

The establishment of routes likely to cheapen the carriage of such immense masses of what for the most part are bulky articles, is therefore a question which has gradually forced itself into a prominent position in the public mind, and affords an almost inexhaustible theme, both for reports of scientific men, and the deliberations of those corporate bodies who represent the commercial wealth, and business intelligence of the country.

The extent of territory lying between the regions of production, and eastern centres of distribution, either for consumption, or export, fortunately presents no serious obstacles to the construction of land routes; whilst the great lakes themselves, form a line of water communication, which although for part of the distance very circuitous, is of almost boundless capacity.

Between the head of Lake Michigan, and the eastern end of Lake Erie, the distance by water is about one thousand miles; by land it is only about five hundred miles; but even this advantage has not enabled the land routes to compete successfully with that by water for the carriage of those heavy articles which constitute the main items of export.

It is nevertheless true that flour, animal food, and such other kinds of freight, as either require to be conveyed speedily to market, or the value of which will bear higher transport rates, are now frequently carried by rail.

During the season when navigation is closed, the movement by the land routes lightens the pressure on the water lines in the open season. Still, the producing powers of the west are increasing so fast as to threaten to outstrip all the existing means of getting the surplus to market.

The keen competition which exists for this vast carrying trade, has induced the State of New York to reduce the tolls on her Canals, 50 per cent, with a view of regaining the large business which has deserted them.

This was done in the early part of 1870; but although the eastward movement of the Erie Canal has increased considerably since that time, it is quite probable that a large portion of this is due to the fact that the crop for exportation in 1871, was much larger than that for 1870.

Strenuous efforts are now being made to introduce steam power on this route, with a view of diminishing the time necessary to pass through it, and thus lessen the contrast in this respect, between it and the railways. A very large premium has lately been offered by the State authorities, for any design that can be judiciously brought into use for this purpose.

The great length and limited capacity of this canal, has enabled the railways to take from it a portion of heavy freights, the carriage of which it formerly monopolized, so that it is questionable whether even the entire abolition of tolls, and the successful application of steam power, would do more than partly restore the traffic which it has lost.

In this connection it may be observed that all the leading lines of communication in the United States, East of the Mississippi River, from the producing regions of the West to the Atlantic sea-board, cross the Alleghany range at some point, with the exception of the Erie Canal and the New York Central Railway, which are carried through a break in the chain, forming the valley of the Mohawk River.

This being the best possible route for a canal in that direction, gives it an advantage, for the Western trade, over all other water channels in the United States; still it does not present a continuous downward lockage towards tide-water; the long level at Rome being higher than those to the East and West of it—and although its draught of water is comparatively small, the supply is maintained with great difficulty during dry seasons.