

FOOD SUPPLY TO BRITAIN.

The question of an adequate food supply for the United Kingdom in time of war is one which has attracted attention for a long time. It has been the theme of British writers and speakers, who have contended with much force that the greatest menace to the Old Country lay in the circumstance that enemies' fleets might in case of war interfere with the supply of foodstuffs from abroad necessary to support the population of the British Islands. At the present moment a Royal Commission is sitting in England to enquire into food supply in time of war, which was appointed by Government at the request of an association formed to look into the food supply question. This association embraces many prominent names, and its officers consist of the Duke of Sutherland, Lord Strathcona, Alfred Emmott, M.P., Lord Aldenham, Mr. Henry McNeil, M. J. E. Gregory, and Capt. Stewart L. Murray.

In connection with this matter, a proposal, or rather series of proposals, is made by Mr. Marshall Stevens, first manager of the Manchester Ship Canal. He desires to increase the quantity of wheat held in the United Kingdom, and to that end would erect warehouses for its storage. "I am of opinion," he says, "that if storage rent free were provided in this country close to the point of consumption, and consequently in the best position for making sales, that a large quantity of the grain now held for sale in other countries would be attracted here a considerable time before it is required for consumption." And thereupon he proposes to offer free storage. One point where he would store at least 4,000,000 bushels is Manchester. His scheme is thus described by himself, as submitted for their approval to grain dealers in Chicago, Boston, and Montreal, respectively:

I am proposing to the Royal Commission that my company should erect [at Trafford Park, on the Manchester Ship Canal] a fireproof grain storage of reinforced concrete on a large scale, the first installation to have a storage capacity for 500,000 quarters of wheat.

The Government to arrange with us to cover the rent charges by way of interest upon the capital expended, we taking our risk in respect of the capital of and expenses in connection with the operating plant.

The proposition is to offer firms like yourselves *rent free* storage of grain, however long your consignments may remain in stock, and in connection therewith to issue warrants for grain received and graded which would be negotiable by the English banks.

The operating costs (which would be limited to those ordinarily paid over here) would be receivable from the purchasers of your grain, so that they would not be in a worse position than they are now when they purchase parcels to arrive.

The advantages which would accrue to yourselves would be that you would be able to take advantage of cheap freights and other economic conditions, and thus send forward your grain to England with the knowledge that you could not be caught with charges as you would almost certainly be if you now sent on to consignment.

Two of the grain dealing firms in America replied favoring the proposal and opining that the scheme would accomplish its object, but the Montreal firm demurred. Mr. Stevens has essayed to make out for the satisfaction of the Royal Commission a *prima facie* case in respect to each of the following three points:

1. That the demand for grain in this country [Britain] is so constant that merchants would ship upon consignment here if relieved of any additional expense by doing so.

2. That merchants and their customers would gain advantages by holding stocks in this country instead of elsewhere.

3. That no additional charges would be incurred either by the merchant or the miller than those now incurred when deliveries are effected direct ex-ship to miller.

He submits arguments and statistics designed to make these points. In the course of his lengthy paper he states that "the approximate requirement by the population of the United Kingdom of imported wheat for two months is 32,000,000 bushels." This means 192,000,000 bushels a year. Further, that the yearly imports equal the whole yearly export of the United States, are four times as much as the shipments of Argentina, and ten times as much as the total shipments of Canada. Further arguments for which we have not room are addressed to merchants and millers. As to the probable exporters of grain in Canada, in case his scheme takes actual form and the stores are built:

It would be explained to producers in Canada and Argentina that if they like to hold their grain it can be taken for them from their local railway depot, brought over by rail and steamer to the elevator without their outlaying one penny, and a negotiable warrant given to them upon which they can obtain advances.

As already stated by the promoter, the British Government is to bear the expense of storage in these warehouses, whose proprietors make their profit, if any, out of handling the grain inward and outward. In order the better to understand what can be done with respect to Canadian wheat in such a scheme, Mr. Stevens is now in our Northwest, but expects to be able to report more definitely to the Royal Commission early in October. His views in the matter of increasing the storage food supply of the United Kingdom are bold, and the scheme he propounds, in some respects, plausible. If the principle be adopted, warehouses by the score could be erected at other points than Manchester, which has been first chosen, we are told, because it is the centre of the most densely populated part of the United Kingdom, eight millions of industrial workers. One portion of Mr. Stevens' figures has struck us forcibly. It is the statement of Mr. George Johnson, statistician for the Dominion, that in 1903 the quantity of Canadian wheat exported to all countries was 38,760,000 bushels. Of this there was exported direct from Canada to the United Kingdom 17,688,000 bushels, and exported in bond through United States ports 15,776,000 bushels. It is probably new to most people that so large a part of Canada's export wheat goes abroad through United States channels.

 THE LUMBER TRADE.

Very little change has taken place in the situation of the lumber market, so far as Ontario and Quebec are concerned, since last report. Prices continue steady, though this is a feature which has not become more noticeable during the past few weeks, the settlement in the building trades perhaps having been discounted already. In New Brunswick there