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THE TIMES.

THE COTEAU BRIDGE—PROS AND CONS.

The projected Coteau Bridge is still the subject of much controversy in the Provinces of Quebec and Ontario. As a public journalist, anxious to know and say what is right and just toward all parties, I invited a gentleman, who is as capable of giving a fair, judicial opinion, uninfluenced by local considerations, as any one in the Dominion, to tell the people of both Provinces what, in his judgment, is the real state of the case. The following is his reply:—

"SIR,—It is difficult for a citizen of Montreal to avoid being biased in his judgment on the question of allowing a bridge to be constructed over the St. Lawrence at the Coteau. In the controversy which has been recently carried on between the *Montreal Gazette* and Mr. Macmaster, M. P. P. for Glengarry, it seems not improbable that Montreal sympathy has been to a great extent with the *Gazette*. What seems extraordinary is that the Bill authorizing the construction of the bridge was not more strenuously opposed during its passage. It is, however, improbable that sectional opposition would have had much weight with Parliament. Mr. Macmaster has correctly defined the established policy of the Canadian Parliament to be the encouragement of free competition in our railroad enterprises. It was at one time believed that the Canada & Atlantic Railway Company, under another title, would be a feeder of the Grand Trunk, and that its traffic would be carried over that road to the seaboard. It has been found practicable to obtain a shorter line, and it would be felt by the population of the very considerable district of country which will be served by the railway to be a great hardship if it should be prevented from availing itself of the offered facilities.

"The question must be discussed without reference to the possible obstruction of the navigation of the St. Lawrence. That contingency has been fully provided for in the Act, and is quite beside the present question. It is difficult to comprehend upon what grounds the Dominion Government could venture to interpose any obstacle to the construction, by a chartered company, of a public work, which has been expressly authorized by Parliament, provided the Governor-in-Council shall be satisfied, after full examination into the question, that no serious objection exists to bridging the navigable channel at the point of location mentioned in the Act 35 Vic., Cap. 83. It would seem clear that the Governor-in-Council is bound to carry out the provisions of the Act of Parliament, subject only to the restriction already mentioned. Mr. Macmaster has advocated the cause of his constituents with great ability, but it must be admitted with strict impartiality. There is hardly a railway in the Dominion of those recently projected that has not been objected to on the grounds of its competing with established lines, but Canada at a very early period of her railway history adopted the policy of free competition. As Mr. Macmaster has pointed out, Montreal is at this moment strenuously advocating the diversion of the traffic of the Western States to the St. Lawrence, and the Grand Trunk lent its powerful aid in the construction of a bridge over the Niagara River to facilitate the diversion of traffic to the United States railroads. Under these circumstances it would have been scarcely possible for the Dominion

Parliament to have refused the Canada & Atlantic Railway Co. the means of gaining access to the seaboard by the most direct route merely for the purpose of benefiting the city of Montreal, or rather the Grand Trunk Railway Co., for it is far from certain that the city or its inhabitants would derive any benefit by the traffic destined for the United States seaboard, and that is the only traffic that will be taken over the bridge in the event of its construction. No reference has been made in the foregoing remarks to the obstruction of the navigation. There can be no doubt that the Minister of Public Works will take care that the plans for the contemplated bridge are subjected to severe criticism, but on the assumption that all engineering difficulties can be surmounted, the construction of the bridge would seem to be inevitable."

I agree with my correspondent, when he deems it "extraordinary that the bill authorizing the construction of the bridge was not more strenuously opposed during its passage." Everything that can be said against it now, might and ought to have been said then. The Editor of the *Montreal Gazette* was in his place, as member for Cardwell, and might have spoken had he chosen; the members for Montreal, as well as others representing constituencies in Quebec, were in the House, and should have been alive to the interests of the Province, but the bill was allowed to pass unchallenged. As Mr. Macmaster puts it:—"Quebec only began to exhibit its wares the day after the fair." For it is beyond reasonable question or doubt that an Act of Parliament was passed, authorizing the Governor-in-Council to grant permission to a chartered company to build a bridge across the St. Lawrence River at Coteau, "provided that the Governor-in-Council shall be satisfied, after full examination into the subject, that no serious objection exists to bridging the navigable channel." No other issues were raised, or contemplated, and the *Gazette* is seriously in error in attempting to include other objections under that clause. Talk about "absurdity" and "nonsense" does not alter facts.

But it is strange that it never occurred to the *Gazette* to suggest that an Act may be repealed or a law may be amended. The *Gazette* is "out of court" when it says that other objections besides the danger of interfering with navigation may be considered under the Act as it now stands; but it may bring itself within the pale of fair argument if it will say, The Act is passed, but it may be repealed. As soon as that is admitted, we have good reason for opening the discussion. And the discussion turns upon this: Will the good to be done to other lines, and to the Dominion generally, by building the Coteau Bridge, compensate for the injury the Grand Trunk will inevitably suffer? It is quite true that the bridge if built will give us another competing line and another means of gaining access to the seaboard, but what shall we lose by that? We cannot tell with anything like certainty, but we may be quite sure that Grand Trunk traffic would be very materially interfered with, and Mr. Vanderbilt would have a chance of working his will in Canada. What the Grand Trunk has done for Western, as well as Eastern Canada, may be judged from the fact that an average of 750,000 tons of freight per annum are carried by the Grand Trunk, realising a revenue of probably \$3,000,000, which freight would be more or less subject to competition should the bridge be built.

The Grand Trunk is a great institution in Canada—an institution without which Canada would be a scattered and disintegrated community; vast sums of English money have been spent upon it; all its works are conducted in Canada; every fresh development it makes is in the interest of Canada; it favours Canadian ports, and with unceasing enterprise "taps" the traffic of the States for Canada's benefit. Whereas, if we allow American lines to come in