

363. The position at that date may be summed up in a few sentences.

But little was known of the great extent of country which now constitutes the Dominion when British Columbia became part of Canada. Between the settlements on the waters of the St. Lawrence River and the Pacific Coast there extended vast trackless regions with a winter climate of much severity. Between the Ottawa River and the prairie region it was rocky and wooded. Between the prairie and the Pacific Ocean it was designated a "sea of mountains." Both these regions were forbidding. The prairie region was better known; it had been examined about ten years earlier by a scientific expedition (sent out by the Imperial Government) the members of which declared the utter impossibility of establishing a Canadian Pacific Railway. The officer (Capt. Palliser) in command of the expedition, after four years' exploration, aided by assistants of great ability and energy, thus summed up the result:—

"The knowledge of the country, on the whole, would never lead me to advocate a line of communication from Canada across the Continent to the Pacific exclusively through British territory. The time has now forever gone by for effecting such an object, and the unfortunate choice of an astronomical boundary line has completely isolated the central American possessions of Great Britain from Canada on the east, and also debarred them from any eligible access from the Pacific Coast on the west."

But Canada had undertaken to construct a railway to connect the seaboard of British Columbia with the existing railway system in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec by the most eligible line that could be found within the territory of the Dominion. To a large extent the intervening country was a *terra incognita*. It had in the first place to be explored and the field of inquiry embraced formidable obstacles within a range of fifty-four degrees of longitude and ten degrees of latitude.

To find a line of railway through this immense and almost unknown country involved unremitting labour by a large staff of men whose difficulty was made more formidable by the fact that the wide expanses of forest and mountain which they penetrated were destitute of the means of shelter and subsistence.

The work of survey began in 1871, but the efforts of those engaged frequently resulted in failure, rendering repeated attempts necessary year by year to gain the objects sought.

364. The work of construction commenced in 1874. The first practical step in establishing the Pacific Railway was the purchase of 50,000 tons of steel rails. In the same year contracts were entered into for clearing the forest land along the projected line of railway and erecting a telegraph line from Lake Superior 1,200 miles westward.

In 1874 the Pembina branch was begun and the line east of Lake Nipissing was subsidized.

When the Mackenzie Government went out of power in October, 1878, the Macdonald administration continued the construction as a public work.

It was some years before the route through the mountain region was definitely established. Meanwhile construction proceeded wherever possible under the circumstances which obtained, and by the year 1880 had entered into 67 contracts with various persons for supplying additional steel rails, rolling stock, grading and bridging. On these services