

and to give it all the knowledge it is in my power to give at this moment, in order to satisfy a very legitimate curiosity.

First, Sir, perhaps it would not be amiss if I were to address myself at once to a question which has come to us from different quarters, and which may find an echo within these walls. Why this new enterprise? Why this expenditure? Why should parliament be called upon to assent to such a policy as is here indicated? We ask parliament to assent to this policy because we believe—nay, we feel certain, and certain beyond a doubt—that in so doing we give voice and expression to a sentiment, a latent but deep sentiment, which is to-day in the mind, and still more in the heart, of every Canadian, that a railway to extend from the shores of the Atlantic ocean to the shores of the Pacific ocean, and to be, every inch of it, on Canadian soil, is a national as well as a commercial necessity. That such a road must be built, that it is, in the language which I have used, a national and a commercial necessity, that it is a corollary of our status as a nation, that it is a requisite of our commercial development, is a proposition to which, up to this moment, I have heard no dissent.

Exception has been taken to the immediate necessity of building such a road, exception has been taken to the policy which we have to suggest for the immediate construction of such a road; but as to the idea itself I have never heard a word of opposition, nor do I believe that such a word will be heard in the debate. The first of these objections, that is to the immediate construction of such a road, can be disposed of, I believe, with a single observation. To those who urge upon us the policy of to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow; to those who tell us, Wait, wait, wait; to those who advise us to pause, to consider, to reflect, to calculate and to inquire, our answer is: No, this is not a time for deliberation, this is a time for action. The flood of tide is upon us that leads on to fortune; if we let it pass it may never recur again. If we let it pass, the voyage of our national life, bright as it is to-day, will be bound in shallows. We cannot wait, because time does not wait; we cannot wait because, in these days of wonderful development, time lost is doubly lost; we cannot wait, because at this moment there is a transformation going on in the conditions of our national life which it would be folly to ignore and a crime to overlook; we cannot wait, because the prairies of the North-west, which for countless ages have been roamed over by the wild herds of the bison, or by the scarcely less wild tribes of red man, are now invaded from all sides by the white race. They came last year 100,000, and still they come in still greater numbers. Already they are at work opening the long dormant soil; already they are at work sowing, harvesting and

Sir WILFRID LAURIER.

reaping. We say that to-day it is the duty of the Canadian government, it is the duty of the Canadian parliament, it is the duty of all those who have a mandate from the people to attend to the needs and requirements of this fast growing country, to give heed to that condition of things. We consider that it is the duty of all those who sit within these walls by the will of the people, to provide immediate means whereby the products of those new settlers may find an exit to the ocean at the least possible cost, and whereby, likewise, a market may be found in this new region for those who toil in the forests, in the fields, in the mines, in the shops of the older provinces. Such is our duty; it is immediate and imperative. It is not of to-morrow, but of this day, of this hour and of this minute. Heaven grant that it be not already too late; heaven grant that whilst we tarry and dispute, the trade of Canada is not deviated to other channels, and that an ever vigilant competitor does not take to himself the trade that properly belongs to those who acknowledge Canada as their native or their adopted land. Upon this question we feel that our position is absolutely safe and secure; we feel that it corresponds to the beating of every Canadian heart.

With regard to the plan which we have adopted for the construction of the road, there may be honest and honourable differences of opinion. The House knows there have been already such differences of opinion, honourable and honest, because it has been our misfortune to lose one of our colleagues upon this question. We make bold to say, however, that we stand upon very firm ground, and it will be my duty to present to the House the reasons which have led up to the policy which we have adopted and the reasons which we can invoke in favour of its support.

Our conception that this road, in order to give to the people the full benefit which they have a right to expect from it, should extend westward from the heart of the maritime provinces, from the town of Moncton, at the juncture of the two lines which proceed from Halifax and from St. John. I know very well that amongst those who oppose our policy there are a good many who maintain that it is sufficient that such a road should be constructed from Quebec westward to the Pacific ocean; that there is no need whatever of extending that railway from Quebec to Moncton because, between Quebec and Moncton, there is already the Intercolonial Railway. Sir, the answer which we have to make to this objection is plain, obvious, categorical, peremptory and paramount; the answer is that the Intercolonial never was intended, and never was conceived, and never was built for transcontinental traffic. The Intercolonial was first conceived as a military road. It was built and located for politi-