

Cowley, Alberta, May 9, 1906.

To Mr. John Herron, M.P.,
House of Commons, Ottawa.

Sir,—I desire to call your attention to the unsatisfactory conditions that prevail in the beef cattle industry in this province and throughout western Canada generally.

It is the prevailing belief of the farmers that the conditions that now control the beef industry are normal, but that they are the result of the workings of a combine, trust or other arrangement amongst the wholesale meat dealers, whose western headquarters are in Winnipeg.

All regular means have been employed to induce the government of Manitoba to investigate the conditions surrounding this great industry—but so far without success.

As profitable cattle-raising is, as you know, a matter of vital importance to the people of western Canada, and as that great industry is now being rapidly killed by the absurd prices that farmers receive for their beef cattle, I take the liberty of requesting you to raise the question on the floor of the Dominion parliament and to use your influence to bring about a thorough investigation.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

EDWIN G. SMITH.

Now, just to show the importance of this matter to the three provinces referred to, I may say that out of the 200,000 head of cattle exported from Canada last year, the three provinces contributed over 52,000 head, or 25 per cent. When you consider our population, it will be seen that this trade is one of immense importance to us. Conditions in the Northwest have to a great extent, led up to what would be likely to result in a combine. On account of the conditions in our country, the ordinary cattle exporter from eastern Canada is not well qualified to handle our cattle. During the last twenty-five years, we have had men come from eastern Canada at various times to buy our cattle, men connected with the export trade. But, owing to the fact that the conditions differ from those to which they have been accustomed, these men have invariably lost money. In this part of the country a man who wishes to purchase stock can go to where the cattle are, look over them and even handle them. But, in the western country, the buyer must mount a horse, and go upon the range, where perhaps a thousand head are rounded up and value them from horseback. The eastern men do not understand the trade in that form. These conditions have led to the cattle trade drifting into the hands of a few men who are familiar with it. These buyers have generally been very large moneyed men. It is the opinion in that country—and I believe rightly—that there is a combine. If there is one, it means that the farmers of that country are losing from 20 to 25 per cent on every animal they ship. This is a matter of very great importance. To back

Mr. HERRON.

up the statement that I have made that a combine exists, I may cite the case of one company in my riding who shipped their own cattle last year and realized from \$8 to \$10 a head more than was paid the average farmer in that country for his cattle. That means, as I say, that the people are losing from 20 to 25 per cent. I hope the government will take the matter into consideration. In fact, I hope the minister will give it his personal attention, and that a commission to investigate into the matter will be appointed. I should like to hear from the minister on the subject.

Mr. FISHER. I may say that I have had some representations of a similar character to that which the hon. gentleman (Mr. Herron) has just quoted. I confess that the matter is rather a puzzle to me. I do not know any law on the statute-book under which any combination to lower prices can be dealt with. The general idea of combines is that they raise prices, and I am afraid, that at the present time, there is no law that would enable anybody to interfere. I do not know what can be done; I am not aware of the circumstances sufficiently, at the present time at any rate, to know whether the facts as reported are correct in all respects and in all ways. But I think that this is one matter that is well worth looking into, and I want to get all the information I possibly can upon it. I hope to be able to do so this year. If I can find anything that I can do that would tend to improve the conditions of the cattle trade in the west, I shall be only too glad to do it.

Mr. STAPLES. I desire to corroborate what the hon. gentleman from Alberta has said. I have had several communications from the west during this session calling attention to this subject, and asking me to bring it up on the floor of the House. As to the legislature of Manitoba they have been called upon to hold an investigation. But, as to giving the matter consideration it has been concluded that it is rather a subject for the federal government to deal with, and that this government ought to take it up. So far as a combine is concerned, I am not able to say. But certainly these buyers for the west, the men who handle our cattle in Winnipeg and other places, so manipulate things that the producer is not receiving the price that he should receive for his cattle. I have had a little experience—but only a little—in shipping some cattle myself to the market in Winnipeg. Last fall I took a carload of cattle off my own farm, and perhaps it will be just as well that I should relate my experience as it may help the minister to arrive at an idea of the difficulties. I was entirely green and inexperienced when I shipped these cattle to Winnipeg.

The cattle landed in Winnipeg late one evening. The following morning I went