

must greatly facilitate treaty-making when the foreign nation can feel that whatever agreement may be reached through mutual concessions can be regarded as not subject to rejection by any authority behind or above that of the agent or the Government which he represents. Practically the question may not have much meaning under our responsible system, inasmuch as the Government's followers may usually be relied on to support it in carrying out its engagements, while it would not be easy, under any circumstances, to persuade the members of an Opposition that they were under any obligations in the matter. Yet it is conceivable that an Administration, having become convinced after negotiating a treaty that it had made a mistake, might take advantage of the provision for the ratification of Parliament as a means of escape from the consequences of their lack of judgment. One thing, however, is likely to be learned from the present case. Future Administrations will be very likely to keep in close communication with their agent or commissioner and see to it that he does not bind them to conditions which they have not carefully considered and approved. The course taken by the Minister of Finance, at the previous session, makes it pretty clear that that precaution was not sufficiently observed throughout in the negotiation of the treaty now in question.

The promise of the Atlantic steamship subsidy is undoubtedly a bold step. Three-quarters of a million of dollars is a large sum for five millions of people, not over-wealthy, to pay every year to a single steamship company. The intercolonial negotiations may be carried on cautiously and at leisure. The French Treaty may be "denounced," if Canada is found to be getting the worst of the bargain. But the subsidy once voted must be paid year by year, so long as the Company fulfils its part of the contract, whatever may be the state of the exchequer or the results of the experiment. The Canadian Pacific Railway was a still bolder experiment, yet few would now be willing to pronounce it a mistake or a failure, however many may regret that the interests of the people were not more carefully guarded and conserved. There is a striking similarity between the arguments by which that great enterprise was supported and opposed and those used in regard to the subsidy. Nor can it be said that, however proud we may be of the railway, it has thus far been a marked success so far as the main reason for its construction, the promotion of immigration and the settlement of the great prairies, is concerned. It is impossible that a great stream of travel, much less of traffic, can be directed across the continent without the country through which it passes being benefitted, at least at certain points, to a considerable extent. Yet there is room for very serious question whether the extent of such benefits can reasonably be expected to be such

as to justify an enormous expenditure to procure them. We can conceive of a strong argument being made to prove that the use of \$750,000 a year in some carefully studied, direct way for the encouragement of agriculture and other industries throughout the Dominion might do more for the promotion of immigration and settlement than the fast ocean service can possibly do. It might not be found easy to answer satisfactorily the practical question of the farmer or mechanic, or even of the manufacturer or merchant, who should ask for demonstration in regard to the particular return he might expect for his share in the increased taxation required for the payment of the subsidy.

On the whole, however, we confess to a preference for the bold policy. The Mother Country, whose experience in such matters is of the highest possible value, seems to be strongly in favour of the subsidizing of ocean steamships as the most effective means of promoting commerce. If the new arrangement should be even moderately successful in attracting travel to the Canadian transcontinental route, the effect can hardly fail to be to bring our country, with all its undeveloped resources and possibilities, more prominently before the European world. Our great wants are capital and population. We, as patriotic Canadians, are persuaded that all that is needed in order to obtain these in ever-increasing proportions, is a better knowledge of what our country has to offer in the way of inducement. The new route, if fairly patronized, will do more than anything else of which we can conceive, to diffuse such knowledge.

One thing is, we think, and we have no doubt that very many of our readers will be of the same opinion, to be deeply regretted. The refusal of the Government to adopt the suggestion, that it should, as a condition of granting so magnificent a subsidy, insist on retaining some effectual control of the freight rates, was surely a grave, almost a fatal mistake. What more reasonable condition could be exacted? The Finance Minister's statement, that the Government never attempted to control freight rates, was a confession of weakness that does the Government no credit. That it has no control of the rates of the great railway which was almost built with the public money is a reproach which it should not have been willing to incur a second time. Surely a reasonable control of prices should be a first condition of the creation of any monopoly, even though it were not aided with immense contributions from the public funds. It is to be most earnestly hoped that such representations may yet be made, before the contract is irrevocably signed, that the Government will recede from its untenable position in this respect and retain at least some power of arbitration, if nothing more, as a means of guarding the great interests of the country which are now committed to its keeping.

ALCOTT, THE CONCORD MYSTIC.*

On Monday, February 18, 1878, after a pleasant mid-day dinner at Mr. Emerson's Concord home, we withdrew to the philosopher's library. The talk had been about Turner and his wonderful colouring, and from him to Miss May Alcott was an easy transition, for it was to this lady and her art that John Ruskin paid a very handsome and deserved compliment. I consider, he said, in so many words, that Miss Alcott was the only person living who had a right, by virtue of her genius, to copy the enduring masterpieces of Turner. In the height of her fame this lady died at Paris, the wife of Ernest Nieriker. Her sister Louisa, who survived her a few years, wrote some touching lines to her memory, entitled *Our Madonna*. We had spoken but little about May Alcott, when Mr. Emerson, whose fancy that delightful afternoon was especially nimble, turned to me and said, "Of course you have met Bronson Alcott." At that time I had not, but I had been interested in the story of his life and had looked into one or two of his books. Tablets had impressed me less than the others, I had to confess. Mr. Alcott's literary manner was not always graceful, but his thought appeared to me to be very rich and striking. The ideal held possession of him very strongly. He was often mystical, and he had certainly an odd way of grouping his favorites, such as Plato, whose writings he read, said Mr. Emerson "without surprise," Pythagoras, the high priest of his philosophy, and the moderns, Hawthorne, Carlyle, Emerson and Thoreau. All through his writings there was an air of sincerity which provoked sympathy for the author and his theme. "Alcott's books," said Mr. Emerson, suddenly turning round in his chair, "are mistakes. He shouldn't write; his forte is to talk." And those who have followed the career and examined the life-work of this kindly old man will agree with Emerson's dictum.

Amos Bronson Alcott was born at Wolcott, Connecticut, on the 27th of November, 1799. There is no need here to describe his way of life during his early years. All that is worth recording in that respect will be found in his poem, "New Connecticut," a privately printed volume, enriched by copious notes. He was a close student of philosophy from the very first, and Transcendentalism,—that intellectual episode, as some one has not inaptly termed it—soon claimed him. Indeed, he was one of the great prophets and heralds of the faith in New England, and though he never belonged to the Brook-farm Association, he linked his fortunes with a similar undertaking on a farm at Harvard, to which he gave the name of Fruitlands. This project embraced, among other things, the planting of a family order, whose chief aim was to afford a means of enjoying a quiet, pastoral life. It was a dream, a romance, a transcendental figure. Its tenets were good and noble, for they comprised love of true

- * 1. A. Bronson Alcott, his life and philosophy by F. B. Sanborn and Wm. T. Harris. 2 vols.
- 2. Transcendentalism in New England, by O. B. Frothingham.
- 3. The Record of a School, exemplifying the principles and methods of moral culture, by Elizabeth Peabody
- 4. Concord Days, by A. Bronson Alcott.
- 5. Louisa May Alcott, her life, letters and journals, edited by Ednah D. Cheney.