

paid. This the people will sooner or later realize, and as soon as they realize that every dollar which goes into the construction of that road means an additional charge on every bushel of wheat sent out of the country, they will rise in their might and insist that instead of such a strange, fantastical idea as this, we should have a plain, common sense business proposition submitted to us.

This road is to be built by a commission. Well, we have before us an object lesson in the railway commission; and with that object lesson before them, it cannot be wondered that every one trembles at the idea of entrusting so tremendous a task as the building of this transcontinental line to a commission to be appointed by this same government which named Messrs. Blair, Bernier and Mills as the three most competent railway experts in Canada. I have no desire to say a word against these gentlemen, but hon. gentlemen opposite have given their opinion, and the facts speak for themselves. When we find Mr. Blair telling the members of this government that they knew nothing whatever about this transcontinental road, and that nothing should be done until they could obtain some information, and then, when we find that a day or two ago the right hon. the leader of the House gave a certificate to Mr. Blair as the most competent railway expert on the continent, despite the fact that he had previously refused to be guided by the advice of this railway expert and would have nothing whatever to do with him until the dread of coming elections caused him to change his mind, we are entitled to regard the course of the government as a very suspicious and questionable one. Then look at Mr. Blair's colleagues on the railway commission, Mr. Bernier and Mr. Mills. I have not a word to say against Mr. Bernier. I believe him to be a thoroughly honest and honourable old gentleman, but look at the question from a business point of view. The government induced us to agree to pay the members of this commission a higher salary than is even given the judges of the Supreme Court; and the reason they gave for granting such enormous salary was that railway experts might be chosen who could not be obtained for less money. For my part I was perfectly willing to vote \$8,000 or \$10,000 or \$15,000 or \$20,000 salary, for I believe that it is true economy to obtain for such a position the best possible men, regardless of price. When we find presidents of railways paid \$50,000 per annum and bank presidents \$25,000 per annum, I would not think it unreasonable to pay a high price for a first-class railway expert, believing that in the long run that would be the truest economy. But, without saying a word against Mr. Bernier, whom everybody on this side respects as a most excellent and honest man, would any body in the province of Quebec attempt to say that his services

are the best that could have been secured or that they could not have been secured for less than \$8,000 per year? Then with regard to Mr. Mills, the representative on the commission from the province of Ontario, with whom I am not acquainted, but who, I believe, is a most estimable man, and against whom I would be sorry indeed to say a word, he is a gentleman, nearly seventy-years of age, who has been for years president of an agricultural college, but I am not aware that he can in any sense be considered a railway expert. Looking at the public accounts for the province of Ontario of last year, I find that Mr. Mills, as president of this college, was drawing the magnificent salary of \$2,000 per year. I do not say that that was too little or too much, but, as a business proposition, trying to judge fairly and impartially, I do not hesitate to say that Mr. Mills is not the most competent railway expert that could have been secured, and that his services could have been secured for less than \$8,000 a year.

I am sorry to see that no reference is made in this address to the question of imperial preferential trade. I would have thought that that was a subject on which the government would have been able to speak. In 1896, pending an election, the right hon. the leader of the House spoke in the city of London with his usual eloquence on this subject, and I have no hesitation in saying that, of all the speeches made, both in the motherland and in this country on the question of preferential trade, not one was more logical and convincing.

Now, Sir, since that time the right hon. gentleman and his colleagues have been in the old country, and while there they subscribed—as shown by the blue-book—to this principle. Why is it that when a word from this country will assist that principle so much, when the silence of this country must inevitably lead the people on the other side of the water to misunderstand our position—some of them, as a matter of fact concluded that the right hon. gentleman is in favour of the principle and some that he is opposed to it—why cannot we speak out in this House plainly and unmistakably and assent to the principle so ably and eloquently expounded by the right hon. gentleman himself in the election of 1896? I appeal to the right hon. gentleman himself, because I believe that no question that has come before this House equals this in importance. Grave and important as our transcontinental railway question is, it sinks into utter insignificance, it is parish politics as against imperial politics, when compared with the great possibilities opened before this country if we can succeed in attaining a satisfactory scheme of preferential trade between this country and the motherland. Let me say to my hon. friends from Quebec represented by the hon. member for Labelle (Mr. Bourassa)—I hope they