

Sir P. Maitland, K. C. B. Lieut. Governor.

Beginning in the westward, it is certainly most important that the lakes should be connected by a navigation which will allow of the same vessels continuing their voyage without discharging their cargoes, so that a schooner laden at Amherstburgh could proceed, without breaking bulk, to Kingston or Prescott. The present design of the Welland Canal Company admits of this to the fullest extent contemplated by the commissioners, and it is therefore, for the moment, unnecessary to discuss the point as regards that part of the communication. With respect to the great canal from Kingston to the Ottawa, it remains an important and somewhat difficult question.

The comparative expense is—On a scale of 7 feet in depth, 40 feet in width at the bottom, and 61 feet in width at the surface of the water, the banks to slope one foot and a half to one foot perpendicular, the locks to be of stone, and 100 feet in length by 22 feet in width, with turning bridges 22 feet in the clear and 10 feet wide—Cost £230,785 14 1½.

On a scale of 5 feet in depth, 28 feet in width at the bottom, and 48 feet in width at the surface of the water, the banks to slope two feet to one foot perpendicular, the locks to be of stone, and 80 feet in length by 15 feet in width, with turning bridges 15 feet in the clear and 10 feet wide—Cost £145,802 7 8½.

On a scale of 4 feet in depth, 20 feet in width at bottom, and 32 feet in width at the surface of the water, the banks to slope one foot and a half to one foot perpendicular, the locks to be of wood and 75 feet in length by 10 feet in breadth, with turning bridges 10 feet in the clear and 10 feet wide—Cost £82,258 8 10.

The committee, in estimating the weight of those arguments which would lead to the adoption of the largest scale on the ground of greater military security, cannot avoid stating that, if the idea is entertained of facilitating by such a canal the naval defence of the Upper Lakes, by the introduction of vessels of war of a small class from the sea, they consider such an anticipation by no means a safe one. It is evident, that it would be at any time in the power of the Americans to construct on the lakes, ships of such overwhelming force, that vessels of the small class which could ascend by the canal, could render no effectual service, and it would be at last reduced again to a contest of ship building in the harbours of the lakes.

A canal larger than is necessary to transport with convenience all description of naval and military stores, would, by its greater dimensions, afford, in the opinion of the committee, no additional security to the Province.

Judging thus, they are inclined to prefer the plan second in the order, being of a canal 5 feet in depth.

So far as the interests of trade are concerned, the committee see more reason to deliberate. It is, however, to be considered in the first place that unless the canal at the Ottawa and the Lachine Canal are altered so as to be of corresponding dimensions, it would be perfectly useless to construct ours on the enlarged scale. If that could be anticipated with certainty, and if it would be clearly desirable to have the canal on the larger plan, it would seem good policy to make every exertion to attain that object at once, and to commence it accordingly:—because, though the smaller works alluded to might, at a tolerable expense, be enlarged to suit the greater, it would scarcely be rational to calculate upon enlarging so long a line of canal as that from Kingston to the Ottawa, when once completed. It is but too questionable, however, whether the policy of Lower Canada will ever admit of such an enlargement of the La Chine canal as would allow of navigation by vessels that could continue their voyage to Atlantic ports. There are obvious interests against it, and it must be expected these will have their influence. If, however, this difficulty did not interfere, there is still, in the opinion of the committee, much reason to incline to the smaller scale.

That the same vessels which navigate one of the Upper Lakes should be able to pass to Kingston and Prescott is clearly of much consequence, because they are equally fit for every part of the voyage, and they save an expense of transshipment at a moderate charge of toll and lockage upon a short line of canal, but unless we could contemplate that these same vessels would continue their course to the West Indies or other parts beyond Lower Canada which for several reasons could scarcely be expected it would perhaps not be advisable to construct a canal at so great a cost merely to admit of their continuing their route to Montreal or Quebec instead of stopping at Prescott or Kingston.—It is true one transfer of the cargo would be saved, but on the other hand the toll must be so much greater on a canal of such length with many locks constructed on such large dimensions, and the wear and tear of a vessel of considerable size and value passing through a long navigation of that description, might perhaps be such that little would be lost by avoiding it at the expense of a transshipment into large and secure canal boats at Kingston, but when, in addition to these considerations, the committee reflect that the River St. Lawrence when the obstacles in some parts of its course are removed, will present a much more direct and natural course for the navigation of vessels to Lower Canada, they are of opinion that, looking merely at the commercial interests of the province, a canal on the smaller scale would be most advisable as being most easily and certainly to be compassed within a moderate period and as affording to every necessary degree the accommodation required.

At the same time it is clear that if the Parent State, concurring with the colony in a work so essential to the preservation of her dominions in this quarter of the world, should assume a share of the charge, it would be highly expedient to attempt a canal on the largest dimensions.

The expense of this and of the other undertaking suggested by the commissioners is to be looked for in their estimates, and assuming their calculations to be correct, the most material inquiry is, whether, in the present state of our revenue, and with the resources which might be called in aid without imposing oppressive burthens upon the people, a sum could be raised sufficient to meet the principal undertaking—the canal from Kingston to the Ottawa. The very encouraging offer from His Majesty's Government, which was communicated to both Houses by His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor at the commencement of this session, would, if we can avail ourselves of it, ensure the necessary advance being procured upon the most favourable terms and with such periods of re-payment as might be thought most convenient.

An increase of revenue, sufficient to provide for the payment of the interest & for the gradual liquidation of the principal of a loan of such sum as would be necessary for carrying into execution the plan of the commissioners, might, it is believed, be obtained without injury to the commercial interests of this Province, and without inconvenience being felt by any of its inhabitants, if the legislature of Lower Canada, recognizing the importance of such a work to that Province, should be disposed to concur in imposing a small additional duty on such articles imported as could easily bear it, uniting their resources for a work of common advantage, there is no doubt the Provinces would be fully equal to the immediate execution of a canal on the smaller scale adapted to commercial purposes; but, if, as has been mentioned, the mother country, regarding a canal upon the largest scale proposed, as a work certain to contribute most essentially to the military defence of the Province, should consent to participate in the charge, the committee conceives that the means of this Province would enable it to meet the exertion which ought, in that case, to be made on her part, to accelerate the period of her security.

Whether the time is now arrived when the Province should actually attempt the execution of works which but a very few years ago would have been considered altogether visionary, is another point to be determined—so far as the decision should be influenced by the most reasonable expectation that can be formed, as to the return such works would immediately yield, the calculations which are given in some of the papers annexed may form perhaps as safe a guide as the committee could pretend to furnish.

One thing is clear, in the peculiar circumstances of Upper Canada, a country of great capability, thinly peopled, and requiring, above all things, that capital and population should be attracted to it by every possible means, the same reasons which might be properly urged in other countries, should not apply, to induce us to delay such undertakings until they are certain to afford profit.

It is greatly the interest of the present generation to submit to some temporary sacrifice in the prospect of a very rapid recompense.—The more natural order here would be, that the improvement should precede, in order to accelerate, the population and commerce of the country, rather than to await the arrival of a period when the existing circumstances of the country would, in a commercial point of view, at once justify the enterprise.

The great impulse which would be given to the country by the demand for labour, the encouragement it would afford to emigrants of capital to remove to this Province, and the confidence it would create in the security of the colony, would amply warrant, in the opinion of the committee, the commencement of the canal at the present period, although the expectation of the Commissioners of an immediate indemnity should appear too sanguine.