

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, MARCH 16, 1896.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN.

One of the most thoughtful and practical papers presented at the recent immigration convention in Winnipeg was read by Mr. Hespeler. This paper was published in full in The Commercial of last week. Mr. Hespeler, in this paper, made a vigorous protest against the granting of our lands to railways or other private corporations, claiming that they should be held for free settlement. Mr. Hespeler's remarks in this connection strike a responsive chord in The Commercial. About five years ago this journal, in a series of articles, started an agitation against the alienation of our public lands in this way. These articles attracted considerable attention at the time, and many of the leading papers of Eastern Canada not only reproduced them in whole or in part, but also devoted editorial space to the matter. The efforts of The Commercial were vigorously seconded by The Week, of Toronto, The Merchant's Magazine and Financial Review, of Montreal, and many other leading journals. Now that an immigration association has been formed here, it should be one of the duties of this association to take up this question. The articles published in The Commercial years ago are as applicable to the situation now as they were then, and as fresh attention has been called to the matter, we take the liberty of reproducing the following article, which appeared under the heading "Dissipating the Public Domain," in The Commercial of September 21, 1891:

"A return brought down at Ottawa last week, showed that the vast amount of 42,000,000 acres of land in Manitoba and the territories has been granted to railways, and still the iniquitous policy goes on. The majority of people will pass over this without realizing what it actually means. Comparison is therefore necessary to show the enormity of the evil which has already been inflicted upon Western Canada, by this suicidal policy of dissipating the public domain in this manner. The entire province of Manitoba contains a superficial land area of 41,002,240 acres, including swamps, muskegs, or other land unfit for cultivation. A considerable portion of this 41,002,240 acres is unfit for cultivation, whereas a large portion of the land granted to the railways has been the pick of the country. These figures must prove a startling revelation to those who have not given the matter a consideration heretofore. It is indeed time to cry a halt in this business of granting the public domain to private corporations. Just think of it! One million acres more than the entire superficial land area of the province of Manitoba, has already been granted to railways, and in the face of this but a small portion of the country has been supplied with railways. Take a map of Manitoba and divide the province into three parts of equal size, by drawing lines across the map from east to west, and what will you find? The railways will be all in the one southern division. The two northern divisions will be without railway communication whatever. Go westward into the territories and the proportion of country now served by railways is even less. If land grants are to continue until all parts are opened up by railway, at the same proportionate rate that it has in the past, there will not

be land enough in the entire country to satisfy the railways. The railways will own all the land and will still be unsatisfied.

The time has come when a vigorous and unanimous demand should come from the West that not another acre of the public domain be granted to any private corporation. It is nonsense to talk about their being plenty of land. A large portion is reserved for school purposes, the Hudson's Bay Company has a nice little slice of 7,000,000 acres, besides other landed monopolies of one kind and another, to say nothing of the large areas held by private speculators. These lands already withdrawn from the public domain are largely the pick and choice of the country. When the water surface, and lands not valuable for agriculture are counted out, the portion of the public domain still undisposed of will not be so large as is generally supposed.

But it makes no difference what amount of land remains, the granting of lands to corporations or private speculators is iniquitous in principle. Were the quantity of land ten times as great as it is, there would still be every reason for denouncing the policy. The public lands should be held for the people. There is no use in trying to encourage settlement and then following up a policy which will effectually block it. There is no use in squandering money to bring in immigrants, and then adopt a policy of creating huge land monopolies, to drive the settlers out of the country. The recent census returns were not satisfactory in point of increase in our population. They indicate that some changes in our public policy are necessary to encourage settlement and induce our people to remain at home. The management of the public domain is one of the matters which should be considered and reformed to this end. Eastern Canada is interested in the settlement of the West. Business people there look in this direction to find a market for their manufactures and to extend their business. The people of the east should therefore bestir themselves, as well as those of the West, in demanding a cessation of land grants at once.

It seems strange that this land question has been allowed to slide along as it has. During the past few years The Commercial has several times raised a warning voice, but the people of the West evidently fail to comprehend even to a slight extent the enormity of the interest at stake and the terrible evil which has been fastened upon the country. It is to be hoped that the figures given above will come as a revelation to the people, and that such a demand will be made as will effectually stop this evil policy.

Not only should the custom of granting lands cease at once, but an effort should be made to repair some of the injury already done. In cases where corporations have not earned the lands granted them, they should be held strictly to the conditions upon which the grant has been given, and any failure to fulfil these conditions should result in every case in the forfeiture of the lands. In some cases it might seem unduly harsh to deprive some corporation of a land grant, some equivalent substitute might be given, but in every case the land grant should be forfeited. An effort should also be made to induce some of these corporations to relinquish their land for some other consideration or concession. It would pay the government to buy back the lands, rather than have such an evil inflicted upon the country.

Of the vast amount of public money granted to be expended upon railways in Canada, none of it has come to Manitoba and the territories. It has been expended upon eastern roads, while the people of the West have had to pay their share of the debt incurred (and more than their share on account of the discrimination against the West resulting from the tariff) from this railway expenditure. But when it comes to a western road the land is

given away and the evil is fastened upon the people. Let an effort at once be made to check this policy, which will in the future prove disastrous to the country."

WATER ROUTE TO HUDSON BAY.

The Discussion of the bill before parliament to grant a charter to a company to open a waterway to Hudson bay, has drawn attention to the question of the feasibility of such an enterprise. So far as The Commercial is aware, no very reliable information has yet been gathered upon this question. If a waterway suitable even for barges could be opened between Winnipeg and Hudson bay, it would certainly be a most desirable thing to have carried out. A waterway between the grain fields of Manitoba and Hudson bay would be worth millions to the country. Even the knowledge that such a route could be established at a reasonable cost, would be an advantage to Manitoba, as it would be a buoyant hope for the future of the country. Such a route would put Manitoba in a splendid position, so far as transportation is concerned, in competing in the markets of the world. It would place us in as good a position as the most favored countries among those now producing breadstuffs for export. The knowledge that such a route were feasible and would likely be opened in the future, would encourage those who are now here and assist in inducing others to come here.

In view of the vast importance of this matter, an effort should be made to induce the Dominion government to make a rough survey of the route, with a view to securing some reliable information upon the subject. If the Dominion would not make a preliminary survey of the route, the Manitoba government might be induced to send a practical engineer over the route, with the object of securing some official information in the matter. As the Winnipeg board of trade has already taken some action in regard to the granting of a charter to the company, it might be within the sphere of the board to ask for a survey of the route. The matter is one of such vast importance to Manitoba, that it would be exceedingly interesting, and indeed valuable, to know that the proposed enterprise could be carried out at a reasonable cost.

THE QUARANTINE REGULATIONS.

Further proof is continually coming up of the almost insuperable barrier to immigration from the south which is raised by the quarantine regulations. Speaking in the Manitoba Legislature the other day Capt. Johannason said that many settlers would come in from Dakota but for the live stock quarantine regulations.

Capt Johannason is a representative Icelandic and he referred in these remarks to the Icelandic colonies in Dakota. These Icelanders would make excellent settlers and it would be greatly to our interest to secure them, if they could be induced to come here. The Icelanders in Manitoba have gone into districts which were passed over by other settlers. They do not search over the country for the pick and choice of the land and they have not objected to taking hold of the bush or scrub districts, to locate their farms. They are a