

THE LORDS OF THE LINE.



THE HON. R. H. DUTTON. F. SAUNDERS, ESQ. SIR M. W. THOMPSON, BT. S. LAING, ESQ. LORD COLVILLE OF CULROSS.
Photo by C. Watkins. Photo by F. O. Devereux, Brighton. Photo by A. Sachs, Bradford. Photo by W. & D. Downey, Ebury St., W. Photo by W. & D. Downey, Ebury St., W.

IT is not sixty-five years since the commencement of the railway system, yet already in the United Kingdom there are nearly 18,000 miles of railway. But there has been more than the building of that large lineage, and the investment of, perhaps, £40,000 in every mile—it has been needful to train up a vast army of men to do the work of the nation on these railways. Very small were the beginnings of the work, few were the men, and simple the methods in the early days. On the primal railway for years there were no trains for passengers, but “coaches” drawn along the line by horses were run at moderate speed, owned by different proprietors, and the conflicting times and claims of the coach-owners caused almost as much trouble to the “committee of the shareholders” as the larger mineral traffic the line allowed.

In Durham stories are still told of how that traffic had to be fostered and regulated by the lords of the line, for the “committee,” in the days before directors, had an oversight so complete that each workman knew when the “committee days” were, and by whom they were attended. As the railways grew, order was educes, precedents were established, duties were defined, and gradually the Board of Directors became the ultimate court of appeal for railway interest, subject to the nominal supervision of their constituents—the capitalists who furnished the money.

But as the railways were formed, a tendency towards union became marked. The first railway—the Stockton and Darlington—projected, or acquired at least, six neighbouring lines, and it was in the end merged in the greater system of the North-Eastern, which was

itself formed by the union of three previously competing lines, and which now embodies the mileage of what were a score of separate companies.

This union of lines has been known in all parts of the country, and now one great railway is made up from a congeries of forty smaller companies; and thus, whilst there are over fifty railway companies in England, with a length varying from six miles to 2,500 miles, five out of the total own nearly one-half of the total mileage in the United Kingdom.

But even with half a hundred railways there is a limitation of power, for some of these are leased. There are still small lines which are independent. The Londonderry and Seaham Railway is the property of the powerful family whose titles it bears. In other cases, companies are merely unions of others—as where the “Cheshire Lines” are owned by the Midland Railway, the Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire, and another company; and thus by lease, joint ownership, and working arrangements the numbers of those who control the railway system of the country are few.

Twelve chairmen of Boards of Directors are, indeed, the lords of the line in England. Sir Edward W. Watkin is the chairman of three important lines—the little Metropolitan, with its vast passenger traffic through the heart of London; the South-Eastern, one of the main arteries of Continental traffic; and the Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire, with its wide-spreading system. There are other gentlemen who each preside over the destinies of two lines—as in the case of Mr. James S. Forbes, who is at the head of the London, Chatham and Dover

and of the Metropolitan District; but generally the work of the chairmanship is over one line. It varies even then. The Marquis of Hartington will have a task, in shaping the destinies of that line tapping the hematite iron districts—the Furness Railway—easy to that of Sir Richard Moon, who till recently presided over the chief of our British railways, the London and North-Western, with its 1,877 miles of line, and its streams of traffic by land and sea. As these lines go to press Sir Richard has given place to Lord Stalbridge.

These lords of the line include courtiers like Lord Colville of Culross, the chief of that fine old line, the Great Northern; men of family like the Hon. Ralph Dutton, of the South-Western Board; prosperous manufacturers, such as Sir M. W. Thompson, of the Midland, and Mr. Armitage, of the Lancashire and Yorkshire; country gentlemen, like Mr. John Dent-Dent, of the North-Eastern; men who have risen in the railway service, like Mr. Saunders, the head of the Great Western, and Mr. Forbes; and noblemen, whose training has fitted them for directing, as in

the case of the Marquis of Tweeddale. Their qualifications are varied—training on the line, intimate knowledge of its working, financial ability, and the important one of presenting a case in its best light to the shareholders. It is true that the “speeches” made at the half-yearly gatherings are largely amplifications of the printed reports, but the earlier speech is part only of the chairman’s duty. He has to reply to questions, objections, criticisms of the policy of the Board, and the speaker without tact or without an excellent memory would find these bi-annual gatherings a test of his temper, and a time of trial.

Many memories arise of the lords of the line in the days when they meet their constituents. There is the meeting of the “Sheffield” Company in Manchester, with Sir Edward Watkin repeating his theory that year after year the railways do more work for a sovereign, and that his aim is to make that company less of a provider of good traffic for longer lines—Sir Edward, skilful in speech, brimful of railway history, and with the map of all the lines in his memory down to the smallest junction. Sir Richard Moon at Euston



SIR EDWARD WATKIN ADDRESSING A MEETING OF RAILWAY SHAREHOLDERS.

spoke as one who was monarch of all he surveyed, and who met opposition by the statement of principles which are on the London and North-Western immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. A little distance away, Mr. Saunders is still under the shadow of the remembrance of that great chief of the Great Western, Sir D. Gooch, the sturdy Northumbrian who recalled the memories of the Stephensons and other early associates. At York, in a long and noisy public room, Mr. Dent explains in rather involved periods the policy of the North-Eastern, that his bluff and slow-voiced predecessor, the late Mr. George Leenan, did so much to consolidate. Again, in London every word is weighed that falls from the lips of Mr. Laing, for the company he represents—the London, Brighton and South Coast—is one whose stock fluctuates very frequently, and speculators listen to the utterances of the chairman to discern the extent of the prosperity before them.

The oratory at these musterings of the lords of the line is business-like. It abounds with figures, and millions are spoken of as meaner men speak of pounds. In the far north-west Sir Wilfrid Lawson intersperses his quotations and parodies with his

explanation of the accounts of the prosperous little Maryport and Carlisle line, but that baronet's gay wisdom is privileged and personal; and the periods of his fellow-chairmen are ponderous, purse-proud, and at times prosy. They form a commentary on "propputty"; they are records of the extent of the traffic and travel, the cost of engine-power, the amounts of rates levied, and, alas! of the compensation that in some way indicates the physical pain and loss of the lines. Through subjects such as these, through projects of amalgamation and suggestions of new branches, the chairmen wade, and finally they arrive at the goal for the shareholders—the dividend.

Of the rest of the meetings, of the economical shareholder (who is generally to the front), the gentleman who desires additional or quicker trains, the argumentative shareholder, the one with a hobby, and the one who comes to complain of the charges for refreshments at the stations—these need not be here delineated, for though they appear as the auditors of the lords of the line, they are indeed better summed up amongst the customers with a grievance.

J. W. S.

CHRISTINA'S GUARDIAN.



HERE'S a telegram, Chriss!— They will be here by the six-thirty."

Christina Barrett turned round quickly. "Really and truly?" she cried. "You are not chaffing?"

"Honour bright; look! here it is."

Christina read the paper eagerly, and then fairly danced up the steps into the hall, saying, "My dear old guardian! Now I shall have somebody belonging to me at last."

Janet and May Drayton watched her half sadly; they had parents, and brothers, and cousins innumerable, but poor little Chriss was alone in the world. Then the excitement of the new arrivals was too much for them, and Janet, full of the subject, went on, "We have not seen Will for five years. How long is it since you saw Major Wetheral?"

"Fifteen years!" said Christina, sobering down at once. "I was four years old when I left India, and I had not seen father for seven years before his death. Oh! girls, whatever you do, don't have anything to do with native regiments."

"I would not for anything!" cried May. "Just look at you and your people. Why, it's worse than exile."

Janet said nothing; somebody was trying for the

staff corps, and she thought it advisable to change the subject before it became personal, so she suggested that the other two had better take their things off, as it was just tea-time, and no one thought anything more about partings, for the meeting absorbed everybody. Major Wetheral was in a sad mood all the journey down from town. Christina was the only child of his dearest friend, besides being his playmate and ward; and only a year previously Colonel Barrett was preparing to return, when he got fever, and died after two days' illness. Christina was likely to be a serious charge, for she had lately inherited a large fortune from the distant relative who had taken care of her ever since her return from India, and the major would have to attend to all the business, which had been interrupted by Colonel Barrett's death.

Christina always spoke of Major Wetheral as her old guardian, and his appearance rather bore out her words, for his dark hair was plentifully streaked with grey, and his face had many anxious lines about it. But it was care which had aged him, and his friendship with young Will Drayton was not quite such a strange affair as Janet and May thought, for he was barely forty, and as hale and strong a man as any officer in Her Majesty's service.

The drawing-room at Drayton Hall was brightly lighted, and dazzled the two men's eyes as they came out of the November darkness; but it was only for a moment, and then, while Will was embraced by his mother and sisters, a slender, golden-haired, black-