

2d Session, 9th Parliament, 5th Geo: IV.

It is in one respect fortunate for this Province, that the State of New-York has found itself able, at so early a day, to attempt the completion of an inland navigation, which might well have been thought to exceed its power. An example has, in the progress of this great work, been afforded to the people of Canada, sufficiently applicable in all essential points to form the ground of satisfactory calculations.

With respect to the general face of the country, (not noticing some particular features) the climate and change of seasons, which call for some consideration, the price of labour, and most profitable mode of employing it, the circumstances are so far similar as to make experience in the one country highly useful in the other, and the resemblance in other respects is sufficiently strong to enable us to estimate, with tolerable accuracy, the probable effects of such improvements on the commerce and the agriculture of this country, by observing the progress of both, under the change of circumstances, produced by the canal in the State of New-York.

With such advantages it is fair to presume, that the commissioners and those they have employed, have not materially erred in their estimate of the probable expense of the several improvements suggested. There is at least much less room for apprehension of any material error being discovered in proceeding to put their plans in execution, than there might have been under other circumstances.

Upper Canada, regarding only those parts of it within the great waters which appear to be capable of cultivation, contains an area of about 50,000 square miles, the soil of which is, with very little exception, most favourable to agriculture, and the climate being equally propitious there is no doubt that when it is sufficiently peopled, its productions, and consequently its trade, must be immense. An inspection of the map discovers remarkable facilities afforded by nature to inland navigation; and it is impossible but that in time, besides those shorter inland cuts connecting the different chains of waters, and communicating at intervals with the St. Lawrence, advantage will be taken of the remarkable features of the country, to render navigable without interruption, the double access to the ocean by the great waters composing the frontier of the Province, and by those which inclose its settlements to the northward.

To these grand objects the public attention should undoubtedly first be called, for in these consist the distinguishing advantages with which the Province is so remarkably favoured. It is very probable that works of a similar nature, but of much more limited extent might be undertaken in particular sections of the Province with a more certain prospect of an immediate recompense, but there are reasons more obviously applying to Upper Canada, than perhaps to almost any other country, why the accomplishment of the greater objects should receive the first, and engross the whole attention of the Province, though in the present state of trade and population, a less return of profit should follow their completion.

It was no doubt with this conviction that the legislature has first and principally directed the attention of the commissioners "to the exploring the most practicable route for a canal between Lake Erie and the eastern boundary of this Province."

With what success they have performed their duty is to be learnt by an attentive perusal of their reports and an examination of their estimates, which it is believed, so far as they may be relied on, are by no means discouraging to those who may have ventured before to look forward to the commencement of undertakings apparently so disproportionate to the present means of the Province.

After examining the estimates and reports, the considerations remaining to be weighed, are, the probable influence of the projected improvements upon our security and welfare, the scale on which they should be attempted, the expense at which they can be accomplished, and the means of meeting that expense, the time in which they may and ought to be undertaken, and in what order.

Upon all these points the Commissioners have offered very valuable remarks; and the committee may without any censurable failure in their duty, forbear much additional observation of their own upon points upon which great diversity of opinion will undoubtedly prevail, however much they may be discussed, because they involve considerations so various in their nature, and so combined a view must be taken of the several questions, that it would be vain to pretend to demonstrate satisfactorily the precise conclusion to which the suggestions of the commissioners ought, under all circumstances, to lead.

That a canal from Kingston to the Ottawa River, would, in the event of a war, not merely diminish beyond measure the charge of our defence, but render its success greatly more certain, admits of no doubt. Happily present appearances indicate no interruption of the good understanding between Great Britain and America, on the contrary, they afford a well-grounded hope of its permanence; but without bringing probabilities into discussion it may be affirmed, that it would be most imprudent to reckon securely on a very long continuance of peace.

In the event of a war, protracted as the last, the safety and the saving of transport, conducted by such a channel, would, it is believed, fully compensate to the nation the charge of the improvement, and it is most evident that to give full effect to the sound and liberal policy which has created the military settlements on the Rideau, & introduced, since the war, a loyal population of more than 10,000 souls where there was before no inhabitant, and which is now surmounting at a considerable expense the interruption of the navigation of the Ottawa, it is necessary to perfect the water communication removed from the enemy's frontier, and leading in truth, from the ocean to Kingston, which is the key to Lake Ontario and the principal military station in the Province. The same reasoning applies, but in a less degree, to the proposed canal connecting Lakes Erie and Ontario, such a work would undoubtedly facilitate military operations in defence of the Province to a great extent under any probable circumstances, but it would not so decidedly ensure the safety of the western portion of the Province as the first mentioned canal would of the eastern, because the enemy, if in possession of the Lake, might still cut off resources from below, and render the benefit of such a work partial and uncertain.

With respect to the advantages to trade & commerce which the projected communications would procure, little can be said that has not been urged and nothing, that observation in a neighbouring country does not readily suggest. In this view, the improvement which would connect the waters of Lake Erie and Ontario, is undoubtedly the most important, because, the more remote that portion of the Province is from the ocean, the more ruinous to its commerce and consequently to its agriculture, is any natural obstruction which increases materially the difficulty of transport.

To a country so situated, the manufactures its inhabitants consume come at a higher charge, and if the only articles they can furnish in return are subject to disadvantages which almost exclude them from the markets, there is reason to fear a depression of circumstances, a discouragement to exertion, and ultimately perhaps, even a consequent inferiority in moral character, amidst great positive advantages of climate and soil.

When the great importance in a commercial point of view, of an uninterrupted navigation from the country bordering on Lake Erie is thus considered, it is very gratifying to find that a hope is held out of its speedy accomplishment by the exertions of a private company at a much less expense than that contemplated by the commissioners, but by a route which may perhaps as effectually serve the interests of the country in time of peace.

If the Welland Canal should proceed upon the scale now contemplated by the company, admitting of sloop navigation, it is to be supposed that, for all purposes of commerce, the execution of the plan reported by the commissioners, might be postponed till the population of the country should become such as to warrant its being entertained for the reasons that it would serve the interests of a much greater extent of interior country and would terminate at a safer and more commodious harbour.

The latter reason would undoubtedly indicate the canal projected by the commissioners, as that which would best conduce to the military defence of the country—but if the Welland Canal should be carried successfully through, it is conceived that no sufficient motive would remain for desiring the completion of the other until many more necessary improvements of a similar kind had been first executed.

The benefits which may be expected to accrue to agriculture and trade from a canal leading to the Ottawa from Kingston, are investigated at some length in the paper alluded to, (No.) and although with whatever candour and intelligence the inquiry is there conducted, it is very possible that the results may appear questionable to many; the committee will not pretend to discuss the merits of an estimate founded on details by which it may be to a certain degree verified or contradicted by any who have more leisure and better opportunity to examine them.

The question on what scale it would be expedient to undertake either of the canals projected, seems to have appeared very doubtful to the commissioners, and it certainly is one which admits of much discussion and calls for great consideration.