

RAILROAD DEVELOPMENT.

Among all the channels of industrial development, railroads take the first place, and their existence becomes a power, everywhere carrying a widespread activity, which largely influences a country's progress. Clearly, in so important a factor in a nation's growth, there must be room for the exercise of great intelligence and foresight. The wonderful strides of scarcely 50 years since the memorable trip of the "Rocket," travelling six miles an hour, to the seventy miles an hour of to-day, transcends any other instances of material progress, changing the very character and condition of society; so that everywhere the railroad question is paramount, and becomes the measure of a country's status. Necessarily the early railroads sprang into existence through local wants only, each business centre demanding facility of intercourse with its neighbour, and lines were built without regard to any well-digested plan. In examining the railroad map of England or of the United States, a marvellous intricacy of lines is observed; they cross and re-cross each other in all directions, without any apparent purpose or assimilation of interests. Supposing the bulk of existing railroads in these countries could be wiped out, and an intelligent plan of development recommenced, how differently would they appear—how great a saving in mileage and money there would be, to accomplish the same end. Now it is too late to carry out such a principle in old Canada, but the correctness of the statement prevails; nevertheless, and I would fain, so far as is possible, prevent the repetition of our past waste in our yet unoccupied domain. The characteristic feature of the American railroad system should be, the primary construction of great trunk lines running east and west across the continent, the intervals of country to be developed by branches or lateral roads acting as feeders to the main line, thus avoiding the ruinous conflict which prevails, and divide the benefit to the terminals of each system, rather than the concentration which now pours the wealth of the continent into one great centre.

Mr. McCullough, in his Commercial Dictionary published about 1835, designates Montreal, New York, and New Orleans as the three great entrepôts of this continent—and viewed from his standpoint as terminals of great water routes, he evinced an intelligent foresight—but to us, living in this railroad age, his judgment is quite astray. What DeWitt Clinton did fifty years ago for New York by the construction of the Erie ditch—which changed the flow of trade from its natural channel (the St. Lawrence river)—is quite likely to find its duplicate in a similar diversion of the promised trade of our Great Pacific Railroad over the Coteau Bridge to New York and Boston, instead of to our own seaports of Montreal and Quebec. "*Steel Rail is King*" now, and backed by the enormous money power which heretofore belonged only to favoured states and kingdoms, but which has now passed into the hands of individuals and rings—wielded and controlled by such master-minds as Gould, Vanderbilt, Cook, and their ilk—it may well be asked what interest or trade is there which these men cannot impair or divert. So that our sleepy pauperised Government ought to be wide awake, and use every possible safeguard against such powerful opponents; and although what has already been done does not inspire much hopefulness, still great results can yet be accomplished by a wise and systematic concentration of the resources left us, to build up our own seaports, instead of those of our unfriendly neighbours. The near completion of our enlarged canal system opens a wide subject for intelligent discussion. All the advantages its projectors claims for the common outlay will be lost, if not fed and clinched by our railroads. Up to this period of our railroad history, we can lay little claim to the intelligence which would have actuated an ordinary business man in the use of his capital. Politics and contractors' greed have been more powerful than trade wants, and stock and bond-holders are paying the common penalty of their credulity.

In reviewing many of the existing lines we can see great want of foresight in their location. For instance, the Grand Trunk was purely a contractors' road, the trade of the country was terribly depressed, and demanded something to revive it—the outlay for 1000 miles of railway was just the pill for the occasion. We can all see now how much better for the railroad and for the country would it have been, to have left the St. Lawrence trade to itself, and located the road in as direct a line as possible to Ottawa, and thence through the heart of the country to Toronto—this would have given a shorter route, enriched our cities tenfold, and lateral lines would have been built feeding the main line, and removing the necessity for an opposing line, the building of which has now become a certainty. The Great Western Railway, crossing the Niagara Peninsula, was also a commercial blunder in its location, and was killed outright by blundering management. It was the missing link between the seaboard and Chicago, with an enormous trade waiting for it at each end, but which now has to be divided amongst three competing roads, one of which, Vanderbilt owns and operates with as little benefit as possible to Canadian interests. "The Intercolonial" the greatest blunder of all, finds its excuse in being a military fancy and political necessity, at the expense of its commercial and economic character. So that, reviewing what has already occurred, there has not been much astuteness shewn in the selection of routes, which really becomes

the all important element in trade competition. Of the three great Trunk lines in the United States across the continent, only one, the Union Pacific, has reached completion. The extravagant expectation of its projectors, respecting a large Asiatic trade has not been realized. The other two unfinished routes, were projected mainly as colonization roads, fostered by large governmental land appropriations, which the railroad companies undertook to populate at their own cost. It is to be regretted that a similar policy has not been adopted on our Canadian Pacific Railway, while, its being a government measure, must militate unfavourably, both as to its accomplishment and results. Probably the one line on this continent which presents the most hopeful results, and which ought to absorb the best energies of every Canadian, is the Montreal and St. Paul Road *via* Sault St. Marie. This route being as near an air line as possible, can never be circumvented like most other great trunk roads. Tapping the great wheat zone of the world, steamships can be reached at Montreal 260 miles nearer than at any other point, and Liverpool brought 660 miles nearer, a fact which, in the hands of Gould or Vanderbilt, would make it the best paying road in America.

Now, with such a commanding position, and the prospect of the speedy settlement of our North-West, there should be no wavering as to the course Canada, and especially Montreal ought to adopt, to secure or simply retain such a manifest destiny as awaits her. If ever there was a turning point in her history it is now, when every local jealousy and party squabble should be merged into this one great enterprise, securing forever her commercial supremacy, and cheapening breadstuffs to Europe. The growing aspirations of St. Paul, to become the great wheat distributing point of the North-West, ensures the hearty co-operation of her enterprising merchants, and to us, whose interests as a shipping port are infinitely greater, the construction of the road becomes our only protection against the diversion of the through trade. Reverting to the general subject of railroad development in our great North-West domain, the rare opportunity presents itself of leading, instead of following population, and as modern engineering recognizes no impediment in the way of reaching a desired point, by the shortest possible distance, the task should not be a difficult one to determine the location which will best subserve the general interests and initiate a railroad system which for all time will mark the wisdom and statesmanship of its projectors.

Progress.

THE PARLIAMENTARY CROP.

It is ten days since our legislators rose from their labours, and the session is represented by a heap of printed paper. The Vice-Regal assent has been given to numerous Acts, public and private, and the country congratulates itself on having, through these Acts, gained something which it was desirable to have. The theory is that a Parliamentary session is a boon to the public in the work that it performs, either in sweeping away abuses, curbing iniquities, relieving burdens, or oiling the social machinery here and there, so that it may work more smoothly and agreeably in the interests of all classes. This is the theory. Unfortunately it is seldom given effect to in practice, and if one might reverse what was said of the terrible curse in the "Jackdaw of Rheims"—namely, that in spite of its terrors, "nobody seemed one penny the worse"—it may be said with truth that, as the outcome of all the Parliamentary fuss and bother, nobody seems one penny the better!

In one respect, indeed, the result of the session will literally be to leave most of us a penny the worse, since we shall have to endure the enhanced prices of almost every article of consumption, without any increase of wages, as the price of legislative extravagance. As an illustration of history repeating itself, I will pause here for a moment to remark on the wonderful vitality of the English income-tax—as an evidence of the tenacity with which ill-weeds cling to the body politic—notwithstanding the bitter hatred which has pursued it from its inception. I have now before me a copy of a now extinct magazine, dating as far back as 1815, in which the first article is devoted to this as "one of the most obnoxious and oppressive impositions that ever tried the loyalty or awakened the remonstrance of the British public." It is denounced as bad in its nature, and worse in the mode of its collection, since "it holds out a temptation to fraud and perjury which ordinary fortitude cannot resist, and so has a powerful tendency to demoralize the habits and manners of the people." These sound like extracts from a paper of yesterday, for the evil which they are directed against is as rife now as it was sixty-five years ago; the public feeling towards it is the same; it is true, now as then, that "ministers appear to have lost all distinct idea of the comparative value of money, and impose taxes with as little sense of the importance of their measures as if they were playing at a game of cards for their personal amusement."

This by way of episode. As I was remarking, the result of the session ought to be something striking in the way of public good; yet it is pretty clear that where not pernicious, the greater part of the Acts passed will be in the nature of chips in porridge, neither good nor harmful, while many of them will not be worth the paper they are printed on. The Parliamentary machine resembles nothing so much as the treadmill. It entails an infinite amount of labour on everybody connected with it; but it is expended in grinding the