AMERICAN RAILWAYS AND CORRESPONDENCE CONNECTED THEREWITH.

No. 1.

Hon. J. VOGEL to the Hon. W. GISBORNE.

SIR,— New York, March 7th, 1871.

I have the honor to submit to you a few observations respecting American railways; and to make a few suggestions which may be useful in New Zealand. Of course, I do not pretend that the suggestions have the value of those coming from an expert; or that they are anything more than might occur to any person travelling through the American continent, and who bore in mind that we are proposing to initiate in New Zealand the construction of a thorough system of railways.

There is a remarkable contrast between the estimation in which railways are held in this country and that in which they are held in New Zealand, or, as far as I am aware, in the Australian Colonies or in Great Britain. Just as we in New Zealand should think of constructing a road and metalling it completely, or metalling but a portion of the centre, or even being content with surface formation at first, according to the probable extent of the traffic, so, in America is the freest discretion used in the construction of railways, which work, is thought no more of than, if so much as, is thought of ordinary road work in the colonies. Consequently, railways in every stage of completeness are to be seen here—from the roughest and slightest style of construction, suited only for light traffic, and low rates of speed, to strong and perfect lines suited for much heavy traffic and high rates of speed.

One of the most remarkable and probably useful consequences of the popularity of railways in this country appears to me to be the absence of all necessity for carefully shutting them off from the approach of all other kinds of traffic. It seems to be regarded as wholly unnecessary to fence or guard railway lines from the approach of human beings. The sole object of fencing seems to be to keep off animals. Thus through a great deal of country where animals might stray or wander upon the lines, some sort of protection is provided; but wherever road lines, highways, or streets have to be crossed, it appears to be a matter of course that the lines shall pass without any attempt being made to guard against accidents. In thinly peopled districts, and even in towns, one constantly sees boards stuck up, with the words "Look out for the locomotive"; but this even is not considered necessary where railways pass through towns, the ringing of a bell upon the engine being regarded as sufficient warning of the approach of each train. Through the most populous portion of some populous towns, the trains pass constantly; and as you glide by you see men, women and children, horses and carts, and other vehicles, waiting at each crossing until the street line shall be clear. Along some streets in Chicago, goods trains are drawn to and fro, for the purpose of shunting or picking up particular waggons; and although there is consequently often a delay of several minutes before the line can be crossed, the pedestrians and the drivers or riders who are stopped, accept the delay as a natural and proper one. One night, on waking and looking out of the window of my berth in a sleeping car, I was amazed to find that we we were running through almost the centre of a large town, (Pittsburgh, as I afterwards learned).

In Baltimore, an exceedingly populous city, and where the traffic is very great and the streets are narrow, there is a distance of something like a mile and a half between the station which one reaches on the way from Washington, and that which is the station for booking, on for New York; but instead of the passengers leaving the cars, or a heavy expense being incurred in constructing a viaduct, or anything of the kind, rails are laid in the most direct line through the streets of the town, and long trains are drawn from one station to the other by four or five horses attached to each carriage. When it is considered that the two lines thus separated are amongst those which have the largest traffic in the country, that many fast trains are run over them, and that it would be practicable to construct a complete connection, though the cost would be considerable, an idea of the "railway policy," as it may be called, of the United States, can be gathered—that policy being to save heavy expenditure by whatever seems to be the most convenient and ready method of doing so, and of dealing with each case upon its merits, without thought of precedent or rule. Further instances of this are afforded by the facts, that out of New York, and out of San Francisco, the railway systems have to be approached by means of ferry-boats. I am not able to suggest what would be the probable amount of the cost of overcoming the natural difficulties in the way of continuous railway transit in either of these cases. Probably, in the case of New York, the cost of a bridge would be very great indeed. But this I am able to say, that the use of the ferry boats is productive of no inconvenience. The arrangements in connection with the ferry are such, as regards baggage, &c., that as little inconvenience is felt as if passengers at once entered the railway cars.

I am not setting down these isolated facts without an object. You must, of course, accept them for what they are worth, and understand that the observations are those of one merely passing through the country, without leisure to study the question, or special knowledge to enable him to do so thoroughly. But I think that the observations will suggest this at least:—