

FARM AND HOME

We Welcome Practical Progressive Ideas

Trade Increases the wealth and glory of a country; but its real strength and stamina are to be looked for among the cultivators of the land—Lord Chatham.

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The Bread Basket of the Empire

It Is Found on the Rolling Prairies of Western Canada—By R. D. Colquette

ON the day that Laurier was returned to power in 1896, a pioneer, living at Port Vermilion, 350 miles north of Edmonton, wrote a letter to a Montreal family weekly, a paper which for many years was the chief source of my mental pabulum. Three or four months later it reached its destination and was published. Somehow or other it has clung to my memory more than anything else that appeared in that paper during all the years in which week by week I devoured its contents. It appeared that though the letter was so long in reaching civilization, several months more would elapse before the return mail would bring to its writer the news of how the election went. Having been very much "agin the government" there was, doubtless, great rejoicing in that distant household when the news of the political landslide finally reached it. But Canada's political history indicates that the intervals were already getting in some of their fine work on the new government before canoe and dog train had carried the knowledge of its existence to that hardy settler's home at Port Vermilion.

The writer of the letter was a bona fide settler. He had trekked away up there near the Arctic Circle not to dig gold, nor to trap black foxes, but to farm. He had passed by Manitoba, not then out of the homesteading stage; trekked through some of the finest parts of Alberta, and, turning his back on civilization had pushed his way for hundreds of miles into the wilderness with the object of settling on the land as a mystery. But he was well satisfied with the outcome of his venture. His letter fairly glowed with enthusiasm over his crops of wheat and oats and his garden. Later, I have since learned, a flour mill was taken in and a market for all he grew was supplied by the traders. His enthusiasm over the agricultural possibilities of the north country has increased with the passing of the years. So have his farming operations. Last year, from his farm at Port Vermilion, 2,000 bushels of wheat was transported by river boat and tote-team to the end of the steel, re-shipped by rail to Edmonton and thence carried by one of our supermarinary transcontinental to the head of the lakes and sold for export. A small matter, 2,000 bushels of wheat, but so is the dollar bill that seals the bargain that a carload of \$2000 worth will be delivered at the station, in due time.

One Corner of the Basket.

The farm of this hardy pioneer may remain for many years the northern outpost of the grain producing area of the Canadian West, but just south and west of it is the great Peace River district. At the Brandon Fair last month I talked with a man who spent two months last year in investigating that north country. I know him well and he is not the kind that is disposed to exaggerate. "There is," he said, "in what is known as the Peace River district, a block of land approximately 200 miles square, and of this about 40 per cent is open prairie. It would support a farming population of well on to a million. Ninety thousand square miles of good average farming land, without a railway except where the steel jobs up into one edge of it. That is the north-west corner of the bread basket of the Empire."

The south-west corner is down there in southern Alberta. Pretty hard hit with

drought in 1910, 1914, and again in 1918, but with several good and some bumper crops to its credit in the meantime. Besides, millions of acres of that land is irrigable and once they get the water on it old Jupiter Pluvius may loaf on the job all summer, and there will be full elevators and laboring grain trains in the fall. Then away east you may travel 800 miles, skirting a belt anywhere up to 350 miles from north to south. That broad belt is the floor of the bread basket. There are a few broken places in it. A few elevations, some of them dignified by the name of mountains, are found. Only one of these elevations is correctly named. It is south of Moose Jaw and is known as the Dirt Hills.

In the Wooded Country.

There are broken stretches along the sides of the streams where the wheels cut back into the prairie for a few miles. On the north and east sides there are wooded patches, not spread out in skirmishing order, but standing in close formation as you penetrate further. Here or there you may find a light, sandy patch, marking the delta of some glacial river retreated far enough to let the Nelson river drain the country into Hudson's Bay. But for the most part the prairie stretches away to the horizon, the soil is a heavy clay and you may travel for scores of miles without finding a gad as big as a whipstock. And in the soil, which in places may not vary appreciably from the bottom of the furrow to the bottom of the deepest well, there is not an element needed by the growing wheat crop that is not found in abundance.

Although the production of cereals from this "bread basket of the Empire" is not a tithe of what

it will be when they are fully developed, the yield exceeds that of all the other provinces of Canada combined. The adjoining table, which includes the lean year of 1914, shows the comparison.

This table shows that the prairies have produced, during the last four-year period, for which figures are available, 799,823,500 bushels more of the great bread-making cereal than all the rest of Canada. Of course it is recognized that in other food products the prairie provinces fall behind. However, they are turning their attention more and more to mixed farming. They stand well up in beef production. Local abattoirs cannot handle the hogs that are raised and every week car loads of live hogs are shipped through to eastern packing houses, even from points far north of Edmonton. Butter and cheese of unexcelled quality are also being made in excess of local demands and many car loads find their way each season to Vancouver in the west and Montreal and Toronto in the east.

Wheat and Flour Exports.

Figures are not available to show the amount of wheat and of flour from western wheat that is exported from Canada or used to make up the deficiency in other parts of the country, but the exports from Canada for the last four fiscal years is given in the report of the Board of Grain Commissioners as follows:—

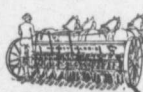
Fiscal year.	Wheat exports (bushels)	Flour exports (barrels)
1914	120,426,579	4,832,183
1915	71,913,385	4,952,327
1916	157,745,469	6,400,214
1917	189,545,846	7,425,723

The above figures do not, it must be remembered, refer to the crop years, which begin on September 1. For the crop year in which the 1917 wheat went forward the exports are estimated by the Canada Food Board to be about 145,000,000 bushels. A bushel of wheat will make 60 leaves of bread. A simple matter of arithmetic shows that nearly nine billion leaves would be accounted for by Canada's wheat exports alone, to say nothing of the flour sent over. Without the wheat from the prairies the war would now be over and the Kaiser the victor. Sufficient reason for the statement that so far as the issue of the struggle is concerned the western farmer is in the front line trenches.

Strategically Situated.

The western wheat fields are strategically situated for supplying the British market. The importance of this matter of proximity has been tremendously emphasized by the war. Submarine warfare has reduced the world's ocean-going tonnage so that ships cannot be spared for the longer routes. The Allies have, therefore, been almost entirely dependent on North America for outside supplies of foodstuffs, and although the United States were able, by strict conservation, to supply some 75,000,000 bushels from the 1917 wheat crop this was less than half the amount sent by Canada. A comparison of the length of the ship routes from the different wheat exporting countries shows how one ship on the North Atlantic route is worth two plying between Liverpool and the Argentine, and nearly four sailing to India or Australia. The distance from

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What Western Canada is Doing in Grain Production

COMPARISONS are not always odious. Sometimes they are illuminating and encouraging. The following table, by placing side by side the production of the prairie and the other provinces of Canada, shows the wonderful growth of western agriculture so far as all staple grains are concerned and the predominant position the prairies now hold in this line of agriculture.

YIELD OF PRINCIPAL CEREAL CROPS OF CANADA, 1914-1917.

Eastern Provinces and B. C.				
	Wheat	Oats	Barley	Flax
1914	20,322,000	162,235,000	16,666,000	92,200
1915	33,355,600	185,262,400	18,014,100	69,600
1916	20,467,000	96,295,000	9,251,000	47,300
1917	21,769,750	148,132,600	14,673,650	99,000
Tl. 4-yr. period	95,934,350	591,925,000	58,704,750	307,500
Prairie Provinces—				
1914	150,943,000	150,943,000	19,535,000	7,083,000
1915	242,046,000	334,840,600	35,317,200	10,559,000
1916	199,900,000	254,879,000	31,967,000	7,075,000
1917	211,953,100	254,877,200	40,384,100	5,835,900
Tl. 4-yr. period	885,759,100	995,439,800	127,203,300	30,552,900

Verily, Western Canada well deserves the designation of "The Bread Basket of the Empire." The prairies produce both the wheat and the substitutes.