

Northwest Letter.

THERE is nothing talked of here at the present time but the grain blockade. Every man you meet has some remarks to make regarding the situation, and generally winds up with the query, "When do you think there will be a change?" The matter is becoming monotonous, and further discussion of the question seems only to be dealing in words which have already been oft-repeated. Still the grain blockade is a most momentous matter to the West. Its influence has permeated every line of business. In a country so largely depending upon agriculture as Western Canada, the stoppage of grain shipping must of necessity prove as a break upon the wheels of commerce, and it has been felt here more or less keenly in every line of business. Some time ago the Winnipeg Board of Trade appointed a committee to investigate the situation. Complaints were pouring in from country towns all over the Province to the effect that trade was at a stand-still, owing to the inability of the C. P. R. to move out the grain. Country merchants reported to wholesalers that they could not meet their payments, as the elevators and warehouses were all blocked, and farmers could not market their grain, consequently they could not raise the money. Many went on to describe the situation of affairs, to the effect that at most of the stations, farmers had been obliged to pile their grain in bags outside, storage being full and no cars to take the grain away. These reports, together with the statements of grain dealers, to the effect that they were unable to obtain anything like the number of cars required, led to the appointment of the committee by the Board of Trade. This committee has obtained a great mass of evidence, directly from representative farmers, merchants, and grain dealers, which has enabled them to present a very full report as to the state of affairs and the loss to the Province from the blockade. The committee has reported to the effect that with one or two exceptions, the storage capacity all over the country is full up, and that cars are not supplied to relieve the jam to any extent, on an average not over one car in five wanted being supplied. Farmers who have come a long distance with grain, have piled it up in sacks outside, rather than haul it home again, at some points as much as 15,000 bushels being thus piled up. Farmers who have had grain outside in this way, after repeated trips to the railway points to sell it, have often at last been obliged to sell it at a very low price, as dealers would not pay a market value when there was no prospect of being able to ship out for perhaps many weeks. At some points buyers withdrew from the markets entirely, and at others, prices were very materially reduced, on account of the inability to ship out the grain. This state of things naturally checked deliveries, and compelled farmers to hold their grain, the result being a very serious injury to business all around. It is feared that this inability to market the grain in the winter season, will interfere to curtail the acreage sown next spring, as farmers (many of whom have no facilities for storing their grain) will be obliged to haul the grain to market in the spring, when they should be doing their seeding and other spring work. Grain dealers are suffering very severely, on account of being obliged to carry large stocks of grain, which they cannot move, and some threaten to withdraw from business here entirely unless there is a prospect of a change soon. They are unable to accept orders unless for very remote future delivery. Some shipments have been on the way between here and Ontario points for about two months, and yet no warehouse receipts are to hand. On this account drafts have to be renewed, and many orders are being cancelled. These include shipments of both grain and flour. The result of all this is a financial stringency which has not been equaled in the history of the country, and which exceeds in acuteness the closest times following the collapse of the "boom." Large quantities of flour are also locked up here for lack of cars, and altogether there probably never existed in any country such a complete blockade of railway traffic as this Province has suffered from for months past, for it must be borne in mind that the block has existed since the first rush of grain to market early last fall, though perhaps not felt so keenly as more recently. A wholesale dealer who has just arrived from Ontario, stated to your correspondent that some of the mills in that Province were obliged to close down for want of flour, whilst at the same time almost every siding between here and North Bay is full of loaded wheat cars, which the company has not the engines to move. Telegrams and letters from Ontario millers, to the effect that they would be obliged to close down, have also been received by grain dealers here. At the present time there ap-

pears to be little hope for early relief, and many believe that not until navigation opens on the lakes, will the railway be able to move the grain out fast enough to afford any great relief from the present stagnation.

There is another feature of the case which is somewhat alarming. This is, that an early spell of mild weather would cause an immense loss to the country. A soft spell of weather is liable to occur at any time now, and it would mean damage or destruction to the many thousands of bushels of wheat piled up in sacks at the railway stations all over the country. But besides this there is a great quantity of grain in the hands of farmers, not yet moved, which would be damaged or destroyed by soft weather. A great many of the farmers, in some districts not over one-fifth, have proper storage facilities for protecting their grain. The custom is to simply cover the grain with straw when threshed. When marketed in the winter it received no harm from this treatment, but as soon as soft weather sets in it is in great danger from moisture. As owing to the car shortage farmers have not been able to dispose of their grain, a great deal remains in this shape and liable to early destruction.

There has been a good deal of speculation as to the quantity of wheat from the crop of 1887 marketed to date, but it is difficult to arrive at accurate figures. Wheat going through all rail is inspected at Winnipeg, but a large percentage of lake shipments pass Winnipeg without inspection. The inspectors returns here therefore do not give a correct idea of the exports. Then the figures of wheat inspected at Port Arthur again include some grain that was previously inspected at Winnipeg. The only way to arrive at the correct figures would be to get the tonnage returns of the C.P.R., but these are inaccessible to the public. The following figures are therefore but an approximation:

	Bushels.
Inspected at Winnipeg to March 1st	2,700,000
" " Port Arthur to March 1st	3,500,000
Ground into flour	500,000
Total	6,700,000

What portion of the wheat inspected at Winnipeg has been re-inspected at Port Arthur, it is hard to determine. It is believed, however, that a very large portion has been so re-inspected. It would therefore be safe to reduce the amount inspected at Winnipeg by one half, or say to 1,200,000 bushels. This would leave a total of 5,500,000 bushels of wheat shipped out of the Province and ground into flour. This is believed to be a liberal estimate. The figures of inspection are estimated for the last few days. Of the wheat ground into flour, a large portion remains in the country owing to the car shortage, and as outside orders cannot be accepted for anything but very long dates ahead, some of the mills have closed down. The large Ogilvie mill in Winnipeg is among the number obliged to close, on account of the block in traffic. It is stated that flour shipped nearly two months ago, has not yet arrived at its destination in Eastern Canada. In many districts through the province, grain dealers say not over one half the wheat has yet been marketed.

I notice the Toronto grain dealers and millers have not taken kindly to the samples of Russian wheat submitted for their inspection. The Winnipeg Board of Grain Examiners have since examined a number of samples of Russian wheat, and their report agrees with that of the Toronto committee. The Ladoga variety they declare to be the best, though not nearly equal to Red Fyfe. The Kaubauka variety was said to be simply "goose" wheat, well known in Ontario, and the Saxona variety was declared to be an inferior soft spring wheat. These last two varieties have been sold here to quite an extent for seed, at fancy prices, and a good many have consequently been bitten. The wheat was sold as high as \$3 per bushel. The grain examiners have strongly recommended perseverance in growing only Red Fyfe wheat.

The Toronto *Mail* has been investigating the relative prices of wheat in northern Minnesota and Dakota, in comparison with prices in Manitoba, to the great disadvantage our Province. It is a fact, as the *Mail* represents, that prices to the south of the boundary have been from six to ten cents higher than in Manitoba. This has been known here for some time past. The only excuse that can be offered is that Manitoba is laboring under a temporary disadvantage, which it is hoped will be removed in a short time.

The difficulty with the customs continues. The department continues to refuse to sanction the shipment of wheat from Emerson via the Northern Pacific branch, which is completed to the boundary at that point, alleging as a reason that the wheat would be loaded in the cars in the United States. It has been pointed out that

a few years ago wheat was freely exported from Manitoba, loaded into cars in the United States, and shipped through to Ontario in bond. At that time it was shipped by the Red River and loaded into cars many miles from the boundary, whereas now the railway runs right to the boundary. Notwithstanding this fact, and also the grain blockade, the customs authorities refuse to recognize shipments via the Northern Pacific.

A large increase in the elevator capacity of the country will likely be made next season, arrangements having already been made for the erection of a number of elevators in the spring. There are some good openings for such investments in Manitoba at present, though some points are already well supplied with grain storage.

IMPROVEMENTS IN OATMEAL MILLING.

MR. J. P. HEPBURN, of Liverpool, has patented an improved apparatus for reducing oats or other grain into a fragmentary condition generally known as pin-head meal, by the action of knives or cutters.

The patentee says:—In carrying out my invention, I construct a grain chamber of cylindrical or other form which may be fixed in position by suitable framing, and closed on all sides. The upper end of this chamber is preferably removable and is provided with a feed spout or hopper through which the grain is fed; the lower end is perforated with a number of holes of sufficient size to admit easily the passage lengthwise of a kernel of oats or other grain to be cut. The holes may if desired be countersunk on the upper side so that the grain more readily enter the holes. In order that the grain when entering through the feed spout or hopper, may be spread equally over the bottom of the grain chamber, I provide if necessary a spreader provided with arms which is fixed to a spindle capable of being made to revolve. This spreader is fixed inside the grain chambers, and its arms are so placed that the grain is equally distributed over the whole of its lower or perforated surface. The spreader may have its bearings formed in the top of the grain chamber or in other suitable manner.

The underside of the lower end of the grain chamber is made with a true and smooth surface, and on its face are made to revolve a series of steel blades placed radially and fastened in a horizontal position, and at a little distance apart, to a central flange or boss. They are preferably made sufficiently long to pass under—during their rotation—all the perforations, and their ends may be secured if desired to an annular ring or frame. Under and partly covering the horizontal spaces between the blades I place gauge plates revolving with the blades and intended to arrest the grains as they emerge through the perforations in the grain chamber, until they are cut off by the blades. The fragments escape through a space between the knife edge of the blade, and the edge of its adjacent gauge plate. It will be obvious that as the plates are placed radially, the space between each of them will be considerably greater at their outer than at their inner ends, and therefore in order to increase the rapidity with which the grain is reduced, I may, if desired, provide additional blades which are secured to the annular ring before mentioned, or in other suitable manner, the gauge plates being of course shaped accordingly.

Between the blades and gauge plates, I may place if desired a series of arms or fan blades which are made of such a shape, that they assist in producing an air current through the perforations by which the grain passes to the knife blades. Further, these blades, if provided, may also be used to carry the reduced grain or pin-head meal to the discharge spout. The knife blades, gauge plates and fan blades are preferably made to revolve at a considerable speed on the same spindle or shaft, though other means may be adopted if desired. This shaft is placed in a vertical position, and may be conveniently provided with bearings in the main frame of the apparatus. It may be driven by a pulley fitted to it, or by other approved means. The spreader spindle may conveniently be driven by this shaft, but as I prefer that the spreader should revolve at a slower speed than the knife blades, I provide a counter shaft for reducing the speed. I do not however limit myself to the use of the countershaft, other means being equally suitable.

I arrange the framing of the apparatus, so that the grain chamber may be easily removed for cleaning, and the blades and gauge plates for sharpening or repair.

It is obvious that in place of using rotating blades, I may cause them to reciprocate and in this case, the grain chamber is preferably made square or rectangular.

Wm. Kennedy & Sons, Owen Sound, Ont., have just shipped two fine Leffel water wheels for Mr. Henry Green, Okhampton, England, at paying rates.