

" Mr. Editor of *La Presse*.

" Sir,—My attention has been called to your article entitled "Down with the Sharppers!" (*A bas les faiseurs!*), which appeared in your paper of the 13th inst., and particularly to the charges against the Montreal and Sorel Railway Company.

" For some time certain persons have taken the habit of charging the company with malfeasance of all sorts, but as these accusations seemed to be circulated for political or personal ends, they were allowed to pass without notice.

" In justice to the company and its shareholders, however, I cannot to-day allow this article to pass in silence. It is not my intention to discuss here the question of knowing whether the Federal and Provincial Governments have granted too large subsidies to other companies; but in attacking particularly the Montreal and Sorel on this point, your mistake is complete, for the Montreal and Sorel is absolutely the only railway in this province which has been built without a single dollar of aid from any government or municipality.

" When, in 1832, the Provincial Legislature granted subsidies to almost all the other railways of the province, not a single dollar was granted to this company. Promises were then, and later, thought to be enough, and on the faith of these promises the company made engagements which it found impossible to keep, because these promises were never fulfilled. It is precisely because these promises were never fulfilled that the company got into difficulties.

" The company being of the opinion that the line could be worked more economically and advantageously by the Grand Trunk Company, leased its line to the latter for a certain term of years, and gave it a large sum of money for improvements on the line. The Grand Trunk Company worked the line for a few months, then abandoned it to the mercy of the elements, refusing to continue working it, or to let it be worked by anybody else. It refused to spend, or reimburse, the amount put in its hands for improvements.

" The line remained in this state for nearly two years when the Dominion Government granted it a subsidy of \$1,600 per mile, just half of the smallest subsidy granted to other companies. Moreover, this subsidy could only be obtained on condition that the shareholders, themselves, should furnish the sum of \$50,000, which was done, and the line resumed its operations. The amount of the subsidy was not enough to pay for the damages caused by the non-working of the line.

" Subsequently, Mr. Mercier having become Prime Minister, a sum of \$112,500 was voted to pay certain claims against the company, and to make certain improvements. This sum was not paid to the company, but was spent by commissioners appointed by the Government, and the account of expenditures was rendered to the Government and not to the company.

" In this case also, the subsidies were much less than those granted to other companies. The amount representing only \$2,500 per mile, while other companies received from \$4,000 to \$7,000 per mile. At the request of the representatives of the Provincial Government on the board, the line had to cease its operations in 1838, and this notwithstanding the energetic protestations of the shareholders of the company, whose voice could only make itself heard at the next annual meeting, when a change was made in the board of directors, and arrangements at once concluded with the Great Eastern Company, the line coming thereby into immediate operation.

" The line was working well in June last, when the Provincial Government, through its representative, succeeded in having a sequestrator appointed who took possession of the railway, and since that time the line is not in operation.

" Neither the company nor the shareholders can, in any way, be blamed for this state of things. If the company ceased its operations it was at the formal request of the Provincial Government, which maintained its attitude in spite of the attempts, several times made, to reopen the line for traffic.

" The Dominion Government granted a supplementary subsidy of \$40,000, or about \$888 per mile, making a total of federal subsidy of \$2,488 per mile, a part of which has not yet been spent—and this is all the aid that this company has obtained from the Governments.

" As to the municipalities, the city of Sorel voted \$12,000, the village of Varennes \$1,000, and the village of Boucherville \$600. Not a single dollar of these sums has yet been paid. Verchères and Contrecoeur refused to vote the proposed by-law. Therefore, up to this day not a single dollar has been paid by any municipality. So your sympathy for these municipalities is uncalled for.

" As to the money voted at the last provincial election, \$50,000 were voted for the building of a bridge over the

Mr. BRUTEAU.

Richelieu River, on the condition that the Dominion Government would vote as much, which has not been done: and as the bridge would cost \$200,000, any one that will undertake its construction for the subsidies will be welcome.

" The other \$150,000 were voted for the completion of the line, for its equipment, and for securing a regular service. This amount was not granted at the request of the company, but at that of a certain clique, or syndicate, who hoped to grab the control of the property of the road, and who have only used the name and the money of the province for endless persecutions against the company, and who succeeded in stopping the operations of the line when it found it could not obtain its control.

" There remains to be seen what the new Government will do. This is not the place for offering them advice, but the public that needs the road hopes for prompt action by them. Although this letter is longer than I expected, I wish to state before concluding, that whatever be the facts concerning the construction of the subsidized lines, I defy you to name a single subsidized railway in this province of which the shareholders have contributed as large a share of cash per mile, as those of the Montreal and Sorel Company.

" It is easy for an editor to speak of the enormous profits realized by railway contractors who build lines subsidized by Government money. I believe that I have as much experience in railway construction in this province as any newspaper editor, and I know no contractor in this province, who has in that manner made profits worth mentioning.

" I know a certain number of them though, who, after years of hard labour, annoyance and anxiety, are poorer to-day than when they began. In fact those who have experience in these matters could show you that the construction of subsidized local lines, in this province, means nothing but continual annoyance and irritation.

" I have the honour to be,

" Your very obedient servant,

" CHARLES N. ARMSTRONG,

" *President of the Montreal and
Sorel Railway Company.*

" MONTREAL, 23rd March, 1892."

These are the facts, Mr. Speaker, and they prove over-abundantly the importance and justness of the request I now make. Besides, this enterprise is not local and of exclusive interest for the town of Sorel or the County of Richelieu; it interests equally the Counties of Chambly, Verchères, Yamaska, Nicolet, Lotbinière and Lévis. As to the city of Sorel, I believe it has intimated to the Government that it was ready to grant \$50,000 for the construction of a bridge over the Richelieu River. The Local Government has voted the same sum, and is ready to pay it. Now we are anxiously awaiting the action of the Dominion Government, and we hope that before long they will do justice to our reasonable demand.

Mr. HAGGART. There is no objection to bringing down all papers in the possession of the Government in reference to the matter. The hon. gentleman states that promises have been made that that bridge should be completed. I did not understand him to mention any one in particular who promised that the bridge should be constructed. He says that many petitions have been forwarded to the Government asking that the bridge should be built. Only two have been received, one from the mayor of the town of Sorel, and one from the city clerk, in which they state that the cost of the bridge would be \$180,000, and offering \$50,000 on behalf of the town of Sorel. They also state that the Quebec Government will give \$50,000 more, if the Dominion Government will furnish the other \$80,000. These are all the papers in possession of the Government.

Motion agreed to.