

How Western Farmers Found Their Voice

Being a Short History of the Grain Growers' Guide and the Part it has Played in the Farmers' Movement

BY GEORGE F. CHIPMAN.

THE first number of The Grain Growers' Guide was published in June, 1908. Consequently, The Guide is ten years old. The writer has been associated with The Guide for the past nine years and has been in intimate touch with the work of the publication during that period.

What is known as the Grain Growers' Movement was started in 1901 as a protest against the vicious practices and abuses in the grain trade. The movement made steady growth and progress. It received comparatively little publicity from the press of the country and even less sympathetic support. Outside of the Farmers' Tribune the organized farmers had few journalistic friends. The grain growers were misrepresented by the politicians, bullied by the elevator combine, and, as far as possible, ignored by the federal government. It rapidly became apparent to the leaders in the Grain Growers' Movement that they must have a journal owned and published by the organized farmers. In no other way was it possible to educate their members, unite their forces and fight their battles against misrepresentation and falsehood. After long consideration it was decided to launch a paper of their own. E. A. Partridge, the war hero of the Grain Growers' Movement, was selected as editor, and under his direction the first issue of The Grain Growers' Guide appeared in June, 1908. The Guide was started as a monthly publication. The aim and object was set forth in the first issue by Mr. Partridge as follows:—

The purpose of The Guide's publication is to aid in the discussion of the economic and social problems which confront us, to assist in unifying opinion among our farmers and other workers as to what it is necessary to do in order that they and we may come to enjoy to the full the fruits of our labors, and, having thus united us in opinion, to serve as a trumpet in marshalling our forces

for the accomplishing of whatever has been decided is best to be done.

Starting the Paper.

The new paper was welcomed by the rank and file of the grain growers with the utmost approval. But Mr. Partridge, at that time the outstanding leader in the Grain Growers' Movement, was too actively engaged otherwise to have time for conducting The Guide. As a result, the July issue of the paper was never published and The Guide very nearly died in its infancy. However, the committee in charge sent out an S.O.S. call to Roderick McKenzie, secretary of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, then on his farm at Brandon. He was conscripted and placed in editorial harness. Without any previous journalistic training Mr. McKenzie, nevertheless, had been for years in the Grain Growers' Movement and had a wide knowledge of the evils from which the grain growers were suffering. He put on the editorial harness and buckled down to work in earnest and The Guide continued to appear regularly each month and carry its message and its challenge to the grain growers of the prairie provinces. Mr. McKenzie continued as editor for three years, until the work of the Manitoba association became so heavy as to require his entire attention.

At the very beginning The Grain Growers' Guide was published as the official organ of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, and shortly after was adopted as the official organ of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association and the United Farmers of Alberta. Each of these associations has continued to employ The Guide as its official organ from the beginning until the present time.

Elevator Combine Bested.

From the very outset The Guide justified its existence and proved to be an important factor in the development of the whole grain growers' organiza-

tion in all its wide ramifications. The first real struggle in which The Guide participated was in the bitter fight between the Grain Growers and what was known as the elevator combine. In the early days the farmers of the West were plundered most shamefully by the elevator interests who enjoyed an absolute monopoly of the grain trade. Shortly after the publication of The Guide the elevator combine realized there was a new champion in the field. The Grain Growers' Grain Company had been in operation for two years and was handling a steadily increasing portion of the farmer's grain. Some of the elevator interests developed a scheme to undermine and, if possible, destroy the farmers' company, and create suspicion among the farmers against their own leaders.

In order to do this they hired a press agent who posed as a financial broker. He wrote letters designed to create suspicion and distrust and they were published over the name "Observer," and paid for as advertisements in a number of farm journals and other newspapers circulating among the Western grain growers. The Guide immediately challenged these letters and the part played by these publications in publishing them without giving the true name of the author. The indignation among the grain growers was widespread and subscriptions to these journals were cancelled in such large numbers that they refused any longer to publish the "Observer" letters. Thus, in three weeks the scheme of the elevator interests was frustrated. A few months later The Guide had the satisfaction of publishing the whole inside story, together with the photographs of the men who employed Mr. Observer and the salary day onward, the press of Western Canada had a more wholesome respect than even for the Grain Growers' organizations. Had it not been for The Grain Growers' Guide in that crisis, it

is quite possible the Grain Growers might have been divided amongst themselves and their organization broken.

The next move in the fight between the Grain Growers and the elevator interests was the action of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange in cancelling the one cent commission rule. The design undoubtedly was to handle grain through the elevators at a small commission or at no commission at all in order to draw the farmers away from the support of their own company. Here again The Guide was able to expose the scheme to the Grain Growers all over the three provinces. The result was that they supported their own company more strongly than ever, and after one year's experience the Grain Exchange restored the commission rule and has never since removed it. By this time the organized grain trade came also to have very considerable respect for the Grain Growers' Movement and to recognize the farmers' company as a real and permanent feature in the grain trade. This was another case where The Guide justified its existence in the support of the farmers' organizations.

The Siege of Ottawa.

It was only made possible through having their own paper that the Grain Growers of the West were able to force the tariff question into the field of federal politics. In the summer of 1910, Sir Wilfrid Laurier was preparing to appeal to the country in a general election. He mapped out a tour of the prairie provinces which he had not visited since he had been premier. It was planned as a triumphal march in which the oratory and the personality of the Canadian prime minister would win the support of the western voters. The leaders of the Grain Growers' Movement, however, decided it was a good opportunity to tell Sir Wilfrid Laurier the grievances of the West. They made their plans, and it

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