

General Statement of, and Remarks upon the Railroad Interests of Western Canada.



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THAT a judiciously chosen line of Railroad from East to West across the Canadian Peninsula must be a profitable investment, has been shewn in the Prospectus of this Company, dated Toronto, August 4th, 1845. The amount of traffic passing round it may be gathered from the number of Steam and Sailing Vessels plying out of Buffalo, but from Montreal, Ogdensburgh, Kingston, Oswego, and Toronto; conveying the surplus population of Europe and the New England States of America, together with their manufactures and the teas, sugars, spices, tobacco, and other productions of the warmer climates, through these waters, to the countries bordering on the Upper Lakes. The tract of country thus supplied, extends from the new British settlement of Owen's Sound on the East, and the Mining and Fishing establishments on Lake Superior on the North, to the American States bordering on Lake Michigan and its tributaries, even to the waters of the Mississippi, on the West and South; and its population, which in 1840 was 562,500, now amounts to about 1,599,600. The productions of these fertile regions, which include the richest mineral Districts of Northern America, are conveyed through the same route by the returning vessels, forming a stream of traffic, the commerce of which is estimated at above £25,000,000 Sterling; and employs above 100 steam and 500 sailing vessels, and above 6000 men.—(Appendix 1.) By far the larger portion of this traffic is now carried through the St. Clair past Detroit into Lake Huron, (Appendix 2), and would necessarily be thrown upon a Railroad carried across the Peninsula, by the tediousness of the Welland Canal, the uncertainty and dangers attending the navigation of Lake Erie, (Appendix 3); and the difficulties of the St. Clair, over the Shallows of which the larger vessels can only pass during daylight, being obliged to lighten their cargoes except when the waters are unusually high. The continued increase of this traffic is insured by the immense extent and fertility of the country to be supplied by it.

In the Prospectus mentioned above, and published nearly a year ago, this Board gave a decided opinion in favor of Sarnia, on the Southern extremity of Lake Huron, as the best Western terminus. Since then, material changes respecting both Foreign and Domestic traffic have taken place, and the question of a Union with the Great Western Railroad Company in Canada has arisen, for the easy accomplishment of which, the Act which has just received the Royal Assent, provides. It therefore becomes necessary to reconsider this opinion.

The Foreign traffic, which is now carried by the one route through Lake Erie, consists nevertheless of two distinct branches; the objects and interests of which are perfectly distinct. The one points to the connexion of the Eastern American Railroad, terminating at Buffalo, with the Western one commencing at Detroit; and necessarily seeking a more Southern route. The other points to the connexion of the navigation of Lake Ontario with that of Lake Huron, requiring a more Northern route, with good harbours at either termination.

Of these two objects, the connexion of Lakes Ontario and Huron is not only the most important now; but with all its vast increase, the trade runs no probable risk of being ever diverted to other channels. But with respect to the connexion of the two American Railroads no such increase can be expected, since the more Southern part of the trade now passing through Buffalo will necessarily be more and more diverted from Detroit, as the improvements now in progress are completed. A terminus at Windsor has for its object solely the connexion of these two lines. To include the other and more important object, the Western Terminus must be North of the St. Clair. The choice lying between Sarnia and Goderich.

Goderich possesses a tolerably good harbour, particularly for Steamers and Propellers; is situated higher up than Sarnia on Lake Huron, and at a shorter distance from Toronto—and for all purposes of Summer trade is most valuable. But it has the disadvantage of being situated on the Lee shore of the Lake, and all Foreign traffic must cease for above five months of the year.

Sarnia is situated at the commencement of Lake Huron, so that every vessel entering that Lake must pass through its harbour; and in consequence of the difficulty of the navigation of the St. Clair, it possesses many advantages similar to those of Buffalo on Lake Erie. Its harbour is both exceedingly good and easy of access, the Lake is always open to it, and it lies under the weather shore of Lake Huron—advantages as a Port for the Lake trade which more than compensate for the longer navigation, and its greater distance from Toronto. (Appendix 4.) At the same time the object of establishing a communication with the Detroit Railroad is not relinquished, as a road from that place to Port Huron, immediately opposite may be considered the certain consequence of one made to Sarnia, a Charter for which was obtained from the Michigan Legislature last year.

The present want of roads on the American side to this point, (Port Huron opposite Sarnia), has been urged as an objection to Sarnia as a terminus, as if it proved not only a want of business but of settlement there. This is no more the case in that part of the country, than in any other part of Western America. (Appendix 5.) Indeed the history of the "Central Railroad" (that West from Detroit) proves the importance of the tract of country, of which Port Huron would naturally become the outlet. When Railroads were first commenced in the State of Michigan, they were undertaken by the State Government; and three lines running parallel to one another were brought forward, and intended to be carried on at the same time. These were the Southern line from Monroe, on the Western extremity of Lake Erie to the bottom of Lake Michigan, which has been completed as far as Hillsdale, a distance of 69 miles. The "Central" from Detroit to St. Joseph on Lake Michigan opposite to Chicago, which has been completed about 130 miles; and the "Northern," from Port Huron to Grand Haven, the only good harbour on Lake Michigan opposite to Milwaukee on the Western shore.

The "Central" line commencing at the seat of Government was of course considered the most important and was begun first. A successful political intrigue enabled those interested in the Southern line to com-