

# The Commoner.

ISSUED WEEKLY.

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Having amputated a part of Castro's anatomy those German surgeons will now proceed to amputate him from a goodly wad of that money he carried out of distressed Venezuela.

The supreme court having decided that the interstate commerce commission can do everything save something worth while, the commission wants a lot more help so it can do it.

One strange thing about all this secret service business is that if the president really used the government sleuths as charged he should have been able to refrain from telling congress about it in a special message.

Just about the time people become so pessimistic as to believe the world has grown cold and selfish, along comes something like that Messina disaster to prove that generosity and unselfishness is growing in pace with everything else.

The New York World gives a list of one hundred things President Roosevelt promised to do and left undone. The World was wise enough not to undertake the compilation of a list of things done that should have been left undone by the president.

After congress has appropriated a half-million for the Italian earthquake sufferers Speaker Cannon may be expected to bob up and tearfully explain that it will be necessary to leave the tariff alone in order that the hole in the national treasury may be quickly plugged.

A reader of The Commoner suggests that a law, making it obligatory to procure a government permit for the transfer of a patent right or trademark, would be a step toward the curbing of the trusts. He asserts that trademarks and patents are sometimes bought up by the trusts to shut off competition. The matter is presented for the consideration of the readers.

### A CORRECTION

In The Commoner's reproduction of Governor Shallenberger's message to the Nebraska legislature the following appeared: "The volume of money supposed to be in circulation in the United States on October 1, 1908, according to the latest report of the national banking department, was \$3,378,800." The amount should have been stated at \$3,378,800,000.

ONLY THIRTY-THREE MORE DAYS UNTIL MARCH 4.

## The Commoner.

# PROTECTION FOR THE INSANE

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 3

Lincoln, Neb., January 20.—To the Editor of the Omaha World-Herald: In yesterday's issue of the World-Herald I read a dispatch from your talented Lincoln correspondent setting forth the protest made by a citizen of Omaha against the method of asylum "investigation" by legislative committees. Your correspondent says that this Omaha citizen "has filed his protest regularly every two years with Governors Holcomb, Poynter, Deitrich, Savage, Mickey and Sheldon and goodness only knows how many members of the legislature."

The explanation for non-attention to this protest will be found in your correspondent's statement that the protestant "is a former inmate of the asylum." Doubtless this gentleman is now thoroughly sane and well; but the fact that he was once in the asylum will serve to discount anything he may say with respect to asylum management—just as any protest or complaint made by any present day asylum inmate would be discounted.

How are we to learn the truth concerning the conduct of the asylum for the insane? Certainly not from the management if cruelty has been practiced. Even where the superintendent is a kind, well-meaning man he does not always know of the treatment accorded his helpless charges by the attendants. To every complaint made by a patient the attendant's answer is that it is a mere hallucination. This is the answer that suggests itself to the superintendent's mind. It is, indeed, the answer that would suggest itself to the mind of any person when, visiting the asylum, his relative complained of ill-treatment.

Are we to learn the truth from legislative committees? As a newspaper reporter I know something about asylum investigations by legislative committees. Where they are not farcical because of the methods employed they are, in their best light, non-effective because during the entire session of the legislature the asylum management is on its good behavior, prepared for a committee call at any time.

I do not criticize present day asylum management in Nebraska because I have no personal knowledge on that point. But speaking from a somewhat extensive newspaper experience I do say that it would be a wonder if brutality toward helpless creatures is not practiced in institutions that have been, as in Nebraska, so long under one management. In my view there is but one way in which to guarantee to these unfortunate creatures a measure of that protection which it is our duty to demand for them at all times and under all circumstances. That way is by frequent changes in the personnel of the asylum management. I invite your attention to what I believe you will find, upon investigation, to be a rule. The rule is this: The physician or superintendent (chosen for his mental strength) who remains in an asylum office for a long period of time, grows weaker mentally. The attendant (chosen for his physical strength) who remains in an asylum office for a long period of time, grows brutal. It is not difficult to see how easy it would be, under such conditions, for brutal attendants to deceive well-meaning superintendents.

The democratic state convention for 1906, which nominated Mr. Shallenberger for governor, arraigned the republican administration "for the failure of those in authority to take prompt and effective measures for the removal of these helpless wards of the state (inmates of the Norfolk, Nebraska, asylum) from the custody of brutal keepers and attendants." Then followed this plank:

"We invite attention to the rumors concerning instances of alleged brutality and neglect at other asylums and we submit to the people of Nebraska that a change in state administration is essential to thorough investigation of the charges made against asylum managers and the adoption of practical measures for permanent reform. To this end limited tenure of office for superintendents and employes is important, native kindness being of more consequence than long experience on the part of those entrusted with the care of the insane. We therefore pledge democratic officials having to deal with asylum management to such change in the personnel of the asylum's staff as will insure, for the helpless inmates, that kind consideration and care which may reasonably be expected from men whose sympathies have not become callous by long contact with the conditions peculiar to asylums for the insane."

Taking it for granted that Governor Shallenberger has appointed as superintendents of these

institutions capable and considerate physicians it is within the governor's power to insure, for a time at least, protection to these helpless wards of the state. Let him see to it that every asylum employe, whose business it is to care for patients and who has held the position for any considerable length of time, is supplanted by persons whose natural sympathies have not become blunted.

I am aware that it will be instantly suggested that asylums can not be operated without these experienced men. But I make bold to say that any country doctor having a level head and a sound heart could, with a force of fresh men and women, make marked improvement in the management of any asylum operated under the present system.

I do not expect that this letter will have any marked effect, but I have written it from a sense of duty because while working as a newspaper reporter I was impressed with the utter helplessness of the inmates of asylums for the insane. Society has made small progress in the adoption of methods for the protection of these poor creatures. Too often men smile at suggested reforms along this line, regarding such suggestions as emanating from well-meaning, but all too simple-minded folks and not deserving, therefore, of serious consideration. But is it not true, Mr. Editor, that civilization would be advanced and men and women made happier if some of the time and effort now wasted on so-called essentials were utilized in the tenderer things of life?

RICHARD L. METCALFE.

Referring to this letter the World-Herald says editorially:

"The World-Herald gladly publishes a letter from Richard L. Metcalfe, in today's issue, in relation to the management of the state hospitals for the insane. His letter deserves the thoughtful consideration of Governor Shallenberger and the superintendents of the institutions at Lincoln, Hastings and Norfolk.

"The democratic convention of 1906 acted with wisdom and humanity when it declared in favor of limited tenure of office in the case of insane asylum employes. This applies with special force to those known as 'attendants,' whose duty it is especially to guard and oversee the unfortunate inmates. Attendants who have served for some time, with rare exceptions, grow callous and incline more and more strongly toward roughness, indifference, and downright brutality. Attendants who are fresh in the service, on the other hand, have still their sympathies alive. Their hearts can be, and are, touched with pity for their helpless and irresponsible charges. The investigation at Norfolk, a few years ago, disclosed that the brutal attendants were those of long experience in this unpleasant work."

### GOVERNOR HASKELL AND PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

The Springfield (Mass.) Republican says: "Governor Haskell was originally anathematized by the president for his alleged favoritism to the Prairie Oil and Gas company, and it is now the opinion of all fair-minded persons who looked into the matter that his record in connection with Prairie Oil and Gas is better than President Roosevelt's. The Indian land cases were the next weapon used in the presidential assault upon the governor, and sometime the courts may decide whether he was as black as the president, for campaign purposes, painted him."

### FAMILIAR

Once upon a time Theodore Roosevelt wrote the "Life of Oliver Cromwell," and now some of Mr. Roosevelt's republican friends are quoting from that publication these significant words: "Had Cromwell not become cursed with the love of power, had he not acquired a dictatorial habit of mind and the fatal incapacity to acknowledge that there might be righteousness in other methods than his own, he would certainly have avoided a break with this parliament."

### WHAT ABOUT "PUBLICITY?"

Newspaper dispatches say that Attorney General Bonaparte has written to the judiciary committee of the senate declining to appear and explain the merger of the steel trust and the Tennessee Coal and Iron company. What has become of Mr. Roosevelt's boasted policy of publicity?