

Good Roads.

The Good Roads Agitation.

ORIGIN.

With the dawn of civilization, many centuries ago, the first road was constructed, and the agitation for better highways, first for military, and then for commercial purposes was introduced.

A short reference to the road making of the ancients, from which our systems have to a large extent been gradually evolved will not be out of place.

The earliest roads about which anything definite is known, are those of ancient Rome, one of which, the most celebrated, "The Applian Way" was commenced 312 B. C.

When Cortez conquered Mexico, the ancient capital was approached from various directions by paved roads from two to three miles in length and thirty feet in width. And in Peru Spaniards found among other indications of civilization, a net-work of highways superior to those in any other country. It is on historical record that there were over 1700 miles of these roads, and that they were paved with large flags and free stone, and in many places set in asphaltic cement. With the disruption of the Roman Empire came a period at which road-making and maintenance became neglected, and seems to have fallen into general disuse until about the 12th. or 13th. Century when the streets of large towns were protected by stone, laid in a gravel or concrete bed. In many continental cities this method of street paving is yet adhered to. The bad state of the roads in England in 1685 is referred to by Macaulay the English historian who states "that it was by the highways that both travellers and goods generally passed from place to place, and these highways appear to have been far worse than might have been expected from the degree of wealth and civilization, which the nation had even then attained." The roads in England were at that time in a much worse condition than those of most European countries, and they were sometimes almost impassable. About the middle of the last Century, some decisive steps were taken for improvement in both construction and maintenance, and shortly afterwards much improvement was effected by the introduction of the systems of Telford and Macadam. During the present Century much has been done to improve the highways of Europe, more especially in France and Great Britain. A great deal has been said about the inferiority of the roads of this country, compared with those in England and the neighboring countries of Europe.

By way of explanation it should be stated that, before railways and steam navigation were invented, all the mails had to be carried over the common roads, and there were no other means of communication. These roads were commercial highways of the country, so that for many years roadmaking was a most important department of parliamentary care in these countries. It is said that in 1816, there were in England and Wales alone 25,000 miles of turnpike road, and this was just at the commencement of modern scientific road-making. The English people had become accustomed to them and they were looked upon as a necessity.

In Ontario the early settler began the agitation for improved highways while chopping his way through the forest. He had hardly established a settlement when steam navigation and transportation by rail came into existence, and so attracted all the traffic. This for the time checked our progress as road-makers. Had railroading and navigation by steam been deferred for another half century, we would have been advanced farther in the science of road-making. But it was not to be expected in a country so extensive in advantages, where

the temptation is so great for the population to spread over immense territory, that it would be possible to make roads everywhere, such as would be looked for in thickly populated countries, so we need not be discouraged.

For several years past the public press has been pointing out the necessity for reform in road-making. Men most acquainted with the details have been clamoring for reform. The people are ready for the change, if satisfactory plans are submitted for carrying out of the work. The result of this agitation, was the formation of The Good Roads Association, at Toronto in February last, and as an association, we desire to interest you in the best information concerning this most important subject. We have assisted largely by way of bonuses in building our magnificent Provincial Railway System, and should now turn our consideration to the important question of road-making, and endeavor to create an interest among the municipal road-makers throughout the province, and obtain an expression of opinion, which in a short time will be so decided that our representative law makers and councillors will have to give heed.

When the subject shall have been discussed in County Councils, in township meetings, in Farmer's Institutes, and in Provincial Road Conventions, a final conclusion reached, and that conclusion sent back to the councils and confirmed, we shall then have come as near as possible to a proper solution of the problem.

No person or association in the land can afford to neglect a movement so vital to the country's progress and prosperity; few, indeed, in addition to their concern in the general welfare, have some special interest, direct or indirect, in the condition of highways.

The organization that will solve the good road problem will secure a notable place in the history of civilization. The best thought is required in developing or choosing a plan of action, and the solid support of the people when a plan is found.

Loss Through Bad Roads and Gain Through Good Ones.

It is impossible to refer definitely to the losses occasioned to any community through bad roads. The public treasury suffers owing to the present extravagant system of road maintenance, to which must be added the large amounts paid both in the way of law costs and damages to persons who have suffered loss through accidents caused by non repair and bad condition of the roads. That bad roads make large demands on private funds is admitted. In comparison, the economic benefits of good roads can readily be shown by their cheaper maintenance, greater and easier facilities for travelling, less cost for repairs to vehicles, a proportionate relaxation of strain upon our horses, a consequent saving of time, to say nothing of the comfort to be derived therefrom by those using the roads. The increase in land values will more than pay for the permanent improvement of roads and this increase will be greater if the county system of road improvement is adopted.

Apart from the acknowledged interest in good roads of the builders of wagons, carriages, bicycles, fraction engines, and implements, and carriage owners, horse breeders, etc., and that of all merchants and manufactures, in respect to the cheap and speedy distribution of goods and better collection of raw materials and money returns, there are many great semi-public institutions whose interests are deeply involved.

Railroads, in the equal distribution of their traffic through the seasons, securing constant employment of their force and equipment; telegraph and telephone companies,

in the extension of country service; newspapers in the expansion of their circulation through free delivery that will follow good roads; banks and bankers, in the quicker movement of capital in country business; and all philanthropic associations and individuals in the provision of employment sufficient to "abolish poverty," or at least want and starvation, for a generation.

The fertility of tillable land is constant and it is the accessibility to market that fixes its value. Ontario's wealth in agriculture is owing to the facilities for transportation afforded by her network of railways. The resources of our country would be almost useless without such means. The same law by which the railway gives value to real estate also applies when a good road completes the system from the farm to the station. With good roads the owner can come and go when he gets ready; he can sell his produce when the prices are best; he is not compelled to wait the pleasure of sunshine or shower, and go "when the roads are good," nor is he compelled to force his produce upon an unwilling market at whatever price a crowded warehouse, elevator or railroad may dictate. He can profitably employ his teams at all times of the year; time will be saved, business will be regular, teaming can be done when the farm does not require attention, larger loads can be drawn in less time, the price of all products would be that allowed by the law of finance—supply and demand. We would no longer be at the mercy of greedy speculators and glutted markets, and the farmer would take his rightful place in the business world and increase profits by decreasing the cost of production.

The construction at once of a complete and thorough system of county roads for a Municipality, or several contiguous Municipalities, has many advantages. It brings into the locality, to be paid out for labor, and afterwards used in improving and increasing the value of the taxable property of the county, the amount required for the improvement. As soon as the system is completed there is a large increase in the marketable and taxable value of all the farms, and the people at once come into the enjoyment of the comforts and advantages which are derived from good roads. The work, the large amount of which makes it practicable to adopt a thorough system, can, therefore be much more economically conducted than when it is carried on in a fitful and irregular manner, insuring at the same time the almost certainty of better roads. The annual tax now levied for the improvement of roads would be then levied to pay interest on the bonds, and to keep the roads in repair. In some portions of the country it is, of course, more difficult and expensive to construct and maintain good roads than in others. Any enterprise which reduces the cost of transportation, and increases the value of land, should commend itself to all. It would be difficult to devise a scheme that would contribute so largely to the general prosperity as money judiciously expended in the construction of first class roads.

The Statute Labor System.

Statute labor or the road-tax system of personal service and commutation, though nearly universal among us, is unsound in this principle, unjust in its operation, wasteful in its practise, and unsatisfactory in its results. Borrowed from similar road labor systems of England and France, it is like them, a remnant of the times when one of the duties by which land was held, was the obligation to make the roads passable for the troops of the Lord of the Manor, and while we do not advocate the abolition of statute labor which is wholly controlled by your local municipal councils, we wish to say that a wise and well regulated system for carrying on the repairs of roads, and of maintaining the greatest degree of efficiency, is as important as their judicious construction.

When the country was new, and the people were not in a position to pay money tax for