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The Board of Railway Commissioners in the West

The work accomplished during the first trip of the Board of Railway Commissioners will be of very great interest to the people of Western Canada, and, in fact, to the whole Dominion. Having travelled with the commissioners throughout the whole journey of between 7,000 and 8,000 miles, covering the whole of the Canadian Northwest and British Columbia, it occurred to me it would be but fair to volunteer an account of the business transacted, and to again point out the vast possibilities of this great Dominion, and the place it will eventually occupy as the back-bone of the food supply of the British Empire. The travelling board consisted of Hon. A. G. Blair and Dr. James Mills, with A. G. Blair, jun., law clerk and acting Secretary. Hon. Mr. Bernier volunteered to remain in Ottawa to look after the many matters which can be attended to by one commissioner. A. D. Cartwright, the Secretary, also decided to remain and complete the organization of his new department.

The business of the commissioners divided itself into two branches: first, the hearing of complaints regarding railway matters; second, visiting the whole territory, with a view of getting as nearly as possible a practical knowledge of the requirements of the farming and ranching industries of Manitoba and the Territories, and the lumber, shingle, mineral, coal, fish and fruit interests of British Columbia and the coast.

Railway facilities throughout the great West have grown up in some cases in advance of settlement, in other cases concurrent with it, and in some instances have followed business development. The freight tariffs are an evolution, based upon conditions and circumstances existing at these various periods. They are so far-reaching in their effects and so interlaced with the building up of industries at certain periods that many industrial enterprises are dependent upon these special rates that even changes which on their face seem eminently fair react on some other industry fostered or brought into existence by reason of the necessities of the case at some former period. This phase of the matter was so strongly developed that in dealing with these cases the commissioners have proceeded with extreme caution. They have travelled nearly 8,000 miles, covering the main line of the C.P.R. to the coast, the branches to Prince Albert and Edmonton, returning through the Kootenay district and the Crow's Nest Pass, including the Macleod and Edmonton branches. They also covered the Canadian Northern Ry. between Fort William and Winnipeg. They have visited

the Port Arthur and Fort William terminals, where they inspected the facilities afforded for the storage and transhipment of grain, and in British Columbia they visited the large lumber mills; they have had meetings in Winnipeg, Carberry, Brandon, Regina, Prince Albert, Medicine Hat, Calgary, Macleod, Edmonton, Revelstoke, Vancouver, Victoria, New Westminster, Vernon and Nelson. At these places the hearing of specific complaints was but a small portion of their work. A great deal of their time has been devoted to becoming acquainted

with the marvellous increase in traffic consequent upon the rapid development of the country.

On the whole, with the exception of a few specific instances, there exists a friendly feeling between the people and the railway companies. Throughout the whole western country there was constantly looming up the influence for good exercised by William Whyte, of the C.P.R., at Winnipeg, whom the people describe as a big man. In many of the towns visited where complaints had been lodged for hearing it was found that his diplomacy had effected an amicable settlement, and the Boards of Trade would announce that since the filing of their complaints things had been arranged to the satisfaction of all concerned. Most of the trouble complained of had been the result of some careless subordinate, or by the blocking of traffic at stations where the business had grown faster than the shipping facilities, but everywhere was to be seen immense improvement, works which must be costing the railways many millions of dollars. On the whole, those who addressed the board as complainants or on behalf of the railways treated the subjects in a manly way. There was very little bickering, and the meetings closed with amicable feelings as between the companies and the people.

One of the most important questions brought before the commission, and one which required exhaustive investigation, was the subject of fireguards throughout the ranching districts between Moose Jaw and the Rockies. The railways cannot operate without their locomotives emitting sparks which cause fires. The heavy winds which prevail on the prairies cause these fires to spread, burning hundreds of miles of grazing country. Great herds of cattle are sometimes lost. The cattle have either to be driven great distances or perish of starvation. Mr. Whyte took much interest in this question and asked that the commissioners give the subject their earnest consideration. Evidence was taken at Winnipeg, Regina, Medicine Hat and other points regarding the most effective means of preventing these fires. The sum of it all was that the board should prescribe the most approved spark-arrester and firebox for the engine, and that fire-guards, consisting of 16 furrows, eight on each side of the railway, should be plowed at a sufficient distance, in some cases 300 feet from the track, and that then the grass should be burned between the track and these fire-guards under the management of a special crew supplied with proper appliances. Then came up the question of the cost. Premier Haultain and others



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with the requirements of the different industries. They have visited the large ranches, have driven through the finest farming districts, in one instance covering as much as 60 miles in one day; they have talked with the farmers, with the cattle shippers, with the fruit growers, the lumbermen, and with the traders, and also representatives of the different towns, and the divisional superintendents of the railways. In this way they have acquired on the one hand a knowledge of what the public requires in a most practical way, and, on the other hand, the difficulties which the railway companies experience in

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