

CHAPTER XVIII.—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 9,796,800¹ 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 areas north of lakes Huron and Superior, the last dividing the industrial region of Ontario and Quebec from the agricultural areas of the prairies. To such a country with such a population, producing, like our western agriculturists, 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 were closed by ice for several months each year, the business of the central portions of the country was reduced to a state of relative inactivity during the winter. 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; the building of the newer transcontinental railways has given the country breadth.

Railway transportation, though essential, is nevertheless expensive, particularly in recent 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 the economic points 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, has been of great social and economic benefit in country districts. The use of the automobile has also been of great benefit in promoting social intercourse and in facilitating the transaction of business among the dwellers in rural districts. 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 radio, has greatly improved living conditions in both rural and urban communities throughout the Dominion.

¹ Estimated population 1929.