

Remarks on railways : respectfully submitted for general consideration, as to their support and improvement / by an octogenarian officer, in retirement.

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REMARKS ON RAILWAYS.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED

FOR GENERAL CONSIDERATION, AS TO THEIR SUPPORT AND
IMPROVEMENT,

BY AN OCTOGENARIAN OFFICER, IN RETIREMENT.

September, 12th, 1858

WHILE railways have been—beyond anticipation—productive, have more than answered the prospects of their enthusiastic projectors, have been beneficial to the public, in commerce, in comforts, &c., &c. ; how has it happened that railways should have been financially *detrimental but to one class alone*?—to the class that furnished the funds for their formation and improvement; to the *shareholders*. Entitled to fair remuneration for their capital advanced; the investments have been ruinous, while the railway receipts were increasing. How has this injury to the most deserving, been caused and continued? To these long vexed inquiries, intelligent solutions have, at last, *been clearly* and fully afforded:—First. *In July* a director of a leading company, was appointed by the House of Commons, *chairman of a Committee of Legislation* on railways, to throw light on the nature and causes of the *adversity* under which they were labouring. Most ably and honorably has that gentleman officiated; his exposition and statements are strong and incontrovertible; his proposed remedies, rational and well adapted, deserve our best thanks, and general commendations.

These appear in the *Daily News* of September 4th, in a letter addressed to *Colonel J. W. Patten, M.P.*, July, 1858, headed "*The True Remedy for the Distress of the Railway Interests,*" a paper worthy of serious attention.

Among the many discoveries and benefactions given by England to the world, do not *railways* and all their ingenious machinery, stand prominently as blessings to *humanity*? Yet there is less accommodation, smaller dividends, even none at all, under great traffic—with more rapid succession of horrible catastrophies in England, in the country of railway origin, than in countries even where recklessness of life is almost proverbial.

Unless alterations are made as to *safety of person*, as also to *safety of property*, railways in their present condition, must droop and decay.

Are not the *sanctioned railways*, in France, *excellent investments*? When the necessary *capital* has been raised, and certain conditions complied with, a great railway between large towns is *sanctioned* becomes a *fait accompli*; no insatiable landlords can impede its progress, no *speculative branches* can subsequently interfere with it, or its capital; the road once opened, inaugurated, *sanctioned*, is considered a complete work. The capital account is closed, not to be re-opened or afterwards interfered with. *Branches* are discountenanced, are considered separate, independent works. *Preference shares*; *guarantees*; single and double *extensions No. 1 and No. 2*—ingenious devices for raising the wind—are excluded as unjust, injurious to the original shareholders; founders of the works. *Competitions and litigations*, the source of monster evils in England, are stopped and prevented *in limine*, in France. *Fee systems*, and frightful costs of Private Bill Legislation, as exhibited in the *Observer* of Sunday, August 22, are unknown there, and moreover, the *Chambers of Commerce* are appointed *competent tribunals* for the settlement of the *litigations*, and to prevent the ruinous delays and expenses of law. *Are not these great advantages*? The public accommodation and interests are cared for, and the *original shareholders* are *protected* and benefited equitably *by success*. Had similar regulations prevailed in England, would our railways have been reduced to their present condition?

What have been the consequences of our opposite system? With a capital of about *three hundred and fifty millions* sunk in railways, we are getting a revenue, according to the authorities, of only *twelve millions*, a return dismally small, as stated by the *Times* of September 11; that great paper tells the present position, from which is to be made a *new start*, a *fresh departure*, and it is of vast consequence that the position should be known, well understood—the stable-door must be closed, or the steeds will all vanish. Former errors and *injurious fallacies* must be extinguished. The prevention of horrible catastrophies, with scores of frightful deaths, and treble the number of mutilations, with hosts of claimants for compensations; for these stoppage must be found and demonstrated, before apprehension can be removed, and confidence can be restored in railway *safety*. No doubt, much may be done in the attainment of these objects. Parliament and the Delegates of the railway companies seem to be pulling well together, and the companies have in great degree the means of favourable settlement in their own power. The state of public affairs too, at-home and abroad, seems highly propitious for the *new policy*, and for prosperity in railway futurity, as well as for the general futurity of England. The events in China, Japan, in India, in our own magnificent colonies, all confirm this statement. The railway companies need only be true to themselves, to repair former injuries, to ensure future success.

The preceding remarks relate chiefly to railway FINANCE—some observations on PERSONAL SAFETY still remain to be submitted, if considered of sufficient consequence for general notice.

Secondly, on Thursday, September 9th, a *meeting of Delegates* from the principal railway companies, was held in London, to determine upon a *policy for the future government of railway companies*. Though the first meeting was private, enough has transpired to justify expectation and belief in beneficial results, such as will entitle their authors to public gratitude, for the proceedings are of great public import.

The term *adversity* is strictly applicable to the railway state, when a capital of somewhere about *three hundred and fifty millions* sterling, has been invested, and the excellent chairman

of the Parliamentary Committee states, that more than *one-fourth of the sum invested—one hundred millions*—have been squandered, wasted to the commonwealth in one way only, namely : in the way of *competitions, litigations* ; ruinous to all the parties in opposition, and useless to all, except to the promoters and encouragers of such mischief ; rendered impossible elsewhere, but hitherto promoted and perpetuated in our own associations.* As the companies have in great measure been the authors of their own distress—under injurious fallacies—the remedies remain chiefly in their own hands. It may be *now* believed they will not hereafter appear as their own enemies and destroyers, but as the authors and supporters of *prosperity* rather than *adversity*, in their own and in great public advantages.

RAILWAY SAFETY.

September 17th, 1858.

THE prior writings related to FINANCE—the more important consideration, of PERSONAL SAFETY, deserves best thought. Excessive *speed* is incompatible with *safety* ; and the greater the speed, the greater the peril. Under *speed*, the slightest deficiency, a screw loose, a *jolt* throwing a carriage off its rail into another moving at speed in an opposite direction, must be followed by injuries dreadful, and collisions worse than the collisions at Waterloo. A long heavy train, moving under speed, according to intelligent workmen, is destructive ; soon injures a railway of the best materials, with machinery of best workmanship. The more the works are worn, the more liable they become to accidents. It is distressing—truly awful, to think of the numbers of the killed and wounded, and to hear the statements of those who attended and witnessed preceding casualties.

* Is it not true that in France there are no such obstacles to railway prosperity, as in England ?

May not much be done to extinguish apprehension? to restore confidence? Is there any longer the *same need* for *break-neck express travelling* as there formerly may have been? By the *electric telegraph*, messages are *flashed* with *lightning rapidity*, from one extremity of the empire to the other—the transmission is *instantaneous*; then why need ministers, or merchant princes, or others, risk their lives in break-neck express trains? Can there be *pleasure* in a closed carriage, whisked along at *fifty* miles per hour under railroad risks?

May not modes of travelling at *rational speed* be found without danger and with general ease even on iron railways? For confidence and convenience, for the future advantage of the public as of all parties concerned, should not *speed be surrendered for safety*? For the satisfaction of the reflecting and timid, the *moving power* should be under *complete control*, to be checked, stopped, regulated, *at pleasure*, should excessive *speed be given up for safety* may not quickness sufficient for all rational purposes even for the mails, be afforded *without any* apprehension or risks to the passengers?

Supposing forty-five miles per hour to be the *express rate* at present, although sixty miles may have been given, may not fifteen miles per hour satisfy all *rational requirements*? Will not fifteen miles per hour in ease and safety be more satisfactory, even to the pleasure-seeking public, than forty-five miles per hour, with frightful liabilities?

Supposing an affirmative to be given to these enquiries, what may be the *best alterations* in the *moving powers* for the attainments desired? In a level country—on a level iron railway, heavy trains, say of ten or twelve carriages, once in motion, are easily kept in motion, are said to follow lightly; would not four or five horses run easily along with such a train for fifteen miles, at a hand canter? Then locomotives—first cost repairs, engineers, fuel, &c., run-away-engines, bad accidents, compensations, would be stopped, avoided. Horses, their keep and attendants, all under control, without danger and compensation, would be the alternative. Short railways then would be converted into *tramways*. Is it not possible that such conversion may be approved by the master minds now engaged in the *new railway policy*, to whom these ideas are respectfully

submitted? May not secondary ways, branches, needless and expensive, be turned into tramways? Several experienced orientals who have passed their lives in India, think among the many improvements now intended for India, *tramways* may be found preferable to *railways* in the long valleys, less costly, more easily repaired, where iron rails can be laid in wild countries easily, where machinery is not understood.

Where *locomotive engines* are retained, may not safety be promoted by an *enlarged safety valve*, so arranged that an engineer or stoker, could let *all the steam* rush out *at once* when required; by *strong breaks* to each carriage, in roads with appreciable declivity, such breaks as are seen on heavy waggons, to prevent any rolling down hill backwards; by double strong *connecting links*, &c.; by *reducing speed*, to a *rational rate*; and by not allowing *the established moderate rate* to be exceeded. As *messages* are now flashed, to and fro by lightning, along the electric telegraphs; may not excessive speed and risks be spared to travellers on railways? and this, moreover, with advantages to *the rail*, as well as to the passenger.

Are not *excursion trains* both dangerous and destructive in wear and tear? Should not the number of carriages, and of passengers, be *strictly limited* in *each train*, and proportioned to the engine power? otherwise the rage for what is called *pleasuring*, would induce vast multitudes to rush into the railways as they rush on board steamers, regardless of all the discomfort and dangers they are causing, both to themselves, and to their conveyancers. An ancient philosopher, Butler said to his cotemporaries,

“No prudent man should ever run
The needless risks that he may shun.”

Affairs are altered since his day!

That railways may be maintained in due estimation, is the earnest prayer of an humble patron in

M. L. ESTE, M.D., late of the Life Guards,
F.R.C.S., &c., &c.