

LETTERS

ON

The Necessity of Cheapening Transport from the West to the Ocean.

LETTER I.

SIR:—There is no subject which can engage the attention of the Western people, equal in importance to that of lessening the cost of transport of the products of the West to tide water. The consideration of this matter is not only of paramount necessity to the producers of the West, but it is rapidly gaining weight with the manufacturers of the East, who find it necessary to make some movement to reduce the cost of the necessaries of life, and thus cheapen skilled labor. I purpose, therefore, in one or more letters, to consider as briefly as possible, the present outlets from the West to the ocean,—how insufficient they are to reduce the cost of transport to a minimum rate, and what is necessary to be done to accomplish so desirable a result. It is, however, impossible, to adapt the means to this end, without taking into view, the vast extent of the western country, and its probable, if not certain future. Half a century ago, this great western region contained only straggling forts and trading points, and now it contains nearly one-third of the population north of the Gulf of Mexico. Emigration from the Eastern States and from the Old World, has poured into it living streams. Its future none can predict, but judging from the past, it will year by year assume increasing importance, and will warrant the largest expenditure to accommodate the vast trade which it will furnish to its outlet channels of commerce. For this trade, as it now exists, the most costly works have been constructed to secure its advantages to each of the great Northeastern Atlantic cities. Canada has improved the St. Lawrence by a series of magnificent canals around the rapids of that river; and by a canal which connects Lakes Ontario with Erie; New York has spanned the portage between the Hudson and Lake Ontario, by canals of great length; Pennsylvania has connected the Atlantic with the