

The railroad system of the Pacific coast, as now projected, promises, when completed, to be one of the most valuable in the United States. That portion, in particular, which is comprised in California, has already been in large part constructed, and has done much to develop the agricultural capabilities of sections of the country that, from their remoteness from extensive markets, would not have paid to cultivate. The great valleys of the Sacramento and San Joaquin, extending parallel to the coast, between the 35th and 41st degrees north latitude, are completely shut out from the East by the lofty Sierra Nevada, and on the west, in most part, by the lower but still rugged Coast Range. Two streams only, in this large tract of country—the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers—admit of cheap water transportation for about two hundred miles north and south to the Pacific coast. These rivers are located in the centers of the valleys—a considerable portion of the latter one being only navigable from four to six months each year, according to the fall of rain in the winter season. As a consequence, the high cost of freight by teams will not admit of profitable grain-growing, except in favored localities, and large tracts of arable land are only valuable for sheep and stock raising. The settlement of these portions of the State was for many years greatly retarded, so that the bulk of the population and property was concentrated in comparatively few localities.

This state of things existed until the advent of the railroad-building era, which may be said to have commenced in 1863, and which, year by year since then, has been making great progress, bringing remote sections of the country into quick and profitable intercourse with San Francisco and other large domestic markets. Permanent population has thereby been spread into the more distant portions of the State, the value of arable land largely increased, and a condition of general prosperity produced in places where formerly the herder of cattle was the only inhabitant, and the live stock about the only taxable property to be found.

The extension of railroads is also causing the development of large sections of mining country, where the presence of lead and other base metals, in combination with gold and silver, has hitherto made such mining often unprofitable. The result is the opening up of many old mines that have hitherto been virtually abandoned, the discovery of new deposits of mineral through the stimulation of prospecting, and the extension of operations on such mines as have proved profitable to work under the heavy expense of team and pack-train transportation. At present the large amount of base bullion produced from the mining regions in Mono and Inyo counties has to be transported, in most part, by pack-trains to San Pedro, from whence it is brought by sea to San Francisco, to be refined or sold. The expense of this long land-carriage and subsequent water transportation is very great, and only admits of a few of the richest mines being worked under such circumstances. When the San Joaquin Valley road, now in construction, is completed to Visalia, the transportation of this bullion will be transferred from San Pedro to the former place, and thence by cars to San Francisco, saving at least one-half in expense, and enabling returns to be had within less than one-third the now usual time.

Another feature that the present winter of 1871-'2 has developed, is the difficulties arising from the storms and the drifting of snow on some portions of the Union Pacific Railroad, thereby causing that road to be blockaded for passenger transit for several weeks at a time, and showing it to be liable to such drawbacks during at least four months of each year. The consequence has been the detention of hundreds of passengers while in mid transit, who in many cases suffered from sickness brought on by exposure and scarcity of suitable food. Also the detention and damage caused to hundreds of car-loads of valuable and perishable goods, which have in many instances been more than three months exposed to the inclemencies of the weather on their way across the continent. The detention of freight alone has resulted in great losses to importers on the Pacific coast, who depended upon quick and continuous rail facilities to keep up assortments of stock, while the forwarding of teas and other foreign products to the Atlantic States by sea, via Panama, is tedious and unsatisfactory to shippers.

The Central Pacific Railroad officers having become aware of the great liabilities of detention by the northern route in severe winters, have been using every energy in pressing forward the construction of the San Joaquin Valley Railroad, of which they are also owners. This road, which runs for a long distance south through the San Joaquin Valley, has comparatively few obstacles to overcome in its construction, and is being built at the rate of about half a mile daily. The managers intend to push its construction well into the southeastern section of California, with the view of subsequently pressing it forward to connect with one of the two projected trans-continental roads, on the 35th or 32nd parallel, as may show the best proofs of early completion. By this means they will be assured of a secure route to the Mississippi Valley, even in the most severe winters, and also will thereby head off all probable opposition or competition in securing the trans-continental traffic.

The connection of the San Joaquin Valley road with the Central Pacific road is at a point called Lathrop, about 18 miles south of Stockton, thence having connection with San Francisco Bay at Oakland. This latter place will thereby soon become the most important railroad terminus in the State, the following roads ending there, viz.: The Central Pacific road, main line to the eastern boundary of the State, 293 miles; the California and Oregon road, from the southern line of Oregon to Roseville Junction, about 200 miles; the Northern California road, from Oroville to Marysville 26 miles; the Sacramento Valley and Placerville roads, from Shingle Springs to Sacramento, 48 miles; the Stockton and Tulare road, from Visalia to Stockton, about 170 miles; the Stockton and