

The Erie Road, So Called.

Does any one man believe for a moment, that a mere question of "pines and cokes" for the supply of passengers, or even the question of a break of gauge in its largest stream, has produced the late melancholy occurrences at Erie and its vicinity? The friends of the Times of this city, should have known better, or if they know better, they were bound to handle the subject with fairness and candor. Even Mr. Green, in a letter from Cleveland, under date of January 15th, says that the "critical question, strip of all disguises and verities, is—Shall there be a break of gauge at Erie?" Now this is in no just sense true, any more than it would be true to say that a simple pine in a steam engine is the "critical question" with the engine. It may be a "critical question," but it is no more than the other pins and parts of the machine. So with the questions of the Erie difficulties. The break of gauge has become a prominent point in the controversy, but the difficulties did not originally hinge on that, nor is it now the main question, further than by reason of its intimate relation to the real matters in dispute.

On looking over the railroads in the western part of this state, and across the Pennsylvania neck, on which is Erie, and onward into the state of Ohio, we are struck with the whimsical changes of gauge, which occur every once in a few miles. The track of the old Central road, from Albany to Buffalo, is 4 feet 8 1/2 inches wide. From Buffalo, on to the Pennsylvania line, the road is of the width of the roads in Ohio, that is, 4 feet 10 inches. The N. Y. and E. road, from New York to Dunkirk, where the road runs west from Buffalo, crosses it, is six feet, and the road from the Pennsylvania line to Erie, is six feet. Now the little city of Erie, containing some eight thousand inhabitants, cannot well be held responsible for all these ridiculous breaks. We must look somewhere else for that. And how came the Ohio gauge in the state of New York at all, when we already had two gauges of our own, and certainly could find no reasonable use for a third?

A slight examination into the history of those roads throws much light upon that complicated affair. The New York and Erie Road was completed to Dunkirk in 1850. The people of Erie at once made a motion to connect their city with this terminus, and to this end the Erie and North East Company entered into an agreement with the N. Y. and Erie company to construct a six feet track from Erie to the State line, where the N. Y. and Erie company were to meet it by an extension of their track from Dunkirk. This would have furnished a six foot track, without break, from Erie to New York. But the people of Buffalo and the Central Railroad took the alarm. The track of Buffalo and the interests of that road were deemed to be in danger. Public meetings were called, negotiations were instituted, but the result of the whole was, as the people of Erie persisted in their preference to unite with the New York and Erie Road by the wide gauge, that the Buffalo and Central interests determined to extend their road also around the lake, and from Dunkirk west side by side with the wide gauge road to Erie. They accordingly commenced the work, an extension of the 4 foot 8 1/2 inch track. But soon a still more advantageous plan of proceeding suggested itself. If they were to build a six foot track, for the sake of the western people, and why not adopt the Ohio, or Erie, or Central gauge, which would be the met and thus secure a break at Buffalo? The road was therefore changed to a 4 foot 10 inch gauge. In the end, however, the Buffalo and Central interest managed to bluff off the N. Y. and Erie company from their design and agreement to extend their road west to the Pennsylvania line; and this accomplished, instead of continuing an additional track to Erie, it was determined to brain the direction of the Erie and North East road, and change the track. This was ultimately accomplished, so far as the direction was concerned, and from an attempt to change the width of the track all the present difficulties have sprung. The people of Erie, in their proceedings in what are called the now and riots, have acted under the direction of the Mayor and public officers, and by virtue of a city ordinance declaring the new track a nuisance, and as of an act which they proceed to remove it.

There are other questions of moneyed and business interests, such as the building of the Sanitary Railroad South, opening a communication with Philadelphia, which are claimed to hinge on the settlement of this gauge question. But it is better to keep the matter separated from foreign issues; and whether Buffalo is to be benefited or Erie, by any particular adjustment, cannot affect the right or wrong of the present controversy in the least.

It appears, then, that the gauge question is an Erie to the State Line—for we find it is not the Erie people alone who are conducting the war, but the inhabitants of the eastern half of the neck generally—is but the termination of the crisis of a long series of struggles and rivalries between contending interests and preferences. It is the final battle which is to decide all questions of the past, between Buffalo and Erie. If Erie loses, she loses a break in the gauge to subservience to local interests, she has Buffalo, and obtained it—Buffalo would doubtless claim a continuous gauge from the Erie West, to pour the riches of wide valley and prairie into her bosom, there all to be transported to eastern markets. Erie, it seems to us, is far more modest than this. She claims that there must of necessity be a break between this Ohio and New York gauges somewhere, Erie, being half way between, is the natural point.

Her road was first commenced, and earliest completed, it was not natural that she should select the wide gauge, and aim to connect with the New York and Erie Railroad, which was newest and the shortest route to market, instead of striking for Buffalo, and had it not been for the Buffalo and Central interest, this would readily have been accomplished, and there would have been no break. The Buffalo interest it appears has opposed them, and having the longest pines, has finally obtained the direction of their local road track, and proposes to turn it into a feeder for Buffalo.

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