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Railroads & Other Things.

At the last meeting of the Canadian Ticket Agents' Association, at Winnipeg, the Second Vice-President, M. McNamara, G.T.R. ticket agent at Walkerton, Ont., read a paper under this title, from which the following extracts are taken:—

It is the railroad especially that has suddenly placed Manitoba & the Northwest in the front ranks of the world's progress. The early settlers in other parts of Canada had to spend their lives in hewing out a home from the forest. But here the magician's wand struck the earth, and suddenly a completely organized community appeared upon the scene. It was the railway that did it. Twenty years ago there was not a mile of railway west of the Red River. And to-day there are within the Province of Manitoba alone nearly 2,000 miles of road, with nearly 300 more under contract for construction. The Territories west of us are developing with equal rapidity, & from the progress being made it is not improbable that some of those now present at this meeting may live to see the day when a serious agitation will arise for moving the capital of this Dominion from Ottawa to Winnipeg. "Westward the march of empire wends its way." The world moves to the west, & Canada is following the natural law of progress. Already it is proposed to make Port Arthur the head of ocean navigation, & I do not doubt that in due time it will become so. Every argument that supports Montreal as the head of ocean navigation at present, applies equally well to Port Arthur, & when the people west of Port Arthur become numerous enough to out-vote those east of Montreal, the canals will be enlarged so as to give the great ocean ships a free course from Liverpool to the head of Lake Superior.

This is a growing time. Everything shows the expansive force of hope & development. Our commerce is booming, & passenger traffic is increasing. Old-fashioned roads that have hitherto taken life easy, are now hustling for business & paying dividends, whilst a man could have nothing better in his pocket than a roll of stock certificates in some of the new ones. They are better than Klondike gold mines, & much easier to work. Our railways have become models of comfort, speed & luxury, whilst the managers are blossoming out into millionaires, & stockholders feel as if they owned the earth. But I regret having occasion to say, that during my connection with the service, I have not noticed any expansion in the commission of ticket agents. Indeed, they have rather shown a tendency towards contraction. I don't know if all the members of the Association have noticed this tendency, but I have been told by some of the older agents that it

is quite perceptible. In other respects the managers treat us handsomely, &, indeed, in all respects they treat us like gentlemen. I know that all present take pleasure in acknowledging their courtesy, but on the authority of an eminent statesman now holding a high position in the public service of this country, I have to say that "business is business," & that on a business basis the ticket agents would like to feel that this is a growing time. We don't want to stand still whilst everything else is growing around us. We want to have a patriotic share in the prosperity of our country, & for this reason,



W. S. STOUT,

Vice-President and General Manager, Dominion Express Company.

Mr. President, I hope you will call the attention of the general passenger agents to this particular phase of the growing time, for otherwise they may think that we are neglecting the interests of the railway companies in this important particular.

What our newspaper friends are in the habit of calling the railway problem, may, I think, properly receive some attention at a railway ticket agents' meeting, for, although it does not specially affect our interests just yet, it is evident that the exigencies of political agitation will ultimately force an issue or some sort on the attention of this country.

The problem is already acute in the United States, & is on the march toward Canada. If the Government of Canada does not in time assume entire ownership of the railways, an effort at least will be made to have their traffic regulated by a Government commission. The experience of the Intercolonial is not an encouraging illustration of Government ownership, & there does not appear to be any burning desire in the public mind of Canada, at present, to duplicate the experiment. But the idea exists & is growing. It would increase the patronage of politicians, & many honest men really think it would add to the prosperity of the country.

The passenger traffic more immediately affects our interests, & in this respect it is instructive to observe the results of experience in dealing with the theories of reformers. The recent rate war between our two great companies is a striking object lesson in this respect. It is a favorite theory with many members of the press, that if passenger rates were lowered, travel would increase in a degree that would more than make up the difference in receipts. I must admit that I held this view myself. But I hold it no longer. There was at first an increase in travel, but when the novelty wore off, people travelled only when circumstances required, & soon settled down to normal conditions. Comparing the whole period of the cut rates with a similar period since, I find in my own business that whilst the receipts of the latter period were not only larger in amount, the number of passengers was actually greater. This does not take into account temporary boom points, or excursions, but only what may be considered ordinary business. In respect to excursions, that to the Toronto Exhibition each year furnishes the best basis of comparison, and to this we sold fully as many tickets this year as last, though the rates averaged 40% over the cut period. There was more travel from short distances to Toronto & other central points during the rate war, & to these points the railway companies carried a considerably increased number of passengers. But they did not carry enough to make up the difference in receipts, whilst their running expenses were largely increased. From this experience, I arrived at the conclusion that people don't travel for fun, or from any ardent affection for the railway companies, but only when it suits their own requirements, & covers their own interests. I have lost confidence in cheap rates as a basis for steady business, & feel satisfied that the railway companies are conducting the passenger traffic of the country at as low a rate as would leave any margin for profit. They are not altogether philanthropists, but are certainly giving the public good service at reasonable figures.