

grew almost out of a fable into what it is, with 10,000 miles of road, capital stock of 237 millions, liable to be increased by \$150,000,000, a dividend of over ten per cent. stock selling in every country upon earth, seventy-seven steamships on ocean and lake, and—

Well, it's no use recounting the merely dramatic side of the thing. The system never grew by any magic; nor by Act of Parliament, nor any mere fluke of circumstances in evolution. At the present time between 1,200 and 1,400 people are employed in the big stone castle on Windsor St., just making it possible for the grand army of men who operate trains and manage hotels and build new lines of road, and steer a fleet of seventy-seven steamships half round the world and back.

I don't know how many thousands of people contribute to the system that concentrates in that huge pile of greystone recently doubled in size. The office of the Vice-President is one of the pleasantest rooms in Montreal; as quiet as any church. A big, square room, with huge arch windows and a colossal picture of the Rockies facing the desk at which sits Mr. McNicoll, with his back to Windsor St. and the glint of his canny, twinkling eyes now and then upon a round of the world swung in a rack.

A PLAIN man; dark clothes, a grey tie, an entirely unostentatious manner and a most genial smile. He sat in a swivel chair which is very useful for putting himself at the precise angle required for any argument. I don't think he ever swung that chair at an angle of more than ninety degrees, however. He is too good an argumentative Scotchman to reverse his front; at the same time too much accustomed to dealing with the public—and the newspapers—not to tack and veer and cut in whenever necessary.

From the cool, almost easy-going poise of this profoundly canny Scot in Canada I should fancy that if he ever lost his temper it never was in open meeting. He was ready to be quizzed just as soon as I got in. At that time two very important railway positions were vacant; the Presidency of the Grand Trunk and the chairmanship of the Railway Commission.

"The Grand Trunk seems to be having some trouble, Mr. McNicoll, deciding just who should—"

I intended finishing the sentence; but he cut in with a smile.

"You mean the newspapers are having trouble appointing a man," he said, in a voice musical enough for a Scotch pulpit. "Yes, the newspapers always have trouble appointing railway officials. Much more than we have."

"Yes, but of course, the press is supposed to represent the public, and the public take more interest in railways than in any other kind of corporations."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And as to the chairman of the railway commission—"

"Well, Mabee was a good man," he broke in. "He was the only man we ever had that told us to go to the mischief when he felt like it—and we usually went."

"What of his successor?"

"Of course we didn't always agree with his point of view," he continued, serenely. "But we respected him. Mabee was a fair-minded, able man."

"His successor?" I ventured to add.

"Must be as fair-minded as Mabee and as able. No merely technical expert will do. He must be able to give broad-minded, common-sense decisions and fair play to both sides—or he will have trouble with the railways."

Few men are better able to pack a world of genial wisdom into a brief space of talk on thoroughly practical matters than David McNicoll. Probably there is no man living able to give so much evidence off-hand concerning the multitudinous details of a vast system from Liverpool to Hongkong. He does it with infinite ease. When he talks he smiles; and what he says seems to be born of a smile—oh, as canny and circumspect, yet as genial a smile as ever a Scotchman had. If he had stayed in Scotland he never would have had that smile. And there is no other man on the C. P. R. that has it. You conclude that this "smile that won't come off" is somehow the result of the kind of thing that a man naturally had to do in the old days of the C. P. R., when no matter which way a Scotchman turned he got his kilts tangled in the briars.

But the troubles are not all over yet. In fact, as Mr. McNicoll admitted, the C. P. R. is always in trouble and expects to be.

"It would be a queer world without trouble," he said—kindly imagine the Scotch burr on all the R's. "But I don't believe in worry. We never worry in this office. But we're always straightening

out tangles. Other men are always kicking. In fact we do a little kicking ourselves sometimes. I suppose it's the lie of trade. But a kick's no use without work. If there's something wrong—well the best way is to work till it's got right again; or at least as near as we can get to suit everybody."

Still with that smile the Vice-President proceeded to unfold a few of the entanglements that have grown up about the system in its multifarious dealings with the public. I felt quite relieved to think that so great a system could possibly get its bumps from the common man. Most of us are obsessed with an idea that an organization like the C. P. R. imagines it has the right of way anywhere and makes the public do just what it feels inclined—when as a matter of fact it takes a very small personage to cause a heap of trouble to Mr. McNicoll and his staff of allies. From what he said it was evident that the ills to which the C. P. R. is heir arise from—

Development; Weather; Other People.

He said nothing about governments.

"No," he said. "I never bother reading any reminiscences of the C. P. R. We don't care about the past. We have troubles enough in the present. And if we keep working away and dealing with problems as they come up I guess the future will look after itself."

"Then you have no—visions?"

"I don't think we ever had any. Nobody pretends that the C. P. R. discovered Canada and then told the newspapers. It's only a few years ago that we were all in the woods. What mortal man ever could have foreseen the tremendous development of this country—a development that's only just beginning?"

"But of course the C. P. R. has—"

"Oh, yes," he put in cannily. "We've done our share to move things along and the country has helped us. It's all a matter of growing together—provided you have the right idea to begin with and realize that the first business is to study the interests of the public along with your own."

ONE might have thought the C. P. R. was a co-operative system.

"Yes, the public expect us to do our duty. Furthermore—here the Vice-President made the simple confession that always gets the other man's interest—"because of our size I suppose we're expected to have a little more faith in the country than anybody else."

"That is—" But the question was needless.

"For instance," he went on, "at the present time we have orders ahead for every car and locomotive and steel rail that can be turned out for us in Canada. We can't fill all our orders in this country. The carshops and locomotive people know it as well as we do. We increase our business because we have to. The country demands it. We can't help it. People must be served. The railways must handle the traffic. The traffic increases enormously. Do the carshops and the locomotive people increase their plants? Not very much. They won't branch out. I suppose they expect the demand for cars and locomotives will go slack. I tell them—'Confound you! you've no faith in the country. You know things have to develop just as much as we do.' What are we to do? Get our rolling stock just where we are able."

And he smiled again.

"Then of course your new lines—?"

And he was off again without changing his gear.

"Yes, people are going in. We can't stop them. We don't want to. The country needs them. They need the railways. We build branch lines. The people produce. We must take care of the grain. We do our best. What's the result? Well, now and again some farmer whom we don't know from Adam gets his grain blockaded on the way out. He gets wrathful. He kicks to the Railway Commission. Our trouble begins. We must show cause why—as though it wasn't almost as much to our interest as to his to get that man's grain out."

"Uh—they say that the average haul of a freight-car in Canada is only about thirty miles a day. What do you think of that?"

The answer was plainly easy. In fact all McNicoll answers are. He holds a perpetual book of ready-made answers up his sleeve.

"Well, I've never figured it that close," he said, circumspectly. "But here's the reason. We send goods in to a man. He's a merchant—there are at least a percentage like this. He knows our cars are as good as warehouses—so long as he knows where his car is. If it's anywhere else but within five minutes of his premises he's as mad as a hatter. Once it's in sight—well, there's no hurry. He has no room for the goods in his warehouse. Let the car stand. He knows his business is increasing the

same as ours. But he won't build more storage room. Why? Well, the C. P. R. car is good enough for that—so long as he can locate it. And the car stands idle till he has a notion to empty it. What can we do? Even if we send in our teams—he has no room. Then we begin to have a blockade of traffic because cars are standing idle. The newspapers raise a howl. We are blamed. The Commission steps in. There you are."

I was beginning to feel sorry for the C. P. R., which seems to be a very human organization, sadly at the mercy of the common man.

"And how does the weather affect you?"

"Oh; we're never done with uncertainty on that score. Of course we can't make weather to suit even ourselves, let alone everybody else on our system. But it gives us a lot of trouble. Suppose this year the crop is poor over a large area. Naturally, do we order as many cars for next year as though the crop were good? No. The crop next year may be poor again; or it may be middling; or it may be very good. With such faith and knowledge as we have we go ahead. Comes a bumper crop. We are short of cars—that is, it takes longer to haul the crop out than usual. Give us time and we'll get it out somehow. But we can't move mountains. People say it's a blockade. The newspapers, always more interested in the public than we are, of course, lay the blame on the railways. We can't stop them. We grin and bear it."

HOWEVER, Mr. McNicoll seemed to me to be looking exceedingly well. And of course he never worries. Also he paid casual respects to the other railways. The C. P. R. have a good-natured way of shouldering the white man's burden. Pioneers in the heavy and long haulage business, on prairies and over mountains, they look with some tolerance on the efforts of the other roads to grapple with problems that get tangled up in the big system.

"Yes," he said, "the other roads build inside to the hopper. They're strong on getting to where the people are. But they neglect the spout. I suppose they expect us, as the people do, to do what surplus haulage they can't attend to from the inside to the spout. We've been doing it a good bit. We don't mind doing it if we haven't all we can attend to ourselves. Why didn't the G. T. P. build its eastern lines first and look after the terminals instead of glutting the internal elevators?"

"Don't you think we need railroads running north and south?"

"But we have them now."

"I mean—more roads. Enough to suit the West." He just twinkled. There was no argument in this. It was dead against all C. P. R. traditions.

"Oh, we're not worrying," he insisted.

"And with so vast a system you have facilities—"

"Ay, but no miracles. Railroading is just hard work, day in and day out, more to-morrow than today, letting yesterday take care of itself."

"But you don't minimize the value of a man in the system. You yourself, growing up with the C. P. R. as you've done—should be more the embodiment of the C. P. R. than —"

"No, no," he said, abruptly. "The President is the C. P. R."

He repeated that. I did not argue the point.

"But is it more the man—or the system?"

"Oh, well, I hope the man has something to do with any system. It would be a poor system that could be run without good men. And it would be a poor man that couldn't work better in a good system."

"What preparation would you recommend for railroading?"

"Industry—hard work!"

"But given a man of mediocre ability and high character as opposed to a man of high ability and —"

"Oh, well, he must have both."

"Any advantages in a college education?"

"I'm sure it'll never hurt him."

"Any particular benefit in studying economics?" Another smile.

"Oh, any man that goes into this business will find economics enough. I know it's a case of economy. Oh, yes, we have the money and we're not afraid to spend it when we need to. But we're not shoveling it out into the street."

The Vice-President turned to his desk. He had said all about the human interests of a great railway system that he thought would be of use for one scribe to hear at one interview. Neither had he imparted any secrets. But he had at least established the suspicion—that a big railway man never finds his private point of view publicly expressed, very far from that of the average man that buys a ticket on a railway.