

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT.

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Should the Towns Assist?

A difficulty in the way of attaining better roads in Ontario, is that, under the present system of township management, the entire cost of road building falls upon the farmers. The people of the villages, towns and cities, to whom country roads are as necessary as to the farmers, and who compose nearly one-half of the population, pay nothing towards their construction or maintenance.

While it is necessary that the farmer should have good roads to haul his produce to the centres of population, he also uses the roads to draw back to the farm the supplies purchased in the towns. It merely happens, as a matter of convenience easily understood, that the farmer draws his produce to the town and his purchases back to the farm instead of the merchant hauling his merchandise to the farmer, and the produce of the farm back to the town.

It is only a century or so ago since the active settlement of Ontario commenced. It was at that time the statute labor system was established. In addition to this, the Provincial Government spent the greater part of its revenue on the construction of roads and bridges. Since that time the distribution of the population has materially changed; the statute labor system remains for the construction of country roads, applying only to the rural districts, while the Provincial aid has been withdrawn, thus wholly relieving the people of the towns and cities, from their share in the cost of country road building.

The change of conditions has taken place so gradually that the evident disparity resulting has remained unnoticed. The system of road control and taxation has not grown and developed with the growth and development of the country. The result, as far as road control is concerned, is similar to a full grown man still wearing the clothes in which he went to school.

There does not appear to be any reason why the farmer and rural population should pay the entire cost of road building any more than they should meet the entire cost of railway and canal construction. A system of good country roads is an expensive public work, in every way necessary for the development of a country, and so long as the farmer bears the entire burden, it is manifest that the desired end, good roads, will be difficult if not impossible to reach. In any event, the attempt to do so, comprises an injustice.

The towns are asking for good country roads. They are beginning to realize how important for them it is to have free and uninterrupted communication with the country districts around, at all seasons of the year, and would no doubt be willing

to pay a fair proportion of the cost in order that road improvement would progress more rapidly. This very interest which is being displayed is the strongest evidence as to the mutual right of townsman and farmer to pay for the construction of our country road system.

The principle, since the inauguration of the good roads movement on this continent, has been recognized in a number of American states, such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont and New York, by the establishment of systems of State aid, whereby the State funds, derived from the entire population, urban as well as rural, contribute to the cost of country road building. In all European countries national aid in one form or another is given, thus taxing the town population.

ROADS OF OTHER LANDS.

In England the county council has entire jurisdiction over the roads, and is aided by a grant from the national treasury. A county engineer is appointed, a salaried officer, whose sole duty is the supervision of road work. The county is divided into districts, and the detail of the road work is attended to by assistant engineers acting under the parishes. The money required for the maintenance of highways is obtained by a precept issued by the county council to the various parish councils, demanding the amount expended on the roads of the parish. This amount is collected in the general parishes (or township) taxes, levied on the assessment values of property. A system of county management has been extended to all parts of Scotland. Roads of Ireland are under a county engineer and several assistants, each of the latter having his own district; improvements being regulated by a grand jury presentment system.

French roads are national, departmental and communal, corresponding largely to state, county and township roads. The national roads radiate from Paris, extending to all the important cities and departments, and are under a special engineering department (department of bridges and roads) attached to the national government. The second and third classes, departmental and provincial roads, are in a general way under local authorities, but departmental roads are usually entrusted to the care of the national corps of engineers.

Germany has a magnificent system of turnpikes built and maintained by the national government. They are under the general management of a state road commissioner, while he is assisted by an extensive staff of road directors and inspectors. Other roads are known as "county roads," and are built and maintained by the several parishes through which they pass.

The highways of Austria are classified as state or Imperial roads, provincial roads, district roads and community roads, according to the authority constructing and managing them. The cost

of building and maintaining the Imperial roads is derived from the national funds, the cost of provincial roads from the provincial funds, district roads from district funds. A little of the cost of community roads is borne by the several communities interested, aided in certain cases from the district funds. For the Imperial and provincial roads the best of engineering skill is employed; while for work of immediate repair road keepers are employed constantly.

Italian roads are under the supervision of the Minister of Public Works, and are national, provincial, commercial or vicerial, according to the source from which taxes for the construction and maintenance are derived.

The more important roads of Denmark are controlled by the county councils, but are subject to the annual inspection of a state engineer; the roads of lesser importance are governed by the parish or township councils.

The main roads of Belgium, those routes running from one part of the kingdom to another are controlled and managed by the state; another class, provincial roads, are controlled by the province; a third class, communal roads, are controlled by the communal authorities. The construction of these roads is entrusted to corps of engineers.

In the Netherlands, a network of roads, providing convenient travel from one part of the country to another, is maintained by the General Government; other roads are at the expense of the various provinces and communities benefitted.

The federal government of Switzerland controls a few of the important roads, but in the main they are built and maintained by the cantonal government through whose territory they pass. The construction and repair of roads of lesser importance pertains to the several townships through which they pass.

Spain, decayed and tottering, the vestiges of an ancient magnificence falling from her, has not joined the good roads movement; nor has Turkey, the home of barbarism. Russia, too, has been exceedingly backward in road-building, and as a result her extensive and rich dominions are still practically undeveloped.

The immense benefit conferred by good roads has practical illustration in most European countries, where it is of unusual occurrence to see a load drawn by more than one horse. In these countries so excellent are the roads, that anyone owning a team of horses does not consider himself dependent upon the railroads for transportation, as wagon loads of from three to six tons are frequently drawn several hundred miles in competition to railway rates. In these cases the roads are, of course, of the best possible construction, built and maintained under experienced engineering supervision, and are a skilful compromise between ease of grade and directness of route.