

Railway from those which are expressed in the speech from the Throne. Let me remind hon. gentlemen of the utterances of this expert, their chief railway commissioner, whom they appointed since the last session of parliament after he had placed himself on record in the matter as follows :—

You have a total of \$139,000,000 representing the direct and indirect liabilities which the government assumed in connection with this enterprise. You could have taken a portion of that money to the harbours of Halifax and St. John and could have equipped those harbours so that they could have handled the traffic coming there for ocean shipment. You would have done some good with the money in that way. You will do no good with it now, except the temporary good that may be done while the money is in the course of expenditure.

Put this question how you will, turn it over, turn it back, examine it right and left, inside and outside, it fails to present a single redeeming feature in any phase of it from beginning to end.

The action of the government with regard to the Hon. Mr. Blair I think calls for some serious explanation. They have regarded Mr. Blair's opinion as a railway expert as of some value or they would not have appointed him as commissioner. What becomes then of his opinion of this great railway enterprise of theirs? If they did not so respect his opinion as a railway man why did they appoint him as a commissioner? Let them answer that question! I should be glad to have that matter explained to the House. If the government did not come round to Mr. Blair's opinion, he did not come round to their opinion, at all events his opinion remains not retracted in any respect. It is before the country with regard to that railway enterprise and still the government appoint him at a very high salary as the chief railway expert, showing, at least, to the country that they have the most profound respect for his opinion on railway matters. I have given you the opinions of Mr. Blair, and we have the opinion of the government as given in the speech. A very strong complaint was made during the last session of parliament on behalf of the people of this country that such a sweeping measure as that, which was not discussed at the elections, which was not in any way put before the electors before the last session of parliament, was put through without obtaining the opinion of the people at the

Hon. Mr. FERGUSON.

polls upon it. No such opinion was obtained. The opposition continually pointed out to the government that it was a project of such magnitude that it should not be proceeded with without a mandate from the people with regard to it. That mandate was not obtained by the government; an appeal to the people was not made, but since the last meeting of parliament some appeals have been made to the people of Canada and this question has come up primarily as the principal one for discussion. On the 16th of last month there were eight by-elections, and as I know in one of them, where I took some small part, this question of the Transcontinental Railway was made the principal topic of discussion. I hope the hon. gentleman has taken a note of the elections and of the popular vote recorded.

Hon. Mr. SCOTT—Hear, hear.

Hon. Mr. FERGUSON—I am glad the hon. gentleman has done so. But should my hon. friend not have looked at these returns as closely as they deserve to be looked at, let me just present to him a few of the figures which are revealed by the returns of these eight by-elections. They were held in constituencies in which the government candidates polled in 1900 at the general election, 22,097 against 17,000 by the opposition, showing a majority of 5,097 votes in favour of the government candidates. The other day in by-elections where the fate of the government was not at stake at all, where the local governments were in sympathy with the government at Ottawa, with the government firmly entrenched in power, we find that a majority of 5,097 was cut down to a majority of 848, a difference of 4,243 votes in the popular result in these eight constituencies. If my hon. friend who gives me to understand that he has looked at the result of these elections cannot find in these figures a great change of opinion on the part of the people with regard to the government and their Transcontinental Railway proposition, I cannot see how he can arrive at any other conclusion.

Hon. Mr. DANDURAND—Does the hon. gentleman count the votes of those candidates returned by acclamation? Does