The Railways And The Republic

#James F. (James Fairchild) 1846
Hudson
Copyright, 1886, by Harper & Brothers.

All rights reserved.
CONTENTS.

CHAPTER                                      PAGE

I. THE PROBLEM OF RAILWAY DOMINATION        1
II. TEN YEARS OF DISCRIMINATION             25
III. THE HISTORY OF A COMMERCIAL CRIME       67
IV. THE LAW AND THE RAILWAYS                107
V. PUBLIC OBLIGATIONS AND CORPORATE PRACTICES 155
VI. THE POOLING POLICY                      195
VII. THE FICTITIOUS ELEMENT IN RAILWAY POLICY 251
VIII. COMPETITION versus COMBINATION        287
IX. THE DISCUSSION OF REMEDIES               316
X. THE PUBLIC HIGHWAY                        368
XI. CORPORATIONS IN POLITICS                 449

432954
THE RAILWAYS AND THE REPUBLIC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROBLEM OF RAILWAY DOMINATION.

A new social power sometimes rises to immense proportions before its nature and effects are understood. The full bearing of its heretofore unknown forces upon future generations can then be learned only by experience. The mediæval rulers who first organized their realms into feudal holdings saw only that the barons would afford military protection against savage enemies, and preserve order among scarcely more civilized subjects. But they hardly dreamed of the rise of powerful feudal princes whose power would be greater than the throne from which they obtained it, and who could set up and pull down kings at their will. The men who first wrote pamphlets in favor of education and justice for the lower orders of France could not foresee the terrible outburst of popular strength which was fated to involve in one common destruction both the instrumentalities which had maintained oppression for centuries and the men who had made the first uncertain steps towards asserting the rights of man. Watt could see in the steam which lifted the lid from the tea-kettle a force which might yield man some aid in his labors; but he could not
foresee the immense application of that force to every phase of life. He could not dream of the millions of factories, the thousands of steamships, or the myriads of railway trains that lay dormant in his discovery. Still less could he foresee the darkened skies of Birmingham and Pittsburgh, or the destructive power which would doom hundreds of thousands to agonizing tortures or horrible deaths as the result of cupidity or carelessness in the employment of the power which he found under the lid of that insignificant teakettle. Experience can alone reveal the extent of the benefits which new ideas or agencies bring to the world. How much more is it true, that the evils to result from the perversion or abuse of such great forces can only be learned by their actual occurrence. This can be seen from the earliest growth of social organization throughout all history; but the lesson was never written in plainer characters than in the development of the vast railway systems which, in the last half-century, have revolutionized the commercial and social character of the civilized world.

When Stephenson was struggling against prejudice and conservatism, to secure the assent of Parliament to the first-born of the gigantic brood of railways which now dominates the world, he thought that passengers could be carried from Manchester to London at a speed of twenty miles an hour, and had a deep faith that freight could be transported rather more cheaply in this way than by carts and wagons. The reality has surpassed his expectations more than his expectations surpassed the conditions of transportation which he was trying to improve. The Tory squires were panic-stricken at the scaring of the game, the de-
struction of the coaching-inns, and the decadence of the breed of horses, which might result from the new method of travel; and thought it an overwhelming argument against the scheme, to picture the disaster that might ensue if a bull should attempt to butt the locomotive off the track. What would they have said if they could have foreseen that the measure which they were fighting would produce a political and commercial power that would prove greater in wealth and more absolute in influence than the greatest Warwick or Montfort ever known in the old feudal times; that would carry legislatures in its pocket and defy the administration of justice; that would partition the territory of a mighty nation among its members, at one place build up a wealthy monopoly, and at another condemn a thriving industry to utter decay and death? What would they have done if they could have seen the arbitrary and irresponsible power of the great railway magnates, the luxury and vast wealth which they accumulate, the speculative fevers and crises of maddening and universal ruin, the bribery and dishonesty which have formed so important a proportion of the immense railway development of the past twenty-five years? It is well that conservative minds could not conceive such a change, for they would have shrunk with horror from the woes into which mankind was plunging and the loss of all the qualities which society had held dear.

The immeasurable benefits that have been secured to mankind, and especially the unparalleled development of the material resources of this country, secured by the rise of the railway system, has been made the subject for reams of panegyric. Unlike most pace-
The Railways and the Republic.

gyric, all that has been said of the marvellous work of the railway system and the magical expansion which it has wrought in the population and wealth of the nation is true. It has brought into commercial intercourse the producer of cheap food in Texas and Dakota, and the artisan of the Atlantic states and Europe. It has not only made two blades of grass grow where one grew before, but has increased the industrial production of the land a hundred-fold. All and more than has been written of the magical creation of states, cities, and agricultural communities, the rise of industrial enterprises, and the production of what is almost untold wealth, by the expansion of our railway system, is but a faint picture of the reality whose proportions exceed the grasp of human conceptions. But there is a reverse to the picture which the eulogists do not show. While the enthusiast sees only the increase of wealth and the growth of population which the railroads have wrought, there is a view which is not so pleasant to the observation of thinking men. The other side is presented by the abuses and demoralizing tendencies which have accompanied the building-up of the immense railway corporations of the country.

Having created our Frankenstein and realized its monstrous power, it is time to inquire whether there are any drawbacks to this immense gain, harmful to the republican equality and personal independence which are the foundation of our national character? If it is found that the wealth and influence of the immense corporations created for the improvement of transportation facilities threaten the debauchery and corruption of the legislative power; if it appears that,