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Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Gogol Busch  
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**The Railroad Question A  
historical and practical treatise on  
railroads, and remedies for their  
abuses**

William Larrabee

# Imprint

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The Railroad Question.

THE RAILROAD QUESTION

A HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL TREATISE ON  
RAILROADS, AND REMEDIES FOR THEIR ABUSES

BY

WILLIAM LARRABEE,

LATE GOVERNOR OF IOWA.

*Salus populi suprema lex.*

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## PREFACE

The people of the United States are engaged in the solution of the railroad problem. The main question to be determined is: Shall the railroads be owned and operated as public or as private property? Shall these great arteries of commerce be owned and controlled by a few persons for their own private use and gain, or shall they be made highways to be kept under strict government control and to be open for the use of all for a fixed, equal and reasonable compensation?

In a new and sparsely settled country which is rich in natural resources there may be no great danger in pursuing a *laissez-faire* policy in governmental affairs, but as the population of a commonwealth becomes denser, the quickened strife for property and the growing complexity of social and industrial interests make an extension of the functions of the state absolutely necessary to secure protection to property and freedom to the individual.

The American people have shown themselves capable of solving any political question yet presented to them, and the author has no doubt that with full information upon the subject they will find the proper solution of the railroad problem. The masses have an honest purpose and a keen sense of right and wrong. With them a question is not settled until it is settled right.

It must be conceded that of all the great inventions of modern times none has contributed as much to the prosperity and happiness of mankind as the railroad.

Our age is under lasting obligations to Watt and Stephenson and many other heroes of industry who have aided in bringing the railroad to its present state of perfection. Their genius is the product of our civilization, and their legacies should be shared by all the people to the greatest extent possible. An earnest desire to aid in attaining this end has prompted this contribution to the literature on the subject.

The author is not an entire novice in railroad affairs. He has had experience as a shipper and as a railroad promoter, owner and stockholder, and has even had thrust upon him for a short time the responsibility of a director, president and manager of a railroad company. He has, moreover, had every opportunity to familiarize himself with the various phases of the subject during his more than twenty years' connection with active legislation.

He came to the young State of Iowa before any railroad had reached the Mississippi. Engaging early in manufacturing, he suffered all the inconveniences of pioneer transportation, and his experience instilled into him liberal opinions concerning railroads and their promoters. He extended to them from the beginning all the assistance in his power, making not only private donations to new roads, but advocating also public aid upon the ground that railroads are public roads.

As a member of the Iowa Senate he introduced and fathered the bill for the act enabling townships, incorporated towns and cities to vote a five per cent. tax in aid of railroad construction. He favored always such legislation as would most encourage the building of railroads, believing that with an increase of competitive lines the common law and competition could be relied upon to correct abuses and solve the rate problem. He has since become convinced of the falsity of this doctrine, and now realizes the truth of Stephenson's saying that where combination is possible competition is impossible.

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It is the object of this work to show that as long as the railroads are permitted to be managed as private property and are used by their managers for speculative purposes or other personal gain, or as long even as they are used with regard only for the interest of stockholders, they are not performing their proper functions; and that they will not serve their real purpose until they become in fact what they are in theory, highways to be controlled by the government as thoroughly and effectually as the common road, the turn-pike and the ferry, or the post-office and the custom-house.

This book has been written at such odd hours as the author could snatch from his time, which is largely occupied with other business.

He is under obligations to many of our ministers and consuls abroad for statistics and other valuable information concerning foreign railroads, as well as to a number of personal friends for other assistance, consisting chiefly in rendering the railroad literature of Europe accessible to him.

William Larrabee.

*Clermont, Iowa, May, 1893.*

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## THE RAILROAD QUESTION.

### CHAPTER I.

#### HISTORY of TRANSPORTATION.

While the prosperity of a country depends largely upon its productiveness, the importance of proper facilities for the expeditious transportation and ready exchange of its various products can scarcely be overrated. The free circulation of commercial commodities is as essential to the welfare of a people as is the unimpaired circulation of the blood to the human organism.

The interest taken by man in the improvement of the roads over which he must travel is one of the chief indications of civilization, and it might even be said that the condition of the roads of a country shows the degree of enlightenment which its people have reached. The trackless though very fertile regions of Central Africa have for thousands of years remained the seat of savages; but no nation that established a system of public thoroughfares through its dominion ever failed to make a distinguished figure in the theater of the world. There are some authors who go even so far as to call the high roads of commerce the pioneers of enlightenment and political eminence. It is true that as roads and canals developed the commerce of Eastern Asia and Europe, the attention of their people was turned to those objects which distinguish cultured nations and lead to political consequence among the powers of the world. The systems of roads [Pg 18] and canals which we find among those ancients who achieved an advanced state of civilization might well put to shame the roads which disgraced not a few of the European states as late as the eighteenth century.

Among the early nations of Asia of whose internal affairs we have any historic knowledge are the Hindoos, the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Phœnicians, the Persians and the Chinese.

The wealth of India was proverbial long before the Christian era. She supplied Nineveh and Babylon, and later Greece and Rome, with steel, zinc, pearls, precious stones, cotton, silk, sugar-cane, ivory, indigo, pepper, cinnamon, incense and other commodities. If we accept the testimony of the Vedas, the religious books of the ancient Hindoos, a high degree of culture must have prevailed on the shores of the Ganges more than three thousand years ago. Highways were constructed by the state and connected the interior of the realm with the sea and the countries to the northeast and northwest. For this purpose forests were cleared, hills leveled, bridges built and tunnels dug. But the broad statesmanship of the Hindoo did not pause here. To administer to the convenience and comfort of the wayfaring public, and thus still more encourage travel and the exchange of commodities, the state proceeded to line these public roads with shade trees, to set out mile-stones, and to establish stations provided with shady seats of repose, and wells at which humane priests watered the thirsty beasts.

At intervals along these routes were also found commodious and cleanly-kept inns to give shelter to the traveler at night. Buddha, the great religious reformer of the Hindoos, commended the roads and mountain passes of the country to the care of the pious, and the [Pg 19] Greek geographers speak with high praise of the excellence of the public highways of Hindostan.

Among the Babylonians and Assyrians agriculture, trade and commerce flourished at an almost equally remote period. The ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia cultivated the soil with the aid of dikes and canals, and were experts in the manufacture of delicate fabrics, as linen, muslin and silk. To them is attributed the invention, or at least the perfection, of the cart, and the first use of domestic animals as beasts of burden. Their cities had well-built and commodious streets, and the roads which connected them with their dependencies aided to make them the busy marts of South-eastern Asia.

During the later Babylonian Empire immense lakes were dug for retaining the water of the Euphrates, whence a net-work of canals distributed it over the plains to irrigate the land; and quays and breakwaters were constructed along the Persian Gulf for the encouragement of commerce. While highways among the Babylonians served the development of agriculture and the exchange of industrial commodities, they were constructed chiefly for strategic purposes by the more warlike Assyrians, whose many wars made a system of good roads a necessity. The Greek geographer Pausanias was shown a well-kept military road upon which Memnon was said to have marched with an Assyrian army from Susa to Troy to rescue King Priam. Traces of this road, called by the natives "Itaki Atabeck," may be seen to this day.

The Phœnicians, who were the first of the great historic maritime nations of antiquity, occupied the narrow strip of territory between the mountains of Northern Palestine and the Mediterranean Sea. From their situation they learned to rely upon the sea as their principal highway. [Pg 20] They transported to the islands of the Mediterranean as well as the coast of Northern Africa and Southern Europe heavy cargoes consisting of the product of their own skill and industry as well as of the manifold exports of the east. They sailed even beyond the "Pillars of Hercules" into the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea. Through their hands "passed the gold and pearls of the east and the purple of Tyre, slaves, ivory, lion and panther skins from the interior of Africa, frankincense from Arabia, the linen of Egypt, the pottery and fine wares of Greece, the copper of Cyprus, the silver of Spain, tin from England, and iron from Elba."

But while the Phœnicians for their commercial intercourse with other nations relied chiefly upon the sea, the great highway of nature, they neglected by no means road-building at home. They connected their great cities, Sidon and Tyre, by a coast road, which they extended in time as far as the Isthmus of Suez. They also established great commercial routes by which their merchants penetrated the interior of Europe and Asia. Caravan roads extended south to Arabia and east to Mesopotamia and Armenia, penetrating the whole Orient as far as India, and even the frontiers of China. The Phœnicians thus became the traders of antiquity, Tyre being the link between the east and the west.

The Persian Empire, which under Darius stretched from east to west for a distance of 3,000 miles and comprised no less than two million square miles, with a population of seventy or eighty millions, had, with the exception of the Romans, perhaps the best system of roads known to ancient history. Indeed, it is doubtful whether without it such a vast empire, more than half as large as modern Europe, could have been held together. Each [Pg 21] satrap, or prefect of a province, was obliged to make regular reports to the king, who was also kept informed by spies of what was taking place in every part of the empire. To aid the administration of the government, postal communication for the exclusive use of the king and his trusted servants connected the capital with the distant provinces. This postal service was, four or five centuries later, patterned after by the Romans. From Susa to Sardes led a royal road along which were erected caravansaries at certain intervals. Over this road, 1,700 miles long, the couriers of the king rode in six or seven days. Under Darius the roads of the empire were surveyed and distances marked by means of mile-stones, many of which are still found on the road which led from Ecbatana to Babylon. These roads crossed the wildest regions of that great monarchy. They connected the cities of Ionia with Sardes in Lydia, with Babylon and with the royal city of Susa; they led from Syria into Mesopotamia, from Ecbatana to Persepolis, from Armenia into Southern Persia, and thence to Bactria and India.

The Chinese commenced road-building long before the Christian era. They graded the roadway and then covered the whole with hewn blocks of stone, carefully jointed and cemented together so that the entire surface presented a perfectly smooth plane. Such roads, although very costly to build, are almost indestructible by time. In China, as well as in several other countries of Asia, the executive power has always charged itself with both the construction and maintenance of roads and navigable canals. In the instructions which are given to the governors of the various provinces these objects, it is said, are constantly commanded to them, and the judgment which the court forms of the conduct of each is very [Pg 22] much regulated by the attention which he appears to have paid to this part of his instructions. This solicitude of the sovereign for the internal thoroughfares is easily accounted for when it is consid-

ered that his revenue arises almost entirely from a land-tax, or rent, which rises and falls with the increase and decrease of the annual produce of the land. The greatest interest of the sovereign, his revenue, is therefore directly connected with the cultivation of the land, with the extent of its produce and its value. But in order to render that produce as great and as valuable as possible, it is necessary to procure for it as extensive a market as possible, and, consequently, to establish the freest, the easiest and the least expensive communication between all the different parts of the country, which can be done only by means of the best roads and the best navigable canals.

In Africa the Egyptians and Carthaginians are the only nations of antiquity of which we have much historic knowledge. The former kept up a very active commerce not only with the south, but also with the tribes of Lydia on the west and with Palestine and the adjoining countries on the east. To facilitate commerce, they constructed and maintained a number of excellent highways leading in all directions. One of the most important among these was the old royal road on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, or the "Road of the Philistines" of the Scriptures. This road crossed the Isthmus of Suez and led through the land of the Philistines and Samaria to Tyre and Sidon. Another road led, in a northwesterly direction, from Rameses to Pelusium. This, however, crossed marshes, lagoons and a whole system of canals, and was used only by travelers without baggage, while the Pharaohs, accompanied by their horses, chariots and troops, [Pg 23] preferred the former road. A third road led from Coptos, on the Nile, to Berenice, on the Red Sea. There were between these two cities ten stations, about twenty-five miles apart from each other, where travelers might rest with their camels each day, after traveling all night, to avoid the heat. Still another road led from the town of Babylon, opposite Memphis, along the east bank of the Nile, into Nubia. Much of the commerce of Egypt in ancient times, as in our day, was conducted on the Nile and its canals. The boatman and the husbandman were, in fact, the founders of the gentle manners of the people who flourished four thousand years ago in the blessed valley of the Nile. There is one canal among the many which deserves special mention. It flowed from the Bitter Lakes into the Red Sea near the city of Arsinoe. It was first cut by Sesostris before the Trojan times, or, according to other writers, by

the son of Psammitichus, who only began the work and then died. Darius I. set about to complete it, but gave up the undertaking when it was nearly finished, influenced by the erroneous opinion that the level of the Red Sea was higher than Egypt, and that if the whole of the intervening isthmus were cut through, the country would be overflowed by the sea. The Ptolemaic kings, however, did cut it through and placed locks upon the canal.

Carthage was a Phœnician colony. The city was remarkable for its situation. It was surrounded by a very fertile territory and had a harbor deep enough for the anchorage of the largest vessels. Two long piers reached out into the sea, forming a double harbor, the outer for merchant ships and the inner for the navy. This city early became the head of a North African empire, and her fleets plied in all navigable waters known [Pg 24] to antiquity. Her navy was the largest in the world, and in the sea-fight with Regulus comprised three hundred and fifty vessels, carrying one hundred and fifty thousand men. Though we have but meager accounts of the internal affairs of Carthage, there can be no doubt that much attention was given, both at home and in the colonies, to the construction of highways, which were distinguished for their solidity. It is said that the Romans learned from the Carthaginians the art of paving roads.

European history began in Greece, the civilization of whose people passed to the Romans and from them to the other Aryan nations which have played an important role in the great historical drama of modern times. The physical features of the Balkan Peninsula were an important factor in the formation of the character of its inhabitants. The coast has a large number of well-protected bays, most of which form good harbors. Navigation and commerce were greatly stimulated in a country thus favored by Nature. Nearly all the principal cities of Hellas could be reached by ships, and the need of internal thoroughfares was but little felt. Nevertheless, public highways connected all of the larger towns with the national sanctuaries and oracles, as Olympia, the Isthmus, Delphi and Dodona. Athens, after the Persian wars the metropolis of Greece, was by the so-called Long Walls connected with the Piræus, its harbor. This highway, protected by high walls built two hundred yards apart, was over four miles long, and enabled the Athenians, as long