

Hon. W. P. Reeves on the "All-Red Route"



ON W. P. REEVES contributes the following article on "The All Red Route" to the Cornhill Magazine:

Traders and travellers, sailing or steaming between England and the Antipodes, may go by half a dozen routes. Much merchandise and many passengers are still carried homewards on the long sea-voyage round the point which, with cheerful disregard of Dutch spelling and pronunciation, we call Cape Horn. Considerable, too, is the outward traffic round the Cape, that of Good Hope. Voyagers and shippers to New Zealand who rate cheapness above time, invalids who seek or are ordered to try unexciting weeks in the bracing air of the Southern Ocean, families of harassed parents and young children, are always likely to patronize these circuitous roads upon the open ocean, despite their length and monotony. But for passengers bound for Australia, as well as for New Zealanders and tourists who want speed with variety, the choice is limited to one or other of the lines which converge on the Suez Canal, or pass by trans-shipment and railway across North America. They may choose between east and west; hitherto they have more often chosen the east. To a visitor from Mars, knowing nothing of the past history of British trade routes, this would seem not a little strange. The westward voyage enables the traveller to pass across an interesting continent, insures him a pleasant voyage across the Pacific, with glimpses of two very beautiful tropical archipelagos; and takes him to eastern Australia or New Zealand in less time than the way through Suez. The Suez route has its attractions truly. They are great, in some ways unrivalled; but in certain months of the year the Red Sea and Indian Ocean are oppressed by sultry heat or vexed by monsoon winds. Except for those whose destination is Western or South Australia, or for leisurely travellers who wish to turn aside to Egypt or India, the natural claims of the Suez-Fremantle-Adelaide route can scarcely rival those of a fast and comfortable line by way of North America. The Queensland steamers, which, touching at Singapore, reach Brisbane through Torres Straits, may fairly be classed as cargo boats. On the map Australia looks close enough to southern Asia, and a long way, indeed, from North America. But then Australia—the Australia of the white man—turns its back on the Indian Ocean. Though there are cattle and pearl fisheries in the north and northwest territory; though there are famous gold mines in the western deserts, and agriculture in the oasis round Perth; still, a line drawn across the continent from Cooktown to Spencer Gulf would have but one-fourteenth of the white population to the west and northwest of it. Such a handful are the inhabitants of the two-thirds of the island continent nearest to Asia. To get to the seaports of eastern and south-eastern Australia, and to connect there with the passenger ships for Tasmania and New Zealand, steamers from Suez have to pass half round the not trifling expanse of Australia. This they must do to serve the needs of the four largest of the Australian group, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, and New Zealand, as well as of little Tasmania; all these front on the South Pacific, and are best reached from America. In the same ocean lie the Fijian islands, a backward and as yet disappointing dependency, whose great fertility and remarkable beauty, nevertheless, assure it a future of importance.

A line of communication, then, passing through Canada, Fiji, and New Zealand to the central port of eastern Australia, will thread and connect most of the chief self-governing colonies of the empire. Of the advantages and attractions of the route more anon. In this page let me anticipate the question—Why has not a route with these claims already superseded, or, at any rate, rivalled, the noted and popular eastern lines via Suez? The answer is simple enough. For many years the Suez route was the only one available. More than half a century ago the enterprise of the Peninsular and Oriental company brought Australia into steam communication with Europe long before the American railways had pierced or climbed the Rocky Mountains and reached San Francisco. And even when San Francisco was linked with New York, a long interval was to follow before the Canadian Pacific railway financiers succeeded in their apparently desperate enterprise and gained their goal at Vancouver after winding through four ranges of mountains and laying rails across two thousand miles of howling prairie desolation. During that interval Canada was not a possible line of transit. So Antipodean colonists who grasped the importance of the Pacific route had to look to Washington. Thirty-five years ago New South Wales and New Zealand opened negotiations with the American government for a subsidized mail service. As a result a line of steamers flying the Stars and Stripes plied for many years from San Francisco to Auckland and Sydney, and the "Frisco Mail" became a household word in Australia. Fast the steamers—judged by present-day standards—never were. More commodious, not to say luxurious, they might have been. But they, or rather their route, did attract passengers, and, at their best, they enabled London letters to arrive at Auckland in thirty-one days from St. Martin-le Grand. Moreover, in the face of the American tariff, they were directly and indirectly the means of fostering a considerable trade between the States and Australasia. The mail steamers did not always carry this trade themselves; but they carried the

men and the letters by which the trade was opened up and pushed on. They carried the American commercial travellers, touts, and wool-buyers who descended on the Trans-Pacific colonies to buy, and still more to sell. In 1906 the trade between the United States and Australasia had mounted to the respectable figure of £11,000,000. But the American Union, as befitted a community in which Protectionism had reached its high water-mark, conducted its trade with the colonies on the principle of selling as much as possible and buying in return as little as might be. A certain amount of high-class wool and of two natural monopolies, kauri gum and New Zealand hemp, they found it convenient to take. Generally, their object was to conduct a trade with a heavy balance in their own favor. The figures for 1906 show how well they succeeded. At first sight these would seem to show that the Australian Commonwealth exported almost as much to the States as it took from them. The Australian exports amounted to £4,338,000. But of this no less than £2,105,000 came under the heading of "specie-gold." Comment is needless. Wool ranked next in value, forming with copper the bulk of the export. As for New Zealand, she sent to the States £640,000 of merchandise, buying in return about £1,400,000 of American goods.

Unpopular as American methods were in Australia and New Zealand, it has only been within the last five years that any retaliation has been attempted. New Zealand led the way with the Preferential Duties Act in 1902, and now Australia is following in her footsteps with a drastic measure. It may be too much to say that this last will destroy trade between America and Australasia; but the rapid expansion of that trade is not likely to continue, and it may even find a difficulty in increasing at all.

Australians, however, found Protectionism not the only unpopular element in the American connection. Steamers making for North America from the South Pacific have perforce to stop at Honolulu in the Hawaiian group, to coal. There is no other stopping place, and coaling station for a steamer traversing the vast expanse of the Northeastern Pacific. Now, in the 'nineties, the government at Washington stretched out a hand and seized the Hawaiian group. There was some excuse for this, inasmuch as the archipelago was in an uneasy state and a certain amount of American capital had been sunk in it. But the outcome was peculiar and unpleasant for colonial shipping. After a while the American navigation laws were extended to Hawaii. This meant that the great stretch of open ocean, 2800 miles broad, between Honolulu and San Francisco, became legally part of the coastal waters of the United States—that is to say, no foreign vessel was allowed to carry cargo or passengers from one American port to another across it. At the time of this monstrous aggression upon the natural rights of ocean navigators, the San Francisco steam service was being carried on conjointly by an American and a New Zealand company. In obedience to the overbearing enactment, the New Zealand company had to beat a retreat, leaving the conduct of the service entirely in the hands of the Oceanic Steam Navigation company of San Francisco. This last-named corporation proved, after some years, unequal to the task. Its steamers showed more and more signs of wear and tear, and it complained that the subsidy given by the American government—some £69,000 yearly, though supplemented by certain payments by the colonies—was insufficient to support a first-class service.

An attempt was made to induce Congress to increase the subsidy, but ocean subsidies have not been popular in the House of Representatives of late years. The attempt failed, and early in 1907 the San Francisco service came to an end. It may be asked why, if the American mail service had grown to be unpopular from a traders' and inconvenient from a passenger's point of view, it had not been supplanted by something better running by way of Vancouver. The answer is that the colonies were naturally very loth to abandon steam connection with the United States, or see the decrease of a line which as a mail service was excellent, however unsatisfactory it might have been in other respects. Moreover, there was also in its favor the strong argument that it connected with the rapid Atlantic steamers between New York and Liverpool. While the service between Canada and Great Britain remained for many years respectable merely, those great competitors, the Cunard and the North-German Lloyd, were engaged in establishing "world records" between the Mersey and Sandy Hook. As late as seven years ago the Canadian liners were in the habit of taking ten days to cross the Atlantic, while in tonnage and splendor they could not stand a moment's comparison with their New York rivals. Within the last few years we have seen considerable progress made. Larger steamers, making a speed of eighteen knots, now make the Canadian Atlantic voyage pleasant enough; but, of course, any improvement thus effected has been thrown into the shade by the gigantic apparitions of the Lusitania and Mauretania. Nor can it be expected that passengers, to whom time is of more consideration than money, will care to patronize boats making six knots less than these sea monsters.

In the first place, then, the United States route between Great Britain and Australasia had a very long start indeed of any Trans-Canadian project. In the next place, however unsatisfactory on the Pacific side, it had always been much faster and more luxurious on the Atlantic; and lately the British Government

itself has paid an enormous subsidy to increase the disproportion of speed between the New York and Canadian routes. The Canadians, after a spirited effort to draw nearer to their rivals, have seen themselves thrown behind almost as far as ever, and have to extract what satisfaction they can from the reflection that this latest handicap is due to British shipbuilding skill, British seamanship, and British public money. Small wonder if, in a recent speech to a Nova Scotian audience, Sir William Laurier thus put the case:

"We have the shortest route across the ocean, namely from Liverpool to Halifax. At this moment the Lusitania is performing a magnificent service between Liverpool and New York. She was built with British money, paid by the British government and voted by the British parliament. What we ask is that the British nation should do as much for Canada as it has been doing for the United States" (cheers.)

The long delay in urging on the organization of a fast service with the Antipodes by way of Canada is thus easily explained. In the Atlantic Canada has had to face extraordinary competitors. Even now the three Canadian Atlantic lines of steamboats have to compete with five times as many companies running to and from New York and Boston, between which ports and Britain fifteen passenger steamers ply weekly on an average. Moreover, the two eighteen-knot Canadian boats have to endure comparison with the Lusitania and Mauretania. Next, it must be remembered that the Canadian Pacific railway was not completed until November 1885, fourteen years after the establishment of the San Francisco service with the Antipodes. Again, stress must be laid on the natural desire of Australia and New Zealand to develop trade with so vast a potential market as the United States. It took many years of patient waiting and hope deferred to teach the colonists that the American tariff makers will not open the door to British colonies. Now Australasians, like Canadians, have learned their lesson. The little glimmer of hope, fed by the Wilson tariff, was effectually extinguished by McKinley. The colonies are left free to act without any tenderness for American feeling, and they are acting accordingly. But in the past there have been valid reasons for disregarding the advantages of the All Red route, reasons which no longer exist. These, and not any insuperable or monstrously costly natural obstacles, have been blocking the way.

Before coming to discuss features and practical details of the proposals now before the English and Colonial governments, a word is needed to dispose of the Panama bogey. Is it the case that so soon as the Panama canal is opened, or very shortly afterwards, the All Red route must suffer an eclipse? The answer can be a curt "no!"—a simple and confident negative. It is true that the distance from Liverpool to Auckland, by way of Colon, is a thousand miles less than by way of Vancouver. But three thousand miles of the Vancouver route will be covered by train at a speed more than double that of any probable Panama steamers. If we allow reasonable time for coaling and canal transit, eighteen-knot boats running via Colon would take twenty-seven days between Liverpool and Auckland, New Zealand. Why do I limit the speed to eighteen knots? Because the burden of subsidizing the line would mainly fall on New Zealand, and New Zealand for at least a generation to come would not be able to afford to pay for anything faster. As a passenger line the Panama route does not interest Australia. Canada would have nothing to do with it; nor could the mother country be expected to help New Zealand alone to pay for ocean greyhounds. Very little, if any, help could be expected from Central America, Colombia, and Ecuador. They are making progress doubtless, but they are certainly not the most solid and advanced portions of Latin America. Nor is England their mother, or London their commercial Mecca. During certain months of the year a Panama route would be healthy enough, and enjoy very pleasant weather; during other months its passengers would run the risks of tropical storms and gasp in sweltering heats. In any case it would offer the tourist but one sight—the canal. A worse route for sightseers could hardly be imagined. The Panama canal is not yet finished. It is not likely to be finished for ten or twelve years. When it is, its opening will not depose the All Red route.

To make the proposed new imperial line of communication a success, its Atlantic steamers will have to rival the Lusitania and Mauretania in speed, though they need not do so in size. They must be capable of steaming twenty-five knots, and actually will have to make an average of twenty-four. Thirty-eight-thousand-ton leviathans being out of the question, can boats of half that tonnage compass the needful speed? Shipbuilding experts say that there will be no difficulty about that. Whether the new boats would depart from Liverpool or from a west Irish port will be a point to be decided on by the English and Canadian governments in conference. It is a matter upon which the Imperial post office will probably have something to say. Australasians will presumably accept the decision of the Atlantic authorities. All that need be said here and now is that a band of enterprising and reputable English, Irish, and Canadian gentlemen are understood to be willing to become the contractors of the All Red line, provided the British port is Blackhead Bay in Ireland. Their proposals will doubtless receive due consideration. If, on the other hand, Liv-

erpool be the port of departure, it is claimed that steamers thence would reach Halifax in four days and eight hours. Halifax is naturally the Canadian port first thought of. In many respects it would not be easy to find a better, and in the winter months the All Red steamers must always make for it. In summer a direct voyage to Quebec may be preferred. As Sir Thomas O'Shaughnessy has just pointed out, the St. Lawrence route will always be the choice of the tourist. That would take passengers right on to Quebec. The time taken would differ according as the steamers rounded Newfoundland on the northern or southern side.

As Mr. Clifford Sifton, speaking as an experienced envoy, has lately well put it, the three objections usually taken to the passage from England to Canada may be summed up in the words: fog, ice and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It is known that the more southern line followed from Liverpool to New York is beset with fogs. The ordinary passenger, therefore, assumes that the routes to Halifax and Quebec, being further north, must be fogger still. The contrary is the case. The western Atlantic fogs are bred by the contact of the ice and ice water, drifted from the Arctic, with the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. Steamers bound for Quebec and Halifax pass to the north of the thickest of these mists. This is no random assertion. As Mr. Sifton pointed out, the Canadian government has made a full and careful series of scientific observations of the Atlantic fog-enemy. These have furnished as complete a weather chart in this respect as could be required. The result is as interesting as, to most people, unexpected. It shows an average expectancy of 3.12 per cent. of fog for the Canadian passages as against fully 8 per cent. for those to New York. Ice is a more serious difficulty. It will compel the steamers to make for Halifax during the winter months, and will sometimes oblige them, even in the season when they can make Quebec, to take the longer journey round Cape Race instead of the shorter passage through the Straits of Belleisle. The difference between the two is a matter of 168 miles. With the route to Halifax ice does not interfere at all; nor, of course, does the much exaggerated dangers of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Under this last head Mr. Sifton shows that in seventeen years only five steamers have been stranded there. Three of these accidents were proved to be due to careless navigation; only two to the natural difficulties of the highway. The Gulf of St. Lawrence, one may mention, is no half-known, mysterious, problematical waterway. It carries a very large shipping trade. Every yard of it likely to be passed by All Red steamers is accurately known, and its risks, such as they are, have been greatly diminished by information and scientific precautions. At but one spot, a place about 120 miles below Quebec, has any deepening to be done to enable the largest sized steamboats to pass up at full speed. This improvement is being carried out, and thereafter no obstacle will remain to hinder a twenty-four-knot vessel going at her best pace up to Quebec itself.

The width and depth of the Channel will be ample, and the curves nowhere short enough to be dangerous.

As already stated, the seaway to Halifax is quite unimpeded with ice, nor do shoals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence concern it. Halifax indeed has but one drawback, which is the somewhat unsatisfactory condition of the line of railway linking it with Montreal. This, however, is easily capable of improvement, and we have the assurance of the Canadian government that the improvement will be effected without delay. For the rest, the land journey presents no difficulties or drawbacks. It were superfluous to praise the safety, speed, and comfort of this Canadian Pacific railway system. Nor need I detain the reader with a summary of the attractions of Canada for the tourist who is in no hurry. From one end to the other, from Niagara and the Montmorency Falls to the Takakkaw Falls in the Rockies; from the Rock of Quebec to the glorious coastal scenery of British Columbia, Canada is a land of the picturesque on the grandest scale. The sportsman finds game without the drawback of fever; the invalid gains health without having to endure exile among men of alien speech; the Imperialist cannot spend a day without finding food for study, and, usually, for legitimate pride. As a New Zealander I should know something of natural beauty, especially where lake, mountain, and forest are found in combination. I am bound to confess that for magnificence and extent many Canadian spectacles are not to be surpassed by any land, however romantically lovely.

Once arrived at Vancouver, we begin the second and longer division of the sea-voyage to the Antipodes. This escapes some of the difficulties which beset, or are supposed to beset, the Atlantic system. Ice, shoals, and fogs are things of the past; almost from the moment of leaving Vancouver the traveller is in clear and usually brilliant air. Nor have steamboat contractors in the Pacific to face fierce competition like that of the New York lines. At present, communication between Australasia and North America is frankly of a second-class kind. Australia and Canada subsidize a service carried on between Brisbane and Vancouver, which, owing to some recent improvements, is now expected to attain a speed of fifteen knots. But from this Canada will now withdraw her grant. New Zealand is served by slower lines, the chief object of which is to carry cargo. Obviously, then, there need be no question of demanding twenty-five-knot boats

for the Pacific section of the All Red route. Twenty-knot boats would introduce a revolution, and even roomy boats capable of doing nineteen knots would be so vast an improvement on recent conditions as to be thankfully welcomed by all reasonable people. Let us suppose, then, for the present, that the contracting governments are satisfied to require the actual performance of eighteen knots. Even then we shall be told that the Pacific journey presents especial difficulties. The distance from Vancouver to Auckland is 6,330 miles, and to this must be added another 1280 miles to Sydney. To make the voyage attractive, steamers must halt both at Hawaii and Fiji for at least eight hours in each case. As the passengers will demand at least a glimpse of these beautiful spots, the boats must manage to arrive in the morning both at Honolulu and Suva and leave in the evening. Again, even if we assume that boats of eight thousand and nine thousand tons will be large enough—as they probably will—they will need to carry very heavy supplies of coal. A steamer leaving Vancouver might require to have from three thousand to four thousand tons of coal on board, for the coaling arrangements at Honolulu are provokingly primitive. Further supplies could be got at Suva, but time would probably be too precious there to allow more than a few hundred tons to be taken in. At Auckland, of course, the arrangements are good and coal plentiful, while, as for Sydney, nothing better could well be desired. A steamboat actually covering eighteen knots an hour could reach Auckland from Vancouver in 16 days, after allowing a few hours for mischances.

If we assume that passengers and mails can be carried to Vancouver in eight days and a half from England, it means that Auckland is brought within twenty-four days and a half of the mother country. For a halt there and the voyage to Sydney three days more must be allowed. Yet if Sydney could be reached in twenty-seven days even, Sydney will stand to gain some four days by the All Red route. In the case of New Zealand the gain will be very much greater. For the last nine months New Zealanders have been depending on the Suez liners to Australia for the conveyance of their mails. They do not at all like the change; whereas formerly their San Francisco mail brought them their letters in thirty-one or thirty-two days, they are now thankful to receive them in from thirty-six to thirty-eight days. For them the All Red route would mean a reduction in their mail time of at least twelve days. In other words, it would reduce their distance from the mother country by the very large proportion of one-third.

I need scarcely add that the smaller colony of Fiji would also stand to gain very greatly. The beauties of Fiji are, perhaps, not so widely famed as those of the Hawaiian archipelago. Indeed, it cannot show the same widely fantastic and terrible volcanic features. But those travellers who know the wooded hills, bright valleys, and sparkling streams of Fiji; its shining beaches and blue bays, surfeited reefs and innumerable palmy islets, know that it is one of the most beautiful groups of the South Seas. Moreover, and that it is much to the purpose, it is healthy far above the average of tropical islands. Its natives, though not equal in intellect to the Hawaiians or the Maori of New Zealand, are a bold, finely built, interesting race. At every point, indeed, the voyage across the Pacific to Sydney offers tempting halting-places to the tourist. New Zealand's various attractions are too well known to make any advertisement of them needful. Enough to mention that the government of that new-made Dominion has of late years organized an active tourist department the object of which is to make smooth the path and pleasant the lot of the visitor to the mountains, lakes, volcanoes, geysers, warm springs, fiords, as well as the cultivated districts of the islands. Once at Sydney, the voyager is not only in the most beautiful harbor of Australia but at the best starting-point for striking out to reach the most characteristic scenery and most interesting colonising work of the continent.

As an imperial mail service the All Red route will be an indubitable advance. It should save the chief cities of Canada two or three days, New Zealand twelve days, and eastern Australia four days. Such a line would be well worth a big subsidy. As a passenger line its advantages should be equally beyond cavil. The Atlantic boats should be up to the best Cunard standard in all but size. The Pacific boats should be able to carry eight hundred passengers, two hundred and fifty of them in the first class. Every year a very large number of passengers, English and colonial, take the voyage round the world. To many of these time and variety are of more importance than twenty or thirty pounds more or less. This is not only the case with business men in a hurry, or globe-trotters with well-filled pockets. The number of colonists who in prosperous years manage to find the money for a visit to the old country is very considerable. They may have waited and saved for many years to make the journey "home"; but when they do manage to get away at last they like to travel comfortably and fast. To save all possible time is of the essence of their scheme; they grudge every day that stands between them and England and Europe. A fortnight more or less consumed on the way sometimes turns the scale and settles their decision to go or stay at home. It is safe, I think, to predict that part of the passenger traffic carried by the All Red steamers will be new. Their speed, comforts, and the attractions of the route will create business. The rest of the traffic will be diverted from the other lines,



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