

try, what are its capabilities in the way of attracting and retaining settlers, and how many years will it be before there will be need of their travelling further north in order to find places for settlement? That is information that we have not got, and yet it is vital for a proper and judicious consideration of this whole question. Now not only does the preamble of the Bill contain language which I think is open to the interpretation that I give it, but the contract does also. Let me read some lines of it, and I ask you if it does not mean exactly what I state:

Whereas, having regard to the growth of population and the rapid development of the production and trade of Manitoba and the North-west Territories, and to the great area of fertile and productive land in all the provinces and territories as yet without railway facilities.

Now that is clear. So we have got to go outside the range of the country which is supplied with railway service, and where will that take us? I think that is a simple question, easy of solution—it must take us north of the Canadian Northern, after you get out of Manitoba, and perhaps before. As I say, when you run that road from Gilbert Plains through to Edmonton you cut through an unpeopled country, you have to go north of that again, and where are you as to the needs? Where are you as to the requirements of a railway? Where is the evidence of a need for another railway traversing that country, as the Bill itself declares?

Now there are some reasons which I think ought to influence this government or any government when a question of this kind arises for solution. You have a great unpeopled country in our western domain. Statesmanship requires that the government should exercise a guiding influence in the direction of settlement, so that it may take place in the best way for itself, that it may be located in the best interests of the country and of the people who are to settle there. In other words, it is the business of the government to see that when people go into that country they should not be encouraged to scatter in isolated settlements, far apart from each other. They ought to be brought together as closely as conditions will warrant. Many reasons require that they should not be scattered too far apart. The social conditions call for it, the comforts of life demand it, municipal organization and municipal government all call for the same thing. The educational needs of these people require imperatively that they should be settled as closely together as convenient; and when they begin to spread out, and fresh settlers come in, then further portions of the country can be opened up. But to build two or three different railways at one time through an unsettled country, and drop down the people here and there, 10, 50 or 100 miles

Hon. Mr. BLAIR.

apart, and continue that policy for a long period of years, when they must remain for an indefinite time without the advantages of roads, and schools, and the ordinary conveniences of life, is to my mind a great mistake, not only in the interest of that country, but in the interest of the settlers themselves; it is to make a serious blunder which will greatly injure the prospects of our western country. Therefore, when you are building another road in the west in addition to the one you are sanctioning this year, you are contributing to bring about these undesirable results; and I say the government should hesitate, if there was no other reason, they should pause before going further. They should be able to tell us what are the prospects, what are the reasons which have induced them to ask us to legislate in the proposed direction, and under the conditions as they exist today.

Now, in brief, my objections to the building of the prairie section are these: First, it is premature. I say it is premature because I have taken some pains to ascertain the facts. My own mind has been led to this conclusion because I have taken some pains to gather by conversations with people who ought to know something about this subject and who are familiar with the western country, some facts relating to it. The first fact which seems to be evidential is the fact that there is no settlement north of the Canadian Northern Railway, which we have authorized to be constructed during the present year. I have asked the question of a number of people from that part of the country: What are the capabilities of receiving settlers in the country between the two railways; that is, between the Canadian Northern Railway and the Canadian Pacific Railway? How many people can go there and find suitable land, can find desirable settlements within the area before settlement begins to overflow and spread further north? The lowest estimate that has been given me by any one individual to whom I have addressed the question has been five millions of people. I do not know whether that is right or wrong. I am giving it to the House frankly, just as it has been given to me. I have asked the question and the reply given to me is that five millions of people can be comfortably located within the area in that western country which these two railways, the Canadian Northern Railway on the north and the Canadian Pacific Railway main line can provide railway facilities for. If that is not true, I should think it would be capable of being very easily answered authoritatively and officially just what the capabilities of this section of the country for settlement are. If that statement is anything like the truth, then it is unreasonable to say that with room for five millions more to-day within that belt there can be no occasion for us to spend more money in order to provide