

THE COMMERCIAL

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D. W. BUCHANAN,
Publisher.

The Commercial certainly enjoys a very much larger circulation among the business community of the vast region lying between Lake Superior and the Pacific Coast than any other paper in Canada, daily or weekly. The Commercial also reaches the leading wholesale, commission, manufacturing and financial houses of Eastern Canada.

WINNIPEG, FEB. 3, 1900.

BAD ROADS.

Winnipeg city aldermen propose trying to induce the provincial government to do something toward improving the roads leading into the city. Previous efforts of the city council to secure the improvements of the country roads have failed, but the matter is of such great importance that it is certainly worth while trying again. Good roads would do more to improve the value of farm lands in the vicinity of the city than anything else that can be thought of. Lands in districts where the roads are not as bad as about Winnipeg, are held at much higher prices in many cases.

The question of roads is really one of the most serious problems which Manitoba has to face to-day. In some districts, where the soil is light or gravelly and naturally well drained, the question is not such a serious one. There are other large areas, however, where the roads are practically impassable in bad weather. Bad roads are a great drawback to any country. They wear out horses and vehicles before their time, lead to breakdowns and accidents, sometimes of a serious nature, render it necessary to make two trips where one would sometimes answer, by reason of the small loads which can only be taken, consume double time often in travelling a given distance, compel farmers to remain at home idle when they should be marketing their produce, etc., etc. The loss of time and money, directly or indirectly, as a result of bad roads, is a most serious matter.

Great attention has been given of late years to the improvement of routes of travel by rail and water, as well as to the cheapening of transportation. The ordinary country road represents the beginning of our system

of transportation. Good roads are as essential from an economic point of view as is the improvement of the great commercial highways. The total production of the country must first pass over the country road before it reaches the primary market. If the roads are bad, the loss in this transportation is serious. It would be a difficult matter to convince individual farmers that they were losing \$50 to \$100 annually, by reason of the bad condition of the roads over which they are obliged to travel in transporting their produce to market. Yet we feel convinced that if many farmers would make a careful record of the time they have lost in enforced idleness through bad roads, or in unnecessary delays in travelling, at times perhaps with half the load which could otherwise have been taken, and estimate the unnecessary wear and tear of horse flesh and vehicle, they would find that our estimate is not a high one.

If some of the agitators who succeed so admirably in working up agitations on such matters as the elevator question, for instance would give their attention to the improvement of the roads, they would be doing the farmers of Manitoba a genuine service, instead of creating discontent in quarters often where there is little if any reason for it.

We do not require to go far from Winnipeg to find bad roads, perhaps equal to the worst in the province. During spells of bad weather the roads leading out of the city are practically impassable. In fact, we can truthfully assert that there is not a mile of good road in the Winnipeg district, outside of the city limits. In discussing this question on a previous occasion The Commercial said: "The main road leading out of the city, through the rural municipality of Kildonan, the oldest settled district of Manitoba, is a sample of a practically impassable road in wet weather. Here is a settlement nearly 100 years old, where the people have been content all this time to wallow through mud hub deep, or shut themselves up within the precincts of their rural abodes, sometimes for weeks at a time, during seasons of frequent precipitation."

"In another direction, perhaps the most important highway leading out of the city, through the rural municipality of Assiniboia, is in the same shameful condition. This highway, known as the Portage road, also leads through an old settled district, and is about the oldest road in the country, but not one mile of this road has been put in passable condition for bad weather, during all these years."

This question of roads is a matter which should be grappled with at once. If these municipalities had built only one mile of road each year for the past ten or fifteen years, they would

now have main highways of a passable nature. The question, however, should not be left with the rural municipalities alone. The provincial government should take hold of the matter, and be prepared to give the necessary instructions to enable the municipalities to build decent roads. The province of Ontario has taken up this matter, and provincial inspectors in road making have been appointed to assist and advise the municipal authorities. The useless and antiquated statute labor system, which is being dropped by all progressive municipalities in the east, should be abolished by the legislature as one of the first steps in the direction of reform in road making. Unless some active and important influence is brought to bear upon this matter, we are liable to go on indefinitely wallowing through mud and mire, as the early colonists of the Red river have done for nearly a century past.

SOLICITING VOTES.

The Winnipeg city council proposes taking action to prevent soliciting of votes in civic elections. Legislation will be sought with this object in view. The principal contained in this proposition is no doubt right, and if it could be applied to provincial and federal elections as well, it would have a great effect in preventing bribery and corruption in connection with the elections. It is only one step from asking a man for his vote to offer him some inducement for it. Men who are intelligent enough to think for themselves, should consider it almost an insult to be asked for their vote. At the same time, it will be quite a difficult matter to properly safeguard a law designed to prevent the soliciting of votes. It is the organized effort made in the direction of soliciting votes which is particularly objectionable, and which it is most desirable to curtail or prevent. If this could be done away with, anything approaching solicitation of votes, in conversation between friends, might be overlooked.

PRESERVE THE FORESTS.

In connection with the formation of a Forestry association at Ottawa, it may be noted that Mr. Stephenson, crown timber agent for the west, is authority for the statement made a year or more ago, that our timber resources have been diminished one-half during the past fifteen years. This destruction is sad to think of, especially when we consider that this western country is largely a prairie region, and timber areas are therefore specially valuable. Much at least of the loss could have been avoided if some system of preserving the forests and subjugating forest fires had been inaugurated. We have lost half of our timber resources in fifteen years,