

20 per cent of the compensation fixed by law for carrying the mails should thereafter be withheld from all land grant roads, and this has ever since been done. The amount of such deductions to June 30, 1899, was \$10,676,671.

In the case of the Burlington company, this deduction for the state of Iowa alone has been \$804,630. Its land grant in Iowa was 358,424 acres, which could have been bought outright from the government in 1856 for \$448,000. Who made the better bargain in that case?

All the land grants contained the following clause: "And the said railroads shall be and remain public highways for the use of the government of the United States, free from toll or other charge upon the transportation of any property or troops of the United States."

Statistics are not available as to the amount of this burden in the aggregate, but upon many western lines it has been large.

#### Appeal to Posterity.

The suggestion is made that it is largely to posterity that arguments upon the question of the land grant policy must be addressed. In this, as in many other public matters, our after thoughts are often our only thoughts. The railroads have been built; the country has greatly developed; the enterprises are successful and the lands have, in many cases, enhanced in value. A spirit exists and probably always will exist that prompts criticism of success. In this case, it will take the form of questioning whether too much land was not granted, whether other conditions might not have been imposed upon the railroads, whether the roads would not have been built anyhow, and whether, after all, some other and better disposition might not have been made of these particular lands.

But posterity, in passing judgment, will not fail to note the conditions which existed when the grants were made. Nothing more clearly recalls and reveals those conditions than the Senate debate on the Illinois grant in 1850.

#### Some Leading Utterances.

Mr. Douglas said: "It is simply carrying out a principle which has been acted upon for thirty years, by which you cede each alternate section of land and double the price of the alternate sections not ceded, so that the same price is received for the whole. These lands have been in the market for 15 to 30 years; the average time is about 23 years; but they will not sell at the usual price of \$1.25 per acre, because they are distant from any navigable stream or a market for produce. A railroad will make the lands salable at double the usual price, because the im-

provement made will make them valuable."

Henry Clay said: "With respect to the state of Illinois—and I believe the same is true to a considerable extent with reference to Mississippi and Alabama, but I happen to know something personally of the interior of the state of Illinois—that portion of the state, through which this road will run, is a succession of prairies, the principal of which is denominated the Grand Prairie. I do not recollect its exact length; it is, I believe, about 300 miles in length and but 100 in breadth. Now, this road will pass directly through that Grand Prairie lengthwise, and there is nobody who knows anything of that Grand Prairie who does not know that the land in it is utterly worthless for any present purpose—not because it is not fertile, but for want of wood and water, and from the fact that it is inaccessible, wanting all facilities for reaching a market or for transporting timber, so that nobody will go there and settle while it is so destitute of all the advantages of society and the conveniences which arise from a social state. And now, by constructing this road through the prairie, through the center of the state of Illinois, you will bring millions of acres of land immediately into the market, which will otherwise remain for years and years entirely unsalable."

Thomas H. Benton said: "From the consideration which I gave to that subject at that early day, it appeared to me that it was a beneficial disposition for the United States to make of her refuse lands, to cede them to the states in which they lay. Lands which had been 20 or 25 years in the market at the minimum price, and had never found a purchaser up to that time, were classed as refuse, and it was deemed that the state, as a local authority, might be able to make some disposition of them, which the general government, without machinery of land offices, could not. The principle of the bill before the senate is to take the refuse lands and appropriate them to a great object of internal improvement, which, although it has its locality in a particular state, produces advantages which, we all know, spread far and wide; for a good road cannot be made anywhere without being beneficial to the whole United States."

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"But Mr. President, with respect to the general proposition. This application rests upon a principle that the young states are made desolate, in a great degree, by having lands in their midst that pay no taxes, undergo no cultivation, that are held at a price that nobody will pay, and which, in fact, in some parts of the country become jungles for the protection of wild beasts that prey upon the flocks and herds of the farmers."

From 1850 to 1856, every political platform and every letter of acceptance

by a candidate for president urged upon congress the making of land grants for the purpose of developing the country. No man could be elected to congress without pledging himself to vote for a land grant.

#### The Financial Risks.

Posterity will note, moreover, the financial risks incurred by those who undertook these railroad enterprises. Neither the general government nor the states would take the risks. The great question then, was how to induce private individuals to invest their means in these doubtful projects. Many of those who ventured, if not the majority, lost everything. Of the five railroad companies to which land grants were made in the state of Iowa, only one (the Burlington) survived to complete its line to the Missouri river. The four others all failed, the mortgages they had given were foreclosed and the property including the land grants, passed into other hands. The large Pacific grants were made in the war period to secure the prompt building of roads through uninhabited regions to make more certain the retention of the Pacific coast states in the union. I believe that every Pacific road, except one, has been in the hands of a receiver, notwithstanding the land grants. Building railroads in 1856 to 1870, was a different matter from the present. Money commanded ten per cent interest and iron rails were from \$80 to \$120 per ton, with other materials in proportion.

Posterity will also fairly consider the question from the standpoint of the government at that period. No pecuniary loss to it was involved. Alternate sections only were granted and the prices upon the ungranted sections were doubled. But the great and paramount consideration was that of bringing the great body of unoccupied and unsalable lands within reach of settlers and creating markets where none existed.

Aside from all these considerations relating to the past and part of the history of the country, who can say that a better or wiser disposition would have been made of these lands? If donation to homestead and similar settlers was preferable, it is clear that it was the railroad which provided the opportunity for settlement and cultivation by the homesteader. Moreover, the railroad companies have induced, encouraged and facilitated settlement and cultivation, as the government never could have done. It has been to their interest to seek out the best class of farmers, to sell the lands to them on long time and at reasonable prices, to transport their household effects free, and by every means to stimulate them to industrious and prosperous citizenship, for by so doing, they would best promote the prosperity of the railroad. In so far as these results have been ac-