

**THE BROAD GAUGE THE  
BANC OF THE GREAT  
WESTERN RAILWAY  
COMPANY. PP. 1-54**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649313846

The Broad Gauge the Banc of the Great Western Railway Company. pp. 1-54 by Anonymous

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Cover @ 2017

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**ANONYMOUS**

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THE  
**BROAD GAUGE**  
*The Bane of the*  
**GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY**  
**COMPANY.**

WITH  
AN ACCOUNT OF THE PRESENT & PROSPECTIVE LIABILITIES  
SADDLED ON THE PROPRIETORS BY THE PROMOTERS  
OF THAT PECULIAR CROTCHET.

**By E. S. D.**

"A barbe de fol, on apprend à raire."  
[Which, being translated for the benefit of Country Gentlemen, means]  
"Mr. Brunel has learnt to shave on the chin of the  
Great Western Proprietors."

*THIRD EDITION.*

LONDON:  
JOHN OLLIVIER, 59, PALL MALL.  
1846.

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## CHAPTER THE FIRST.

### INTRODUCTORY.

*Peculiar style of management of the Great Western Railway Company—Cause of this—Its peculiar Gauge.*

THE great railway question of the day is undoubtedly that of the Gauges—a question in respect of which there can be no neutrality on the part either of established or of embryo companies; for to all of them the final settlement of the matter at issue is fraught with consequences, prospective as well as present, of no slight importance. On the one side stand alone the Great Western Railway and its tributaries—on the other is arrayed a host of lines occupying almost every district of the kingdom, the peculiar locality of the broad gauge scarcely excepted. In commencing, therefore, a series of chapters on this very important subject, it may be desirable to remind our readers that it is impossible fully to



discuss the question without more frequent and more minute *personal* reference (if we may be allowed the phrase) to the affairs of the Great Western Railway Company than would be necessary in the case of other Companies, did the matter under consideration involve only some minor, though it might be very important, points of internal policy.

The broad gauge is not the only peculiarity of the Great Western Railway Company. The mode of its management is peculiar. In no railway is there so little of the mercantile element, and so much of the political element, as in the Great Western Railway. In states, the origin of this state of things may, ordinarily, be traced to an ambitious and aggressive spirit, the means by which it works being crafty negotiation and deep-laid plots; and, without wishing to apply hard terms to the Great Western management, we must say that its affairs have always appeared to us to be conducted more in the style of a small political state than in that of a great mercantile concern. To us it has ever seemed intent upon squeezing the smaller lines within its power, such as the Cheltenham and Great Western and the Bristol and Gloucester, and seizing every opportunity of encroaching upon its neighbour's frontiers at any risk, rather than careful to cultivate

its own resources and its own internal economy, or mindful of the good old maxim of commerce, "Live and let live."

In accordance with this policy, we believe there are few Directorates in which the letter-book is more often consulted, and the ledger more seldom; few Directorates in which the capacity of handling that potent weapon—the coat-button of a member of Parliament—is more prized. The Bristol section of the board, consisting, for the most part, of mercantile men, has, it is notorious, almost ceased to exercise any control over the proceedings of the Company. A power has grown up behind the throne, greater than the throne. Within the last two years, this policy has become most clear in its manifestations, so much so that the stoutest advocates of things as they are at the Great Western Board, have ceased to deny it. A course has been entered upon, full of danger, we are convinced, to the proprietors—a downward, hazardous, and desperate course—which (if the proprietors do not now take measures to check it) will precipitate the concern into a bottomless pit of debt, embarrassment, and loss, of which the burden will not fall upon those who now hold the reins, but upon the thousand innocent and confiding shareholders

who have invested their earnings and property in the undertaking.

It is the part of wise men to learn from the experience of others, and it must be admitted that the political system of managing a railway, which we have been remarking upon, is exactly the opposite of the commercial system which has been found to answer in the north. It is the reverse of the mode pursued by the most successful railway leader of the day, Mr. Hudson, whose principle has invariably been to adhere to *cheaply constructed lines—economical management*—the cultivation of local traffic lying in the proximity of the lines, and to enter into mutually advantageous arrangements with all neighbouring companies. Often, indeed, have his terms in transactions of this nature appeared, to his colleagues and to ourselves, too liberal; and as often has his unexampled success disarmed censure.

It was in Lancashire and the north that railways first arose, and are still, we believe, best understood. There they are not made barren arenas for "smart" and able negotiations, but well cultivated fields, bringing forth abundant fruit to their owners. The interest of the proprietors, rather than the aggrandizement of the concern, is the point always kept in view.