PRICES OF STAPLES COMPARED

An enquiry for a specific purpose into the actual selling prices of staple commodities in the English market, developed such interesting results that we were led into a systematic comparison of prices with those of last year, which we believe will be considered to be of some value by our readers. A good deal of wild talk is allowed to find its way into some newspaper and magazine articles, which leads to generalization respecting the cost of living, certainly not warranted by facts. As a matter of fact, while most raw materials are dearer in London than in May 1912, food articles are inclined to be rather cheaper. Steel is no longer the "index" article apparently, though the price of jute is still indicative of the trend of raw textiles. We quote from reliable sources, and according to British units, in London:—

	May, 1912.			May, 1913.		
Textiles.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Jute, per ton	22	5	0	29	12	6
Flax, per ton	39	0	0	34	15	0
Hemp, per ton	22	5	0	33	10	0
Cotton, per lb.			6.28			6.60
Cotton yarn, per lb.			9½			10 1-16
Wool, N.S.W.			12¼			14¾
Silk, per lb.		11	3		10	10½
Metals:—						
Iron, Clev. No. 3, per ton ..	2	14	6	3	7	3
Steel Rails	6	0	0	6	15	0
Copper, per ton	69	12	6	68	7	6
Tin, per ton..	208	10	0	230	0	0
Lead, per ton	16	16	3	17	18	9
Foods:—						
Wheat, per qr.	1	17	10	1	11	8
Barley, per qr.	1	10	4	1	6	7
Oats, per qr.	1	2	9		19	3
Flour, per 280 lbs.	1	10	0	1	10	6
Beef, per 8 lbs., poor		3	10		3	10
Beef, per 8 lbs., prime		5	6		5	6
Mutton, per 8 lbs., prime ..		6	4		6	10
Potatoes, per ton	4	7	6	4	5	0
Rice, per cwt. (112 lbs.) ..		9	10½		9	0
Sugar, per cwt. (112 lbs.) ..		13	7¼		9	8½
Tea, Congou, per lb..			5¾			4¾
Tea, Congou, per lb., best ..			7¼			7¼
Coffee Santos, per cwt.	3	10	9	3	0	3

It will be remembered that these are actual wholesale prices at the world's financial centre, especially collated for our readers, and quoted in the usual selling units which mark the conservatism of British trade. They furnish a base for a comparison of the actual spending value of money, which has an undoubted bearing upon the condition of the money market, though we confess to finding a difficulty in defining that bearing with any sense of satisfaction. Broadly, we may fall back upon the elementary principle that when trade conditions and wages are good, prices are generally high, and that decreases in the values of the great staples of commerce usually mark the certain approach of times of greater depression in business. There is nothing in our list to cause immediate alarm to the cautious observer of trade prospects. Neither is there sufficient unanimity in the comparative state of the more important items to authorize optimistic opinions which might lead to speculations in futures on the chance of important upturns.

DIRECTORS' COMMISSIONS

It is difficult to see how the King's Bench Judges could have given a judgment exculpating R. C. Miller from the serious charges made against him. Most thoughtful men had, in fact, anticipated the decision rendered, which ordered that he should give a detailed account of how, as President of the Diamond Light and Heat Company he had expended $41,000, which appeared as "Sundries" in his books, or refund the money. That he is said to have declared that the money had been spent to obtain contracts from the late Dominion Government, while refusing to give particulars as to whom he had given it, was a charge dealt with at Ottawa, in connection with which he is now a prisoner of State in the Carleton County Gaol. That was an aspect of the matter which did not especially concern the Judges here. What they were solicitious of, was the right of shareholders of companies, as against the expenditure of their funds by their directors.

The question of the morality of laying out money in bribing Government officials to give assistance in obtaining contracts, did not arise either. A nice legal query might, however, be hung upon the point. Considering the expense, and the disability, which would threaten a company, should such bribery be discovered, the right of a director to make expenditures of that kind might well be questioned. Probably repudiation of such actions by any company would be sustained in a court of law, if the point could be brought squarely before it. We do not suppose that any legal authority could be discovered for punishing directors for the expenditure to gain business for it. That would make advertising a crime and reduce the duties and privileges of directors to a nullity. It was not for spending money in the hope of obtaining business, that judgment went against R. C. Miller. The point is important, and needs more emphasis than many appear to be inclined to give it.

Shareholders claimed before the Court, that the annual meetings that passed the accounts, in which these "Sundries" items appeared, were small and poorly attended, though surely that was their own and, unfortunately, a very common fault. Still a director who has the company's best welfare at heart, ought not to take advantage of the absent shareholders, and put through accounts which are not clear enough in detail to stand the scrutiny of each and every holder of shares in the company. Such appeared to be the reasoning of the judges, and most men will be glad of their decision. It should have a tendency to elevate the positions of directors, and to inculcate a high sense of the responsibility naturally attached to them. This is an exceedingly important thing, and has a widespreading application.

It is understood that further appeal is to be made to the Supreme Court, and on that account we refrain from further comment upon the case, which may still be considered to be sub judice. Most shareholders will be glad to have the whole subject of directors rights, liabilities and duties thoroughly cleared up. The decision of the Supreme Court Judges on this Miller case will perhaps be a step towards that end.