board in all their dealings—that there should be no concealment or want of candor. Run upon other lines, suspicion will be aroused in any association, whether for the farmers to say or any body of men or women. That the extent of concern is appreciated by citizens generally is open to doubt. It is policy for the newspapers to report proceedings, make comment and butter and sugar everything that has to do with the farmer.

The Grain Growers' Convention has broken all records in attendance, in interest displayed and in business done. That they are a power in the land is beyond question and this is right. The pursuit of agriculture represents the most capital, the greatest source of wealth and the largest population devoted to any walk in life. That it has received such scant recognition in past years is the result of many causes, some of which it will be well to mention only, but others at the



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