

# Need of a Parcels Post System

By J. W. WARD

The exorbitant charges of the express companies are one of the unjust burdens which the people of Canada are loudly protesting against today. This burden could be immediately lifted by the extension of the parcels post system, and the competition of the government against a private monopoly of a public service

The establishment of a general and practical parcels post system would be one of the greatest boons which could be conferred upon the people of Canada. There is a widespread demand for the parcels post, and practically the only opposition to the project is that which is prompted by the selfish interests of the express companies. Farmers want the parcels post in order that they may be enabled to purchase from the cities, without paying exorbitant express charges, articles which they cannot obtain satisfactorily in the country stores; city merchants want the parcels post so that they may be able to supply the demands of the dwellers in the country; and both farmers and townspeople who know of the workings of the parcels post system in European countries are asking that this system may be established in order to bring together the producer on the farm and the consumer in the city.

## The Manufacturers' View

This question, moreover, is one in which the farmers, the city dwellers and the Canadian manufacturers are agreed and can work together for their mutual advantage. For this reason alone, if there were no other, the question deserves the greatest possible prominence. Industrial Canada, the organ of the Canadian Manufacturers' association, in commenting upon the recent convention of that association, says:

"How important is the problem of distribution was illustrated by the consideration that was given to the subject of the parcels post at the convention. Mr. R. D. Fairbairn opened the discussion with a general review of the situation on this continent and in Europe. That buyer and seller are brought closer together in Europe than in America was amply proven. In Germany, where business is carried on according to scientific principles, parcels post has been developed to the highest degree. The charge is low and the restrictions are few. Practically everything in the whole scale of purchasable goods to a weight of one hundred and ten pounds can be sent through the mails at a fraction of a cent a pound. What a boon to the city dweller! The householder in the congested district can buy his butter or vegetables, or a dozen other articles of daily consumption, direct from the farmer in the most remote province of the Empire. A hundred and ten pound parcel will include most of the ordinary supplies of a family. Thus parcels post removes that burdensome disadvantage which comes from living in a large city with only a comparatively small farming population immediately adjacent.

## Brings Producer to Consumer

"It brings the farmer and the consumer of his products together, even though they are hundreds of miles apart. What is worked in Germany on this large scale is in force in other countries on a less elaborate basis. In France the limit of weight is twenty-two pounds, although it will be seen readily that this allows for a very general distribution of merchandise; and the charge is low. In Great Britain eleven pounds is the maximum weight. In Canada we suffer from the dual disadvantage of a high cost and low maximum weight. We can only send five pounds and are charged sixteen cents a pound for doing so. It was urged by one speaker that the broadening of the parcels post system would operate to the disadvantage of the merchants in the smaller towns. That might be the case if the reduction in rates were very marked; but only to the extent that the consumer was able to get into more direct contact with the producer. But, as conditions now exist, the ones who get the benefit are the foreign and British merchants,

who can send larger parcels to points in Canada, at a less cost, than can Canadian merchants in the next town. No feature of the transportation problem is of greater importance than this, and it will call for careful study and investigation by the Railway and Transportation committee during the coming year."

## A Foreign Preference

Canada already has a limited parcels post service, packages of merchandise being handled with a weight limit of five pounds and at a general rate of one cent an ounce. These packages are handled in ordinary mail sacks, and the character of articles that can be mailed is consequently limited to such commodities as will not be injured by the necessarily rough methods of handling. For instance, even if the rate was low enough, no one would think of shipping eggs by mail, even within the five pound limit, though eggs and every kind of dead produce under the limit of 110 pounds weight are shipped by

one post office in Canada to another, even though they might be only a few miles apart, they would have to be divided into three parcels, each weighing less than five pounds, and the charge would be \$1.76.

## Two-fold Discrimination

The discrimination against domestic transportation and in favor of overseas commerce is two-fold—first in the weight limit, and second in the rate. The writer has no objection to the low rates charged on parcels carried between Canada and other countries, but surely if there was reason for our post-master-general making international conventions to put these rates into force, at least equal privileges should be extended to our own people in sending parcels from one part of Canada to another. A reduction of rates, however, would not be satisfactory without an increase in the weight limit. There appears to be no reason, except the opposition of the express companies, which are part of the railway com-

would be collected and delivered at country post offices (and in some cases at their homes) instead of only at railway stations as is the case with express parcels.

Since the government already has an extensive system of machinery for collection, transportation and distribution of mail an enlargement of the business to include the handling of parcels would not mean a proportional increase of expense. Neither would the handling of letter mail be hampered or delayed by the addition of the parcels post. An increase of the post office staffs would be required, and this would enable the letter mail to be handled with greater despatch than at present, the whole staff being available for the handling of letter mail when required, and the parcel mail waiting until the more urgent matter had been disposed of. In the cities auto vans would be employed for the delivery of parcels, and the same vehicles might be used to convey letter carriers to the starting points of their routes instead of their having to walk or depend on the street cars as at present. Mail is at present carried to rural post offices by stage, and the addition of the parcels post would simply necessitate a larger vehicle, or, in some cases, the substitution of automobiles for horses. The revenue derived from the parcels post would also make possible a much more rapid extension of rural mail delivery, an agency which would be an untold saving of time and labor to farmers and their horses.

## The Country Merchant

It is a very natural belief, and one very generally entertained by country merchants, that the establishment of a general parcels post would very greatly increase the business of mail-order houses, with ruinous results to the small retailers throughout the country. Both reason and experience, however, show that the fears of the country merchants in this respect are greatly exaggerated. In view of the fact that the mail-order houses have built up their business without the aid of an up-to-date parcels post, it is manifestly impossible to ascribe their success to a governmental service or to assume that their continued success would be materially affected thereby. The mail-order houses, as every catalog will show, always urge their customers to make up a sufficiently large order to ship by freight, that is, a consignment of 100 pounds or more, and the result is that a person who requires a certain article from a mail-order house either induces his neighbors to join with him in making up the order, thereby becoming an unpaid canvasser for the mail-order house, or he orders goods, sufficient to make up the weight, which under other circumstances he would purchase at the local store.

## Make the Country Attractive

Speaking of the attitude of the country merchant toward the mail-order houses, Mr. Ransford, a member of the Canadian Manufacturers' association, said at the recent convention of that body:

"I maintain . . . that the greater facilities you put into the hands of people living in small places to deal with departmental stores at the centres, or, in other words, to live in the country and at the same time have the advantage of shopping in the city store, the more you will make the country attractive and the less likely you will be to make these people leave the country parts and flock to the cities. There was a meeting of the board of trade in my town a short time ago. They have adopted the method of having a committee of the retail storekeepers quietly, sub rosa, watch everything that comes

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## Inquiry into Western Freight Rates

The campaign for a reduction of freight rates in Western Canada, in which The Guide has taken a prominent part, has had its first-fruits in the decision of the board of railway commissioners to hold a general inquiry into the whole question of Western freight rates. The commissioners have asked the government to appoint counsel to represent the public at the inquiry, and will first take the matter up at Ottawa on February 13, afterwards holding sittings at various points in the West.

The order of the board which is signed by His Honor J. P. Mabee, chief commissioner, is as follows:

"Whereas, as many general complaints and petitions have been made to the board against the existing freight rates charged by the railway companies operating in Canada west of Lake Superior, and the board had been delaying the consideration thereof until the final determination of the Regina rate case:

"And, whereas, the supreme court of Canada on the 6th day of December, ultimo, dismissed the appeal of the Canadian Pacific and Canadian Northern Railway companies from the order of the board No. 12,150, dated the 10th day of December, 1910, in the matter of the application of the City of Regina (above referred to) requiring the discrimination in favor of points in the province of Manitoba, and against points in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, to be removed by requiring the class freight rates from Port Arthur and Fort William and points east thereof, to the said points in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and the said decision having left the board free to undertake a wider inquiry, and

"Whereas, as the tolls of the railway companies operating in the province of British Columbia are already the subject of inquiry by the board upon the complaints of the Vancouver board of trade and the United Farmers of Alberta, and

"Whereas, the board is empowered by the act upon its motion to hear and determine any matter or thing which, under the act, it might inquire into, hear and determine, upon application or complaint—

"Therefore it is declared to be advisable that

"(1) A general inquiry be at once undertaken by the board into all freight tolls in effect in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, and in the province of Ontario, west of and including Port Arthur and Fort William, with the view that in the event of its being determined that the said tolls, or any of them, are excessive, the same shall be reduced as the board may determine.

"(2) A sitting of the board will be held at the city of Ottawa on Tuesday, the 13th day of February, 1912, at 10 a.m., to consider the procedure upon the said inquiry and give directions with reference thereto."

the parcels post in Germany. When the parcels post regulations are examined, Canadians cannot help feeling that we are great international philanthropists. Under the law, the post-master-general is authorized to make international postal conventions. The result is that the inhabitants of Great Britain and the principal foreign countries enjoy the right to send packages at 12 cents a pound or less, and up to 11 pounds in weight, from their own countries to any part of Canada. Similarly, a foreigner, or anyone for that matter, can send an eleven pound parcel to Great Britain or the principal foreign countries at the same rate. For instance, an eleven pound package may be sent from any post office in Canada to any place in France for 98 cents, or to England, Germany, Jamaica, the Leeward Islands, Mexico or Trinidad for \$1.32. To send the same articles from

panies, why the post office cannot undertake to carry every kind of parcel which an express company will handle at the present time. If the express companies charged reasonable rates, there would not be the same demand for the parcels post, but, as Judge Mabee, chairman of the Railway Commission, stated in a famous judgment, "the original principle upon which the express companies' tariffs are based is, 'what are the heaviest tariffs we can obtain from the public for the least service we can give them!'"

## A Rural Service

There is no question that a parcels post service could be given by the post office at a great reduction of the express companies' charges, and in addition, the parcels post would have the great advantage from the point of view of the farmers of the country that parcels