

The Freight Car Shortage.

While the past fortnight has witnessed some amelioration in the blockade of grain freight upon both the western and the trunkline railroads, it would seem that the congestion of traffic is by no means ended, and that considerable time may elapse before the roads will again be in condition to handle the business offered them with their customary celerity. At the close of last week it was indeed announced that several of the trunk lines had raised the embargo which had existed to Chicago, and were again receiving grain freights for shipment to the eastern seaboard. At the same time it was stated that some of the leading western roads had consented to allow their cars to be taken east of Chicago loaded with grain under pledges from their trunk line connections to return the cars in not less than ten days. These concessions, together with the fact that the trunk lines were clearing away with the accumulation of grain which had existed at Buffalo, seemed likely to result in a sensible amelioration of the situation. The late developments, however, indicate that such expectations were, to say the least, premature. The western lines are for the most part still unwilling to allow their cars to go east of Chicago, and the trunk lines, in spite of all efforts to dispose of the heavy volume of business, are still unable to adequately fill the demands of eastern consumers and shippers for cars. Although grain shipments from New York and other Atlantic ports have attained the largest weekly figures on record, and the east-bound shipments of freight by rail from Chicago during the week ending December 12 reached the enormous proportion of 120,000 tons, almost the maximum capacity of the trunk line railroads, it would seem that the pressure of traffic is as yet unrelieved, and that the ability of the railroad to furnish equipment may be justly claimed to be below the requirements of business.

One of the natural results of this state of affairs is that no little amount of complaint is heard on the part of exporting and distributing interests in the grain trade. The burden of this situation falls with particular force upon Boston, Baltimore and Philadelphia, although in New York shippers apparently find equal ground for complaint. Records are numerous where shippers have been unable to supply cargo to vessels under charter, although grain to load has been contracted for and was lying in Chicago or Buffalo. A feature of the situation is the fact that consignees have been unable under the circumstances to maintain the individuality of grain shipments in transit, and it is noteworthy that although instances might be multiplied where efforts have been made to obtain cars by paying extra therefor or by shipping in refrigerator lines, such endeavors have been for the most part futile.

Under these circumstances it is natural that attention should be called to the inadequacy of equipments and motive powers for the extraordinary demands which the present season have made upon the railroads. At the same time it would seem that some of the figures which have been brought forward as illustrative of the matter demand at best scrutiny, if not qualification. It is, for instance, stated that while between 1887 and the close of 1890 the railroad mileage of the United States had increased from 137,000 miles to 158,000 miles, a gain of about 15 per cent., and the tons of

freight moved one mile had in the same period advanced from 61,500,000,000 to 79,000,000,000 per annum, the total number of freight cars in the country has increased only from 950,000 to a little over 1,000,000 in number, a gain of about 11 per cent., against a gain in the ton-mile freight movement of 29 per cent. It is true that these figures, which it must be observed are not distinctly accurate ones, are the best that could be attained, and that they indicate with a reasonable certainty an existing deficiency in the general magnitude of railroad equipment. Still it must be remembered that the present traffic, and especially the grain tonnage, is phenomenal and exceptional, and that to have prepared for it it would have been necessary for the railroads to have commenced to augment their rolling stock and motive power at least a year ago. In the face of the light traffic, the declining rates and the unfavorable financial situation of the preceding two years or more, such expenditures on the part of the railroads would have been almost impossible, even if a foresight of what was coming in the way of traffic had existed. On the contrary, it is distinctly true, as was stated in these columns some time ago, that the railroads and particularly the western lines which had been experiencing the effects of competition, destructive regulation and decreasing traffics, had in many cases adopted a contrary policy, involving as a rule economies in regard to replacing and repairing their existing rolling stock equipment, the effect of which is plainly visible now. At the same time it must be noticed that increased power of locomotive and increased capacity of cars have been the rule with regard to all additions to or replacements of rolling stock during the past few years. For this reason the actual numbers of the cars in service at this moment do not in all probability bear the same relation to their capacity which the mere number of cars given above or the proportion of the increase itself would indicate.

One of the most immediate results of the existing situation has, however, been the placing of enormous orders for both cars and locomotives. Nearly all of the great western and trunk line railroad systems have already given orders for cars by the thousands, the aggregate orders which are now being executed at the various car manufacturing aggregating an enormous figure. Inquiry shows that all the car shops and engine works of the country are working to their fullest capacity, and that large unfilled orders are in the market seeking the attention of builders. It is, of course, possible to turn out cars with sufficient celerity to be available before the present season's freight movement begins to slacken, although engines are of slower construction, and it would indeed seem that there is less pressure for motive power than for cars. The effect of this movement upon general business and upon iron and lumber interests is already of a marked character, and it is evident that the consumption of iron and steel for car-building purposes is attaining proportions which must exercise a stimulating influence upon the entire iron industry.—*Bradstreet's*.

Canada's trade returns for November are most satisfactory. Exports totalled up are \$16,203,075 against \$9,839,844 last year. Imports were \$9,419,716 as compared with \$8,001,307, and duty collected \$1,378,718 and \$1,632,007 respectively.

Northwest Commercial Travellers' Association.

The annual meeting of the association was held at the board of trade rooms, Saturday evening Dec. 28th. There were upwards of sixty members present, being the largest turn out of the active members at an annual meeting since the association was formed.

After the minutes of last meeting had been read and confirmed, the annual reports of the president and the treasurer were read and adopted, both of which were very gratifying to the members, the financial report showing a net increase for the year of \$1,476, and the membership has increased from 196 to 228.

While the scrutineers, Burns, Coombs, and Evans, adjourned to another room to count the ballots to ascertain who had been elected as officers and directors for the ensuing year, the chairman arose and in a few appropriate words said the meeting was ready to hear any representatives of the Canada Travellers' association re amalgamation. A Murray Miller, local secretary of the C. T. A., had not arrived, Mr. Ronald, who is a member of both associations, said he thought it would be better to amalgamate, as he thought in the matter of dollars and cents the offer of the C. T. A. was a good one, but as R. J. Whitlaw remarked later on, it appeared that Mr. Ronald, while really speaking of amalgamation, being situated as he was, had at the same time apologized to the members for speaking in its favor.

Murray Miller having arrived he was asked to speak. He mentioned the progress of the C. T. A. from its infancy until now. It had a surplus of nearly \$200,000 and a membership up in the thousands. He gave facts and figures to assure the members of the N. W. C. T. A. that they would be benefitted by amalgamation.

M. R. O'Loughlin replied and went into the matter thoroughly and showed by facts the offer of the C. T. A. was not such a good offer as it would appear to be at first glance. When he resumed his seat there was a feeling that amalgamation would never carry.

R. J. Whitlaw, J. R. Brock and T. Ryan spoke of the remarkable progress of the N. W. T. association since its inception and the future before it, and they all agreed that it would be a great mistake the members would ever regret if they took the step.

As there were no other speakers the following resolution was put to the meeting: Moved by L. C. McIntyre, seconded by R. J. Whitlaw, that this meeting has heard the speakers for and against amalgamation and that while we entertain the most friendly feeling toward the C. T. A., and will be always ready to work to the interest of the commercial travellers of Canada. Be it resolved that this association do not amalgamate with the C. T. A., and thus losing its identity, but remain intact as at present. On the resolution being put it was carried unanimously, amid loud applause.

The work of the scrutineers being finished, the secretary read the result of the ballots, and the following are the officers and board elect for the ensuing year: President, L. C. Macintyre, (acc.); vice-president, A. Strang; treasurer, M. W. Rublee, (acc.); secretary, J. M. O'Loughlin, (acc.); directors—M. R. O'Loughlin, H. Bruce Gorden, A. L. Johnson, J. M. Lamb, D. W. Bole, J. C. Gillespie, A. S. Binns.