

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF WORKS.

REPORT of the Board of Works, laid before the Legislative Assembly, by command of His Excellency the Governor-General, on the 13th October, 1843.

In accordance with the 30th section of the 4th & 5th Victoria, Cap. 38, for the establishment of a Board for the control and management of all public works and buildings in the Province of Canada, it becomes my duty as Chairman of that Board, appointed under the Act referred to, to submit the following detailed statement of the several public works carried on under the direction of the Board, shewing the progress made in these works, and the amount of monies expended upon them respectively, together with such further details as are deemed necessary to be submitted for the full information of His Excellency the Governor-General.

In consequence of the large immigration, as well as in consideration of the then existing low rates of provisions, and other necessaries, upon the prices of which the cost of public works greatly depends, it was deemed advisable by His Excellency, the Governor in Council, immediately after the passing of the Act establishing this Board, that no time should be lost in commencing with, as many as possible, of these works, for the construction of which funds were provided by the Act 4th & 5th Vic. Cap. 28.

In pursuance of directions to that effect, the Board at once proceeded with the advertizing for tenders, and the placing under contract those, for which the necessary specifications, plans and working details, had then been prepared, and subsequently, and by the same authority, and with as little delay as the locations, and the preparation of the various working plans admitted of, the Board have, from time to time, advertized and entered into contracts for most of the works, sanctioned by the Act last referred to.

In doing so the Board have endeavoured to regulate the annual rate of expenditure as nearly as possible, by that recommended in the Schedule I had the honour to prepare by the order of the late Lord Sydenham, and which was laid before the House of Assembly; but where extensive works, the execution of which extends over a period of two or three years, are being carried on by contract, the rate of expenditure for each year must, in a great degree, be governed by the interests of the Contractors, and their arrangements founded thereon.

As most of the works sanctioned by the Legislature, form links of a connected chain of main communication, either by land or by water, throughout the Province, it was considered highly desirable that the entire should be undertaken simultaneously, so as to be completed together, in as short a time, as a due regard to their efficient and permanent construction would permit: in order that the Province might, as soon as possible, derive the benefit of the large revenue, reasonably expected therefrom, by the collection of tolls and dues, the imposition of which, however, particularly as regards the improvements of the River St. Lawrence, was considered inexpedient and unwarrantable, until the entire would be completed;

prior to which the public could derive but comparatively little benefit from these improvements.

The Board have been governed in their operations by the foregoing considerations, as well as by a desire to reduce, at as early a period as well may be, the heavy expense of the large establishments unavoidably requisite to the effective superintendence and management of such extensive works. There are therefore but very few of the works embraced in the Schedule, already referred to, which are not now under contract, and in progress of construction; and in the hereinafter detailed notice of each work will be found, explained under its respective head, the reasons for delay in each particular instance.

In the management of these works, the Board have, almost without exception, adopted the system of public competition and contract, and heretofore, as invariably, have accepted the lowest tenders; they have also been most scrupulous in not listening to claims for after allowance beyond the terms of the respective contracts; and this unalterable determination of theirs, they have taken much pains to promulgate.

Notwithstanding which, in many instances, the works have been taken below their real value, and much difficulty has been experienced in having them performed in a manner fully up to the specifications. These difficulties had not been unforeseen, and the Board by no means advocate the principle of uniformly accepting the lowest tender, as one to be continued and acted upon in all cases hereafter; but by adopting it in the first commencement with public works generally on a large scale in the Province, they calculated on the prices being thereby brought down to a reasonable rate, that the matter would shortly right itself, and that the works would ultimately fall into the hands of men practically acquainted with their true value, and capable of properly executing them.

The chief objections to the system of accepting the lowest tenders are:

The probability of the labourers being more or less left unpaid by the defaulting contractors:

The certainty of delay (in some cases of an entire season) in the completion of the work:

The acceptance of the tender below the value of the work, thereby ultimately entailing increased expense;

And, finally, the impossibility under any supervision, however extensive, of having the work faithfully performed.

To guard against these evils, the Board have taken every possible precaution by stringent stipulations introduced into the contracts; by looking very closely to the nature of the security tendered; by holding in hands a drawback on the returns until the final completion of the work, which drawback is forfeited