

Mr. CANTLEY: Agreed.

Mr. BIRD: I know perhaps as little as the hon. gentleman who interrupts.

Mr. CANTLEY: Very likely.

Mr. BIRD: But I know the problem is simple—in fact at one end of the period there is no problem at all, and at the other end it is so simple that it does not need a special expedition to find out just when the period of navigation closes, because I feel convinced that all the documentary evidence exists whereby any reasonable person can form a fair conclusion as to the conditions of navigation in November and December. Supposing this expedition, advocated by the enemies of this scheme in order to win delay and profit by the accidents that might happen, went there in a very unfavourable year, ran into a pack of ice in the middle of August and was stuck there, unintentionally, just as I was told by my hon. friend from Marquette a short while ago the Welshman, a tramp steamer, ran into a pack of ice in the St. Lawrence river in the month of May about two years ago; supposing that happened, would it not be a triumph for our hon. friends? That is precisely what they want. Supposing on the other hand it happened to be a very favourable year, something like the year 1912 when ordinary steamers could have gone in the middle of June and sailed out in the first week in January, because it is on record that in certain years there the straits are clear of ice for seven months, during which commerce could safely traverse those straits; what would our friends say if that happened to be the sort of year in which this expedition was sent out? I am afraid they would not accept the results, and all the money would have been spent for nothing. The futility of a proposition of that kind is beyond words to anybody who knows anything about the documentary evidence.

Mr. MANION: Did the expedition to which my hon. friend refers make one trip or a number of trips?

Mr. BIRD: They made a number of trips in the one year. Their official instructions were to enter the straits at the earliest moment, and to leave at the latest moment, they did considerable cruising around the straits in between the trips.

Now let me refer to the colonization phase of this subject. My hon. friend from St. Lawrence-St. George made a big pretense of building up a solid structure of argument against this proposition. It is only necessary

to point out one or two things in addition to those I have already brought to the attention of the committee, to demonstrate that his argument from beginning to end was just a form of special pleading, not very much better than the servile articles that have now and again appeared in the newspapers of Montreal—not very much better, not much more solid; a little more pretentious, that is all, but in some cases actually based upon those pot-boiling articles. For instance, imagine the hon. gentleman standing up and seriously telling us that the Hudson Bay railway runs through a country of muskeg! We thought that bogey had been dissipated a good many years ago. We thought when that wilderness had been penetrated by actual construction work that all the talk about frozen tundra and frozen soil would be forever shattered. You know, in the childhood of the race people always conjured up all kinds of chimeras just beyond the horizon where the unexplored land lay. It was always very easy for the childish mind of humanity to conjure up all sorts of mysteries in that region where human beings could not penetrate and find out for themselves. Similar chimeras were conjured up about the Hudson bay country before construction of the line began. I had not intended to mention the fact, but I myself two or three years ago went over the entire length of the Hudson Bay line as far as steel is laid and then went down the Nelson river to the port itself. I want to say, in contradiction to what the hon. member for St. Lawrence-St. George said this afternoon, that there is no such thing as muskeg between The Pas and Port Nelson. Why, the original reports of Mr. Armstrong are enough to prove that. Under a Liberal government he was sent to investigate conditions for railway construction in the direction of Port Nelson, and here is an excerpt from his report:

The route selected towards Port Nelson follows the Churchill route for some 150 miles, or thereabouts, the description of which has been given. Unlike the Churchill route, the Nelson route does not resolve itself into natural divisions, each presenting different characteristics peculiar to itself, but throughout maintains a generally uniform appearance, so that the description given for the first division of the Churchill route may be applied in a general way to the whole of the Nelson route. It is not expected that the rock work will amount to very much, the major portion of the grading being in clay loam with smaller percentages of sand, gravel and swamp. The tundra is not encountered on this route, the whole line being through timber not appreciably different from that described on the first 200 miles of the Churchill route. It may be mentioned here that sand and gravel has been found sufficiently often to justify our belief that ballast may be had without unduly long hauls, except on the northern 70 or 80 miles of the Churchill route.