

# AUSTRALIAN RAILROADS.

The New Commonwealth Will Reorganize and Control Them.

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Sydney, Australia.—During my travels in Australasia I have gone over its chief railroad systems. Every colony has its own roads and its own methods of managing them. Each has a different gauge, and passengers and goods must be often transferred. In Queensland the roads are all 3 feet 6 inches; in New South Wales they are 4 feet 8½ inches, while in South Australia they are 5 feet 3 inches. The parliament of the new commonwealth expects to take up this subject and there will eventually be a standardizing of all the railways. It is thought that the 4 feet 8½ gauge will be adopted, though it may be a long time before all the roads are changed to fit it.

## AUSTRALASIA'S RAILROAD SYSTEM.

At present there are about 12,500 miles of railways on the Australian continent, and a little more than 15,000 miles in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. This is about one-twelfth the mileage of the United States, which has approximately the same area, and about sixteen times the population.

The most of the Australian railways are on the eastern side of the continent. Indeed, the bulk of the population lies east of the long range of mountains which extends from north to south a little back of the eastern coast, embracing the greatest part of the wealth of the country. Queensland at the northeast has 2,900 miles of railway; New South Wales, just below, perhaps 2,300; and Victoria, which is smaller than either, more than 2,000 miles.

South Australia, with its enormous territory, has 1,300 miles, and northern Australia, a country one-sixth the size of the United States, has only 145 miles of railways. Its only line is a little narrow gauge running inland from Port Darwin, which was opened for traffic about ten years ago, but which as yet falls to meet its working expenses.

In western Australia the railways are fast growing. That country is about one-fourth the size of ours, including Alaska, but it is largely desert. Still it has already 1,800 miles of railroad and is building more. Tasmania has 508 miles and New Zealand, small as it is, 2,357 miles.

In nearly every state the government

owns the railroads. There are a few private lines in western Australia and you find a stray mile or so here and there in other colonies, but the bulk of the roads belongs to the governments and is managed by them. Each government has had its own system and methods, some having a single manager and others a board of three commissioners, which has entire charge.

I have talked with a number of the commissioners. Here in Sydney I had a conversation with Mr. W. H. Fehon, one of the three railroad commissioners of New South Wales, who has been connected with railroads and railroad building all his life. He began as a clerk in a railway office in England at the age of seventeen. Later on he went to Canada, and from there came to Australia. He was for years one of the railroads of Victoria and he has commissioners of railroads both under governmental and private management.

During our chat I asked him whether he thought it advisable that the government should control the railroads. He replied:

"There is no doubt of it. It is now twelve years since the railroads of this colony were put into the hands of the present commissioners. The commissioners were appointed for seven years and were given absolute control of the building and management of the railroads. The results have been so good that we were reappointed at the close of our term; and are holding office today. We believe that such management is for the best interests of the people. We are giving a better service than the private roads could do and a cheaper one."

## POLITICS IN THE RAILROADS.

"But how about the political end of the machine, Mr. Fehon?" I asked. "Do not the politicians try to manage the commissioners and control the vote of your employees?"

"No," was the reply. "Our laws provide that we shall be absolutely free during our term of office. The government cannot dictate to us and the politicians have nothing to say. We have our own staff of officials whom we appoint, and no promotion can be made without our consent. We have all told about 15,000 employees in this state alone and we handle them without strikes or trouble. We are careful of our Westmen, and hold a court every other Wednesday, at which discharged or punished employees can appeal to us if they have grievances. There are many such appeals and about one-third of them

are settled in favor of the men."

"How about wages and hours of work?"

"We adopt the eight-hour day as far as possible," replied Mr. Fehon, "and we pay about the same wages you pay in the United States. We pay far more than they do in Europe, and our men are better treated than those of any railroad I know. We have a civil service and no man is removed except for cause."

## THE RAILROADS PAY.

"How about the profits? Do your railroads pay?" I asked.

"Yes; it is our business to make them pay. Our total earnings last year were \$15,000,000. We have a debt of about \$100,000,000 for railroad construction, upon which the colony pays 3.6 per cent. We are increasing the value of the property every year. We are studying the country and doing what we can to develop business along the various lines. We are pushing out roads into the good territory, knowing that settlement will soon follow and that they will become profitable. A part of our business is to meet deputations from the various districts and to discuss the development of the roads, such discussions being barred. The only question is as to whether it will be profitable for the railroad and the people."

## THE GOVERNMENT OWNS THE STREET CARS.

"How about the street cars; I understand you also control them?"

"That is true," said Mr. Fehon. "All the tramways of this state are under us. We have all told about sixty-six miles of street railroads, mostly here in Sydney and in Newcastle. There are steam, electric, cable and horse trams. We have recently discarded steam for electricity on a part of the Sydney system. We are using American machinery and American cars. At present our fares average about one penny (2 cents) per mile, and we have the lines divided into sections of one and two miles. We carry school children at reduced rates. There is some difference of opinion as to whether the street cars should be run by the cities or by the government, but we think that the government control is the best for the people."

## UNCLE SAM SHOULD OWN THE RAILROADS.

"Do you think the United States gov-

ernment should own the railroads?" I asked.

"Such a thing is a possibility," replied Commissioner Fehon, "although it is probably far in the future. You have the largest railway system of the world, and any change in its management would be a gigantic undertaking. If the government should take over the railroads it would have to pay an enormous amount for them. It could buy them by assessing them at their commercial value according to the dividends paid. This could be largely done by changing government bonds for railroad bonds, and the interest on the railroad debt should come from the roads if they were properly handled."

"One of the great objections to such a scheme," continued this government railway commissioner, "would be that of political management. The roads would have to be divorced from politics and a railroad civil service system established. The system might be more economically managed than now. You could cut down your unprofitable lines. Parallel roads would be to some extent abolished and you might save in many ways. The problem is a big one and one which it would take years to settle. You would need for your commissioners men of the highest integrity, of great ability and of practical experience."

## RAILROADS IN QUEENSLAND.

Another prominent railroad man with whom I talked on this subject is Mr. J. F. Thallon, who has the control of the 2,600 miles of Queensland railroads. He is the superintendent and general manager of the Queensland system, and as such is always building new lines. Said he:

"As far as I can see, the government control of our railways has been an excellent thing for the country. It has given us a profitable system, which would never have been built by private parties. Take our Rockhampton line, for instance. It begins at the coast and goes 400 miles to the westward through a country thinly populated. There are places on that line where you can ride 100 miles without seeing a town. Still, the land on both sides of the road is available for sheep. It is now taken up for pastures, and there are hundreds of thousands of sheep feeding upon it. Formerly it was desert, and the land was worthless. Now an outlet for the wool these big flocks have been introduced. Towns are springing up along the lines, and in time the road will pay well."

## THREE PER CENT DIVIDENDS.

"How about the profit of your roads, Mr. Thallon?" said I.

"They are just beginning to pay. The most of them now net 2 per cent on the capital invested. We don't want a big profit, for it is our principle to put the rates of freight and passage as low as we can to the people. As we make more we shall lower fares and increase wages. We have about \$90,000,000 already invested and have more than 100 feet of railway for every family in the state. We have several unprofitable lines, but we see, we are a new country, and we have to build with reference to our development, knowing that the roads will pay in the end."

## HOW THE AUSTRALIANS BUILD RAILROADS.

"Suppose you want a new railroad," said I, "how do you go about it?"

"The proposition has first to be brought before the state parliament," replied Mr. Thallon, "for that is the only body that can appropriate money or decide matters of such importance. Our commission proposes the matter to the parliamentary railway committee, and this committee discusses the situation and sends out its agents to investigate the cost and probable profits. At the same time we make a separate investigation of our own. We go over the proposed territory, surveying the route and taking testimony as to the feasibility of building the road. We make our report to the railway committee and through it to parliament. It approves, the construction of the road is in our hands. We buy all the materials, lay out the line and manage it when it is completed."

## AMERICAN ENGINES IN AUSTRALIA.

"Where do you get your materials?" I asked.

"Wherever we can buy them the cheapest. So far most of our supplies have come from England, but we are now using quite a number of American engines and other rolling stock. Many of the ties are of Australian hardwood; a variety called iron bark is usually considered the best. This wood is so hard that it will last from twenty to thirty years or longer. We are not troubled much with the white ants. They will eat other kinds of wood, but will generally let the ties alone."

"Do you find the narrow gauge profitable?" I asked.

"Yes. It pays us better than the broad gauge. Our roads cost only about half as much per mile as those of New South Wales and they do all the business required."

"How about tramways?"

"We have the entire control of them in Queensland," said Mr. Thallon, "and we make them pay, but they cause us more trouble than the railroads. We are giving on the average a two-mile ride for 2 cents, which is much cheaper than your 5-cent ride in the United States. We have a number of electric tramways and are purchasing our supplies for them from your country."

## RAILROAD FARES AND THE COMMERCIAL TRAVELERS.

The Australian railways make good time. From Melbourne to Sydney the distance is 370 miles and the trip requires seventeen hours, including the change of car at the frontier. The ordinary fares for the journey are \$20, first class and about \$23 second class, being respectively equal to about 24 cents and less than 2 cents per mile. All the railroads make a reduction on passenger tickets sold in connection with steamship tickets, so that people coming into and going out of Australia by sea should buy their tickets of the steamship agents.

There is also a 20 per cent reduction to commercial travelers on account of the large number who are always on the road. The trade here is done by drumming, the commercial travelers going from town to town with their samples. The distances are so great that such men are often out for six months at a time. They go to the end of the railroads and then travel from station to station and town to town on horseback or by stage. Some of them take tents along and camp out on the way. They are hotel at all the rail towns, a saloon and hotel often being combined. The hotels charge commercial travelers \$2 a day. They have sample rooms for them and give them every assistance.

## FROM BRISBANE TO SYDNEY.

One of the most interesting rides I have had in Australia is from Brisbane to Sydney. This takes you through the better parts of the states of Queens-



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land and New South Wales. The road is good, and the cars are about like those of the United States. Pullman cars being joined to the train at the New South Wales boundary. There is no checking system such as with us, although you are given a receipt for your baggage. One hundred and twelve pounds are allowed on first-class tickets, and all above this must be paid for by rate. I rode first-class. The cars were divided up into compartments, with cushioned benches running under the windows.

A curious feature is the drinking water supply. It is impossible to get ice in most parts of Australia, and the more we shall lower fares and increase wages. We have about \$90,000,000 already invested and have more than 100 feet of railway for every family in the state. We have several unprofitable lines, but we see, we are a new country, and we have to build with reference to our development, knowing that the roads will pay in the end."

## THE TREES SHED THEIR BARK.

The scenery in a ride like this is worth noticing. A part of the way was through mountains and rolling lands used for grazing. A part was through forests of eucalyptus and other Australian trees. The leaves of the trees hang down as though in mourning, and the bark of most of them is half off. Nearly all the trees of Australia shed their bark instead of their leaves. The leaves remain green all the year round, but the bark is the roughest of its kind in nature. The old bark is black, and it hangs in long strips down the trunk of the tree as though it were silver hair. The new bark is white or silver gray, which looks very pretty when the black has all fallen off.

In some places you see groves of dead trees. They have been ringed with an ax in order to kill them for clearing. Such a tree loses its leaves, its bark falls off the trunk and branches are left a dazzling silver gray, which, under the bright sun, look like clean and well-polished bones. A dead forest in Australia is a skeleton forest, it is the dearest thing in nature.

Where the trees have been cut down

the stumps are perfectly white. The logs lying on the ground are white and the surroundings are those of a bone yard.

## THE PASTURES OF THE DARLING DOWNS.

I wish I could show you some of the pastures along this line from Brisbane to Sydney. Take the Darling Downs for instance. These are prairies at the head waters of a branch of the Darling river, and are as beautiful as the best lands of the Mississippi valley. There are about 4,000,000 acres in the Downs, a vast tract of meadows surrounded by low wooded mountains. This tract consists of green fields as flat as a floor, walled by wire fences, enclosing flocks of sheep and herds of fat cattle and sheep. Sometimes there are 2,000 sheep in one field and single paddocks inclose hundreds of cattle.

Here and there a field is cultivated. The soil is as black as that of the Nile valley, and it shines like velvet under the sun. Now you pass a tract of a hundred acres covered with alfalfa, and now see the green wheat poking its head through the black soil. Now you cross a stream where the water has cut deep into the land. You can see that the soil is many feet thick, and that it can be used for a generation without fertilization.

The farm buildings are few. The houses are one-story cottages made of wool, painted yellow and roofed with galvanized iron. There are no big bank barns and no farm houses of any size. Wood is expensive. Galvanized iron is used largely for sheds, and the houses have big round galvanized iron water tanks on their porches to catch the rain from the roofs. Many have galvanized iron chimneys, and some few are built entirely of this material, imported from England.

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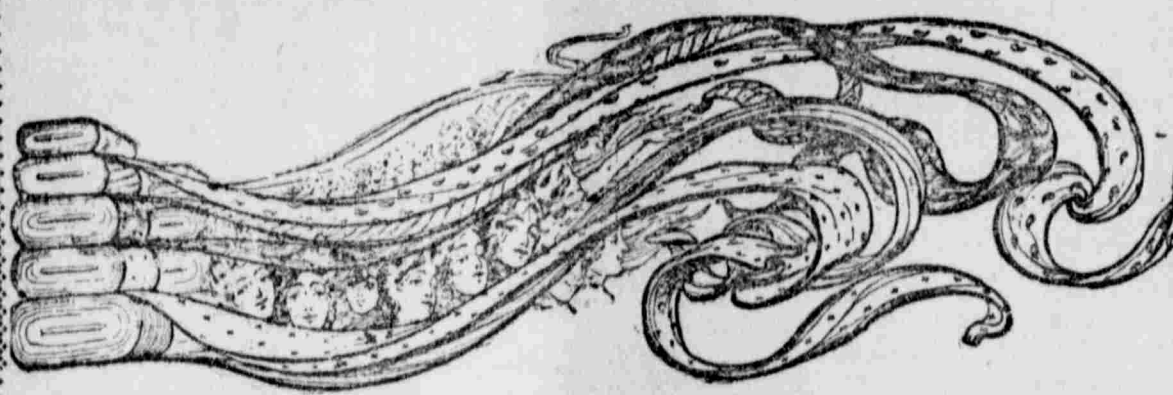


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