

## THE GREAT "JIM HILL."

ST. PAUL, April 3, 1893.—"Well boys, you may laugh at Jim Hill now, but the time will soon come when you and every railroad manager of the United States will have to take your hats off to Jim Hill. He is the greatest railroad man in the country today, and you'll have to acknowledge it!"

The speaker was S. S. Merrill, the manager of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railway. It was at a meeting of the great railroad men of the country, which took place a few years ago. James J. Hill of St. Paul, then representing a comparatively small line of road, had made a speech in a halting, modest way. After speaking he had left the meeting and some of the eastern railroad men had laughed at his manner and his ideas and this had angered his old friend, Mr. Merrill, and the above prophecy was made. It has already come true. The railroad men of the United States have long since begun to take off their hats to Jim Hill and he has since that meeting accomplished more as a railroad builder than any man in the world. He is, in fact, the modern Aladdin of the great northwest, though he is as yet practically unknown to the rest of the United States. You can buy his photograph in the book stores. You will not find his biography in any of the fat books on millionaires and little has ever been said about him in the newspapers. Still, he began his life here without a dollar and he is now worth more than \$25,000,000. He started here as a clerk on the levees along back near the sixties and he is now the owner and builder of the Great Northern railway system, which has just been completed, and which with its more than 4,600 miles of iron tracks has given us another great trunk line across the continent. I have spent some time here studying him and his personality, through chats with his most intimate friends, and he is one of the most remarkable men in the world. His great trunk line across the continent has been practically built within the past six years and the United States hardly knows of its existence. Still, he has had an army of something like 10,000 men at work right along, day after day, laying down this wonderful system, and the construction of the line has been such that it is even more wonderful. Every foot of it has been built to stay. It is called here the Pennsylvania railroad of the west, and it is so built that it can be run more cheaply and better than the other roads of the country. Built as it was by one man, who had sole control of its capital, it has cost only \$25,000 a mile, while the average cost of the roads in the United States, taking their bonded indebtedness only and not the stock, is \$45,000. The Union Pacific has, I am told, cost something like \$71,000 a mile, the Northern Pacific over \$70,000 a mile and the Southern Pacific more than \$80,000 for every mile of track. Mr. Hill's new road has a grade of only thirty-one feet to the mile and the road has been built so that a single engine can carry 1,500 tons over its heaviest grade. When it is remembered that on some of the other roads 250 tons is the maximum for heavy grade it will be seen what a wonderful difference this will make in operating expenses. Mr. Hill believes that freight rates by rail will be eventually cheaper than by water, and he

expects to see the day when by the means of well-constructed roads and the best of modern engines a ton of freight can be carried across the continent cheaper than it could be sent the same distance by sea.

## THE JAY GOULD OF THE NORTHWEST.

In this letter I have not space to write of the Great Northern road or the wonderful region it traverses. I may speak of it hereafter. I can only give you something of the personality of the man who built it. James J. Hill has been called the Jay Gould of the northwest. His friends spurn this insinuation. They say he is a builder up of countries rather than a wrecker of railroads. He has never been a speculator, and he has made his great fortune by studying the needs of the times, laying out a good foundation for his plans and steadily and solidly carrying them out to completion. He is a Canadian by birth, and he came here a poor boy along about 1856, and I have been told that he had to borrow the money to buy his railroad ticket to St. Paul. He first clerked on the levees, but early saw that the transportation problem was one of the great ones of the future and devoted himself to studying it. I have heard stories of how he drove a dog sledge in carrying freight from one part of this country to the other, and during my visit to his house here I saw a great silver plate as big around as a center table which Mr. George A. Brackett and other citizens of Minneapolis gave him as a testimonial of their gratitude for what he had done for their town. This plate was made by Tiffany and cost more than \$10,000, and the engravings upon it represented the different scenes of Mr. Hill's life work in the improvement of transportation, beginning with his dog sledges and ending with his great railway.

## THE GREAT NORTHERN SYSTEM.

The Great Northern system was begun by the buying of the old St. Paul and Pacific road by Mr. Hill. This had been built and was owned by Dutch bondholders, and Mr. Hill raised the money and bought it for a song. It represented only a few miles of track, and it had been rather expensively built. It was not well enough made, however, to suit Hill, and he tore up the track and reduced the grades until he made it so that one locomotive would do the work of three in going over it. He gradually extended his lines into the great Red River valley. He saw that this was to be the bread baskets of the United States and he has gridironed it with railroads. Then he built, in connection with the British government and others, the Canadian Pacific railway. And he was, I am told, the practical man to superintend the construction of this road from Winnipeg to the west. He had a connection with it from Winnipeg for his roads in Minnesota and Dakota, but when the Canadian government decided to extend their line on toward the east he at once saw that this would cut off his revenue from the west and he planned the great trunk line which was this month completed. He went over the whole line on foot and on horseback, and he knows, I am told, every foot of track and the character of nearly every section of land along his nearly three thousand miles of main track. He has made a thorough study of what is under the soil as well as what

is in it, and a famous geologist who recently went over the road said that Mr. Hill knew as much as he did about the geological nature of the country. It was the same with La Doux, the chemist of national note, and Mr. Brackett tells me that Mr. Hill can describe to you the details of the construction of every side track and every water tank along this big line from the headwaters of the Mississippi to the Pacific.

## HOW HILL BUYS STEAM ENGINES.

There is probably nothing connected with railroad building that Mr. Hill does not know. He has a mind which grasps a subject in all its details, and he has made such a study of railroads and railroad management that he can tell today just how long each part of one of his engines will last and to a pound just the amount of work it will do. A record is kept in the offices of the Great Northern of the life and work of each part of every piece of machinery connected with the road, and though Hill could probably not build an engine himself, I venture to say he could direct the construction of one. Not long ago he was in New York and during his stay there he contracted for fifty-seven engines for his road. These engines cost about \$25,000 apiece and the contract represented considerable money. In awarding he asked for bids from the different car works, and five great companies submitted bids and specifications. Their agents brought in these bids. They were sealed, of course, and Mr. Hill opened them in the presence of the agents and looked them over. After a few moments his brows began to knit, and at the end of half an hour he said: "Gentlemen, there is something wrong about these bids. You have combined together in the making of them, and this is a put-up job. Now, I want to tell you you can't do work for me in that way, and you can take your bids and yourselves out of the room." And with that he threw their papers to them and showed them the door. He then had his own engineers draw up specifications of just the kind of locomotives he wanted, and he went to the companies and told them if they wanted to bid honestly on them they could do so, but he would have nothing more to do with their agents, and they must have honest bids or he would send the work elsewhere.

At this same time, a friend of his tells me, Mr. Hill went to Tiffany's to buy some jewels for his wife. He looked at a very expensive piece of workmanship and liked it and asked its cost. One of the Tiffanys who was waiting upon him asked him what he thought the cost would be, and Mr. Hill began to calculate. He told the value and weight of each stone, estimated the cost of the workmanship and figured it out within a few dollars of the actual price. Tiffany says he is one of the best judges of precious stones in the United States.

## A FARMER AND AN ART CONNOISSEUR.

It is the same with his farming. He knows all about stock and stock raising and he has some of the finest stock in the United States on his farm near here. This farm contains about 4,000 acres. It has more than 400 head of fine animals on it. He can, I am told, tell you the pedigree of any one you may pick out at a glance, and he knows the record of each cow. It is the same with a half dozen other branches of know-