

THE COMMERCIAL

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D. W. BUCHANAN,
Publisher.

The Commercial certainly enjoys a very much larger circulation among the business community of the vast region lying between Lake Superior and the Pacific Coast than any other paper in Canada, daily or weekly. The Commercial also reaches the leading wholesale, commission, manufacturing and financial houses of Eastern Canada.

WINNIPEG, JAN. 20, 1900.

INTERIOR WATERWAYS.

The United States government is evidently alive to the great value of water transportation, as a cheap means of handling heavy traffic. Wherever the rivers throughout the country could be rendered useful for navigation purposes, the government has pursued a steady and consistent policy of improving the same. An example of this wise policy may be found in the case of the Red river. That portion of the Red river lying within the United States has been improved until it has become a valuable artery of commerce. Last year nearly one million bushels of grain were handled on the Red river in the United States, besides large quantities of cordwood, brick, lumber, and general merchandise.

In strange contrast with the action of the United States in regard to waterways stands the long continued policy of the Canadian government. While in this country we have been exceedingly liberal in voting bonuses and subsidies to railway corporations we have been extremely parsimonious in voting anything for the improvement of inland waterways. In the one case private corporations have been voted public funds in a most lavish manner, while needed public improvements to waterways have been neglected. This would appear to be an exact reversal of the policy that should have been followed. Possibly if our rivers could have been exploited by private corporations, the funds for their improvement would have been voted more readily. The people would not, however, have tolerated the handing over of the rivers to private control.

The policy of granting bonuses freely to private transportation corpor-

ations, and giving little or nothing for the improvement of the great natural public highways of commerce, is one that should receive the careful consideration of our people. Here in western Canada we have probably the finest system of inland navigation in the world, standing comparatively idle for the need of a little expenditure on the part of the government. This is an enormous annual loss to the country. In the case of the Red river, already referred to, the annual loss to the people of eastern Manitoba is very great, owing to the refusal of the government to undertake the very limited expenditure necessary to render the river navigable. Fuel, lumber and other building material have cost the people much higher than would have been the case if the river had been rendered navigable.

The strength of a chain is equal only to that of its weakest link. One weak link would render a chain useless for the purpose required. This is exactly the situation that exists in connection with the Red river. One obstruction between the source of supply and demand destroys the value of the route.

The Red river in Manitoba is immensely more valuable for purposes of navigation than the portion of the same river within the United States. Connecting with the river here there is a vast lake, nearly three hundred miles long, having a large fishing industry, and with timber and minerals abounding in the tributary country. Here is the source of supply. In Winnipeg is the demand. The weak link is the St. Andrew's rapids, which the citizens of Winnipeg have been endeavoring to have improved for almost the last two decades. It is to be hoped that the present promised action of the government will result in something being done.

The work of developing our western inland waters should not stop with the improvement of the St. Andrew's rapids. Practically nothing has been done toward improving any of our western rivers. There are other valuable stretches of navigable water, the value of which is largely reduced or entirely destroyed by slight obstructions. What we require is a general policy of improving these public highways of commerce, until their full value to the country shall have been realized.

THE PASSING OF THE OX.

The ox, as a beast of burden, has about had its day in Manitoba, though it is still used to a limited extent in some of the foreign settlements in the province. Manitoba is still a young province, from a historical point of view, and it seems only a short time since the ox was quite commonly used here as a motive power, yet a

Winnipeg paper the other day referred to the passing of an ox team down one of our streets as a novelty. This shows that the ox, as a beast of burden, has already become a rarity here. It also shows how quickly things familiar are forgotten. Such is life in the Great Northwest. Great men pass off the stage of life and are quickly forgotten. Likewise the ox.

In the early days the ox was a very important institution in this country. Before the advent of railways he was the great motive power here. Hitched to a home-made wooden cart, with the aid of straps of home tanned moose skin, the patient beast wended his way for many weary miles over the vast plains of the Great Lone Land, hauling supplies for the trappers and traders and bringing back the product of the hunt in the form of rich furs from the north country.

Later, when the advance wave of the tide of settlement began to reach our great prairie country, the ox came into even more active requisition. Larger quantities of goods were required to be moved to the new settlements that were formed throughout the country, and upon the ox was placed the burden of this work. Strings of ox carts were constantly passing over the sinuous prairie trails, leaving their zig-zag tracks in the dust of the trail, as the home-made wheel of the cart wobbled around in its irregular course. Long, weary trips were made in this way, sometimes aggregating hundreds of miles; sometimes almost thousands, for the country was traversed from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains, and from the United States boundary to the Great Saskatchewan river of the north. Day after day, and week after week; aye and even month after month, the patient animals plodded along, asking little and often receiving less. He wiggled through the prairie sloughs with his load, where the horse would have floundered and proved useless, and as for food he got nothing but what he could forage for at night, after travelling all day. Of course the prairie afforded a liberal grazing supply most of the year. But only the ox was equal to the occasion of having to travel all day and rustle for his food at night.

The ox in those days was to the country what the railway is now. Rather a remarkable comparison to be sure, but a just one. He was the means of transportation then, as the railway is now. Of course, the wheels of commerce revolved somewhat slowly then. They certainly did not receive a very liberal supply of grease. The mournful creaking of the cart wheels, audible almost miles away on a calm day, as the carts passed along the prairie trails, indicated surely that the wheels of commerce in those days were but