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Regulation of the Grain Trade

The proper regulation of the handling and transportation of grain in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories has given rise to great difficulty during the last seven years. In the early history of the business, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, foreseeing the large increase in grain production, endeavored to encourage the construction of standard elevators, and inaugurated a system which practically gave grain buyers and elevator owners an undue and injurious monopoly of the business. About 1898 serious trouble arose through the increase in the production of wheat. Bills were introduced in the House of Commons by Dr. J. M. for the purpose of dealing with the question. The proposition was, in the first place, simply to remove restrictions upon the construction of flat warehouses. Much discussion took place upon this proposition, and it was investigated to some extent by a special committee of the House of Commons. The result of the hearing before this committee was to show that the question was little understood, and great differences of opinion existed in regard to the facts. The Government, and particularly Mr. Sifton, were violently attacked for not immediately supporting this bill. The view entertained by Mr. Sifton was expressed by him at various discussions of the subject which took place at that time. His view was that the subject was not understood, and required to be thoroughly investigated before effective action could be taken. With a view to carrying out this idea a royal commission was appointed in 1899. The commission consisted of three practical farmers: Mr. W. F. Sirrett, of Neepawa; Mr. William Lothian, of Pipestone, and Mr. Charles Castle, of Foxton, with Judge Senkler, of St. Catherines, as chairman. The commission made a complete investigation of the whole subject and presented a report for the information of the Government and Parliament. Upon this report a bill was introduced and became law in the year 1900. The object of the bill was to provide for the complete regulation of the grain trade in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories. It provided a system of regulation under which all warehouses and elevators were required to take out licenses and to furnish exact returns, when required, to a commissioner appointed by the Government. Under the system adopted every precaution was taken against frauds being perpetrated against the producers of grain, and a special method was provided for investigating any complaints which might be made.