

Class C

"Semper Sursum"

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Class C Second Prize

The Story of the Canadian Railways

As they fought the elements and endured tremendous privations for the sake of mere existence, as they blazed their trail amid the forests, little did the hardy Canadian pioneers know that the Canada, whose foundations they then were laying, would so soon grow into a highly prosperous country, extensively rich in its productions. They marvelled at the loftiness of its mountains, at its incomparable beauty, at its mighty rivers, and at its boundless prairies, but how much more would they have wondered had they seen today's vast wheat-fields and the great net-work of railways! In the development of Canada the growth of the railways is perhaps the most interesting phase, for not only does this reflect the growth of her trade and her cities, but it also reveals the determination and perseverance of the Briton. Indeed, now that the powerful trans-continental engines speed from coast to coast, it is difficult to realize that, sixty years ago, the scheme of forming a trans-continental railroad was met both by incredulity and opposition. But the world rolled on. The era of invention started, and with it an era of determination,

so that, great obstacles having been overcome, this railroad has altered from a thing of seeming impossibility to a thing of vivid existence.

Even early in the nineteenth century, the Canadian colonists had dreamed of a transcontinental railway, but, this being apparently impossible, it was not until 1869, when the first United States transcontinental railroad was completed, that their dreams changed to an unquenchable desire. In 1871, British Columbia entered into the federated Dominion, one condition being that a railroad was to be constructed connecting her to her sister provinces, from which she was then isolated. When one realizes that the distance between British Columbia and Nova Scotia is even greater than that between Nova Scotia and Britain, the enormity of such a task and the opposition thereto become obvious, but, when the rough nature of the country, and the formidable barrier provided by the Rocky Mountains are taken into account, the success of such an enterprise would be thought impossible. On the other hand, were the west and the east not to lose touch, the railway was a necessity, dire and immediate. Thus, although work was begun in 1873, the construction progressed very slowly, for not only had the engineers to contend with great obstacles, but the land had carefully to be surveyed. Then came an unexpected factor that added great impetus to the project. From the depths of failure welled a spring of hope. In surveying

Very important

the land, minerals, and other sources of wealth, such as rich and extensive forests, were discovered, while it was found that the fertile prairies of Saskatchewan and Manitoba were admirably suited for wheat-growing. As people became interested, they invested their capital in the railroad, so that, in 1881, was formed a Canadian Pacific Railway Company, which undertook the enormous task of completing the remaining 1,920 miles of rail in ten years. Although, in return, they were to receive 25,000,000 dollars and 25,000,000 acres of land, the undertaking was considered impossible. However, because of the favourable conditions existing on the prairies at the time, and also by reason of the employment of 12,000 workmen, the construction, proceeding by night and by day, was carried on rapidly, so that, as early as November 7th, 1885, Sir Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona) drove the last spike. What a momentous day! Then was the desire of years fulfilled, then was completed a task which had been fought against time, the elements, and the stubborn nature of the country. But despite the opposition of Nature, despite the constant boring of tunnels, the bridging of chasms and of ravines, and the construction of zig-zag descents in the mountains, the work had been successfully carried out. It is interesting to note that in fifteen months, 1,500 tons of

dynamite were used, while swamps across which the track had to be laid, swallowed up thousands of tons of earth and stones. Frequently such swamps were too formidable, the course having to be diverted. Thus was concluded one of the greatest engineering achievements the world has known, an achievement that is a great tribute to the skill of the persevering and dogged Briton.

In 1886, when the first through train from Montreal arrived at Port Moody (then the western terminus of the railway), a great triumph had been scored for both mechanical science and empire-building. But the value of the railway was not confined to the linking-up of the various states, for there was now another route connecting Britain with the Far East. Three weeks after the first through journey, the good ship "W.B. Flint" arrived at Port Moody from Yokohama, laden with a cargo of tea, which tea was the first home-bound merchandise to be carried by the trans-continental railway. Again, the railroad brought increased commercial activity, and also encouraged the development of the prairies into the vast agricultural lands which today occupy so great a part of the Dominion.

Although a trans-continental railway had been completed, great tracts of land to north and to south of the line were yet practically isolated, for it is to be remembered

that Canada has length as well as breadth. Therefore other railroads were eminently essential. Hence there came into existence the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific railways, both of which spanned the continent, and both of which assisted greatly in broadening the advancing front of civilisation and productive development. Now that the area of production had been increased, the railways had difficulty in coping with the enormous harvest freights, so that it eventually became imperative that another outlet should be found for the wheat. Because of the increasing need for a more northerly outlet, and because Hudson Bay is ice-free from the end of July to the beginning of November, a railroad has recently been constructed connecting the wheat-fields and Port Nelson on the Bay.

Today, Canada has two chief railway systems, to wit, the Canadian Pacific, which is yet a privately owned company, and the Canadian National Railways, which, being the property of the Government, incorporate the Canadian Northern, the Inter-Colonial, the Grand Trunk, and the Grand Trunk Pacific lines. Altogether the Canadian railways now total over 40,000 miles, and carry nearly 100,000,000 passengers and over 120,000,000 short tons of traffic per year.

A marvellous history concerns the Canadian railways. In 1836, when a horse-drawn train commenced running between

Montreal and St John's (Quebec), none
 foresaw that this early line was the forerunner
 of the great systems of today. In those
 times a journey across the continent was
 considered an enormous undertaking, for it
 would not only take many, many months,
 but it would also require great strength
 and courage. Yet today the mighty
 trains span all those miles in a few brief
 days, while the passengers live as though in
 a first-class hotel. Perhaps, in half
 a century's time, those great engines will
 occupy in the museums of tomorrow the place
 that the engines of a century ago occupy in
 the museums of today. Probably the
 luxurious stations of the Canadian
 railways will become aeroplane bases,
 possibly leviathans of the air will
 accomplish the trans-continental journey
 in even a few hours, but so long as the
 era of invention continues there is no
 saying what may be the future of the
 Canadian railways.

Books Consulted
McKillop, Highways.
Protheroe, The Dominion Man.
Sum, The British Empire (vol on Communications)