

THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE AND HOME MAGAZINE.

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AND N.-W. T.

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The Wheat Blockade.

The wheat blockade is a very evident fact. Farmers' organizations, boards of trade and all the newspapers in the West have been busy discussing the situation. We are in receipt of many enquiries as to the cause of this serious situation. The Winnipeg Board of Trade held two stormy meetings discussing the situation, and passed strong resolutions urging the C. P. R. to provide sufficient cars and locomotives, double track their line from Winnipeg to Fort William, double their storage capacity at the lake port, and in the meantime carry grain all rail to the seaboard at the same rates as are charged for rail and lake transportation.

These discussions will do good. If the West quietly submits to the present condition of affairs, we shall be long in obtaining relief: the eastern capitalist, railway magnate and Government must be awakened to the development and possibilities of the West. If the Canadian wheat route to the sea by rail and water is not developed fast enough to prevent such disastrous wheat blockades as exist to-day, we must look to American outlets via Duluth. It is doubtful if the independent spirit of the West, leavened by the new blood now arriving from the south, will permit its growth and prosperity to be hampered by sentiment, and if the trade channels mentioned are used, no blame can be laid to the long-suffering Western farmer.

The C. P. R. claim they have purchased all the cars and engines they could procure on the continent, and yet they have not half enough to handle the crop, nor have they half enough storage at lake ports.

The result of the blockade is that the farmer is either obliged to sell his grain to buyers who can't handle it, or else store it himself. Not being able to realize on the crop, he cannot meet his liabilities, and will have to pay heavily for the accommodation of being carried over. None lose but the farmer who has to pay the interest that the retailer, the wholesaler and the banks all collect, while the railroad profits by the blockade by its storage charges at the terminal elevators.

Objectionable Features of Hedge Fences and Hedge Fence Companies.

Early last spring the "Advocate" obtained information that some parties were talking of forming a hedge-fence company in Brandon, and in our issue of May 20th an editorial was published pointing out the undesirableness of hedges, except for small garden rows, and warning farmers to be on their guard against hedge-fence fakes in general. In view of subsequent developments, the item in question is herewith reproduced, and we would like to ask those who have signed contracts for hedge fences if they do not think the advice contained therein is sound.

THE FENCE PROBLEM.

Farming in the older-settled sections of the West is undergoing a transition, from the rough-and-ready way of the pioneer to the systematic and scientific methods of the advanced agriculturist. A systematic rotation of crops, including seeding down to grass, is now recognized by all thoughtful men as a present-day necessity, if the productiveness of the soil and ability to grow a No. 1 hard wheat is to be maintained. In order to properly utilize the grass land, fencing becomes imperative, and herein lies one of the most difficult problems, owing to the cost of fencing material.

THE HEDGE FAKE.

An active demand for fencing, together with the expense of good fence pickets and wire, creates the opportunity for the faker with the patent fence, the slickest of whom is the patent hedge-fence man, with his alluring colored plates of beautiful blossom-covered hedge-rows, with nature's growth so marvelously trained that the mesh is close enough to intercept the gopher and, at the same time, strong enough to be "bull-proof." These wonderful combinations of hedge plants (at so much a thousand), that are sure to grow, and a few strands of barb wire (at wholesale), are bound sooner or later to be offered to the Manitoba farmer, and, like the farmers in every other civilized country, experience bought and paid for is likely to be the only thing that will convince them of the uselessness of the hedge fence. Doubtless, too, local companies will, in due time, be organized to sell and plant hedges, and farmers will be offered special inducements to invest some of their surplus cash in the shares of these companies, whose only hope of success is in the gullibility of the public. Those who remember the osage-orange and locust hedge fakes that were successfully worked some years ago—and many may have cause to remember—will not be so easily caught in the meshes of the patent-hedge man.

HEDGES UNSUITABLE.

Hedge fences are totally unsuited to the conditions of prairie farming, when one considers what the growing of a hedge means. For the growing of any kind of trees or shrubs in this country, cultivation is absolutely essential. Think of the labor necessary to thoroughly cultivate a strip of three or four feet along both sides of a hedge a mile or two in length, and to keep down all weeds and grass (including twitch-grass), for several years; then, to insure a thick undergrowth in the hedge, it must needs be kept closely and frequently trimmed for all time to come. As a reward for all the labor, the hedge, even if it has grown fairly well, is at best a poor substitute for a wire fence. It collects snowdrifts, which break down the hedge and keep the land adjoining wet until late in spring, and in the event of soil drifting from the adjoining fields, the results to the hedge would be disastrous. Anyone who desires a nice bit of hedge along the garden border will be well repaid for the labor necessary to obtain it and keep it in shape, but few who stop to consider are likely to undertake to hedge-fence even the boundary line of a quarter-section farm.

Under the title of The Manitoba Farmers' Hedge and Wire Fence Company, Limited, operations have been carried on this past summer, and contracts have been made with farmers whereby the Company undertakes, for certain considerations, to set out hedge plants for the farmer in the spring of 1902. These contracts are very one-sided arrangements, and contain some objectionable features, which, for the benefit of our readers, we refer to somewhat in detail.

The Company gives no post-office address on

the contract, and there is absolutely nothing on the contract to identify the whereabouts of its officers. While the Company agree to set out hedge plants in the spring of 1902, there is absolutely nothing in the contract as to what kind of plants are to be used; they might be osage-orange or English buckthorn, or any other plant that won't live in this climate. Of course, the Company agrees to replant in the spring of 1903 and 1904 "where necessary to secure a sufficient stand of plants."

When the hedge grows sufficiently robust so that the Company "considers the plants of sufficient size," then they undertake "to attach to the bodies of the plants" three parallel strands of "barbed wire, which is to form the wonderful combination of hedge and wire fence. It is presumed that fence posts will be required to carry these three strands of barbed wire, but nothing is said in the contract about furnishing or planting the posts, so of course the farmer would do that.

The farmer undertakes to prepare the ground under instructions from the Company, and to properly protect, manure, cultivate and keep free from damage, weeds and grass, and in the event of the Company determining that the farmer is not giving due care and cultivation to the hedge, then the farmer agrees to let the Company put in men and teams and do the work to the Company's satisfaction, and to charge up the cost of the work to the farmer. After the farmer has complied with all the terms of the agreement, which includes payment of all claims in full, the Company will "guarantee that the said hedge" (with three parallel strands of barb wire) "will turn ordinary farm stock."

Another interesting clause reads: "It is agreed that no verbal arrangements made with any agent, and not included therein (in the contract), shall be binding upon the Company." This conveniently relieves the agent of all responsibility, and he can talk as glibly as he pleases.

The terms are quite moderate: 50 cents per rod at time of planting, and another 50 cents per rod at time of resetting, and then 25 cents per rod as the hedge is plashed (this means when the three parallel strands of barb wire are attached to the bodies of the plants). In addition, the farmer agrees to pay "interest at the rate of seven per cent. per annum on the amount of the first two payments remaining unpaid from the date of planting said hedge." The three strands of barb wire are worth about 11 cents per rod, and if any farmer will do the work of preparing the ground and cultivating it, as he agrees to in the contract, and set out a row of native maples or caraganas, which can be got for a trifle, he can have all the hedge fence he wishes at one quarter the expense, but, of course, he would not have the pleasure of signing a contract.

There is one other feature about the contract that is especially interesting, so much so that we reproduce a facsimile of it. This portion is at the bottom of the other contract, which is duly completed by being signed and witnessed, and then this lower portion, which is semi-perforated, is also signed and witnessed. It reads:

"I, of the Municipality of, in the Province of Manitoba, farmer, hereby agree that if I shall not have paid to the Manitoba Farmers' Hedge & Wire Fence Company, Limited, the amount due to the said Company, under agreement of even date herewith, amounting to the sum of dollars, that the said sum shall be, and I hereby grant, a lien and charge upon my lands, and bear interest at the rate of seven per cent. per annum from the date hereof and be payable on demand.

"In witness whereof I have hereto set my hand and seal this day of A. D. 1901.

"Signed, sealed and delivered in the presence of"

In this last clause, we take it, lies the kernel of the whole matter. For it may be assumed that, supposing the Company set out hedge plants and reset them the following spring, and that the bulk of the plants die, as in all probability they would, the farmer would, in disgust, not give very careful cultivation to the plot, then the Company, being the sole judge, could claim that the farmer had failed in his part of the contract, and they could collect on the strength of this last part of the contract the full amount with interest from the date on which it was first signed, from six to nine months before a single plant had ever been set out, or register it against the land of the farmer the same as a mortgage.