



Good Roads and the Farmer

By E. F. W.



I OUGHT to go to town but the roads are so bad I dare not try it," is an expression that we often hear from the farmer during certain seasons of the year, and it is said with such an air of submission that one cannot help but draw the conclusion that in many cases the farmers have accepted the "bad road" as one of the necessary evils—a thing that cannot be avoided and consequently must be endured.

How often have we wanted to go somewhere, yet were prevented by impassable roads. How often have we been obliged to put two teams on a load that was in reality only half a load because of the fact that the wagon cut in to the axles and made the draft almost prohibitive? How often have we ruined a valuable horse through spavin,weeney or some other blemish because that particular horse was obliged to pull abnormally on what should have been an easy load?

The above are simply mentioned in passing for Western Canada is a new country and a new country is more than likely to leave its road building until the very last, suffering much inconvenience and loss of money in the meantime.

The public roads are in evolution from the primary paths made by animals and men. Of the identity of the first beings who made paths in the wilderness, we are uncertain. Whatever their character and origin, we may be reasonably certain that they had roads of some sort. It cannot be positively asserted that the primitive Indian had roads, but that such was the case seems not unlikely. Several circumstances indicate that they had some system of communication. The remains of their works are often found on streams that are not navigable and groups of them are concentrated about natural strategic points, such as mountain passes; thus making natural the inference that such avenues of overland travel existed. The buffalo herds made broad, straight paths from point to point which can yet be traced. The animals instinctively chose the best routes and in many cases it has been found impossible to improve upon them. The Indians used these thoroughfares for many of their trails and later the white man, finding them good, appropriated them to his own use.

The first white settlers to start with had very little transport. Therefore, a path to accommodate the pack horse was sufficient for their needs. As population grew and the country became civilized, more commodities had to be moved and the wagon superseded the pack train. This necessitated widening the former

paths and when it was found that the soft earth would not sustain the wagon traffic, attention was given to the road bed.

The first step in this direction was the construction of the corduroy road, made by the use of sticks and logs. This was a step forward, although it is possible that some of you have ridden over such roads and know by experience that they do not compare very favorably with some of our roads to-day.

The advent of the stage coach and freight wagon brought another era in road building. This caused much friction between the pack horse owners and the stage coach and wagon men—a thing which always has and probably always will happen when a radical

change is made in methods of transportation. They facilitate the country's growth in education, religion and sociability, for as one writer once said, "The road and the schoolmaster are the two most important agencies in advancing civilization."

The good road has decided economic value in any country. It holds the balance of power for good. They have a money value to farmers as well as political and social value and leaving out inconvenience, comfort, social value and refined influences, which good roads always enhance and looking at them only from the "almighty dollar" side, they are found to pay handsome dividends each year.

The question of road construction in a new country like Western Canada is one that is not very

port a load and at the same time will not over-tax the farmer's team. The average farmer says there is no hurry about this matter; that good roads will come in due time, but what about the enormous amount of annoyance and expense caused during the waiting period.

When Appian Claudius, the famous Roman road builder, started out to build the now famous Appian way, he did not wait for laggard builders, automobile clubs and farmers to pass resolutions on the subject, but simply put men to work and constructed a road 330 miles in length by 16 feet wide, from Rome south to Capua to Brindisi and although over 2,200 years have passed since then, the Appian way is still the best country road in all of Europe. If figures are to be arrived at as regards the amount of money that road has earned Rome, it would doubtless be found that it has paid for itself hundreds of times, not only in cheapness of transportation provided to those who live along it, but through the increase in the value of real estate.

Although the question of road improving is of direct interest to the residents of our towns and cities, it is most always one of importance to the farmers. By far the greater mileage of our roads are located in the farming districts and the chief use of these roads is by the farmers in getting their products to market and for social intercourse with their neighbors. In recent years the automobile has served a good end in that it brings our highways into use by tourists travelling for pleasure and thus demanding a good road. This use will doubtless be greatly increased in the future, but the bulk of the travel on country roads for a considerable time to come will continue to be that of the farm wagon or buggy. So while every farmer should join hands with the automobile owners in promoting the good road cause, it is likely to remain a farmers' question for some time and if it is to be settled rightly, it must be settled in accordance with the wishes of the farmers.

Perhaps this statement should be qualified to some extent by saying "enlightened farmers" for there is no use in denying that for a long time the attitude of the farmers towards the good road proposition was not as favorable as it should have been, and there are still a great many who fail to realize the great importance of promoting their prosperity, comfort and social welfare. Western Canada at the present time is in a most unfortunate condition as regards good roads; it is a prairie country; consequently the average road is not confined to any partic-



The Kind of Road That Makes Farming a Pleasure.

change is made in methods of transportation. We see the principle illustrated to-day in much the same in the advent of automobiles. The adoption of the stage coach ushered in the adoption of the macadamized road, or as it was known at that time a road made of layers of broken stone. It is true, however, that but few such roads were built at the time. Most of the old roads were merely widened and graded, but remained of dirt.

A good road rightly kept is the railway of the world. Like well-paved streets, they make living along them most desirable. They economize time and transportation of products, reduce wear and tear on horses, harness and vehicles and enhance the value of real estate. They raise the value of farm lands and farm products, and tend to beautify the country through

likely to receive its due attention. The new settler is far too much occupied with other matters to pay his respects to the public highways. There is little regard for road sites, old trails being followed wherever available and little or no attempt is made to establish a permanent road. As the country grows older and the crop becomes more and more a factor in its growth, the marketing of this same crop becomes a problem on the hands of the farmer, and he begins to realize that the good road is something more than a thing of beauty.

This is the condition of a large part of Western Canada to-day. The trail across the prairie has been left behind, the section lines are being fenced and civilization and settlement are demanding a passable highway twelve months in the year, a highway that will sup-

