

(November 17, 1913.)

The Relations between the Public and the Railways.

By SIR WILLIAM CORNELIUS VAN HORNE, K.C.M.G.*

AT a regular luncheon of the Club held on the 17th November, Sir William C. Van Horne said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen.—While I deeply appreciate and am very much flattered by the words of your Chairman concerning myself, they are somewhat embarrassing to me, for I know how far short I am of deserving them. I want to take but a minute of your time to call your attention to the fact that the real men in the Canadian Pacific Railway were the men who found the money; my part of it was the very simple one which consisted only in spending that money, wisely or not. (Laughter.) And as to that I frequently think of the many mistakes I made in doing it, and how much more cheaply we could have done things if I had only known enough. However, I thank you for your kind words. I would mention Lord Mountstephen, Lord Strathcona, Mr. Angus, and in the early days that doughty Scotchman, Duncan McIntyre, as among those who had to do with the original financing of the Company, not forgetting our friend, Sir Edmund Osler. (Applause.)

Your Honorary Secretary has warned me and put upon me a maximum of time limit of thirty minutes; fortunately for me, and no doubt for you also, he has not fixed any minimum. (Laughter.) And therefore I shall keep you away from your business just as little time as possible.

I had thought of speaking to you here to-day on what I regard as an exceedingly important subject, the drift of the farm population of Canada towards the towns, which has, as you know, been going on so long in the United States, and with, I think, unhappy results. But when I arrived here this morning and saw your imposing Union Passenger Station (laughter) with all its lightness and grace—an extraordinary contribution to the architecture of the Dominion of Canada, (laughter)—and when I walked out through the beautiful

*Sir William Van Horne after many years of railway experience in the United States entered the service of the Canadian Pacific Railway at one of the most critical periods in its history. When it commenced operation there were few who thought it could be made a financial success, but under Sir William's management the foundation was laid for the wonderful system which we now know.

walks of your Waterfront Park along the Windmill Line,—another contribution to the beauties of Canada (laughter) the landscape gardening of Canada, and to the healthfulness of your city, I changed my mind. (Laughter.) For it came to me that there was something of very much greater and more immediate importance than the farm movement. That can be deferred a few weeks. I refer to the relations between the public and the railways.

I don't think the railways have always been very well treated by some of the people of Toronto, not nearly so well as they deserve. And I think it would have been better long ago if there had been more sympathy, if all had worked more in accord. (Hear, hear.) For I think the Park would have been a little more attractive, and the Union Station perhaps a little lighter, and various other things would have been better.

You all know, I am sure, that the railways of the United States have for a long time back been under attack; that at every session of the State Legislatures a great number of adverse laws are launched against them, laws which I believe to have originated in political stock jobbing or other similar motives. At all events, the public generally has supported these laws without giving them, I am sure, very much thought. And to-day the railways of the United States are struggling almost for their existence; they are struggling, many of them, against bankruptcy. I am quite unable to account for the spirit of hostility shown towards the railways there, because I am sure there are many among you who will bear me out in this statement, because the service by the railways in the United States is far above that of those in any other country in the world,—save perhaps the railways of Canada, we must never forget. (Laughter.) Their rates are very much lower than those of any other country in the world, saving again Canada. (Laughter.) They are operated with an intelligence and public spirit that you don't find in any other country in the world. They have greater regard for the public interest and the rights of the individuals, as usually shown, than in any other country I have visited,—save Canada always. (Laughter.) I don't know the reason, as I have said, for this hostility, but it has created a situation, a deplorable situation, that is really a great cloud, and the great danger of the situation of the American railways is that it overshadows the business of the United States to-day so that all other dangers are trivial compared with it.

We have seen recently the New York Central Railway compelled, through the false statement of an employee to the effect that he could not see a red light on a particular occa-

sion, which every railway man knows to have been false,—we have seen the New York Central Railway compelled to expend untold millions, fifty or sixty million dollars, I don't know how much, on changing its New York terminals. And we have seen the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railway hounded by ignorant public sentiment to the very verge of bankruptcy, hounded to the point where its very financial existence was threatened.

Now all these things are catching, and sometimes,—too frequently, I think,—Canada has shown a disposition to follow the example of the United States, as along labor laws and others I might mention. I am only afraid they may follow in laws against railways. However, up to the present time, there has been comparatively little illiberal, unintelligent legislation affecting railways in Canada. I will mention one case, that where ten years ago the foundations were cut into of that splendid grain elevator system in the Northwest, which had been built up by the Canadian Pacific Railway after many years' effort, with the result that the farmers from that time on have not received nearly as much for their grain as before. There was an exception on that occasion, and the effect of that legislation, I am afraid, will continue forever. We have had some legislation of that kind, but not very much to complain of.

I want to plead to-day for a more liberal, intelligent, and friendly consideration of the railway interests of Canada, and against any attempt on the part of "blatherskites" to put through ignorant legislation such as has been the curse of most of the States among our neighbors on the south.

I have now passed my fifty-sixth railway year, and in that time I have known hardly one executive or managing officer of a railway, either in the United States or Canada, who did not take the deepest possible interest in the welfare of the property entrusted to his administration, who did not feel the deepest possible interest in the welfare of the communities served by his railway, who did not heartily desire the good will and friendship of every patron of the road and of everybody living along the line. I cannot recall one single exception to this. It has been my lot or fortune to have been a director, of one railway at a time, of a good many lines in the last forty years, and I can truthfully say that in all that time I have never heard a suggestion of an illiberal character. (Applause.) In any question, any matter of policy, or any other case, where there has been the least doubt, the question has been decided on the liberal side and in favor of the public.

There are many who think, perhaps most people think, that the first efforts of the managing directors and managing officers of the railways are directed to squeezing out dividends. I can say that that is absolutely false! It is the very last consideration. I don't know one single exception in Canada, or any exception on any railways I have ever been connected with in the United States.

Railway men are extraordinarily busy men; they have all that they can possibly do within the twenty-four hours, and perhaps they have failed in making sufficient explanations to the public; but that is a very difficult thing to do; and that may perhaps be nullified quite by the statement of some ignorant "blatherskite" who has the gift of the "gab." (Laughter.) But the hearts of the railway men of Canada are in the right place. There is not a man among them who is not interested intensely in the welfare of the public. And again I plead, when there are any questions between the public and the railways, they should be talked over in a friendly way. (Hear, hear.)

Somebody some time ago said something about corporations having no souls. I say, as a result of sitting in a vast number of Board meetings, not only of railway directors but of manufacturers and others, for many years, that a corporation has a soul, and it has a bigger, cleaner, finer soul, than any individual on the face of the earth! I don't pretend to say that there are not ignorant men and simple men sitting on some Boards, but those men never have the hardihood to show their bad side. I have never known it, and at present sitting here there are many men who will bear me out in this statement.

I thank you again, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen. (Applause.)

In moving a vote of thanks to Sir William C. Van Horne, Sir John S. Willison said:

Mr. President, Sir William Van Horne, and Gentlemen,—I always make a much better impromptu speech when I have had time to prepare it. I have the same qualities, not of an intellectual type, which belonged to Sir Robert Peel. Disraeli, he said, drew on his imagination for his facts, and on his memory for his jokes. To-day I have had no adequate opportunity to draw on either.

It is, however, an extreme pleasure, unexpected as it is, to be asked to move a vote of thanks to Sir William Van Horne. I suppose we are not absolutely agreed as to the eternal unflinching benevolence of railways. I don't think, however,

in the final judgment of history it will be said that the founders of the Canadian Pacific Railway have not been pre-eminently makers of this Dominion of Canada. Sir, I altogether refuse to believe that the men who control this great corporation, who develop, extend and carry on this great public enterprise, are actuated only by selfish and mercenary considerations. I have lived long enough also to know that there is a public spirit of patriotism in every class of the population. (Hear, hear.) And I am profoundly convinced that the men who made the Canadian Pacific Railway, and who made the other great transportation companies of Canada, were actuated by as profound patriotism as we men on the newspapers and in other offices, who misunderstand what they are doing, and speak with exceptional authority on subjects which we do not quite understand.

Just in closing, may I say a thing I have said elsewhere, although not in the form of a public address? Anyone who crossed the Canadian West in the early days of the Canadian Pacific Railway must have been absolutely amazed to find that with a road trailing across such enormous territory, with only a few straggling villages and with only small stretches of scattered settlements—I was one of those who must have been absolutely amazed to learn that the road could be successfully operated. It is a great miracle in the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway, not that it was built, because generous subsidies were provided towards its construction, but that when the money was expended and the road constructed men with the genius of Sir William Van Horne were found to operate it, and to operate it successfully under these onerous conditions.

So I say in closing and in moving a vote of thanks to Sir William Van Horne that we in this growing commercial city hold for him great admiration and regard; (hear, hear and applause); that we believe he is a great and unselfish Canadian patriot, and that in the pages of the history of our Dominion no name will shine with greater radiance than that of our guest to-day. I move a vote of thanks to Sir William Van Horne for his address. (Applause.)

Mr. D. R. Wilkie, seconding the vote, said:

Mr. Chairman, Sir William and Gentlemen,—This honor is quite unexpected, but I can assure you I take advantage of it to-day with the greatest pleasure. I have looked upon Sir William Van Horne ever since he came to this country as

a leader in the industrial progress of the country and of the finer class of gentlemen who make up the nation. The only thing we regret is that the Canadian Pacific Directors are not oftener in Toronto. We are not as much in touch with them as we would like to be. I only hope this is the first of many addresses from Sir William; there are many subjects on which he could give us valuable information. I hope it will be the pleasure of Sir William to come again. No man has greater admiration for him than myself. I have very much pleasure in seconding Sir John Willison's motion. (Applause.)
