

vestment can consequently be looked at with a more of impartial judgment, for the reason that a person is to a considerable extent relieved from the influence of sentiment in their favor, which only a few months since was universal, and because all that can be said, or exists, against them, in the present state of affairs, is sure to come out.

A trip west during the month of October gave us a pretty good opportunity of inspecting, personally, the roads of that section of the country, the general system of management which prevailed, of studying the sources, and extent of their traffic; the influence they were exerting in developing the natural wealth of the country, and in this way, creating a business for the future. We had the good fortune of being in company with several very intelligent German gentlemen, among whom were Mr. Schleiden, resident Minister at Washington, from Bremen; Mr. Rucker, charge d'affaires for the city of Hamburg, at Berlin, Prussia; Mr. Delbrueke of Berlin, holding an official position in the Prussian ministry; and Mr. C. G. Eschen, in behalf of the Banking House of Meyer & Stuken, of this city. Their object was precisely the same with our own, which was to form a correct opinion, for themselves, and for the numerous class of German and Continental capitalists interested, as to the value and commercial influence of our roads. As the railroad companies did all in their power to facilitate our objects, and offering to our examination every thing that could aid us in forming a correct idea as to the uses and value of their roads, we had the best possible opportunity of forming correct notions upon the subject of our inquiries. It is needless for us to say that the favorable opinions, which we had previously entertained, and so often expressed, were fully confirmed by what we saw, and were sustained, we believe, by those of the gentlemen named; and we are happy to refer to them in the general confirmation of our views.

The most prominent fact which strikes attention in travelling over western roads is ease and cheapness with which they can be constructed, and the capacity of the country to supply an abundant traffic. The valley of the Mississippi is one vast plain having a very slight descent in direction of the gulf. Wherever the general surface is broken, the irregularities are due to the action of the water courses. Many of the larger rivers, the Ohio in particular, have cut for themselves deep trenches in the friable soil of the great valley. The principal obstacles to the cheap construction of railroads are consequently found in the vicinity of such rivers. After leaving them, however, the table lands are soon gained, which preserve pretty much the same elevations above tide water, upon similar parallels of latitude; with these all difficulties in the way of construction disappear. The grades of the road accommodate themselves, to the general undulations of the country, and where curves are resorted to, they are used quite as often for the purpose of avoiding the buildings of farmers, or for the purpose of obtaining convenient approaches to the turns and stations on the line, as for any other cause. There is little, or no, rock cutting upon very many of the western roads, and there is frequently so little difference in the choice of routes, that tangents of from 50 to 70 miles are often used with very little additional cost.

The favorable topography of this section of the

country permits the opening of a road for business, with a comparatively small outlay. It frequently happens that roads are in the enjoyment of a very large and profitable traffic, when they are only half finished; even before the road-bed is in suitable condition for use, and before any suitable stations or depots are erected for the comfort and protection of persons and property. It is perhaps on the whole bad policy for many of the western roads to commence running their trains, as soon as they do; but it is hardly possible to resist the pressure, to put them in motion, as soon as the rails are laid. It is impossible to make a good road in the West, out of the soil. To make it passable it must be *McAdamized*. The moment that the fat, unctuous, soil becomes *wet*, travel over the highway is at an end. Consequently the railroad is pressed into service, at the earliest moment for the saving its effects in the carriage of the heavy bulky products of the great valley.

After the western roads are thoroughly built and equipped the difference in their cost, and that of eastern roads will be much less than has been generally supposed. The items of graduation, masonry, bridging and right of way, cost less than those of eastern roads. On the other hand, their iron and equipment cost more, and they generally are compelled to submit to larger discounts on their securities. But as the cost of roads in all parts of the country depend more upon the extent of the business, than upon any other causes, we must expect to see the cost of western roads run up to a high figure, to provide the necessary accommodations and equipments for their enormous traffics. Although fortunately they are able to commence business upon a very small outlay. We do not believe that any road can be built in the West, adapted to a large trade short of about \$30,000 per mile, while the cost of a majority of them will before many years exceed this sum. A low cost road is only compatible where its business is very small.

As a general rule, and we may say almost without exception, the money raised by western companies appears to have been judiciously expended. The facilities for cheap construction compensate for the want of engineering skill. Its place is made good by that practical sense which grows out of a constant necessity, in new countries, of supplying the absence of capital and labor, by expedients of one kind or another, for which our people are so justly celebrated. We know of but one instance of misapplication of funds from their ostensible objects. Parties at a distance, therefore, may be assured, that the means which they have contributed toward the construction of our railroads have been properly expended, a fact, which narrows down the question of the safety of their investments to a single point, that of the *income* of the roads.

In building railroads in a new country, certain results are predicated from well known data, such as the course of trade, the actual movement of persons and property over a particular route, the rates at which they can be transported, &c., &c. In presenting the claims of any scheme to the public, it is usual for the parties having it in charge to accompany it by a statement showing among other things its probable cost and income. It is upon the credit attached to this statement, that the securities of the various companies are

purchased. Now we know of no new southern or western roads recently constructed, the results of whose operations, is not much more favorable than the estimates. The cost of the road is not so much exceeded, as are the excess of earnings over estimates. The stock and bond holders get all and more, than they contracted for. If they have made unsatisfactory bargains, *they*, and not the railroad companies are at fault. The railroads of the entire country have been as profitable, and are as strong, as far as their revenues are concerned, and have as favorable prospect for the future, as was expected, and, on the whole, was claimed by sensible men.

A correct idea of the ability of the newly settled portions of the country to supply a lucrative traffic to the railroads can only be formed from actual observation. It would very naturally be supposed that the labor of the *pioneer* would be unproductive; that supplying his own wants would occupy all his time and attention. Such would be the case in most countries. In the Mississippi we find a soil, the fertility of which years of cropping does not exhaust. Almost the only instrument used is the *plough*. The soil, broken for the first time in the spring, yields an abundant harvest in the fall. As agriculture is the simplest of all forms of labor, combination neither of numbers nor capital is necessary to a very large production. In the culture of wheat or corn, the labor of *two* men will produce one-twentieth as much as the labor of *forty*. A particular district which two years since was without a single inhabitant, may this year furnish a large business to a road. In the West too, the labor of the country settlers is not only as profitably employed, as in the Older States, but furnishes a much larger amount of freight for *exportation*. A single farmer may easily raise with the labor of his own hands, 1000 bushels of grain for sale. As by necessity, he confines himself to *one* staple, he is compelled to purchase from abroad whatever he requires, that his own farm does not supply. Railroads in the new States have therefore a double office. By giving the means for *selling*, they enable the farmer to *purchase*, to the same extent; and as our manufacturing and commercial communities are widely separated from the agricultural districts, a very considerable part of the transportation on our railroads, is a *thorough* movement both of property and persons. This fact adds very largely to the receipts, and is one cause of their extraordinary success.

The State of Wisconsin furnishes a striking illustration of the correctness of the above remarks. In 1840 its population was only 30,000 souls. In 1850 it reached 304,000. At the present time the number of inhabitants cannot fall short of 450,000. The increase for the past *ten* years has been just about 400,000. As we were desirous of seeing what ten years had achieved in what, prior to that period, had been an unbroken and uncultivated waste, we passed over the principal line of railroad in the state, the Milwaukee and Mississippi, and devoted a day to a pretty critical study of the city of Milwaukee. In no part of the west did we see a better settled, a better cultivated, or a more productive country; and no road groaning under the press of a larger business in freights than the above named. Wisconsin is one of the most attractive, because it is one of the best *wooded* of the