

GOOD ROADS ORGANIZATION*

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STATESMEN, diplomats, historians and scientists agree that the most important element which lies at the root and beginning of a nation's progress is a system of good roads. Without this, the national resources and energies remain to a degree unawakened and useless. Roads are the veins and arteries by means of which the circulation of the social body is carried on. When they are clogged, the march of civilization is retarded, the people have little in common, and limited opportunity for intercourse of any kind hurts their commercial prospects.

The question of good roads is a very ancient one, dating from the time of the Romans, who constructed the Appian Way, the "Queen of Roads," having a length of three hundred and fifty miles, about the year 312 B.C. This road is in use to-day. The Romans regarded good roads as of vital importance for conquest and the maintenance of their empire.

It was the boast of Great Britain over one hundred years ago that beyond all national dispute it stood at the head of the world's civilization, because no country on the face of the earth was so well provided with good roads. The length of pike roads and highways in Great Britain, as long ago as 1820, exceeded a total length of 114,829 miles.

The progress of civilization in India is owing largely to the military highway built by the British from Bombay to Calcutta.

To-day France probably leads the world in a system of good roads, or did before the war. Although her area is only about four times as great as that of the State of New York, France has spent about six hundred million dollars in the construction of her common roads, and she annually spends about eighteen million dollars in keeping them in repair.

In the United States, our neighbor to the south, the construction of extensive public highways was begun so long ago as 1776, when the first artificial road was built from Philadelphia to New York and another from New York to Boston. To-day many States in the Union are spending millions annually in the construction of good roads, our bordering State of New York leading in this respect.

Cannot Canada, therefore, profit by the lessons taught by these older countries? Cannot we take a leaf from their book and avoid the pitfalls into which they slipped? Does not the future of our great country depend to a great extent upon the roads built and to be built, and surely the prospects of a heritage which is ours would recommend a continued and thorough study by our Federal and Provincial Governments into the building and maintaining of the road systems of this country?

It is only within the last fifteen years that any attempt has been made to develop an up-to-date policy to deal with this question. We have not yet completely cleared our highways of that old bone of contention, "the toll-gate." The introduction of our provincial county good roads system went a long way towards removing them from our midst and a great deal towards giving us better arterial roadways.

The county road system, as adopted by our provincial government, has been improved upon from time to time,

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and is a long step in the right direction; yet the question presenting itself is, Can we not improve upon it? Would it not be well to give this subject a more extensive study so as to bring into proper relation the interests involved? the provincial government? the county? the town and the village? These all have vital interest in the question of good roads.

There are many points to be settled, and I will enumerate a few which, it seems to me, are worthy of consideration and may provide food for discussion:—

1. What methods should be adopted for raising and administering funds for road construction? As all are interested, should not all pay in accordance with benefits derived and ability to contribute?

2. Having raised or provided means for raising funds, how should they be spent? Should we have a central government control, with proper business organization? Should we have a federal highway department, co-operating with the township, county, city or town departments? Some system whereby it could be assured that the money raised be spent to the best advantage and not wasted as it has been done in many cases in the past?

3. Should our roads not be classified? For instance, we might have a classification as follows:—

(a) National highways. (b) Provincial highways. (c) County highways. (d) Township highways. (e) Inter-urban highways. (f) Suburban highways, etc.

These again might be classified into first class, second class and other classes, depending on the nature of the roadways, the use to which they are put and the amount of traffic they have to provide for.

The question of highway administration is in urgent need of attention in Canada. There are at present highway commissioners in most of the provinces, but they deal with rural highways and are not concerned with the local improvements in cities and towns. It is desirable that every city, town and municipality in each province should have the assistance of a central department on all highly technical engineering questions, including that of road planning and construction. The work of the road board in Great Britain and of the highway commission of the state of New York are worthy of careful study in this connection, but to be really efficient each provincial highway commission or board should be linked up with a department of local government, dealing with municipal affairs in general and not solely with highways.

The roads in Canada are more important for distribution of produce than in Great Britain, where distances are so short and light railways are so plentiful. In Canada we have had to start off without any of the advantages possessed by older countries in the matter of old foundations and the accumulated work of centuries of road construction. We have had to develop motor transportation by road as a means of feeding the great trunk railways and securing the economical distribution of food. The respective obligations of the provincial and the local governing bodies in regard to road construction and maintenance have to be considered. Local authorities need to be advised regarding the proper use and value of the different kinds of road material, after adequate trial and investigation by an expert department, in order to save hundreds of thousands of dollars spent in unsuitable road material used in local improvements.

When we consider the enormous amount of money spent in roads and road maintenance and the great waste arising from the haphazard methods of carrying out local improvements, it is surprising to find so little effort being