

The Improvement of Country Roads.

BY C. L. STRACHAN, MACKENZIE, MAN.

During the past year the transportation problem has been a very lively topic of discussion among the farmers; and, indeed, it was the greatest grievance they had during the year. But there is a striking contrast shown in the lack of interest taken in the scarcely less important question of local transportation—a question over which they have a more direct control.

We have little grounds for congratulating ourselves on the general condition of our roads. After spring freshets or rainy spells the hillsides become so water-worn as to be almost impassable for loads, and on the level the drainage is so bad as to allow the water to stand on the roadway. It is not uncommon, either, for a stranger in the land to traverse a fairly good road until he is brought to a halt by the road coming to an abrupt end at the edge of a large slough.

We try to excuse ourselves for these conditions by saying that the country is young; or, if we are a little more interested, we blame the councillors. But that is only evading a question which has a most vital bearing on the welfare of the farmer; for it is he who is most adversely affected by poor roads. Poor roads have a paralyzing effect on the social and industrial life of the farmer. They tend to shut him in from the outside business and social world, and to make him live a more lonely life. It is a noticeable fact that districts which are opened up by good roads are marked by prosperity and thrift; while those less fortunate districts which are without the animating influence of good roads are noticeable because of their lack of industry and progress.

What can be done to improve matters? It remains for the farmers to say what will be done. The improvement and maintenance of roads is the chief function of municipal councils. The members of these, with few exceptions, are farmers, and are largely directed by farmers' interests. The responsibility, therefore, rests with the farmers themselves. Each farmer should feel his individual responsibility, and be willing to pay liberal taxes, provided the money be well spent. Too many farmers give their support to the man who will "keep down the taxes," regardless of what he accomplishes for the municipality. Their influence should be used not so much to keep down taxes as to see that the money is well spent in making a permanent job of the roadways.

Good roads are a good investment for farmers, the returns of which, though not so apparent, are none the less real. When we consider the saving of time and labor in the transportation of farm produce, and the decrease of wear and tear on horses, harness and vehicles, we cannot but see that they yield the farmer each year a very real dividend. Added to this, too, they greatly increase the value of real estate. Every farmer knows that a good road past his place adds much to the value of his farm.

The levying of a tax to raise money for road-building by contract or through a road commissioner instead of by statute labor, marks an advance in methods of road improvement. It allows the council board to select a competent man to superintend all road construction. It also enables them to secure up-to-date road machinery—graders and road-rollers. These economize time and labor, and make a far better road than scrapers and plows. They are especially useful in a prairie country like this.

In this country, owing to the scarcity of other material, the common earth road will always be the most general. Stone roads will always be rare. In localities where proper material can be obtained, gravel and shale roads will lead; but very substantial and passable roads can be made with earth only, if properly constructed and drained. The roadway should be well rounded, and heavy road-rollers should be used after the graders to make a smooth, firm top. This, after being travelled for some time, becomes almost as impervious to water as shale or gravel roads. Broad-tire wagons, too, if used by farmers in

teaming, would greatly help to keep the roads in proper condition, rather than cut them up.

The greatest defect of our roads is improper drainage. Water is the worst enemy of good roads, and so all drains and side ditches should lead to some outlet. If the water is allowed to stand along the roadside it will gradually soak up into the road and soften the roadbed.

I think most farmers, when they consider the matter, will be willing to give up the old system of statute labor for a system which will give a competent road commissioner the management of roads for a large district or municipality and which will supply him with the proper machinery



HOME OF JAS. M. JAMESON, GLADSTONE, MAN.

to do the work. It will certainly mean some expenditure of money, but the advantages gained will warrant the expenditure.

Finding His Work.

The son of an immensely wealthy American, having graduated from college, went to Paris to study art. He worked hard in the Paris studios for three years. One day he made up his mind that he would never be a great artist, and that he would rather be a successful farmer than a fairly successful painter. Now—although still a young man—he has a model farm covering 10,000 acres in Illinois. He knows every foot of it, what it should produce, and sees that it produces everything it should. He has built a magnificent



HOME OF D. MCKENZIE, ARDEN, MAN.

house, in which not an ornament jars the finest taste. He goes to Europe every winter and studies European methods of scientific farming and cattle-raising. He is developing the land as his fathers did before him. He employs scores of men; he helps the smaller farmers about him; he is likely to be a great factor in the development of the State during the next few years. And this is the story of a young American who works for the love of it, and who is a great success because, anxious to do things, he knew when he had not "found his work."—[The World's Work.

Fall Wheat in Northern Alberta.

For several years past we have taken a great interest in the progress and culture of fall wheat in Alberta, and particularly in the Lacombe and Red Deer districts. Every season sees a considerable increase in the area devoted to this grain. When it was first tried, which was about a dozen years ago at Pincher Creek, a single pocketful was tried, the kind being the Red Chaff Clawson. This weathered the winter all right, and harvested well early the following fall. More seed was then

put in, and again doing well, farmers around secured some of the seed and tried it more extensively, with equal success, though the Red Chaff Clawson is now superseded at Pincher Creek almost entirely by Dawson's Golden Chaff.

Coming nearer to our own district, the first man to try fall wheat at Bowden was Mr. G. R. Skinner (the father of Mr. J. D. Skinner, of Lacombe). This gentleman has grown fall wheat for nine years in succession without a failure, almost invariably sowing the first week in August and harvesting by the middle of the following August. The kinds he grew were somewhat mixed, no less than three kinds of fall wheat in one crop, but all always did well. Another successful grower is Mr. G. Power, of Innisfail.

Further north still, and in the Balmoral and Springvale districts east of Red Deer, are several farmers who, within our personal knowledge, have grown fall wheat for several years. The first to try it in that district was Mr. Elias Code, and from the seed grown by him (Dawson's Golden Chaff), at least a dozen farms have been stocked. This seed has become thoroughly acclimatized, and this is a very important point

to bear in mind, because it is found that this sort of wheat, when imported by the C.P.R., does not do very well until after two or three years of cropping from it. The yields secured from fall wheat are generally heavy. We tested, about two years ago, the yields on certain farms in the Balmoral and Springvale districts, and the return of one farm, according to the threshing tally, ran up to sixty bushels to the acre. The kind grown on this farm was Kansas Red, but other farms returned nearly the same yield. In the year 1902, which was reckoned a poor year for fall wheat, a return of forty bushels an acre was no uncommon yield.

Of the larger fields of fall wheat we may mention Halgren's in Springvale. This gentleman is a very successful fall-wheat grower. He has Dawson's Golden Chaff, which, having been grown by him for several years, is well acclimatized and a good safe seed to secure. Then there is Jamieson's farm, one mile east of Red Deer, where we looked over as fine a field of fall wheat as it has ever been our pleasure to see. There were twenty acres of it, and not a bare spot. The kind was Dawson's Golden Chaff.

The question, however, is often asked as to the conditions to be observed for the successful growth of fall wheat, and on this point we would place on record a few remarks which are the result of several years' observations. It seems to us that failure or success depends greatly on (1) the aspect, (2) date of seeding, and (3) the depth of drill, and not so much on the intensity or mildness of the winter. For in the interval between the winter of nine years ago and the last there have been winters varying from cold to mild, but fall wheat where there has happened to be a failure cannot be shown to have been directly injured by the winter. A level or gentle slope to the west or north-west (one which will not get the direct rays of the

winter sun) appears to be the best situation. Of 20 men I observed growing fall wheat in 1901, one put his crop in a field sloping due south, and the result was such snow as fell soon melted. Whether through want of protection, or some other cause, his crop, which had secured good growth by winter, was entirely winter-killed, not a blade surviving. The majority of the others sowed on western or north-western aspects, and one or two on absolutely level land, and all their wheat, with three exceptions, not only wintered well but stood the abnormal rainfall of May and June unharmed.