

The Canadian Pacific Railway.



A RAILWAY from the Atlantic to the Pacific, all the way on British soil, was long the dream of a few in Canada. This dream of the few became, in time, the hope of the many, and on the confederation of the British North American provinces, in 1867, its realization was found to be a political necessity. Then the Government of the new Dominion of Canada set about the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, a work of such vast proportions that the richest empire of Europe might well have hesitated before entering upon it.

Much of the country through which the railway must be built was unexplored. Towards the east, all about Lake Superior, and beyond to Red River, was a vast rocky region, where Nature in her younger days had run riot, and where deep lakes and mighty rivers in every direction opposed the progress of the engineer. Beyond Red River for a thousand miles stretched a great plain, known only to the wild Indian and the fur trader; then came the mountains, range after range, in close succession, and all unexplored. Through all this, for a distance of nearly three thousand miles, the railway surveys had first to be made. These consumed much time and money; people became impatient and found fault and doubted. There were differences of opinion, and these differences became questions of domestic politics, dividing parties, and it was not until 1875 that the work of construction commenced in earnest.

But the machinery of Government is ill adapted, at best, to the carrying on of such an enterprise, and in this case it was blocked or retarded by political jealousies and party strife. Governments changed and delays occurred, until finally, in 1880, it was decided almost by common consent to surrender the work to a private company.

The explorations and surveys for the railway had made known the character of the country it was to traverse. In the wilderness east, north and west of Lake Superior forests of pine and other timber, and mineral deposits of incalculable value, were found, and millions of acres of agricultural land as well. The vast prairie district between Winnipeg and the Rocky Mountains proved to be wonderfully rich in its agricultural resources. Towards the mountains great coal-fields were discovered, and British Columbia beyond was known to contain almost every element of traffic and