

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN P.E.I. AND THE MAINLAND.

Mr. DAVIES moved for (1) copies of all contracts or agreements entered into by the Postmaster General, since the last Session of the late Parliament, for the conveyance of the mails to and from Prince Edward Island, and all correspondence relating to steam communication between the Island and the mainland while the navigation remains open. (2) Of all correspondence and papers relating to the winter crossing between Cape Traverse and Tormentine. (3) A Return of all trips made by the *Northern Light* during the winter of 1881-82, with her receipts for freights and passage moneys, and the expenses of her management and running. (4) Copies of all reports and correspondence relating to the survey or construction of the Railway authorized to be built between Cape Traverse and the mainland on Prince Edward Island. He said: The subject matter of my motion has been before The House on more than one occasion, and I dare say some hon. gentlemen may be tired of hearing it. But I make no apology for bringing it forward again, because of its immense importance to the interests of the people of the Island, and because the good faith of the Dominion Government is pledged to carry out the terms upon which Prince Edward Island entered the Confederation. That has not yet been done, though I am sure the hon. gentleman who has charge of the Government must be anxious that no charge of breach of faith can fairly be brought against the Dominion by even the smallest member of the Confederacy. Now, I may be pardoned if I call the attention of hon. gentlemen to the history of this question. It is a painful history for us in Prince Edward Island. At the present time an agitation is going on throughout the Island, meetings are being held and the people are expressing themselves in decided language. They have come to the conclusion that they are being trifled with on this question, and though I should be sorry myself to adopt the extreme language of some of the resolutions, still there is no one, on whichever side of politics he may be, who is not in unison with the prevalent feeling of the people, that they have not been treated with fair play. When we entered Confederation in 1873—I think it was—one means of communication with the mainland consisted of the steamers which we now have, and a contract was made at that time with the Steam Navigation Company for a period of ten years. That is important in connection with the subsequent history of this question, because before the late Government came into power, that contract had been entered into, and there was some excuse for them in not providing better accommodation in view of the contract then running. My main reason for bringing this subject before the House at the present time is, that the contract for the conveyance of the mails, during the summer months, is now about expiring, and I believe the hon. the Postmaster-General has entered into negotiations, the nature of which I am not aware of, for the renewal of that contract. In the renewal of that contract provision should be made to improve the communication in the autumn months. The provision in the Terms of Union, which had reference to this subject, reads as follows:—

“Efficient steam service for the conveyance of mails and passengers to be established and maintained between the Island and the mainland of the Dominion, winter and summer, thus placing the Island in continuous communication with the Intercolonial Railway and the Railway system of the Dominion.”

Now, it is well known that Prince Edward Island was averse to casting in her lot with the Dominion, and that one of the chief arguments which were used to gain the people's consent was the promise made in that very clause. They felt that the communication previously existing between the Island and the mainland was not sufficient

to take their products to market, and did not afford proper facilities for passenger traffic. They felt the resources of the Island, taxed as they were for the construction of a railway, were inadequate to cope with this question; and I believe—and I think my fellow members from that Province will bear out the statement—that the inducement which operated most strongly in gaining the consent of the people to enter into the Union was the solemn compact, offered by the Dominion and accepted by the Island, that efficient steam communication should be maintained. The Island may be small in point of population, but no one can conceive, unless he lives there, the difficulties we are under during several months of the year, in respect to our communication with the mainland. Not only is passenger traffic seriously interfered with, but our people are unable to carry their products to market or to purchase the goods they require. After we came into the Union an attempt was made—a very miserable attempt—by the late Government, but I suppose it was the best they could do under the circumstances, when they put the steamer *Albert* on the route. They employed, as I am given to understand, the best one they could get, and she performed the service two seasons. She did that in an unsatisfactory manner, but the people were not disposed to grumble. They were disposed to give fair play to the Government, and they had plenty of time to carry out the compact. There was some political grumbling, of course, but the mass of the people felt convinced that before many years this compact would be faithfully performed. Then the *Northern Light* was put on. A great deal of opprobrium has been cast upon that vessel, and upon her builders, but I think those who know anything about the question at all will admit that the *Northern Light* was a great success, in many respects a complete success, and experience has shown us wherein her defects lay and how they can be improved. She was a success, in that she solved the question of the feasibility of crossing the straits in winter by a steamer. It was contended by many that it was a mad scheme, that no steamer could be built capable of pushing through the ice in the winter months, and even some practical men shared in that opinion. But the Government of the day, led by the hon. member for East York (Mr. Mackenzie), put on this boat, and I believe those efforts of the Government received full credit from the people as showing an honest intention to grapple fairly with the question. At that time pressure was brought to bear upon the Government to induce them to improve the communication between Cape Traverse and Cape Tormentine. I do not know whether hon. gentlemen are aware of it, but the service now carried out between these two capes, a distance of only nine miles, is no better than it was thirty or forty years ago. When the *Northern Light* was put upon the route between Georgetown and Pictou, the Government of the day asked, I believe, that they should not be pressed to make any large expenditure in connection with the Cape route until they saw whether the *Northern Light* answered the purpose required of her. That was some little excuse; the people of the Island were patient and they took the boat the Government gave them, although there was a very violent attack made upon her from time to time by some politicians. Nevertheless the *Northern Light* is a success, and has solved the problem in so far as she has proved that the compact the Dominion Government undertook is capable of being carried out. It is only a question of willingness on the part of the Government to do it; it is only a question of a small amount of money. When the hon. gentleman who held the position of Minister of Marine and Fisheries three years ago was elected from the Island, he expressed a strong opinion that the *Northern Light* was not what she ought to be, and he made repeated promises to improve the means of communication. I may say that when that hon. gentleman took a seat in the Ministry