

IX.—TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS.

Canada is a country of magnificent distances, nearly 4,000 miles in length from east to west, with its relatively small population of 8,788,483¹ in the main thinly distributed along the southern borders of its vast area. Different parts of the country are shut off from each other by areas which are almost wildernesses, such as the region lying between New Brunswick and Quebec, and the vast areas north of lakes Huron and Superior, the latter dividing the chief industrial region of Ontario and Quebec from the great agricultural areas of the prairies. To such a country with such a population, producing, like our western agriculturalists, mainly for export, or, like our manufacturers, largely for consumption in distant portions of the country itself, cheap transportation is a necessity of life. Before 1850, when the water routes were the chief avenues of transportation and these were closed by ice for several months, the business of the central portions of the country was during the winter in a state of stagnation or hibernation. The steam railway was therefore required for the adequate economic development of Canada, more particularly for linking up with the economic and industrial world the vast productive areas of the Canadian west, and thus promoting their development. The construction of the Canadian Pacific railway gave to Canada, as an economic unit, length, but it was "length without breadth." The building of the newer trans-continental railways has for the first time given the country breadth—a fact which in another ten years, as settlement fills the extensive areas thus opened up, will be more evident than it is to-day.

Railway transportation, though in many parts of the country essential, is nevertheless expensive, particularly in these last few years, and for bulky and weighty commodities. Hence new enterprises have either been undertaken or are under consideration for improving water communication, such as the new and deeper Welland canal, the deepening of the St. Lawrence canals and of the channel between Montreal and Quebec, and the utilization of the Hudson bay route for the transportation of western grain to the British and continental European markets.

Problems of transportation are, therefore, of vital importance in the economic life of Canada, occupying a large part of the time and thought of our Parliaments and public men. Scarcely less important, from the social and from the economic point of view, is the development of methods of communication, in a country so vast and so thinly peopled. The post office has been a great, though little recognized factor, in promoting solidarity among the people of different parts of the Dominion, while telegraphs and telephones have gone far to annihilate distance, the rural telephone, in particular, having been of great social and economic benefit in country districts. That the use of the automobile has also been of great benefit in promoting social intercourse among the dwellers in rural districts is evidenced by the fact that in Ontario alone, 70,453 passenger cars were owned by farmers in 1922. The press, again, assisted by cheap telegraph and cable rates, and reaching through the mails all over the country, has been of great use in developing national sentiment. To sum up, it may be said that the progress of modern inventions, not least among which is the radiophone, is going far to eliminate that isolation and loneliness which in the past were such characteristic features of Canadian rural life, and have thrown their gloomy shadow across the pages of Canadian literature.

¹ Census of 1921.