The Monetary Times.

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The Monetary Times

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ROADS TO HUDSON'S BAY.

An unexpected method of financing a railroad to Hudson's Bay from the middle west is offered by the Government in the Consolidated Lands Bill described by the Minister of the Interior on Thursday. There remain about 80,000,000 acres of Government land available for free settlement in territory outside what may be called the existing railroad belt. It is proposed to give again to the homesteader the right to pre-empt a quarter section adjoining or even distant from his first holding, and to apply the proceeds of the pre-empted quarters to grants in aid of a railroad to the northern tidewater.

This enlargement of policy is opposed by ex-Premier Greenway, of Manitoba, on the ground that it would depopulate Manitoba by inducing farmers to go far afield for more land at small cost. Mr. Greenway need not be afraid of the depopulation of Manitoba. Farmers will not leave the province unless they can sell at good prices. The reputation of the West is sufficiently established to perpetuate a demand for improved farms. Land hunger is one of the most stable phenomena of human nature. In some it takes form in flights to unknown regions—the instinct of the pioneer has made us what we are. In others it assumes a desire for possession in venerable communities.

To be afraid of depopulation in Manitoba is to revert to the spirit of the olden time, which produced the belief that railroads would destroy business. There is a depopulation aspect of prairie development, but it is an effect of the increase in the number of large farms—an evidence of rewarded ambition.

Whatever the merits of Mr. Oliver's method of aiding a road to Hudson's Bay, it is one more proof that the export of grain by the northern route is within the region of practical politics. Obviously the government intends to have a Hudson's Bay scheme well under way as its great card for Western support in next year's general election. Churchill is the destined entrepot of the last great exploitation of the Eastern seaboard of this continent. It is argued that the difference between reaching tidewater over existing routes, and via Churchill from a central point such as Regina, is 9c. a bushel on wheat. The difference makes the financing of a railroad a mere detail, always assuming that navigation through Hudson's Straits is possible for a sufficiently long time to make a fleet of specially constructed steamers commercially successful on that route. There is never any trouble about a nation carrying a heavy burden of credit for a business enterprise, such as is the saving of 9c. a bushel in cost of transportation.

Of course, there are powerful Eastern interests against the diversion of traffic northward, but if Western trade demands an outlet through Hudson's Bay, it is about as wise to try to stop it as it would be to prevent teeth piercing the gums of a child. The warning of the pessimist nearly always is on the assumption that we have reached the limit of development in Eastern Canada. Nothing of the sort has happened. The people who believe we have come almost to the end of our tether this year believed that the country as a whole was in that condition a generation ago.

Hudson's Bay itself is more than a mere convenience for the wheat grower of Saskatchewan. It must be reached from the south as well as from the west. The hundred miles of muskeg around the southern fringe of James Bay, and the shallowness of the