

The Manitoba Grain Act.*(Continued from page 109.)*

contiguous points on the U.S. side, and this, notwithstanding that in every instance the haul to Fort William was a good deal longer than the haul to Duluth. The difference arose in part, no doubt, from the exceptionally brisk demand for hard wheat by the Minneapolis and Duluth mills, which were paying a premium for the immediate delivery of futures in hard; as well, perhaps, as to the operations of Chicago "bull" speculators. Having discovered that the C.P.R. was not to blame, the Manitoba farmer along the frontier wheeled round and maintained, rightly or wrongly, that he was being robbed by the grain men; and, as no investigation was held, is probably of that mind still.

The farmer who has wheat to sell is not always the most reasonable man in the world. If his sample is poor, owing to the presence of dirt or from any other cause, and he is offered a lower price than that paid to a neighbor having a better sample, he is loth to blame himself, preferring to accuse the buyer of over-reaching him. So, too, he is disposed, if he cannot blame the railway, to blame the buyer, when, owing to exceptional circumstances, the price south of the line is higher than the price north. Those newspapers which pose as his champions, along with others having party ends to serve, encourage him in this belief, and in the end he accepts it as incontrovertible. From the press the grievance is transferred to Parliament, and dealt with by furious orators in search of his vote. There will be no chance of peace between farmers and buyers, or between the farmers and the railways, until Mr. Castle is in a position to dispatch inspectors to enquire into local grievances and to hold the more important enquiries himself. When that day arrives, provided the inspectors are men of probity, the farmer will begin to trust the elevator, and the scandal of having hundreds of cars held up day after day during the busy season at loading platforms or sidings will gradually disappear.

The President of the labor party in Manitoba, Wm. Scott, who cannot be accused of excessive friendship for the railways, dealt with the platform question in a letter to the Winnipeg Voice, in December last, in which he said:—

"The threats of our Ninga friends to blow up the elevators is an exact repetition of the machinery-smashing policy of the trades unions in the beginning of the last century. That policy, though mistaken, was not unjustifiable. Now, just as the improved machine took the bread out of the tradesman's mouth and sent him adrift as a tramp, or condemned him to factory wage-slavery, so the improved method of handling grain by means of elevators has been made the instrument of robbing the farmer of a large portion of the products of his fields. The robbery may have been sufficiently palpable to warrant the farmers in demanding remedial legislation, but legislation compelling the railway companies to load off the wagon is reactionary and parallel with the action of those economists who, perceiving the evils of the factory wage-slavery system, advise the people to go back to the good old times of hand manufacture."

Mr. Scott's criticism is sound, as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough—he should have condemned the Act for leaving the farmer at the mercy of the grain-buyer, that being the fount and origin of the whole trouble. When the Manitoba Grain Act was passed, one of the Minnesota commissioners pointed out this defect and predicted, what has come to pass, that it would arouse universal suspicion, lead the farmers to ship from platforms instead of elevators, and involve all concerned in an uproar, owing to the obstacles thus placed in the way of speedy shipment of the crop. Even without such artificial impediments, the Canadian railways would be at a serious disadvantage as compared with the railways south of the line, since the wheat-belt in Minnesota begins only 225 miles west of Duluth, whereas in Manitoba it begins at Winnipeg, 426 miles west of Fort William, though in reality not much wheat is grown

east of Portage la Prairie, 56 miles west. The western limit of wheat may be said to be Moose Jaw, over 800 miles from Lake Superior. Geography thus handicaps the Canadian lines, and when, on top of it, they are obliged to substitute the antiquated platform for the modern elevator, it is absurd to expect them to move the crop to Lake Superior as rapidly as the U.S. lines do.

In other instances, the authors of the Manitoba Grain Act, while trying to protect the farmer, have unwittingly done him harm. For example, section 58, as amended in 1902, provides that when cars are scarce they shall be apportioned to the applicants in order of their application, "until each applicant has received one car," after which, "the surplus cars, if any, shall be apportioned according to the requirements of each applicant." This section is copied from the Minnesota law, but an important variation has been made, the Minnesota law reading that in time of scarcity cars "shall be divided as equally as may be among the applicants until each shipper shall have received at least one car, when the balance shall be divided ratably in proportion to the amount of daily receipts of grain or other freight," etc.

An elevator of 30,000 bush. capacity, containing wheat belonging to 20 farmers, is full, and 20 other farmers are waiting to use it. Alongside is a platform or flat warehouse which affords accommodation to one-fifth of that number of farmers or probably less. Yet under the Manitoba Act the elevator is put on precisely the same footing as the platform in the distribution of cars. Imagine that an epidemic was raging at Ninga or Gretna, Man., that doctors were scarce and that the local hospital was crowded with patients, a few were in private houses; what would be said if, in the distribution of doctors, the law ordained that the few should rank with the many in receiving succor, one to the hospital, one to each private house? The Minnesota law takes note not of the order of the application alone, but of the quantity of grain being received at the elevators and platforms respectively, and bases distribution upon those proportions, the 20 farmers concerned in the elevator being, not unreasonably, favored with cars in preference to the four or five using the platform or warehouse. The effect of the Manitoba law last fall was to create a scarcity, which meant, of course, a cut in the price offered by grain-buyers, so that the last condition of the farmer was worse than the first. It was an every-day occurrence for elevator men and track-buyers to wire the General Superintendent of the C.P.R. at Winnipeg, offering to pay more for wheat than the current price if he would ignore section 58 and give them cars at once, instead of waiting until he had satisfied the requirements of the owner of a few wagon-loads of wheat at a platform. There was an unexpected demand for Manitoba wheat from Australia, where drought prevailed, but it could only be met in part. On this point the retiring President of the Board of Trade of Winnipeg said the other day:—

"Dealers have been handicapped in the Australian trade by the operation of the Manitoba Grain Act, which only permits an elevator to stand as one in a number of applicants for cars. In other words, if each of 20 farmers and an elevator place an order for cars with a railway station agent, the elevator can only secure one car in turn with all the other applicants, and, as farmers could not ship single cars to the Pacific Coast to meet the Australasian trade, it is apparent that either the grain buyer could not make any considerable shipment at one time, or else the railway company would have to violate the Grain Act by giving the number of cars necessary to transport a round lot of, say, 40,000 or 100,000 bush."

If the reader, who may not be a railway man, imagines that too much importance is attached to the absurd mode of distributing cars in Manitoba, let him reflect that for every car that can be loaded at a platform 60 can be loaded in the same space of time at an elevator. However, the farmers are not

likely to abandon platform-loading, with all its drawbacks to themselves and to the railways, until they have confidence in the elevator companies, and that can be restored, if at all, only by the reconstruction of Mr. Castle's department in such a manner as to insure the prompt treatment of complaints on the farmer's part by officials familiar with every phase of the grain trade, and honest and above-board in their findings.

Other defects in the Act might be pointed out, but probably these are sufficient to convince the Dominion Government that it needs amendment at the present session.

Putting aside the obstacles to rapid shipment thus artificially created, the railways had other difficulties to encounter. The unusually heavy spring rains filled the streams with alkali and vegetable matter, which found their way into the tanks and crippled the locomotives. In the fall, however, the rainfall was far below the average, so that towards the close of the season there was not water enough. Then, with the rush into the country of 40,000 settlers, who had to be fed and provided with other necessities and conveniences, west-bound traffic attained enormous proportions; while, on the other hand, the coal famine in the United States compelled the C.P.R. to haul an unusually large supply of fuel east from Lethbridge and Souris. It was quite as necessary that the people should be kept from freezing as that grain should be hurried to Lake Superior. Notwithstanding these and other adverse influences, the C.P.R. did splendid work in carrying wheat, the quantity taken to Fort William between Sept. 1 and the close of navigation on Dec. 6, 1902, being no less than 16,000,000 bush., or 3,000,000 more than during the same period of 1901. The Canadian Northern Ry. took to Port Arthur 4,283,946 bush. between Sep. 1 and Dec. 6, 1902.

April Birthdays.

Many happy returns of the day to Adam Brown, formerly President Wellington, Grey and Bruce Ry. (now G.T.R.), Vice-President G.N.W. Telegraph Co., and Postmaster of Hamilton, born at Edinburgh, Scotland, April 3, 1826.

A. H. Clark, Master Mechanic, Irondale, Bancroft and Ottawa Ry. at Irondale, Ont., born April 5, 1867.

G. M. Clark, K.C., Consulting Counsel C.P.R., Cobourg, Ont., born April 14, 1828.

A. P. Cockburn, ex-Manager and Treasurer Muskoka and Georgian Bay Navigation Co. at Gravenhurst, Ont., born in Finch tp., Stormont, Ont., April 7, 1837.

B. W. Folger, Manager Niagara Navigation Co. at Toronto, born at Kingston, Ont., April 8, 1872.

G. H. Garden, C.E., Chief Engineer Alberta Ry. and Coal Co. at Lethbridge, Alta., born at Woodstock, N.B., April 5, 1849.

J. P. Gay, Division Freight Agent, G.T.R. at Stratford, Ont., born at Hamilton, Ont., April 26, 1857.

E. A. Geiger, Superintendent, General Freight Agent and Treasurer Brockville, Westport and Sault Ste. Marie Ry. at Brockville, Ont., born at Newark, N.J., April 10, 1863.

B. C. Gesner, Air Brake Inspector, I.C.R. at Moncton, N.B., born at Cornwallis, N.S., April 23, 1859.

A. L. Hertzberg, Division Engineer C.P.R. at Toronto, born in Norway, April 30, 1855.

E. A. James, General Superintendent, Canadian Northern Ry. at Winnipeg, Man., born in London, Eng., April, 1865.

B. S. Jenkins, General Superintendent Telegraphs, C.P.R. at Winnipeg, Man., born April 8, 1859.

Thos. Long, Secretary, Northern Navigation Co. of Ontario, Toronto, born at Lime-
rick, Ireland, April 7, 1836.