

RAILROADS.

San Francisco, being the center of trade on the Pacific Coast, is directly interested in the improvement of every channel of commerce tending to facilitate trade or open new avenues of travel, in whichever part of our vast territory they may be. No narrow minded jealousy should conspire to oppose any such improvement, whether in the remotest North, or extreme South, for all will find their center here and unite in giving it prosperity. This centrality is unalterably fixed by nature,—by the unrivaled harbor and noble bay which indent the coast, the branching streams of navigable water, giving hundreds of miles of steam communication into a country the most fertile and lovely of the earth, with mines of precious and useful metals in great profusion, and forests and scenery of unparalleled grandeur opening to it by natural routes, while on the other hand the winds and oceanic currents so favor the latitude as to forbid a rival to the port. San Francisco is in the path of empire. The accidents or the designs of nature have fixed the condition and marked its destiny. At such a point, where all natural lines concentrate, there too must all artificial lines. Trans-continental railroads may seek a harbor either north or south, at each extreme of our territory, but none will have a terminus until it reaches the central point of the western coast.

The railroad is the most simple and complete of all the artificial highways yet conceived by man. The strong iron bars form a smooth and uniform track over rocks and marsh alike, crossing rivers, plains, mountains, and desert sands, with no hindrance to the whirling wheels nor fatigue to the powerful machine, which like a living monster, drags his mighty train along, with a speed unattainable by other means. No roads of history, ancient or modern, exhausting the resources of an empire at the command of a despot to construct, can compare in efficiency to the two simple iron rails, scarcely observable as they lie upon the plain. This grand consummation of genius and science, in this most practical age of the human race, has now come to aid the development of the country, and give ease and comfort to man, and is now regarded as indispensable to progress. Great minds appreciate the rising importance of railroads, and with strong will and untiring energy are working like giants in their construction. Throughout the Pacific Coast the work goes on, the most pleasing assurance of the extraordinary wealth of the country and the determination of capital to reap the reward of its development.

This is now the age of railroads. With the completion of the Pacific transcontinental railroad a new era of aid and advancement was opened for the western slope. Although other railroads had been built and in operation a number of years, the great impetus was given and the change effected by the last. From this date progress may be expected in this manner of constructing this most perfect of highways, until every road throughout the country where there is daily travel will have its iron track.

Much attention has recently been paid to the narrow gauge railroad that has proved such a success at Festiniog, in Wales. A track of but twenty-three inches in width, with engines of but five tons weight, was found practicable, performing a great amount of service, and operating in the most economical manner. Such roads, cheap in construction and cheap in operation, are peculiarly well adapted to the mountainous and sparsely settled regions of the Pacific Coast, and many places by their means will be reached by the iron horse which would otherwise remain isolated for an indefinite period. This style of road is soon to be tried in several parts of the country. A company has been formed in this city for the purpose of entering upon the construction of narrow gauge railroads, and one from the Central Pacific to Grass Valley and Nevada is proposed.

In the neighboring State of Nevada, by Act of the Legislature, the eastern counties have been authorized to vote a subsidy for the purpose of aiding in the construction of a narrow gauge road running south from the Central Pacific at Elko to the town of Hamilton in White Pine County, with the probable extension to Pioche and to the Colorado river. For this important work a company has been organized and the work of survey undertaken.

The history of railroading on the Pacific Coast can, at this date, be told in a few brief paragraphs. Washington Territory, though one of the youngest in its organization, and, until recently, backward in its settlement, yet has the honor of having the pioneer railroad. This was made in 1852, for the passage of the Cascades, or falls of the Columbia. This is six miles in length, connecting the two towns of Cascades and Upper Cascades, and does a thriving business. Above and below these places, goods and passengers are transported in boats of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company.

To the Sacramento Valley Railroad is usually accorded the honor of being the first constructed west of the Rocky Mountains, but this properly belongs to the Cascade Railroad. The Sacramento Valley, however, was the first of California, and the first for a number of years in importance. This was constructed in 1855 and 1856, from Sacramento to Folsom, a length of twenty-two and a half miles, at a cost of about \$1,100,000—a very large sum, considering the level country over which it was made. For a number of years, this short road transacted a large business; but through the decline of prosperity in the section of its patrons, accompanied by the construction of the Pacific Railroad running from the same point and supplying to a great extent the same territory, it lost a large portion of the trade, and now but little more than pays its running expenses.

The Sacramento Valley and Placerville Railroad is an extension of the first, running from Folsom to Shingle Springs, in El Dorado County, a distance of twenty-six miles. This route is quite circuitous to its present terminus, and remains incomplete. The business of the road is the transportation of passengers and merchandise of Amador and the southern part of El Dorado Counties.