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FROM PORT NELSON TO EUROPE.

On the strength of some evidence given before a select committee of the House of Commons, last session, by Professor Hind, the question has been raised whether Port Nelson, on Hudson Bay, can be made the shipping port for produce destined for Europe, of the great and fertile valley of the Saskatchewan. Port Nelson, we are told, is nearer than New York to Liverpool by some eighty miles; but we are not told that Hudson's Bay is seldom or never entirely free from ice; that the vessels of the Hudson Bay Company find it convenient to arrive at Port Nelson about the 10th or 15th of August, and that they have to get away again by the 15th or 20th of September; for if they remained five days beyond this last date, they might encounter twenty degrees of frost. A vessel is sometimes buffeted by the ice, in Hudson Strait, for more than a month, though it may by good fortune, chance to get through in four days. These detentions sometimes last till the beginning of August. Steamers would have an advantage over sailing vessels; but they would fare badly if they should be detained in the ice and ran short of fuel. On an average, each vessel going to Port Nelson passes through from 800 to 1000 miles of ice; and the voyages are made at the most favorable season. Sometimes all the ice is not got through till September. It has happened once, in 1836, that it was not possible to land the cargo sent out at all, owing to detention caused by ice.

It is quite true that much of what we know about Hudson Bay comes from persons who have had an interest in placing its navigation in the most unfavorable aspect. Though detentions are serious, vessels are seldom lost. But only two or three on an average, go there every year. The navigation must be dangerous as well as being subject to great delays. The navigation of the Strait and Bay must be put on nearly the same level as the proposed winter navigation of the St. Lawrence.

To reach Port Nelson, from the valley of the Saskatchewan, all produce would have

to travel a distance as great as that between Quebec and Toronto, and much of it farther. In the shorter distance, great obstructions to navigation occur; and the produce would have to be taken by rail, if it were found possible to build a railway over a barren district, one hundred miles of which is little better than a bog. It may be true that, with a railway from Battleford to Port Nelson, the distance between the former point and Liverpool would be 260 miles less than between Chicago and Liverpool; but does any one suppose that 260 miles saving in distance would not be more than counterbalanced by the obstructions occasioned by the ice in Hudson Strait and Bay? In fact, it is quite useless to compare distances, under such circumstances. But the comparison of distances would have to be between the route from Battleford on the Saskatchewan, some 560 miles west of Red River, via Port Nelson to Liverpool, and via Montreal. In that case the difference would be very great; but the question is whether the saving in distance would not be counterbalanced by the difficulty of the navigation on the shorter route. If we cannot try the experiment without building a railway to Port Nelson, it will have to be deferred to the Greek Kalends. The country north of the height of land and east of Lake Winnipeg, will never be a grain growing country; a large part of it is a moss-covered rock, on which only stunted trees grow, and which affords little food for animals. Most of the produce that would require to be shipped would have to be raised west of Lake Winnipeg; and without a railway it could not be got over the barren, muskrat country. There was a time when the route to Europe via Hudson Bay had a sort of importance that no longer belongs to it. In the beginning of this century, when the North West Company had opened up regular communication—though Mr. Flemming does not seem to be aware of the fact—with the tribes on the Pacific coast, it would have been a great advantage to these traders to have been permitted to use the route via Hudson Bay, to Europe; because in travelling overland from Montreal to the Pacific Ocean, they had a great deal of unnecessary work to perform. But when the North West Company asked liberty to use this route, the Hudson Bay Company stood on the rights of its monopoly and barred the way. It was this refusal, in fact, as much as anything, that compelled the North West Co'y to amalgamate with its privileged rival. To us it seems, looking at these facts, that the importance of the Hudson Bay route to Europe, has been greater in the past than it is at present or is ever likely to be again.

THE PROBLEM OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

An increasing disposition is shown to throw aside our municipal system as incurably vicious, because taxes are high, instead of attempting to improve it. This is the policy of despair; but we venture to think it is not the true policy. It finds adherents among well meaning people, who are sincerely desirous for some improvement in municipal administration. What is unusual, in such cases, there is among those who despair of the present scheme of municipal rule, a singular unanimity as to what the remedy should be. Cities are to be governed by Commissioners, who, as they would have no objects of ambition to serve, would have to be paid for their time. We need not say that the proposal is confined entirely to cities and towns; municipal government being about the last franchise that a county or a township would be willing to part with. And if it came to the point, we doubt whether any city, however much oppressed with taxes, would be willing to give up its representative government. The attempt recently made to place the management of the affairs of the city of Quebec under Commissioners failed; and unless there be a change of opinion, we think any similar attempt, in respect to any other city, would share the same fate.

A board of commissioners is not suited to carry on the government of a city. A commission may sometimes be advantageously employed, when the work requiring to be done is purely administrative. But when legislative powers have to be exercised, a commission is not suitable for the work. The purely administrative work of a city council is, in its details at least, worked out by paid officials; but it is for the legislative authority of the city to say what work shall or shall not be done. A commission of half a dozen men could not do the work now done by the servants of the corporation; its functions must necessarily be mainly of the legislative order. A commission entrusted with this work, would necessarily exist under conditions unfavourable to municipal reform. This kind of commission has been tried, and the experience is not encouraging. Extensive improvements in the city of Washington were carried on, at the expense of the national government, by a commission; and the name of "Boss Sheppard," the leading spirit in it, acquired quite as bad a notoriety as Boss Tweed. The elective system has its drawbacks; but if the elected are sometimes unduly anxious to serve influential electors, the consciousness that the eyes of their constituents are upon them has a restraining influence, under temptations to do wrong.