

NEW FACTS ON THE INCREASED COST OF LIVING.

IN a surprising number of cases the retail prices of household necessities in New York to-day are comparable to the wholesale prices in London. While scores of more or less contradictory theories are being advanced to account for the high cost of living, here at least is a solid ground of comparison.

The prices of the familiar food products in London come as a surprise to the New York housekeeper. In no single instance are the current London prices higher than in New York. Quite apart from the general interest of such comparison, the figures may serve to throw a new light on the causes behind this upward movement.

The prices of living supplies have been obtained within a few days of one another in the two cities. The English figures are those obtained in a painstaking investigation by Special Agent Henry Studnicka, for the Weekly Consular and Trade Report of the Department of Commerce and Labor, and may be accepted as official. The prices were obtained in the three most prominent laboring sections of the City of London.

In each district some ten or fifteen stores were visited and the general average price computed. The prices, therefore, do not apply to the fashionable districts of London, where the scale is, of course, somewhat higher. In obtaining a parallel in New York many stores were visited on the avenues on both the east and west sides. The market quotations of food prices were also considered, as well as the special list of prices advertised from time to time by large stores and syndicates of grocery stores, and a general average struck. Incidentally, the influence of the trading stamp or premium system has been disregarded.

The retail prices of meat in the two cities are surprisingly far apart. If you were in London to-day, you would find the price of beef ranging from 16 to 20 cents per pound, and this rate varies little from week to week. In New York this week porterhouse steak is selling at 30 cents a pound, sirloin at 26, round steak at 22, and roasts at 24 cents, or an average of almost exactly 25 cents per pound.

These prices, as every housekeeper will understand, are remarkably uniform throughout the city. It is possible to buy meat more cheaply, but it will be of another grade.

The cheaper grades of meat show a similar contrast in price. In London the so-called frozen beef is selling for from 10 to 14 cents a pound. The less desirable cuts corresponding to the meat consumed in the working districts of London cost in New York to-day from 15 to 20 cents a pound. The price of bacon in London again ranges from 16 to 24 cents, while in New York the same grade brings from 25 to 30 cents a pound.

For some time bacon has ceased, in New York at least, to be a poor man's meat, and is as costly as the higher

Table of Comparative Prices.

	London. Cents.	New York. Cents.		London. Cents.	New York. Cents.
Apples, 1 lb.....	4 to 6	10	Milk, 1 pint.....	4	4 to 5
Bread, 1 lb.....	4	5	Oatmeal, 1 lb.....	4 to 6	5 to 10
Butter, 1 lb.....	24 to 32	30 to 35	Onions, 1 lb.....	2	4
Cheese, 1 lb.....	14 to 16	18 to 22	Oranges, 1 doz....	10 to 12	18 to 50
Cocoa, 1 lb.....	16 to 36	25 to 50	Potatoes, 1 lb.....	1 to 2	3 to 4
Coffee, 1 lb.....	16 to 30	20 to 50	Prunes, 1 lb.....	8 to 12	10 to 18
Currants, 1 lb....	4 to 8	8 to 12	Raisins, 1 lb.....	6 to 10	10 to 16
Eggs, 12 to 16....	25	6 to 12	Rice, 1 lb.....	4	6
Godfish, 1 lb.....	8 to 12	15 to 20	Syrup, 1 lb.....	6	10
Fish, (general) 1 lb.	4 to 12	10 to 25	Sugar, white, 1 lb..	6	6
Flour, 3 lbs.....	9 to 10	12	Sugar, yel'w, 1 lb..	4	5
Meats:			Tapioca, 1 lb.....	8	10
Bacon, 1 lb.....	16 to 24	25 to 30	Tea, 1 lb.....	20 to 60	30 to 1.50
Beef, 1 lb.....	16 to 20	22 to 30	Tomatoes, 1 lb....	8	12
Pork, 1 lb.....	12 to 16	20 to 24			

grades of beef. It is the same with pork chops. In London the average price in the working districts is from 12 to 16 cents a pound for pork steak and ribs. The latest quotation in New York is 24 cents a pound. The London housewife suddenly set down in New York would doubtless consider these quotations famine prices.

The price of meat is peculiarly significant, since it is from America that London draws its supply. The economists have offered several plausible theories to account for this mounting cost of meats. They point out that in the early days the cattle growers enjoyed unlimited ranges for pasturing their cattle. Food cost very little, for the immense herds, in the care of a few cowboys, were merely turned loose to roam far and wide. When one range was exhausted the herds simply moved further west. The supply seemed inexhaustible.

Later, as the West became more populous, these ranges were greatly reduced. It has even become necessary to feed the cattle, an expensive operation. It is said that the cost of feeding the herds has increased two or three times over in the last twenty years, and hence the inevitable increase in the cost of beef.

It has been argued, therefore, that, since the western prairies have disappeared, with their practically unlimited ranges, the day of cheap meat has passed never to return. We must look, it is said, to South America, to the immense undeveloped areas of Argentina for relief. It is strenuously denied by many of these economists that the tariff has anything to do with the situation.

The great firms handling meat, again argue, with impressive array of figures, that the high prices are the result simply of the working of the law of supply and demand, and that neither the packers nor the middle men have caused the increase.

It is at least an interesting fact, in view of these arguments, that in London, where meat is imported from the United States and Argentina, the prices are 25 per cent. or more cheaper than in New York. Special care has been taken in comparing the cost of bread in the two cities,

More than a score of the large bakeries of London were visited, and the bread was carefully examined. The average cost of bread in London is 4 cents a pound. In New York and other American cities the same grade of bread costs 5 cents a pound. The penny may seem trifling, but it means an increase of 25 per cent. in the cost of the great food staple.

In the working districts of London a four-pound loaf is sold for 12 cents, which may be compared to the second day's stale bread which wholesale bakers in New York and other American cities sell for 2½ cents.

The argument that the high price of meat is due to the building up of the West is also advanced in the case of wheat. The cost of raising wheat, it is said, has steadily increased, because the land is higher, and the cost of labor has gone up and continues to rise. The manufacturers again deny that they make any undue profit. In this 25 per cent. increase in the cost of the staff of life there may be found food for thought.

There are still other food supplies for which England must look to America,

which show the same surprising divergence in price. The cheese consumed in London is largely supplied from the United States and Canada. An interesting sidelight on the effect of the tariff and the cost of transatlantic transportation is afforded by such a comparison.

In London cheese is selling for 14 to 16 cents, while in New York it brings from 18 to 22 cents. Dairy butter, again, is selling in London for from 24 to 32 cents a pound, and in New York for from 30 to 35 cents. Apples, largely imported from the United States, are selling for from 4 to 6 cents a pound, while the same grades are bringing 10 cents a pound in New York.

It is interesting to note in this connection that in England the question of the middleman's profits is even a more lively issue than in America. There has been an immense amount of discussion on this subject and considerable bitterness. It is argued that the grower gets more than his share of the profits, and that the middleman is robbing the consumer. The criticism is the more interesting since it arises in a country where the trust or the manipulator of prices has admittedly less influence than in the United States.

So acute has this problem become in many sections of England that the consumers have organized to produce and supply the staples of life at a reasonable cost.

Many of these experiments have been successful, and whole communities are able to purchase the necessities of life at a considerable reduction below the current market prices, which in turn seem so reasonable to New Yorkers. These co-operative enterprises lease the land, cultivate it, maintain distributing stations or stores in the cities, and supply food and manufactured products at a substantially reduced price.

The prices to which many Londoners object are in turn 25 per cent.—sometimes

more—below the current New York quotations. Eggs are selling in London to-day from twelve to sixteen for 24 cents. In New York one can only buy from six to twelve eggs for a quarter with any reasonable degree of safety.

Potatoes, which cost in London 1 or 2 cents a pound, are selling in New York for from 3 to 4 cents. Onions, which bring 2 cents a pound in London, are worth twice as much at home. Tomatoes are selling in London for 8 cents a pound, and in New York for 12 cents. The grade of flour which costs 9 cents for three and a half pounds in London, costs 12 cents in New York.

The price of fish in London continues far below that in New York. Both cities are near the sea, so that some other factor than the legitimate cost for transportation must be found to account for the contrast. Even in the case of fish which must be carried for great distances the same variations as to prices seem to obtain. Codfish, for instance, is selling in London for from 8 to 12 cents a pound, and in New York for from 15 to 20 cents. The average price of fish in London runs from 4 to 12 cents a pound. No New York housewife need be told that it is impossible to buy fish for less than 10 cents a pound, while the more desirable fish cost 20 or even 25 cents a pound. Since the markets of both cities are supplied at such short range here is a problem for the economist.

Both cities again would seem to be on an equal footing as regards the supply of tea and coffee. Geographically, at least, there would seem to be little to choose between them. Both cities import these staples from a considerable distance, using the common highway of the seas. In London the price of tea varies at present from 20 to 60 cents a pound. The cheaper grades of tea in New York bring 30 cents a pound, an advance of 50 per cent. over the London price, while