

PHILOSOPHY OF RAILROADS

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Philosophy of railroads by Thos. C. Keefer

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THOS. C. KEEFER

**PHILOSOPHY
OF RAILROADS**

PHILOSOPHY
OF
RAILROADS,

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF
THE DIRECTORS
OF THE
ST. LAWRENCE AND OTTAWA GRAND
JUNCTION RAILWAY COMPANY.

BY
Thos. C. Beecher, C. E.

FOURTH EDITION.
REVISED.



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1853.



This Pamphlet was first published about three years since in Toronto, and ran through three editions during the agitation of the Great Western Simcoe, and Toronto and Kingston Railways; its influence in the promotion of which enterprises has been generally acknowledged.

It has had but a slight circulation in the Lower Province and upon the Ottawa, and therefore the Directors of the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Grand Junction Railway Company have determined to republish it in a revised form, believing that it will be found to be a valuable exponent of the influences of the Railway System generally—and will tend to awaken a stronger interest in the important enterprise which they have in hand.

Transport
Necessities
9-17-29

WILSON

INTRODUCTION.

OLD Winter is once more upon us, and our inland seas are "dreary and inhospitable wastes" to the merchant and to the traveller;—our rivers are sealed fountains,—and an embargo which no human power can remove is laid on all our ports. Around our deserted wharves and warehouses are huddled the naked spars,—the blasted forest of trade,—from which the sails have fallen like the leaves of the autumn. The splashing wheels are silenced,—the roar of steam is hushed,—the gay saloon, so lately thronged with busy life, is now but an abandoned hall,—and the cold snow revels in solitary possession of the untrodden deck. The animation of business is suspended, the life blood of commerce is curdled and stagnant in the St. Lawrence—the great aorta of the North. On land, the heavy stage labours through mingled frost and mud in the West,—or struggles through drifted snow, and slides with

uncertain track over the icy hills of Eastern Canada. Far away to the South is heard the daily scream of the steam-whistle,—but from Canada there is no escape: blockaded and imprisoned by Ice and Apathy, we have at least ample time for reflection—and if there be comfort in Philosophy may we not profitably consider the

PHILOSOPHY OF RAILROADS.

New commercial enterprises, however well supported by dry and accurate statistics, are not often undertaken upon imperfect information—through the representations of theorists or politico-economical writers—or even when supported by bright analogies, and the most authentic records of the success of similar undertakings amongst similar communities. It is true, that well-established systems become the subjects of stock-jobbing and speculation by parties ignorant of their uses or real value; but their origin and maturity are the work of the well-informed few, whose foresight has been rewarded frequently before it has been acknowledged. In older countries the feasibility of public projects and their value as speculations are more speedily ascertained than in our young and thinly populated Province, and any attempt to transplant a system, or found arguments for the latter from the experience of the former, is at once met with disparaging and “odious” comparisons. The intrinsic merit of the question,—the absolute instead of the comparative value of our own projects,—are not often inves-

tigated, because the nature of such investigations are not familiar to us, while they have long since become unnecessary and are therefore not canvassed in those countries where an established system exists.

Thus it is with the Railway System in Canada. We see, and to our cost, feel its effects around us;—we acknowledge its importance, the great results it has achieved, and the substantial expression of public opinion in its favour in the hundreds of millions which have been freely devoted to its extension in other civilized countries. We have talked about it for years—we have projected a great deal, and done very little, because the public,—the real estate owners large and small,—have not taken up the subject. Our Representatives have lately acquitted themselves nobly in this matter, but they have rather led than followed public opinion, and have themselves been acted upon by a “glorious” minority, to whom the actual and efficient execution has hitherto been confined, and who have contended with the chilling influence of popular apathy, ignorance, and incredulity.

An attempt to investigate the Railway System in its applicability to new countries,—to define its limitations by shewing where and why its application becomes justifiable,—to disseminate popular information upon a too unpopular subject, and turn a portion of that earnest and eager covetousness of foreign prosperity back upon our own neglected resources,—will it be hoped be received with public favour—or at least with public charity.

At the outset it may be objected that there is an insufficiency of disposable circulating capital in Canada, to construct a time of the length of projected Railways, and that *therefore* the discussion is premature. The premises will be admitted to any reasonable extent, but the conclusion, instead of the discussion is, we hope to show, premature.

The population, soil, and wealth of Canada are not in-

ferior to Vermont, New Hampshire, Michigan, Georgia, and other States which have Railways; and the local resources of some portions of our Province, where Railroads are wanting, are at least equal to those in Ohio and many other States where these advantages have been enjoyed for years. Whatever is or was the condition of the circulating capital in the States mentioned, they have *found a way* to build their roads. This we believe has been done through the energy and perseverance of the local proprietors of real estate, who have convinced capitalists that they could have no better security for their investments, than that contingent upon the certain increase of population, wealth, and traffic, in rising countries like our own;—and thus they have secured improvements from which the land is the first to benefit, and without which its value in Canada is stationary; and this too, under circumstances when to stand still is to recede. The projectors of the Welland Canal were not Rothschilds; yet the untiring perseverance of one gentleman secured the construction of a work which for importance has no parallel in America.

There is a greater amount of unemployed capital amongst our agricultural and trading population than is generally supposed; and of fixed capital and absolute wealth there is more than sufficient both to need and to warrant the construction of all the roads proposed. A very considerable class of the Stockholders in New England roads are farmers, with investments from £50 to £500.

Railway stocks, unlike most others, are a species of real estate immoveably attached to the soil, and have therefore become of late years favourite channels for investment with all classes of capitalists. Banks may fail,—commerce may languish or be partially diverted,—manufactures be rendered unprofitable,—even the earth may for a time refuse to many a return for the capital invested in it; but as long as there are men to profit or to

lose by speculations, there will be people to sustain a Railway; and if universal ruin be inevitable, *they* will be the last public works to succumb to the general prostration. The cart road is succeeded by the turnpike, this again by the macadam or plank roads, and these last by the Railway. The latter is the perfected system and admits of no competition—and this characteristic pre-eminently marks it out as the most desirable object for investment in the midst of an enterprising and increasing population.

With an *assessed* value of above one hundred and forty millions of dollars—with cultivated lands worth fifty millions of dollars, and an annual crop, valued at twenty millions of dollars, in Upper Canada alone,—with population, production and wealth, doubling in about ten years, we offer a security upon the industrial character and the increasing wants of a progressive people, for all judicious commercial investments. We therefore believe—although we could not borrow a dollar for any other purpose,—that as the unavoidable customers of a well placed Railway, we have only to secure its receipts to those from whom we ask assistance and take those necessary preliminary steps which none but ourselves can take, in order to obtain the capital required to construct our works. This can scarcely be contested from the experience of the past, because the value of Railway investment is of comparatively recent discovery—and is even now but partially appreciated. Did we not find it so difficult to foresee the inevitable future instead of looking backward, we must acknowledge that with the same future of past progress, there will have taken place in the natural order of things, *before* such works as we propose to consider *could be* brought into perfect operation, such an improved change as is now only demanded by the most incredulous in order to secure their sanction to a Railway system for Canada.