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House of Commons Debates

FOURTH SESSION—SIXTH PARLIAMENT.

SPEECHES OF HON. EDWARD BLAKE, M.P.,

ON

MAIL CONTRACTS, &c.

TUESDAY, MAY 12TH, 1890.

Mr. BLAKE. It would be extremely unsatisfactory if the temporary service were to be less efficient than it was a while ago under the arrangement by which, I think, the *Vancouver* and another ship alternated with the faster ships of the Allan Line, so that we really got the benefit of the best ships that were on this particular voyage. Everybody knows that the Allan ships are getting more and more out of date, and slower, and we would be worse off than ever unless such an arrangement as that was made. My own impression is that there may be a great danger of our sacrificing the substance for the shadow in attempting to carry out the proposals of the hon. gentleman. I do not see any great advantage in obtaining ships capable of traversing the ocean at the rate of 20 knots, which is quite a different thing from doing a measured mile in the harbor, and unless we are able to utilise these 20-knot ocean liners at something approximating that speed for the whole voyage, there is great disadvantage in a 20-knot ship. Such a ship requires an enormous expenditure of engine power and fuel, she is very expensive to engine, she is very expensive to run, relatively, and she has but very little relative capacity for freight carrying, because her model and her requirements for storage of coal are such as disables her from extensive freight carrying. She is, therefore, an expensive ship to build, expensive to engine, expensive to run, and not profitable to carry freight. She derives her profits in carrying passengers of the highest class, at the best rate, and from carrying a certain high class of expensive freight up to a limited tonnage. Now, if you cannot take the speed out of her, it is unprofitable to engage in the service a ship of that description. There are two reasons why I fear we cannot expect to take the speed out of the ship. One is the climatic difficulty. I spoke a year or two ago with one of the principal owners of the Dominion Line, and he told me that the fast ship *Vancouver*, of which the Finance Minister has just spoken, had been two consecutive whole years running, during which she never had one chance, on either the inward or outward voyage, of

making her speed. Fog or something else had intervened, and that ship had never been able to make her mark on her voyage. I suppose it is unpatriotic in me to say so, but it is nevertheless true, that our climate presents a difficulty in this respect. The other difficulty is that to which the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) has alluded. I must confess that although not very nervous, I would not feel particularly happy in trusting my bones in a twenty-knot ship running up the gulf. She is too near the land for that speed. You can do it, of course, in a bright day, but in a great deal of weather it would be utterly unsafe to do it. For these reasons I am afraid that it is practically out of the question to expect it. Then you have to enter upon the business of endeavoring to secure—not to keep what we have got, but to secure a high class passenger trade, and you would have to do that with the alternative difficulty, during a large portion of the year, of landing the passengers at Halifax for a long rail journey, through a country exposed to somewhat inclement weather, which circumstance will not attract a high class passenger traffic. These are the difficulties which a twenty-knot service will have to meet. Now, what would be really useful for Canada is a service of somewhere of about seventeen knots. You will get it at much less rate for ships built largely for freight carrying, ships that would be run more economically and which would retain, at any rate, our freight business which we are in danger of losing as years go on. We have given half a million on the statement that we were going to get a twenty-knot service. I hope the result will not be that we shall be asked at some future Session to sanction, or be told that we have sanctioned in advance, a grant of half a million for something entirely different from a twenty-knot service. My opinion is that a seventeen-knot service is something that we could get for much less money, and it will be relatively more advantageous to us. There is no object in telling us that our ships are capable of travelling twenty knots, unless we are going to get something like that speed out of them. I would like to see this contract prescribe, not merely that the vessel should