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**THE GOVERNMENT AND THE
PACIFIC RAILWAY.**

The experience of the Government in the matter of railway construction has so far been of such a character as to inspire caution rather than encouragement. The unproductive millions sunk in the Grand Trunk were our first essay, and Canada, with all her resources, is not so rich that she can afford to repeat many experiments of the same nature. But the Intercolonial road has been a more trying experiment than even the Grand Trunk. It has been some seven years in progress, and it is not completed yet. It has added very largely to the burdens of the country, and has scarcely yielded one particle of appreciable benefit to it. It was introduced as a necessity of Confederation, but we venture to say that the bond between the provinces would have been just as strong in reality had the railway never been advanced beyond the stage of a mere project. The large trade between the provinces is carried on almost wholly without reference to it. And apart from political, and perhaps military considerations, there is in reality no necessity for the existence of a railway such as the Intercolonial at all.

The truth is, that in seeking for a political basis for an enterprise of the nature of a railroad a fundamental mistake is made. All roads and highways of whatever description, whether by land or by water, are ultimately beneficial and valuable only as they subserve the purposes of commerce. Roads

are for purposes of intercourse between man and man, and are channels for the conveyance of the products of the earth, or of the skill of man to the regions where they are wanted. Basing its operations on the channels of natural communication, a Government will use them for its own purposes of administration or defence. But when a Government itself creates such channels of communication having governmental objects in view only, it is the universal experience that they become useless in time and ultimately fall into decay. The Rideau canal is a monument of this policy as pursued in a former generation, and in the condition of half-decay to which that work has fallen, we may say reflected the principle for which we are contending: viz., that commercial considerations alone should be regarded whenever a highway is to be constructed.

We are led to these remarks by the contention that has arisen between the merits of the former and the present modes of carrying out the enterprise known as the Pacific railway. A railway through British territory all the way across the continent has been a dream of statesmen and politicians for almost a generation; and endless speeches have been made, glowing with various degrees of eloquence, on the trade that would be likely to spring up between China and Britain, and would be certain to take this channel. One thing was, however, sometimes overlooked, viz., the precise interest Canada had in the matter. If the line was mainly required for the furtherance of the trade of Britain, why should Canada bear all the burden of its construction? The interest of Canada in a highway to China and the East is infinitesimal compared with the interest of England. The whole trade of Canada with these regions would scarcely occupy the line for a single week out of the fifty-two in the year. Even if we consider the interest which the provinces along the St. Lawrence and the Atlantic have in the Province of British Columbia, it amounts to a very small trifle indeed. Considerations of trade and commerce would never justify the expenditure even of a single million to obtain communication with it. This is the plain fact, and we might as well acknowledge it. What trade can we ever have with British Columbia? What supplies can we ever draw from it? It sounds very large and very romantic to talk about this connection with the Pacific Ocean, but practically speaking, it is a mere dream to think of its being any material advantage to us. When enormous sums of money require to be found, and enormous material

burdens undertaken, it is material advantage alone that have a right to be weighed. The advantage would be almost wholly to England, and, so far as a route across the continent is concerned, if the burden were distributed according to the advantage, England ought to pay at least nine-tenths of its whole cost. We again state, that we discuss this matter from a monetary point of view alone. The schemes of politicians often prove to be mere dreams—but the expenditure of money is a hard and substantial fact. And when the expenditure is incurred it bears interest and involves taxation practically for all time to come. Our opinion then is that the scheme of making a railway across the Rocky Mountains and through the tremendous gorges of British Columbia to the Pacific Ocean at the expense of Canada, was one of the boldest that ever entered the brain of a Canadian statesman. It was utterly unwarrantable and unreasonable to make any promises of constructing such a railway within a definite period. Impossibilities cannot be done, and this may be classed in that category.

But there are portions of the Pacific Railway scheme which may claim to rest on a strictly commercial basis. In the North-West, we have a territory that only requires opening up and settling, to become one of the most valuable and important members of our Confederation. It is large enough for half-a-dozen Provinces to be carved out of it. That region has natural trade relations with the older parts of Canada. For many years back, and until a recent period, its whole business was controlled from Montreal. At this day it has intimate business relations with both Montreal and Toronto, drawing its supplies of imported goods from their markets and sending them in return a considerable portion of its productions. As the territory has advanced in business and wealth, its trade and financial relations have been drawn more and more closely to Canada proper, and there can be no doubt that if better communication were opened, and the tide of emigration directed to that quarter, a vast and constantly increasing commerce would be carried on. Here then we have a good commercial groundwork for railway communication. We can approach within four hundred miles of this great region by lake navigation—obviously therefore, the first thing to do, vying matters solely from a commercial standpoint, is to open up a good road over this barrier of four hundred miles. On commercial grounds, at the same time, communication might be opened up with the interior