

ished, the cost of the docks and approaches will be over a million and a quarter dollars, exclusive of the hydraulic machinery and buildings.

The navigation at both ends of the railway has been well tested during the construction of the docks, and found perfectly safe. It is open generally two or three weeks before vessels can pass through the Straits of Canso.

There has been three millions and a half dollars spent on the construction, and the money to finish and equip is waiting the action of the Dominion Parliament to pass the necessary legislation to enable the company to proceed with the completion of the work.

H. G. C. KETCHUM.

## LETTER TO OTTAWA "FREE PRESS."

By C. T. Keefer, C. M. G.

*Editor Free Press* :—An unfavorable editorial on this undertaking in a recent number of the *Free Press*, closed with the admission : " It is true that the nation, presumably represented by its parliament, by lending its endorsement to the scheme, is most blameable."

The fact that parliament, representing the nation of which we are all so proud, has endorsed the scheme, and thereby induced Englishmen to invest some three millions in it—raises the question : " Can we afford to treat them differently from other outsiders, as well as Canadians investing in other Canadian railways, where the subsidies have been regularly and repeatedly revoked without a single exception, whenever any substantial work has been done." Some of these were subsidized as early as the Chignecto, and are still unfinished ; and it would not be difficult to believe that the ship railway when completed will be at least as beneficial to the Dominion as some others among the subsidized roads.

The engineering success of this railway is vouched for by Sir John Fowler and Sir Benjamin Baker, two of the foremost engineers of the world : and, unless there is engineering success, no subsidy is earned. I know of no prominent engineer, on either side of the Atlantic, who doubts the practicability of safely transferring ships (including gun boats and torpedo boats) across this isthmus.

The safety of the vessels is vouched for, among others, by Sir E. J. Reid, late chief naval constructor for the British Admiralty. There is no novelty in the matter, except that of putting the ship into a different water from that out of which she was taken. Before lift docks were invented ships were hauled out on marine railways. Now they are lifted on pontoons (with their keels several feet above water level) where the paint dries in half the time it would in a graving dock. Where, also, they must be able to remain without water support.

The commercial success of this railway is a question of what traffic is within reach, and what tolls can be obtained in competition with a longer but untaxed and more exposed route. We have not exacted any guarantees as to commercial success from any other subsidized railway. If any of them have achieved commercial success it has been the result of their subsidies. If the commercial success of this road was not at least doubtful we would not have undertaken to nurse it until the age of maturity.

If we had undertaken it as a superior substitute for the Baie Verte canal, to compensate the Maritime Provinces (all three of which it serves) for our canal expenditure westward of them, it would doubtless be as commercially profitable as they are ; and it will give us what they do not—two excellent dry docks - one open to the Atlantic, the other to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The only difference between this and the great majority of the subsidized railways is the terminable annuity form instead of a mileage rate, terminable with completion, but it is not exceptional in this respect, for we are now paying a larger 20 years' subsidy to the C. P. R. to enable it to compete with the Intercolonial, besides a somewhat similar one on the Quebec and Ottawa line. It is true work has been suspended, but parliament at its present session has lengthened the life and revoked the subsidy to the Montreal and Ottawa railway—a work on which a less proportion has been completed—and on which no work has been done since 1892.

We have given about one hundred and fifty millions of dollars to railways (exclusive of provincial and municipal aid, amounting to about 50 millions more) besides land grants of over thirty millions of acres—entirely for their indirect benefit. If this had been an ordinary railway the greater part of the subsidy would have been paid years ago, as on other roads expending the same proportion of total cost whether they are ever completed or not. Because it is an extraordinary one, the first of its kind in the world, shall we inaugurate a new policy with regard to it ?

THOS. C. KEEFER.

Ottawa, 7th April.