

MONTREAL'S ISOLATION.

By Harry Bragg

Last month the City of Montreal suffered from an accident that would have been calamitous had it been more severe, as might easily have been the case if nature had not aided the efforts of the fire fighters.

On Saturday night, August 21st, a fire started in the wooden flooring of the great Victoria Bridge, which was only mastered by the combined efforts of the fire brigades from both sides of the river—and a copious rain.

As it was, about half a mile of the roadway was completely destroyed, while the adjacent tracks for trains and electric cars, as well as a footway, were damaged.

The immediate result was that hundreds of motor cars carrying tourists and business men from the United States, and Montrealers returning from week-end outings were held up, and had to seek a passage to the city by the ferry boat at Longueuil, some three miles away. And as the ferry is not built for carrying such numbers of vehicles (it can only take from 30 to 50 cars at once), and as each trip, including loading, unloading and the steam across, took about one hour, the waiting cars were parked in lines extending nearly two miles from the ferry, and it took as much as ten hours to get across.

Many of the tourists left their cars, either with the chauffeurs, or parked in a yard, while they got across by the electric cars. Others slept in their cars and foraged for food in the City of Longueuil.

This condition was aggravated on Tuesday morning, as this is market day at the huge Bonsecours Market, and hundreds of farmers' wagons rolled along during Monday night, adding to the crowd trying to get to the ferry.

The immediate result to the city was a jump in the price of vegetables, and the thoughtful realized how dependent was the population of Montreal for its vegetable food on the rich farming district across the river.

Naturally all the delayed tourists have gone away with gloomy news about the pleasure of a visit to Montreal, and incalculable harm has been done in this particular. This is bad advertising!

The accident has brought into prominence the very isolated position of the Commercial Metropolis of Canada, and its utter dependence on the single bridge that now connects it with the mainland and offers access—not only to the Province of Quebec, but also to the Eastern States. For it should be remembered that this bridge carries, not only the Grand Trunk Railway, but also the Canadian Government, Central Vermont and Rutland lines, as well as the Montreal and Southern Counties Electric Railway. Thus it forms the connecting link with the Maritime Provinces by what was the Intercolonial, as well as the lines for Portland, Boston and New York.

The crisis in transportation therefore would have been acute if the fire had been allowed to destroy the rail tracks, as it threatened to do.

Even the destruction of the roadway has been a severe surprise to the average citizen who does not look very deeply into such questions until a catastrophe occurs.

For the Victoria Bridge carries only a single roadway, some 13 feet 6 inches wide, the other one having been taken over by the Electric Railway, although the money

given by the Government was specifically granted for two roadways. And this single roadway is far too small for the tremendously increased traffic that crowds it regularly, while its width occasionally causes a block in the traffic.

In short, even the new Victoria Bridge is almost out of date, and is loaded up to capacity, both on the rails, and the roadway.

Its importance is proved by the careful way in which it was guarded during the war, all traffic at night being rigorously forbidden.

When the original bridge (which carried only a single track) was enlarged, it was made to carry two rail tracks, and two roadways, the Government giving half a million dollars for the roadways. Later, only one was left for vehicles, including farmers' rigs, and the greatly increased, and still increasing, number of motor cars. Thus traffic has increased enormously, and in ordinary times, a queue of motors can be seen waiting until their fares are taken, or their tickets punched. It is stated that a few weeks ago, no less than four thousand cars crossed the bridge on one Sunday.

So small was the traffic of vehicles at the time of the Victoria Bridge enlargement that the Federal Government of the day refused to grant the Canadian Pacific Railway any money to equip their Bridge at Lachine with roadways, as they did to the other.

So that today, there is no bridge for vehicles between Quebec, 180 miles below, and Niagara, some 400 miles above, except this Victoria Bridge.

And it should be remembered that this is not a Montreal question but a Provincial and a Dominion one. For all Canada needs good rail and road communication between the Eastern parts of her own country and the Eastern States.

The Harbour Commissioners of Montreal have had a plan for a second bridge for several years. This was, very properly, kept in abeyance while the Great War was on. But now that it is over, it again comes to the front as a burning question. The Commissioners agreed to guarantee the interest to the Government, if it would supply the money. And as this Harbour Board has always paid its interest on such loans (a thing unique in Canada) and has not been bonussed, as have so many less necessary places—it appears as if it has some unassailable claims to a loan.

Again, while the Federal Government gave thirty millions to build the Bridge at Quebec, where traffic is extremely less, and has only given half a million to the bridge at Montreal, the case seems good for a loan for a new bridge.

The short supply of food, caused by the delay of the market wagons to reach the city, suggests what would have been the position if the ferry had not been running, or—worse still—if it had not survived the heavy loads, but had sunk.

In a speech some time ago at St. Lambert, the present Premier, Hon. Arthur Meighen, preached an admirable and convincing sermon on the absolute necessity of Personal and National Economy, and was deservedly eulogised for his plain talk. But there comes a time when economy necessitates the spending of money. And this is the case with regard to a second bridge for Montreal.