

Its length was four miles and its cost fifty thousand dollars. The country, at present, contains a hundred fifty thousand miles of track, and the money invested amounts to eight billion dollars. The whole country, from east to west, and from north to south, is overlaid by one vast network of railways. Even the remotest towns of "The Far West" are connected and surrounded by parts of this great system.

Though the railroads have been, perhaps, the greatest factor in making our country what it is, yet no one can deny that they have been, and still are, the cause of a great deal of evil. Most of the corruption that has taken place in our legislatures and courts during the last thirty years is attributed to the influence of the railways. We all know, that, for many years, a great deal of the time of our national Congress and of our State Legislatures has been taken up with matters referring to the railroads. The same thing may be said of our courts. It is plain to see what a vast expense this must be to the people. Another great drawback attached to the railways is the high rates and their lack of uniformity. All rates are high, but some reach such extremes that farmers and merchants realize very little profit from their labor at the end of the year. The difference in the rates gives to one section of the country even less chance for progress than it gives to another. Not only do the merchants and the farmers suffer, but also those who are in the railroad employ; quite often, on account of strikes, caused by low wages, thousands of workmen are thrown out of employment. Several times, on account of the same trouble between the proprietors and their employees, has our fair land been disturbed by riots, which have ended in destruction of property and even in bloodshed. To add to all this trouble, the railroads absolutely refuse to pay the interest on the money the government has loaned them. Years ago the government gave them land on which to build their roads, and to-day they refuse to pay even the taxes on this land.

Thus we see that, in spite of the great benefits resulting from the railroads, the disadvantages are so great as almost to counterbalance the benefits. What is wrong with the working of the railways? It is clear that all the trouble is caused by improper government. Instead of the railroads existing for the benefit of the people, they exist for the benefit of a few individuals. The owners of the different roads combine and

form one great monopoly, which rules the country. The absence of competition gives to the owners of the roads complete power, and so they establish rates to suit their own private wishes. Their unbounded wealth gives them such influence as to enable them to have any law established that may be beneficial to the working of their system.

Now that we know what the causes of the troubles are, can we think of no way to remedy them? The great system is so intimately connected with all the industries of the country that it would cause their standstill to check its operation. If the railroads belonged entirely to the government, they would be the source of as much corruption as they are now, for then their million of employees would be so many office-seekers.

Instead of being under private control, why should not the system be under national control? By giving the government control is not meant giving it ownership, but simply giving it the power of regulation—such power as the government has over the national banks. Every one knows in what a state of uncertainty the people's money was and how unsatisfactorily the banks worked when they were under somewhat the same system of government as our railways now are. Since the banking system is under national control, with what perfect smoothness it works! As a great deal of the people's money is invested in the railroads, and, as they intended to exist for the benefit of the people, why should not the railroads be governed through them? To insure the safety of the money thus invested, why could not inspectors be appointed to examine yearly the financial conditions of the roads? This is done in the banking system and why could it not work as well with the railroads as it does with the banks? If the system were under national control, it could, no doubt, be governed through a code of laws made for the benefit of the public. This would surely do away with most of the dissatisfaction caused by the present mode of governing. There would then be no necessity for keeping Congress, the legislatures, and the courts constantly at work on railway matters. It would be of no profit to a railroad man to work himself into Congress or into the legislatures for the purpose of furthering his own interests, as the code of laws would prevent anything being done that is not for the benefit of the public. The difficulty regarding rates would also be overcome, for the code would contain a law establishing low and uniform rates.