Some Features of Railroading in the Southwest.

Naturally there is much that is common to railroading whether in the East, or in the Central West, or in what may be called the Far West, which, for some years, was an indefinite quantity, a constantly receding portion of this country; nevertheless, there are some points of difference.

In New England, from the start, there was enough business in sight to justify putting in structures of a permanent character, more expensive at the start, but often more economical in the end under the conditions prevailing here. In the newer regions, many of the railroads which were the most successful and the most valuable to the country, could not have been built when they were unless for instance temporary modern bridges had been adopted rather than stone arches or spans of iron. The modern structures were not only cheaper in first cost but were more quickly erected, and a railroad was very promptly put upon a paying basis, so that its earnings, its profits, were later used in steadily providing better and more permanent structures as the older ones needed replacing. The Western method was superior for the conditions existing there. The American engineer has been remarkable for the ability shown in adapting methods to conditions found to exist. The Western railroad was often pushed ahead from one to four miles a day, and methods of construction were harmonious with this rapidity of work. The railroad from Worcester to Albany was some seven years in process, and slower and more expensive construction was naturally an accompaniment of conditions of conservatism peculiar more to that time perhaps, than merely to locality.

The rapidity of railroad construction was only one of the manifestations of the vigor characteristic of the western country. The Mexican town of Las Vegas, New Mexico, was reached by the railroad in 1879 and by 1882 (possibly earlier), it had a street railway, gas works and water works, which cost about $100,000, and this with an "American" population of perhaps 3,000 or 4,000.

In the same town (very soon after a city), there were two National Banks, and two large commission houses whose trade extended into the surrounding country for literally several hundreds of miles, houses with business enough in 1886 to allow one of them to buy such an article as baking powder in car-load lots. The town of Albuquerque, on the Rio Grande, was hardly less enterprising. When a railroad had such marked effect on the prosperity, the development of the country it served, there was special warrant for it to strain every nerve to make rapid strides to reach the earning point, even if its structures, while amply safe, did not give promise of everlasting life.

The country traversed, part mountain, part rolling prairie, and part river bottom, called for skillful work and clear discrimination on the part of the engineer. Rigid standards suitable to the East must needs be laid aside, and that line selected which suitably conformed to the conditions both of the traffic and of the topography of the country. As a matter of fact much of the railroad built was located with the most scrupulous regard to the best modern practice in such work, the standard in this direction being higher than has generally prevailed on railroads in this neighborhood. The conditions absolutely demanded that the railroad built should be economical not only in first cost but for operating as well. That mistakes in detail were sometimes made was but natural.

When the bed of a stream was dry for most of the year, who could foresee how furious it might some day become when fed by a cloudburst in the not distant mountains? The dry stream, the Rio Salado, which already had earned from the railroad the respect expressed by two iron spans of 130 feet each, had the bad grace one day to bring down a torrent which was successful in washing out about half of one of the abutments. The ease with which the "adobe" soil melted when subjected to the scour of the Rio Grande, when charged from the melted snows of the Colorado mountains, was a warning that initial economy might be secured at the expense of large continuous cost for maintenance, and demonstrated that a line close to the river had elements of danger, aside from occupying the most fertile and valuable lands of the valley. In the river bottoms, the lands irrigated by ditches led from the melted snows of the Colorado mountains, was a warning that initial economy might be secured at the expense of large continuous cost for maintenance, and demonstrated that a line close to the river had elements of danger, aside from occupying the most fertile and valuable lands of the valley. In the river bottoms, the lands irrigated by ditches led from the river served to support the native Mexican population whose title to the land dated back perhaps for several centuries although commonly there was not a scrap of paper to legally establish it. The lands taken for the railroad mostly belonged to the small