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Robert Magill, M.A.; Ph.D.

Some Impressions of the Man

By an Observer

It is not the intention of the writer to give a biographical sketch of the "Doctor," as he is familiarly known, rather is it his intention to place before the readers a few impressions gained after close intimacy for a number of years with Dr. Magill.

Perhaps a brief outline of Dr. Magill's career would not be amiss. He was born in County Down, Ireland, educated at Queen's College, Belfast, the Royal University of Ireland and the University of Jena, Germany. He is a Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy. In 1903 he came to Canada and settled in Halifax, first as professor in Pine Hill Presbyterian Theological College and then as principal of that college. In 1908 he left this institution and entered Dalhousie University as head of the political economy department, where he remained until 1912. In 1912 he was appointed the first chairman of the Board of Grain Commissioners for Canada, in which position he remained until December, 1916, when he resigned to become secretary of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange.

While stationed in Halifax the doctor did some important outside work in addition to his professional duties. He was appointed chairman of the Royal Commission to enquire into "Regulation of the Hours of Labor in Nova Scotia" in 1908. Two years later he came West, for the first time, as chairman of the Saskatchewan Royal Commission to enquire into the grain elevator problem of that province. In 1911 he was appointed chairman of the Conciliation Board to settle strikes in the Port Morien coal mines disputes.

An Unknown Man

Few farmers in Manitoba and Alberta knew Dr. Magill or anything about him when he was first appointed chairman of the Board of Grain Commissioners. He was known to a large number of Saskatchewan farmers through his being chairman of the Saskatchewan Elevator Commission in 1910. Incidentally, through the recommendations of this commission the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company was formed. What a boon it has been to the farmers of that province! They are now operating over three hundred country elevators and building more every year. I do not think there is another instance in the history of the civilized world where organized farmers in co-operative endeavor have made such a huge and quick success of an undertaking of this magnitude.

The Saskatchewan farmers who appeared before this commission found a very amiable Irishman as chairman. The farmers answering questions were soon made to feel at home. Witnesses, however, soon found out that the slim Irishman was not as ignorant as he appeared to make out, particularly when he looked at them over his glasses. If a witness inadvertently made a wrong answer it was never accepted, but further questioning was indulged in. Throughout the entire investigation Dr. Magill made a great number of fast friendships with the producers of Saskatchewan and won general approval from the grain people he came in contact with. Through his work on this commission and the reputation gained therein, he was offered the chairmanship of a permanent board, the Board of Grain Commissioners for Canada, which he accepted.

Record of Accomplishment

When he was appointed chairman in 1912 he found that a great deal of organization work was sadly needed. There was only a make-pretence inspection of country elevators, the weighing of grain at the terminal elevators was under the control of the inspection department and was only considered of secondary importance to that of inspection. Statistics were kept in each office, and no attempt had been made to co-ordinate them. Unlike the United States, there was no grain laboratory.

Before Dr. Magill left the board the regular inspection of country elevators was a fixed part of the organization.

The weighing department had been organized under a chief weighmaster and placed on a better and sounder footing. And a statistical department had been formed, from which important statistics are published regularly. A grain laboratory had been established in Winnipeg. In addition to these different matters, Dr. Magill, with the help of his colleagues, had supervised the erection of the first publicly owned terminal elevator at the head of the lakes and also the first interior terminal elevators at Moose Jaw, Saskatoon and Calgary, along with the transfer elevator at Vancouver. And let me say right here that after spending over five million dollars of the public monies for the erection of these elevators, there was not the slightest breath of scandal attached thereto.

Doctor Magill was never the kind of man to be satisfied with reports and reports only. He had to be shown, although he was not from Missouri. He took, from all accounts, wonderful interest in his work and travelled extensively in connection therewith, approximately 32,000 miles per annum, and he hated travelling as only an Irishman can hate. He was constantly at his office in the Grain Exchange Building, Fort William, and had his finger tips on every department under the board. I am told that he was usually at his office at 8:30 a.m. and remained there throughout the day, with the exception of that part of the year when potatoes had to be sowed and reaped, but who can blame an Irishman for liking potatoes!

Gave General Satisfaction

When he was appointed chairman of the Board of Grain Commissioners western people were frankly amazed. They doubted the ability of a mere professor, a book worm, to grasp and regulate the grain trade. It was new to see a technical man placed in the position rather than a practical man. These expressions were quite common in 1912, but they are not today. Dr. Magill's work as chairman of the Board of Grain Commissioners will stand for a good many long years as a model to succeeding chairmen.

The producers found him to be a man of great ability, honest purpose, vision and foresight. They found him fair in dealing with complaints and also sympathetic. He was impartial when adjudicating complaints or claims, and none of his rulings, to my knowledge, have ever been set aside. He was a hard worker and always endeavored to the best of his ability to get at the bottom of a subject before expressing an opinion thereon. Take, for instance, the decision on the subject to grade and dockage ticket. Very few know how hard and long he worked on that particular dry subject, but the report published by the Board of Grain Commissioners, which was undoubtedly written by him, is a standard work on country elevator legislation, rights and duties.

When he resigned his position as chairman of the Board of Grain Commissioners to become secretary of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, some unkind people said he had left the lambs and gone to lie down with the wolves, that money had influenced him and a lot of other tommy rot. Outside of the above, however, I have never heard any of the reasons assigned for the doctor's move. The real reason, to my mind, is undoubtedly this: I believe he saw the end of his organization work with the board. He saw that future work would be simply routine, and he saw that chances for individuality were slim under our red tape governmental system of doing business. Apart from all this, I am positive it was not money that made him change, neither was it, as some people have stated, differences of opinion with his colleagues.

A Big Field

Dr. Magill saw in the new business a great opportunity for good work. He would be in a position where he could endeavor to make the farmers see the economic advantages of grain ex-

changes and bring them on better terms with the trade, a work well worthy of him. I am told by men high up in the Winnipeg Grain Exchange that the feeling that now exists between the organized farmers and the Grain Exchange was never better than it is to-day. In my opinion, it is all Dr. Magill's work. Some producers have sufficient faith in him to believe that whatever he is connected with or does is right and proper. If he does not do anything else as secretary of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange other than bring the producers and the trade to a better understanding of each other's duties, his labor will have been worth while.

And then, do you remember the May trouble? Bankers and grain men were harrassed together, transportation companies were being deluged with requests to bring the grain forward, and many men were in daily danger of going down to bankruptcy. Who saved the situation? Some say the council of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, some say Mr. James Stewart of the Wheat Export Company, and some say Dr. Magill. All three guesses are partly right. These loyal men worked days and nights to straighten out the tangle. It was a blessing that the grain men in Winnipeg had the benefit of Dr. Magill's knowledge. He undoubtedly was a big man in the proceedings. He did not sleep much those nights, smoked his pipe a little more than usual and his appetite and temper went away.

What would have happened to the western country if these line elevators had gone into bankruptcy? The entire grain handling machinery of this country would have been disorganized and the country itself in a worse position than even Russia is to-day.

As Price Fixer

Taking into account Dr. Magill's work during this critical period, there was only one man in Canada to head the Board of Grain Supervisors when appointed, and that man was Magill. Some of his work is well known. The board has fixed the prices of wheat, and every fair-minded citizen must admit that they are fair and equitable. He has also seen that the grain trade of this country is kept in close harmony with that of the United States. There will be no international complications in the grain trade while he remains at its head. A lot of the work that he is doing will never be known until after the war, if at all. It is to be devoutly hoped that he will write one of his inimitable reports on the work of this board some day. And, by the way, he is doing all this work for nothing, but like food controllers generally, he is being blessed and cursed. Some men will tell you that he is arbitrary; others will say he is using his honorary position to further the interests of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, and others more lenient and fair minded will admit he is doing big work.

If there is one man in the Canadian grain trade to-day who is far from being arbitrary it is the doctor. As for furthering the interests of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange members—well, just take a walk around that exchange and see the scores of men who are idling away their time. They have lost most, through and by virtue of the orders of the Board of Grain Supervisors, and bear this in mind, it takes a strong, fearless man to countenance and sign orders when they are hurting the men with whom he is associated.

READY TO SEND SHIPPING ASSOCIATION ORGANIZER.

With a view to encouraging co-operative livestock marketing, the co-operative organization branch of the Saskatchewan Provincial Department of Agriculture will be prepared after January 1 to send a representative to assist the manager of any co-operative association in the receiving, forwarding and marketing of its first co-operative shipment of livestock. It is also prepared to furnish, free of charge, a set of livestock marketing receipt and account forms, sufficient to record one year's livestock marketing transactions. Associations interested in this announcement are requested to communicate with the department so that a date may be selected for forwarding the shipment which will be mutually acceptable.

over a year ago. In the campaign to produce a billion bushels of wheat next year to help feed the Allies, an acreage of 47,337,000 of winter wheat was advocated. Failure to reach this amount was due to the adverse conditions, such as unfavorable weather, late harvest of other crops and shortage of farm help. The fall was exceedingly dry in many important sections, particularly in Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, as well as in the north-west. The condition of the crop on December 1 was low, being 79.3 per cent. of normal, which compares with the 10 year average condition on same date of 89.3. The lowest condition ever reported in previous years was 81.4 on December 1, 1895. In 1917 the crop was about 418,000,000 bushels; in 1916, 481,000,000 bushels, and the average of the preceding five years was 543,000,000 bushels.

The rye acreage shows a material increase of 36.6 per cent. over last year, due largely to more than doubling the acreage in North Dakota. The estimated acreage is 6,119,000 in North Dakota.

BROME GRASS SEED SCARCE

There appears to be a great scarcity of brome grass seed this year. This scarcity is not confined to Western Canada but appears to be the general situation all over the American Continent. Recently a prominent nursery man informed a representative of The Guide that he had already received a number of large orders for brome grass seed that he had not been able to fill. He said that practically none of the large seed firms in the United States are quoting brome seed in their list. He saw some brome seed advertised in one firm's list of prices and wrote the firm but in reply they stated that they had only two or three sacks on hand. Any who have brome seed on hand should have little difficulty in disposing of it at good prices this year.

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