

We must, however, remember that while the charges for fourth-class freight are sometimes reduced below three mills per ton a mile, the other classes of freight range from five to fifteen mills per mile, and usually bring the average return to six or eight mills per ton a mile on through freight, which may remunerate a well-conducted railway.

The Commissioners of Massachusetts Railways, however, suggest, in the report cited, that "in consequence of intense rivalry the business [on our railways] is done in a way which hardly admits of improvement." Is this a safe assumption? Have we not for nearly fifty years been improving? And if to-day our great railways can carry the excess over a million of tons for three or four mills per ton a mile, are we to admit further progress impossible?

For some years past we have bought our steel rails at prices gradually falling to forty-five dollars per ton. They have, however, cost us on the average more than sixty dollars per ton. We have produced iron rails at thirty-five dollars per ton. To-day steel rails are made in England for less than the cost of iron rails—indeed, for twenty-five dollars per ton—although made from ore imported from Spain and Africa. We have abundance of ore from which the steel rail can be made with one-half the labor and fuel used to produce iron. We have made our rails nearly as cheap as those of England, and our converters are superior to hers. May we not reasonably expect to bring down the price of the steel rail to one-half the rate we have paid, and thus save in the future more than half the cost of our tracks and repairs? Are not our steel-works coining money?

Again, may we not profit materially by substituting steel for iron, and by the adoption of uniform bearings, as proposed by our engineers? A good steel rail will outlast fifteen of iron. How is it with our freight-cars? To-day they carry, on an average, but ten or eleven tons; but has it not been demonstrated by successful roads that with slight changes in construction and slight addition to weight they may be made to average fifteen, and the dead-weight be thus reduced? May we not expect from such steps as these further reduction and a further gain from the use of the Bessemer steel for wheels and boilers? Whatever may be the cost to-day, is it not

safe to predict that the cost of transportation may be diminished at least a fourth in the future—a diminution which will be felt still more in the wheat-producing countries of Europe by increased importations of American grain? If to-day American wheat has reduced one-third the rent of English farms, may not a further fall be expected?

To-day the steam-ship which leaves the pier at Boston with live stock and bread-stuffs has arrived here in ballast, and has added her inward to her outward freight, thus keeping down the pro rata share of the railway. Now that we have mastered our war debt, may we not admit at least some of the raw materials of Europe as imports, and thus ameliorate the condition of our railways?

Let us refer again to the report of our Commissioners. It alleges that our through freight "touches remotely the vast manufacturing interest of this State, and not to help therein. Low rates on through, imply high on local business." But is this warranted by facts? Do not the low rates on through freights bring to us vast supplies of cereals, provisions, and dairy products to sustain our operatives and cheapen their manufactures? and do not return cars take manufactures to the consumer, and thus stimulate consumption? And if the railway realizes a portion of its profits from through freight, will not what it draws from this source, which it can not command at higher rates, enable it to carry local freight more cheaply? "Low rates do [not] imply high rates on local business," but the reverse, for most of our trunk roads have of late years reduced the rates they were charging before they acquired any through traffic.

In some of our sea-ports we meet with "laudatores temporis acti," who recur to the days when our piers were lined with brigs, barks, and schooners, owned by our merchants, which paid wharfage, purchased stores and outfits, and contrast them with those leviathans owned in Europe, which carry masses of freight from the West to Europe, passing our sea-board cities in transitu.

Do they reflect that one of these steam-ships—the *Hooper*, for instance—takes for her cargo sufficient to load fifty such vessels; that it fills its lower hold with hams and lard from our packing-houses, then covers them with grain, and fills up between-decks with cotton, and then takes