

## PROTECTING THE GRAIN ACT

THE Grain Act, a piece of Liberal legislation designed to protect the interests of the farmer in the sale and shipment of his grain and which has proved so successful in its purpose that it has been the object of assault by the railways and the grain buying interests since its inception, was once more the subject of a sharp fight during the recent session of Parliament. The abnormally heavy crop of last year found many Western farmers with larger quantities of grain than they could possibly get under shelter after threshing and the trouble was accentuated by the inability of the railway companies to move the crop fast enough to make room in elevators or to supply anything like enough cars to fill the orders of farmers who had their grain ready to haul to loading platforms. Winter came with millions of bushels of grain heaped in the fields either without shelter or with only the flimsiest of covering, so that the danger of damage as spring approached was very great.

### A Dangerous Amendment.

The trouble appears to have been accentuated in certain parts of Saskatchewan and representations made by the farmers caused the Government in March to bring down an amendment to the Grain Act which would give the Grain Commission wide powers to order a special supply of cars to the districts most affected. With the effort to relieve the pressing necessity of farmers who were threatened with heavy loss the Liberal members of Parliament were in hearty accord, but they found on examining the amendment introduced by Sir George Foster that it was couched in such broad terms that it would have given the Grain Commission powers which would have endangered the most vital protection which the Grain Act affords to the farmer.

### Liberal Vigilance Prevented Change.

Careful scrutiny of the amendment showed that it would give the Grain Commission power to depart from the regulations which insist that railway companies must provide cars for shipment in the order in which they have been applied for. The Grain Commission would have been given wide discretionary powers to disregard this most vital provision of the Grain Act—a provision which has proved of immense value to the farmer in protecting him against the rapacity of the middleman who in the past found little difficulty in getting the railways to work with him to the disadvantage of the farmer. As a result of the vigorous protest of a number of Liberal members Sir George Foster changed his amendment to make it apply only to such specific conditions as appear to have existed this year, and then only after the Grain Commission has made "due examination."

This incident affords one more proof of the necessity of eternal vigilance on the part of the Opposition in Parliament to prevent amendments which might destroy the effect of important and valuable legislation. The Grain Act, passed by a

Liberal government to protect the farmers of Canada, and especially the farmers of the West, is of such importance that a brief review of its history and its effect may be given at this time.

### Liberals Enacted Grain Law.

The Grain Act was first brought into Parliament by the Liberal government in 1898 by Mr. J. M. Douglas, Liberal member for East Assinaboia, now Senator Douglas. Its object was to protect the Western grain grower from the monopolistic tendencies of the elevator companies and the railroads.

The reason for this legislation was the fact that the grain is handled in bulk, not in separate packages as are other farm or manufactured products. Grain is much more economically handled from America to Great Britain in bulk, while from South America or Australia it is handled in sacks. The advantage of handling in bulk from Canada is on account of the enormous transshipments from railroads to lake and canal boats and then to the ocean boats, which necessitate frequent handling by elevators. In handling the grain in this way it is impossible to preserve the identity of any particular shipment, the whole being mixed up in the general mass.

The purpose of the Grain Act is to preserve identity of the grade or quality of the wheat so as to ensure the delivery in England of an equal quantity of wheat of equal quality to that originally sold by the grain grower.

This had been done by mutual consent as a business arrangement before increasing difficulties with regard to the elevators and railroads necessitated Government action to make such arrangements a matter of law rather than mutual agreement.

### Cured Practice of "Mixing."

The great difficulty was from the practice of "mixing" by elevator owners. A buyer might purchase a shipment of wheat from the grower as high class No. 2, he might then purchase from another grower a shipment of high class No. 3, and ship them to Winnipeg for inspection. If he owned an elevator at Winnipeg he would mix the high class No. 2 and the high class No. 3 and so make the whole mass fit to inspect as a scant No. 2 grade and as such it would be shipped to Liverpool. But the English miller while he buys according to grade, mills according to flour producing quality and fixes his price on that basis, the result being that lowering the value of a grade by "mixing" reacts upon the selling quality of that grade with the ultimate result that the grower of the high grade wheat suffers from the "mixing." The dealer makes money while the grower of good wheat is "skinned down."

To prevent this the Grain Act provided for Government inspection so that every grade would be of a fixed standard, this being carried out by a complete system of inspection in the interest of the grower.