

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

Hon. D. Davies on Winter Communication.

Stm.—In resuming the subject of Winter Communication, I observe that a delegation has been sent from Richibucto to Ottawa with a view of urging the Government to change the water route from the Capes to between Richibucto Head and the West Cape of the Island, on the ground that the tides part between these points and there is more open water there. The tides between the Capes part "regularly" and our skilful navigators take advantage of it. There may possibly be more open water between the West Cape and Richibucto occasionally, seeing that the distance is five miles greater. Those who have crossed the Straits, as often as I have, would not care to try the Richibucto route in small boats; and as for a steamer plying there, it does not possess a single advantage over the route between the Capes—and the distance is five miles greater.

Dr. Jenkins says "that when the 'Northern Light' is driven against heavy 'pack ice' she rises on it, has no weight to bear it down, sticks fast, and to overcome this a vessel must be modelled that will glide upon the ice without concussion and have sufficient weight forward to bear it down." He further says "the Newfoundland sealer is the only boat at all adapted for ice navigation, but that she is constructed chiefly with a view to 'capacity.'" Now the "Northern Light," from her peculiar shape, will glide upon "pack ice" without concussion as easily as any Newfoundland sealer; but I agree with him that she has no weight forward to break it down when closely frozen together. The question is, could a steamer be built on the lines of a Newfoundland sealer, and having greater weight forward do better? When the "pack ice" is unfrozen I am informed that the "Northern Light" can work her way through it fairly well, but when she gets into "a pack" in very cold weather "Jack Frost" sometimes stops her, and she has to lay by until thawed out, or released by a gale of wind breaking up the pack.

The Newfoundland steam sealer does not leave St. John's until March. The only point she has to make is to strike the seals. Now in March the extreme frosts of winter are over and her work, as compared with what a winter steamer has to do in trying to make passages between Pictou and Georgetown, is comparatively easy.

The Newfoundland steamer is generally fitted with a propeller that can be disconnected and raised above the floating ice when jammed in "a pack," in order to prevent its being broken. It is again connected when there is a chance of proceeding. These operations take time. The propeller of the "Northern Light" is eighteen feet under water, and thus below the drift ice. This ought to be in her favor, as she is always ready to take advantage of any opening in the ice. I think a steamer, say double the size of the "Northern Light," built on the lines of the old sailing seal-hunters—of which we built so many for the Newfoundland market before the advent of steamers—would be the best for our purpose. She would have to be fitted with a propeller that could be disconnected and lifted above the ice when necessary.

I am afraid if a steamer was put on between the Capes that she would occasionally, in gales of wind, be driven by the running ice down the Straits towards Point Prim, and that it would be difficult for her to get back again against the Northwest winds and the set of the current, which is well known to run to the eastward.

It is noted that the "Northern Light" when at her best in the early part of the winter, could not force her way up to Pugwash against the winds and currents—in fact did not get half way up before she was disabled—and we may judge from this the chances of such a vessel forcing her way back to the Capes in mid-winter, after having drifted down as far as St. Peter's Island. It has been suggested that "Harbors" could be cut in the "board ice," on each side of the Capes, into which the steamer could go for shelter, into which she would occasionally be fitted on the board ice, but which piles up on the edge of the board ice, but an experiment of this kind might succeed. The proper way to test the practicability of a steamer being able to run between the Capes during mid-winter, would be to get a new steamer for the Georgetown and Pictou route, and send the "Northern Light" to the Capes to try the experiment.

I have a strong opinion, which is shared by most nautical men, that our winter steamer should ply between Georgetown and Pictou until severe winter sets in when the ice masses between Pictou Island and Pictou Head; afterwards she should ply between Souris and Cape George, and Georgetown and Cape George; she would sometimes be able to reach Georgetown when she could not get to Souris, and vice versa. She would thus have two objective points on the island connected with our railway system. Cape George is about ten miles from the Antigonish Railway. There is a cove at the south side of the Cape with a wharf there generally free from ice, at which the steamer could land passengers and freight. It would be easy to connect with the Antigonish Railway with teams the first winter, and if the experiment proved successful, the Dominion Government would give us a short branch to connect. Now the great advantage of this route is that the Straits of Northumberland expand into a large basin between Cape George, Cape Bear, Souris Head, and Cape Breton, and that during the heart of winter there is always a good deal of open water in this basin—plenty of sea-room—and no dangerous shoals on which the steamer might be lost.

The Dominion Government is spending millions on opening the Northwest by means of the Canadian Pacific Railway, expecting to be repaid when that part of the Dominion is covered with settlers. Meantime our "light little Island Province" is saddled with one-fourth of the cost of opening up the Northwest. Surely they can afford to do us justice and give us a second steamer with a view of "trying" to carry out the terms of Confederation. Our representatives at Ottawa, one and all, irrespective of party, should insist on another steamer. If we don't "agitate" we get nothing.

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Perkins & Sterns

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