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Well Balanced

C70

"Muskeg."

V.G.

Royal Empire Society

1930

Class C First Prize

Kemnay Secondary School,
Kemnay.

The Story of The Canadian Railways

The Russians had a sure instinct when, on rounding Lake Baikal in Central Asia, with their Trans-Siberian line, they put on the Western end of the Central Tunnel a conspicuous inscription "To the Great Ocean", and on the Eastern end "To the Atlantic Ocean". No railway can stir the imagination like one that bestrides a continent, and links oceans far apart. In no other work of human hands on a gigantic scale, have the spirits of romance and adventure been so closely allied with industry, or, indeed, with any enterprise, except man's first voyaging round the world. The story of the construction of the Canadian Railways, is an epic of a great accomplishment in which the engineers overcame difficulties well nigh insurmountable - difficulties of interposed lakes, rapid streams, strong and weak mountains, bottomless bogs, avalanche-swept slopes and snow-filled cuttings, with the usual want of labour, and doubt as to adequate capital. The mere length of the Canadian Pacific, joining Montreal with Vancouver, does not even hint at the story of the difficulties encountered and overcome.

Looking back into the mists of the past, the greatest world nations have all been transport pioneers. One has only to consider the road and bridge building activities of the Romans to realise this, or the merchant shipping of the Spaniards in our own Elizabethan times. In more recent times, countries that have been slow in the development of Railways, Roads or Waterways have been left high and dry by the flowing tide of commerce.

Canada soon began to realise this, and by the development of her railway system has risen to an outstanding position amongst the trading nations of the world.

The first Canadian Railway was constructed in 1836 between St. Johns and Laprairie, Quebec, with the object of shortening the journey between Montreal and Quebec. In 1850 however there were only sixty-six miles of railway in all Canada. The Railway Era in Canada may be said to have begun in 1851 when an act was passed providing for the construction of a main line of railway. The result was the completion of the Grand Trunk Railway in 1856.

In 1859 it was extended westward to Sarnia and eastward to Rivière au Loup. In 1859 on the completion of the Victoria Bridge across the St. Lawrence at Montreal, the Grand Trunk had a through route, eight hundred miles long, from Portland to Sarnia. In 1888 the Grand Trunk took over the Northern Railway (Toronto Barrie and Hamilton and North Western Railway) and in 1891 the completion of the St. Clair tunnel gave direct communication with the United States of America.

As early as 1830 it was proposed to build an Intercolonial Railway between the maritime provinces and Quebec. In 1851 the Government were prepared to give money, but the project failed through a difference of opinion as to the selected route. Nova Scotia made a start but both she and New Brunswick were not able to raise sufficient capital, and in 1864 there were only 341 miles of railway in the maritime provinces, and these passed to the Dominion Government which overlooked to complete them. They took over new branches and obtained running rights ~~over~~ the Grand Trunk tracks into Montreal, and the Intercolonial Railway became a competitor for the business of Montreal, which was at that period the ^{metropolis} commercial of Canada. Although the building of the Grand Trunk line, and of the Intercolonial, was a fine engineering work, there can be no doubt that the greatest railway enterprise undertaken and accomplished by men, has been the

construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway - the first transcontinental railway joining Montreal with Vancouver. Some seventy years ago, Major Carmichael Smyth had advocated the construction of a Canadian Pacific Railway nearly along the present route. In 1851 a government commission reported against the proposal. Nevertheless the problem had to be grappled with at the price of a united Canada. Only on the promise of a transcontinental Canadian Railway would British Columbia, whose valleys rich in minerals run southwards into the United States, agree to enter the Canadian Federation. That conditional agreement to join with the eastern Canadian provinces was made in 1871, and surveying began in that year, but it was not until 1885 that the difficulties of the long journey were surmounted, and the steel track finally linked the Atlantic and the Pacific across British lands.

Building began in 1874 but extraordinary difficulties were encountered.

"After Ottawa was left behind, was a stretch of some nine hundred miles of 'bad lands' - rocky, infertile, water-logged, abounding with difficulties, barren of resources. When the line emerged from rock and inhospitable forest, and reached the gateway of the great prairie lands, some distance short of Winnipeg, there was ahead 1,000 miles of easy gradient, rising to the great central prairie plateau of 2,000 feet elevation, but known only to the hunter and rancher, and entirely devoid of every form of supplies, whether of wood, or other material. Across the prairies loomed the most forbidding bastions of the Rocky Mountains, with the solitary Selkirk range behind that, and the Coast Range beyond, a prospect to daunt all except the most hopeful and fearless."

The enterprise never would have been carried through but for the splendid public spirit of the Canadian Government under Sir John MacDonal. A brief statement of the help given by the Government will show how formidable were the financial obstacles to this huge scheme. The Government itself made and gave to the company 400 miles of line through the

almost impenetrable Rocky lands, separating the fertile east of this great Dominion from the fertile centre in the West. They made the company, which eventually completed the line, a loan of £6,000,000 and gave them a present of 25,000,000 acres of land lying across the railway, through the wide stretch of then untenanted prairie. The difficulties of the route were increased from the fact that the line had to skirt the northern shore of the Great Lakes, and so enable the future corn lands of the west to ship their grain at the North Western extremity of Lake Superior, and secure a cheap outlet to the markets of the world. The railway was built by 1885, and like the Grand Trunk, it began to acquire feeders linking it to Quebec, Ottawa, Manitoba, various parts of Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Sudbury and Sault Ste Marie, and many other places.

The second great Transcontinental Railway is the Grand Trunk Pacific. The story of the construction of the Grand Trunk is told very vividly in "The Making of a Great Canadian Railway" by E. A. Talbot. About the end of the 19th century the Grand Trunk Pacific Company, which already had a line as far west as Chicago, submitted to the Canadian Government a proposal by which it might have a share in the settlement, and (a) development of the West.

The Government objected to the first scheme, because too much of the line would lie in the United States. The company then proposed to construct a line from Winnipeg to North Bay, but the Government suggested that they themselves should continue the line east to Moncton, New Brunswick, and lease it to the Grand Trunk Pacific for fifty years.

The western half from Winnipeg to Prince Rupert was to be built by the Grand Trunk Pacific. The company agreed to these proposals, and work on the National - Transcontinental and Grand Trunk Pacific Railway was begun, the Government giving subsidies to aid the work of construction. The special feature of the Eastern part of the Grand Trunk line was the attempt to get clear of the wilderness of rock and water,

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that lies to the southward of the Great Lakes, and which proved such a costly barrier to the Canadian Pacific. By carrying the line well to the North through New Ontario, it was found possible to avoid much of the heavy work needed to blast a passage through the wilderness of rock, and also to open up for cultivation a clay forest-belt of great richness. Beyond the prairie, the Grand Trunk crosses the Rocky Mountains by the Yellow Head Pass to Prince Rupert, at a height of only 3112 feet compared with 5329 feet at the Great Divide of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

The third of the great Transcontinental Railways—the Canadian Northern Railway was begun in 1896 when the 125 mile line of the Lake Manitoba Railway and Canal Company was completed. The Government of Manitoba wished to compete with the Canadian Pacific Railway, and assisted the Canadian Northern Railway to secure the Manitoba lines of the North Pacific, and in 1902 the line from Winnipeg to Port Arthur was completed. During the next ten years the west was filling rapidly, and during this boom of immigration, the railway was able to secure grants from the Government of the Provinces and Dominion to enable it to continue the line east of Montreal and west to Vancouver, and so complete the great scheme.

With two new Transcontinental main lines and branches under construction, the mileage between 1900 and 1915 almost exactly doubled. For it increased from 17,651 to 34,882 miles. The builders of the new lines, the Government, the people everyone expected that immigration of capital and labour from Europe would rapidly settle the areas served by the new railways; and bring them adequate and profitable traffic, as had been the case with the Canadian Pacific Railway.

The Great War, however, intervened. Neither capital nor labour from Europe was available. Immigration decreased enormously, and working costs increased to an abnormal extent, and it became necessary for the Government to assist the Railways. In 1916

loans were made to the Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern Railway Companies, and a commission of three experts was appointed to investigate the working of these railway systems. The commission issued a report called the Drayton - Aeworth Report which has been the basis of railway management in Canada since then. Their recommendation was that the public should take control of the Canadian Northern, the Grand Trunk Pacific, and the Grand Trunk, and that they should be administered by a board of trustees. In this way the Canadian ~~National~~ Railways came into being and several eastern lines were acquired recently. The very latest is the Railway to Churchill (formerly the Hudson Bay Railway). The former terminus was Nelson but in 1926 it was transferred to Churchill, and which was reached in April of last year, though it is not completely graded or ballasted yet.

The boldness of spirit, and faith in enterprise which have planned and financed the vast net-work of communications which has so swiftly developed every part of the Dominion, would seem to indicate that the Dominion of Canada has before it a great future. Through its railways Canada will live and grow.