RAILROADS AND FREIGHT CONGESTION.

It has been a matter of common knowledge how that offerings of freight in many parts of North America have increased so much and so fast that the railroads have been utterly unable to handle it. Time and again shippers at the various traffic centres have had to put up with a temporary complete demoralization of the railroad service. Great distress and loss have consequently occurred. The different systems have, each year, added enormously to their equipment and facilities, but, notwithstanding their efforts they do not catch up with their traffic. Generally it is recognized that the railroads are doing the best they can to perform their duties as public carriers, but sometimes grave accusations are levelled at the men who control them. In the Northwestern States at the present time, for example, there is a woful lack in the facilities provided for moving the grain. Stories come from a number of localities of elevators and granaries filled to the bursting point and of huge piles of grain on the open prairie. Naturally the farmers are discouraged and angry at the state of affairs and they do not hesitate to charge the blame to the railroads. Responsible newspapers have gone so far as to state that, in their opinion, some of the railroads have been deliberately holding back their cars and locomotives in order that they may have the more hauling to do at the higher freight rates which go into effect when navigation season on the lakes closes and the roads are free from that competition. Against Mr. J. J. Hill, who controls the lines that were comprised in the defunct Northern Securities, a peculiar charge is laid. Hostile critics aver that the scarcity of cars on his United States lines is partly due to his policy of supplying full facilities to his Canadian branches and connections in order to the better prepare the way for friendliness at Ottawa towards his extensive Canadian projects. With regard to the first charge the Wall Street Journal points out that it is difficult to believe that the railroads would be so foolish as to purposely withhold their facilities. Anybody but a fool could see that such a policy, at all generally pursued, would result in stimulating the emigration of American farmers to the Canadian West and thus permanently lessening the richness of the traffic field of the railroads referred to, and perhaps dragging some of them towards bankruptcy. And it might be said, too, that the policy would have a considerable effect in increasing and intensifying that popular hostility to railroads which is already causing them much trouble and anxiety. As for the charge against Mr. Hill it only needs to be said, that his Canadian branches are hardly extensive enough yet to demand so many cars as to cripple his American business. And Mr. Hill is far too wise a diplomat to antagonize the people of the States where his interests mainly lie.

One of the ablest railroad men in the States, Mr. A. B. Stickney, president of the Chicago Great Western, whose ringing speech on Canada's banking system aroused so much attention after the panic of 1893, gives the most probable explanation of the car shortages. He says the people do not show foresight or judgment in disposing of their freight. The great bulk of their products come at the one season of the year—the fall—and everybody wants to ship at once. Consequently there is a period of two or three months during which the railroad equipment is altogether inadequate; but during the rest of the year it is about sufficient. No railroad man wants to buy cars and locomotives enough to handle as it comes all the fall freight, because, during the other nine months, a great deal of his equipment would be idle. Besides the shortage of cars there is another trouble—terminals are inadequate. In the effort to remedy this, most of the large systems are spending money on an enormous scale.

Notwithstanding what Mr. Stickney says about the people not showing foresight, etc., it is likely that freight will continue to be offered as at present for a long time to come. No matter how much the farmers and other producers might desire to regulate their offerings so as to give the carriers an equable quantity of freight all through the year, many of them are not financially able to hold back their stuff, and a great many others will not consent to bear the carrying charges resultant upon holding back. In view of the foregoing the following tables of statistics from Poor's Manual for 1906, which has just been issued, are interesting:

	1905.	1901.
Miles of R. R. Operated	215,506.92	194,974.96
Rev. Train Mileage	....	....
Passenger	467,270,447	391,543,708
Freight	559,434,683	505,468,619
Mixed	26,715,494	20,812,985
Total	1,053,420,624	917,825,312
Passengers Carried	745,446,641	600,485,790
Passenger Mileage	23,906,420,668	17,789,669,925
Tons Freight Moved	1,435,321,748	1,084,066,451
Freight Mileage	187,375,621,537	148,959,303,492
Traffic Earnings	....	....
Passenger	$486,420,902	$360,702,686
Freight	1,478,167,246	1,126,267,652
Miscellaneous	147,609,622	125,478,488
Total	$2,112,197,770	$1,612,448,826
Net Earnings	$ 685,464,488	$ 520,294,727
Other Receipts	80,927,659	68,368,814
Total Avail. Rev.	$766,392,147	$ 588,663,541
Mileage of Railroads	212,624.18	195,886.90
2nd Track, Sidings, etc.	88,707.57	70,105.45
Total Track	301,331.75	265,992.35