New York Tribune.

First to Last—the Truth: News—Editorials—Advertisements.

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The Trouble with the Government Ownership Shipping Bill.

The report of the Chamber of Commerce's Special Committee on the American Merchant Marine in the Foreign Trade, presented yesterday, met with opposition and was referred back to the committee for further consideration. This is not surprising, since the report contained some recommendations which on account of their novelty need to be more generally discussed. Public opinion is still much confused on the question of recreating an adequate American merchant marine. We are groping along, just as we groped along for many years on the subject of currency reform. There is no powerful popular sentiment concentrated behind any of the relief plans now under debate. Congress would undoubtedly have done something more at the last session than pass a bill admitting foreign built ships to American registry if it had had any clear idea of what the country expected it to do.

The special committee's report offers some suggestions for government aid in rebuilding a satisfactory merchant marine. To clear the way for these it announces its absolute opposition to President Wilson's government purchase and operation measure. In that, we believe, it reflects the nearly unanimous sentiment of the commercial bodies of the country. These bodies realize that a restored merchant marine must rest on a broader economic basis than government ownership. It must be a growth in which the business world itself has vital interest. The entry of the government into this field as an owner and operator would practically limit the development of the merchant marine to the extent of the government's participation. Private enterprise would be frozen out, instead of being encouraged to take a hand in the restoration.

What the United States hopes to get is a real deep sea service of its own, such as it used to have. But the government would be reluctant to go beyond a minimum limit of investment. There development would stop, private competition having been killed off. That is the great fault of the Wilson scheme. It would not spend a dollar out of the Treasury to encourage the private investor to spend four or five dollars. It would simply use the government's credit to drive all private capital out of the ocean carrying trade.

The special committee naturally prefers some plan which will bring the government and the private investor into helpful co-operation. It suggests that the government create a fund to guarantee the bonds of American shipping companies which put new vessels into commission. That is a form of Treasury aid similar in character to subventions, subsidies and the other devices through which other countries have stimulated the growth of their merchant marines. But any form of aid involves financial assistance, and there is no difference in results between taking money out of the Treasury to aid private shipping ventures and running government vessels at a loss and then charging the deficit to the taxpayers.

The South American trade would be helped, the special committee says, by amending the ocean mail law so as to allow $4 a mile to vessels of sixteen knots as well as to those of twenty knots and $2 a mile to all vessels making twelve knots. These changes have been several times advocated in The Tribune, but Congress would never sanction them.

If we are to get anywhere in recreating an American merchant marine we must build on what we have and stick to the general theory of government aid, not government monopoly. National ownership might be tolerable as a means of starting one or two new lines to South America for use after trade conditions in South America become more normal. But national ownership on a big scale would cost more than it is worth and would leave us eventually worse off as a maritime nation than we now are.

Count Berchtold's Retirement.

Popular dissatisfaction undoubtedly forced the retirement of Count Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister. Viennese newspapers have hinted at the existence of such dissatisfaction. The recent retirement from Servia excited fierce resentment, and the Hungarians have been annoyed because the armies of the Dual Monarchy are being used largely to support the German offensive in Poland instead of in defending the eastern and northern boundaries of Hungary. Count Berchtold was a shining mark for criticism on account of his grave misjudgment of the effects of his ultimatum to Servia.

The Tribune pointed out at the beginning of the war how self-deceived Austro-Hungarian opinion was. The newspapers inspired by the government all said that Russia would never go to Servia's aid because she knew that France and Great Britain would not back her up in interfering with Austria-Hungary's "punitive expedition." Count Berchtold also allowed the public to delude itself with the idea that Italy would act with Germany and Austria-Hungary, although Italy had served notice on him in 1913 that she could not approve a policy of aggression toward Servia.

The whole structure of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy went to smash when the great test came. Aehrenthal was the chief architect of that unstable fabric, but Berchtold continued to work on the false foundations which his predecessor had constructed. Austria-Hungary is now paying a severe penalty for the miscalculations of its leaders in foreign affairs. Those of them who remain must also pay some penalty.

A Barnes Victory in the Senate.

On the issue of Barnes versus anti-Barnes in the committee contests, the Barnes side won in the selection of Henry M. Sage to be chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. This was, moreover, a declaration of the Senate itself. Lieutenant Governor Schoeneck requested that the rules be changed so as to relieve him of the appointment of committees, and the Senate, reversing the precedents of years, took this duty out of the hands of a presiding officer of the same party as the majority.

Mr. Sage is an estimable and accomplished legislator, whose ability to handle the affairs of the Finance Committee cannot be questioned. Nevertheless, it is to be regretted that at the organization of the Legislature a member of Mr. Barnes's Albany County machine should be elevated to a post of such power by a course conspicuously unusual. There were Senators of longer service and equal ability who might have been chosen. If one of them had been there would not be hanging over the Legislature the shadow of Barnesism, which has been an affliction to the Republican party in this state for years, and which grows no less even though Mr. Barnes himself occupies no party position now.

Italy's Disaster.

The very extent of the Italian earthquake prevented its terrible destructiveness from being promptly known. As one stricken town after another revives sufficiently to send out a call for aid the death list mounts. Every means of communication has broken down, and it will be days before the full extent of the disaster can be ascertained. From present indications the loss in life may be close to the figure at Messina, when 77,000 persons were snuffed out of existence.

We have grown so numbed toward death by reading day after day of the wastage on the battle lines of Europe that the present calamity is hard to appreciate at its true horror. Yet if the worst is true the lot of Central Italy is in some respects but little better than that of Belgium. The great difference is, of course, that nature did her work swiftly, mercifully, with the turn of a hand; while the devastation and destruction of Belgium are continuing horrors, without an end in sight. The relief of the stricken sections of Italy will be that much simpler and surer. For emergency relief Italy will be glad of any assistance that may be within reach.

As in Belgium, thought of the art imperilled runs side by side with the human tragedy. It seems appalling that the treasures of the Roman Forum, of Siena and of Florence should be assembled over one of the flaws in the earth's surface, a foundation among the most unstable that could be found. Yet that is the way of the world. Art endures only by comparison with individual lives. In the end nature conquers all.

Repeal the Full Crew Law!

The two bills presented to the Assembly attacking the full crew law have the same purpose and would accomplish the same thing, but by different methods. Mr. Conkling's would repeal the existing law, leaving it to the Public Service Commission to say how many men in a train crew should be employed for safety. Mr. Sullivan's would give to the Public Service Commission the power to determine the propriety of a reduction in the make-up of train crews stipulated in the full crew law.

Of these measures the former seems the better, since it is more direct in its repeal of the objectionable law. Certainly one or the other should be adopted. The full crew law has not proved itself a benefit for anybody, even for the railway trainmen's unions. It has cost the railroads hundreds of thousands of dollars which they might better have devoted to improving service. It cannot be proved to have afforded protection to the public. Its repeal and the delegation of this whole question to the Public Service Commission, where it belongs, will mark a return to sanity on the subject.

Support for the Small Education Board.

The demand for a small Board of Education gains strong supporters in the signers of a petition to the charter revision committee of the Board of Estimate for speedy introduction of a bill to reduce the number of the Education Board's members. The City Club, the Citizens Union and the Public Education Association are represented, while individuals like Seth Low, R. Fulton Cutting, Abraham Flexner and Miss Lillian Wald add their names to the plea. Their wishes are also the wishes of the Mayor and of a committee of the Board of Education itself, which has recommended the creation of a small board.

There should be no dissent. A board of forty-six members, while much better than the absurdly huge one which existed a couple of decades ago, is just as much less efficient than a board of from five to nine members would be. It is unwieldy and is bound to be inefficient. No one member under the system of committee work gets anything resembling a grasp on the whole school problem. There is a diffusion of authority and responsibility. Consequently there is bound to be a disposition to laxity on the part of individual members. The old spirit of local representation which partly accounted for the big board cannot prevail now over the demand for efficiency and simplicity and directness in the schools' affairs. While there remains a Board of Education of forty-six members it is impossible to obtain the desired quality of service.

Mr. Root to Lead the Constitution Makers.

The informal letter balloting process by which Mr. Low, Mr. Stimson, Mr. Wickersham, Judge Clearwater, Dr. Schurman and other eminent Republicans have assured the election of Senator Root to preside over the Constitutional Convention is unusual, but the result is highly desirable. It amounts to a caucus decision of a majority of the delegates-elect to vote for him. That action will permit him to devote himself to many preliminaries necessary to organization which, if they were transacted after the formal meeting of the convention, would occasion delay in getting to the real work of that gathering.

Mr. Root is worthy of the honor. As chairman of the judiciary committee of the convention of 1894 he probably had more to do with shaping the present constitution than any other member of that body save Mr. Choate, its presiding officer. The state, which knows his ability, is fortunate to have him for this great service.

The Conning Tower

THE PASSIONATE POLYGAMIST TO HIS LOVE.

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
And then, when I have spoiled your life,
I'll go and get another wife.

Mr. Charles L. Woody, the B. R. T.'s counsel, said that the company would soon go bankrupt if it tried to please its patrons. We'd like to buy some B. R. T stock.

Suggested motto for boards of directors whose vote it is necessary to obtain before transportation improvements can be effected: Conservatism First.

Made in U. S. A.

The subway crush.
Words to ragtime songs.
Baseball contracts.

The top o' the morning, if not of The Tower, to Mme. Strindberg, who advises "people who aren't fit to wipe off Bernard Shaw's shoes" not to "insult him when he isn't here to defend himself." But why insult Shaw, unless you resent the large amount of merriment he has given you. Or, as Miss Rodman says, hasn't he?

BACK TO THE PHARMACOPEIA.

[From "A Prairie Wife," by A. Stringer in the satevepost.]

"The open air and the swaying and jolting had chloroformed me into insensibility."

"I breathed in lungfuls of clear, dry, ozonic air . . . . champagnized with the invisible bubbles of life."

"I needed that etheric eye-opener."

In our admiration for Mr. Alfred W. McCann's pure food crusade in the Globe we doff our cap to nobody. It is matched, however, by our astonishment at the pat. meds. the Globe accepts money for advertising the virtues of.

There must be a lot of English actors who deliberated the question of enlisting, but decided to See America First.

Perhaps, too, they are here to avoid reading "Punch," which prints many a quiddity these days about just such things.

GIRL, AS HUMAN BELL-CLAPPER, SAVES DOOMED LOVER'S LIFE

Brave Act of Bessie Smith Halts Curfew from Ringing and Melts Cromwell's Heart.

[By Cable to The Conning Tower.]

Huddersfield, Kent, England, Jan. 15.—Swinging far out above the city, "Bessie" Smith, the young and beautiful fiancee of Basil Underwood, a prisoner incarcerated in the town jail, saved his life to-night.

The woman went to "Jack" Hemingway, sexton of the First M. E. Church, and asked him to refrain from ringing the curfew bell last night, as Underwood's execution had been set for the hour when the bell was to ring. Hemingway refused, alleging it to be his duty to ring the bell.

With a quick step Miss Smith bounded forward, sprang within the old church-door, left the old man threading slowly paths which previously he had trodden, and mounted up to the tower. Climbing the dusty ladder in the dark, she is said to have whispered:

"Curfew is not to ring this evening."

Seizing the heavy tongue of the bell as it was about to move, she swung far out suspended in mid-air, oscillating, thus preventing the bell from ringing. Hemingway's deafness prevented him from hearing the bell ring, but as he had been deaf for twenty years, he attributed no importance to the silence.

As Miss Smith descended, she met Oliver Cromwell, the well-known lord protector, who had condemned Underwood to death. Hearing her story and noting her hands bruised and torn, he said, in part; "Go, your lover lives. Curfew shall not ring this evening."

They don't overestimate the value of the individual in Elizabethtown, Pa. Mr. J. C. Witmer, take it from the Elizabethtown College Catalogue, will "transport any baggage between depot and college at fifteen cents the passenger and twenty-five cents the trunk."

Come, my Corinna, let's go a May-wheating!

THE COMPLEAT ANGLER.

Full fifty times I must have shot
My shafts of vibrant verse and wit
Fair at this turret smoking hot,
And once or twice my darts have hit.

Experience has taught me dear
The way to get the stuff across.
It's up to you to lend an ear
That you may profit by my loss.

A sure and much-espoused harangue
Takes for its topic this here col.
Another winner ends with slang
An ode to one's g. b. b. doll.

Shoot at the specials when begun
(Like Pet Names and the Epitaphs)
The worms by early birds are won;
Viz. Burgess and the typographs.

You've got to make the metre fit.
No lagging feet can hope to scale
The Tow-er's narrow stairs, but split-
Ting words keeps none outside the rail.

Be decent; rough stuff makes a blot;
Hatch out a novel scheme of rhymes;
Go straight ahead and invert not,
And talk the lingo of the times.

Then call the game before it's dark.
Why, even this bright gem, I think,
With every added flash and spark
Is drawing closer to the zinc.

EARNEST GUY.

Each one of us has in our dreams a Venus of our own.—The Tribune.

The Freudian theory.

SILVER LININGS.

Consider the movies, old top;
Observe how the crowds block the walk.
It's quite an attraction to get lots of action
Without an abundance of talk!

C. A. B.

Consider the phonograph, too;
What charm in a rebord is pent!
It's worth half your trousseau to hark to Caruso
And not have to look at the gent.

The column of Marcus Aurelius was twisted by the earthquake.

Business of looking at our seismograph.

F. P. A.

WHEN THE GODS MAKE WAR.

JOHN BURROUGHS RENEWS ATTACK

The Case Against Germany Written in Fire and Blood Across the Face of a Kingdom—Conduct That Does Not Differ from the Acts of a Highwayman.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: How the educated German can think that our attitude toward his country at this time, with the overwhelming spectacle of Belgium before our eyes, to say nothing of anything else, could be other than it is is a mystery. Professor Wien wants us to defer our judgment until we can get the right historical perspective, and a distinguished Jena professor charges me with naive ignorance of the European situation because of my November letter to The Tribune. No doubt both these learned men know that situation and the factors which brought it about much better than I do. I have never been in Germany, nor have I made a study of her present day methods and economies. I have loved her literature and philosophy, and, like all the rest of my countrymen, I am a beneficiary of her science and her efficiency. But, like the rest of my countrymen, I trust I have ordinary discernment and a safe standard of individual and international morality.

The events upon which we judge Germany stand out so that he who runs may read. They are written large in fire and blood across the face of a kingdom. They are written in the burned cities, in demolished cathedrals, in consumed libraries, in piratical indemnities, in aerial bombardment of defenceless women and children and in the insolent and overweening spirit of domination that attends it all.

Do we need to know all the antecedents of these events—all the diplomatic or political history that led up to them? We draw our conclusions from the events themselves. The facts are patent to all, namely, that Germany agreed to back Austria up in making demands upon Servia that would have destroyed the latter's autonomy, and that Germany knew her course would precipitate a general European war. Then there lies Belgium—starving, homeless, bleeding Belgium, whose only sin was that she was a small kingdom and lay in the path of the German hosts. Belgium, who had never taken any part in war but the defensive part since Cæsar's time; Belgium, one of the most peaceful and thrifty and humane nations in the world.

Do we need to know all the secret histories, all the diplomatic and political chicanery of the times, to judge of these events? Certain of the antecedent factors and conditions are patent to all, one of these being the growing feeling of distrust and rivalry that sprang from the conflict of commercial interests; another, race antagonism, with the survival of ancient feuds. But the chief factor was the growing military spirit of Pan-Germanism which begat the enormous armaments, built the military railways and perfected the terrible war machine which has at last been ditched in Belgium and in Northern France.

Belgium's wrongs and Germany's crimes are present day facts, and the lapse of time can never make them less. Time will soften or blur the harshness and the terrible reality of these events, but the murder and spoliation of this admirable and peaceful little state, just because she was little, will ever remain one of the blackest pages of modern history. No plea of dire necessity, no conjuring with right and wrong, can palliate the crime. When the impartial history of the war comes to be written, the blood and famine of this neutral and peaceful people will strike through and through its pages like some indelible and infernal stain. No matter what excuse Germany had for making war upon France, she had not the shadow of an excuse for destroying or seeking to destroy Belgium. Belgium's offence was the offence of a man who resists the passage of an assassin through his house seeking a short cut to the house of his neighbor.

The fancied necessity of the situation was of Germany's own creation. It was a necessity only from the point of view of her haste to quickly destroy France. France had aimed no blow at her; she was only getting ready to ward off such a blow. France would never have attacked Germany. She did not dare to; and if she had even contemplated such an act, she was not ready to strike at that time. If Germany had invaded France from her own territory, as she did in 1870, or had mobilized her army there and waited for her enemy to strike the first blow, how different our attitude toward the whole matter would have been! In 1870 our sympathies were largely on the German side. France was the aggressor, and the flimsy cause of that sham Napoleon did not win us. Now the cause of the Allies wins us because it is the cause of civilization; it is the cause of international morality; it is the cause of neutral states; it is the cause of the weak and the innocent against the ruthless and the powerful; it is the cause of our heritage of peace and good will to men against the rampant, the overbearing, the hellish war spirit, drunk with the greed of conquest. The necessity of the highwayman to act quickly, aiming a knife or a bullet at your heart, is quite a different thing in the eyes of the world from the necessity of his victim to act quickly. We could excuse the latter if his blow or his bullet injured some one else, but could we excuse the former?

Germany was bent on assassinating her neighbor and plundering her treasury, and we know why she wanted to do it quickly, but her fear of Russia, whom she had defied, and the tramp of whose gathering hosts were in her ear, does not make her crime any the less.

The sophistries with which the learned Germans seek to dope their consciences—such as the assertion that if Germany had not violated the neutrality of Belgium the French or the English would and that French officers in automobiles had been seen weeks before in Belgian territory—show how in her desperation Germany catches at straws. No, not till our eyes are holden that we cannot see, till our hearts are turned to stone that we cannot feel and our sense of right and wrong dulled and obscured by German Kultur till we cannot judge, can our sympathies in this war be other than they have been from the first.

In what respect does the conduct of the German army differ for the better from that of the highwayman or the robber baron, who murders or overpowers his victim, and then takes or demands his treasure? The money penalties which Germany has demanded of prostrate Belgium and the destruction that has strewn her path place her acts on a level with the murder and pillage of a band of common outlaws.

I believe we are justified in applying to this collective act of the German people the standards of justice and fair play of our civic and social life and of judging nations as we judge individuals, because our humanitarian progress during the last century points in this direction. We feel the incongruity and the debasing effect of one rule of conduct for man singly and another and lower rule for man collectively. If the nation can not and ought not to be as fair-minded and as humanitarian as are the individual units of which it is composed, then we should like to have the present day moralists and philosophers of Germany—Haeckel, Eucken and Wien—tell us why. Haeckel, the friend and disciple of Darwin, speaking in the spirit that now animates his nation, wants London destroyed and England made a German colony. In this attitude of mind does he feel that he is the same man who has drunk so deeply at the wells of British science and philosophy and who has fought so nobly and successfully the battle of evolution against its enemies in church and state? Does Eucken feel no incongruity between his own lofty idealism and his stimulating ethical teachings and the pleasure his countrymen seem to take in the destruction of Belgium and the slaughter of defenceless women and children by the German warships?

The unanimity of the German people is easily accounted for and proves nothing but the unanimity. They are trained from infancy to revere and obey the state. The state is a divine institution. Their Kaiser rules by divine right. They never question the state's authority or its veracity. What it tells them they accept as law and gospel. The Kaiser says his people are the salt of the earth, the chosen of the Lord, and in their souls they believe it, and act upon it. He told them the sword was forced into his hand, and they believe it, and echo and re-echo it; when he knew, and the correspondence with Austria shows—would show if published—that one word from him to Emperor Francis Joseph, the word "arbitrate," would have saved the situation. But he spoke a word of another kind. In our vernacular he said, "Go ahead, and I will back you up." That precipitated the avalanche, and now they are fighting for their life, as is every dog that runs amuck among a pack of dogs, each member of which is as large as he is, and lucky he is if he escapes without being torn limb from limb.

It was not their individual wills that wrought this havoc upon their neighbors; it was the will of the military despotism that has them in its grip. When we consider all the factors in the case, the psychological change which takes place in the attractive and orderly and industrious citizen when he becomes a part of a ruthless and conscienceless war machine like the German army is not hard to understand. He is now only a cog or a bolt or a blade in an engine of destruction. Never was the triumph of drill and rigid discipline more marked. The German soldier in the ranks knows nothing but obedience. His behavior is that of an automaton. He apparently has no more fear than the swarming locusts, or the migrating lemmings, or than a charging herd of buffaloes. The German sailors stand in line on the decks of their sinking ships and go down with their vessels singing the glories of the Kaiser. The gospel of valor can no further go. On land, when beaten, they sometimes surrender like men—their human nature asserts itself, but upon the sea their chiefs have a tradition to make, and they die like the fires in the engines of their ships. An ideal army? Yes, so far as an army is necessarily a machine, but one of the penalties of mechanizing human beings is seen in the conduct of the army.

The Germans, echoing their Kaiser, unanimously declare that they did not want the war, that it was forced upon them, etc. If they could blot out the evidence of their long and exhaustive preparation for war, if they could prove to us that they had turned a deaf ear to the teachings and preachings of their prophets of war, or if we could believe that such men as Bernhardi and Treitschke were not a legitimate outgrowth of the national spirit, if they could show us that such a work as Professor Usher's "Pan-Germanism" was pure fiction, that it rested on no historical foundation, that Germany has not been cherishing the dream of world-empire during the reign of the Kaiser, and studying the problem from every point of view; that her prodigious increase of armaments of late years was only an offering upon the altar of the goddess of peace; that the military burden which her people so cheerfully took on was only a discipline in self-sacrifice, or that all those things were only to put "the fighting edge" upon German Kultur and keep it whetted against an invasion by her neighbors—if the advocates or apologists of the Kaiser could satisfy our minds upon these points, we would gladly welcome the proof. But the proof does not come. Her spokesmen slur over these points. They urge her need of expansion; they throw in our faces her immense superiority to all other nations; they stand upon her Kultur and challenge the whole world to dispute her divine right to do what she pleases. Inferior mortals are not to complain if they are ruthlessly swept aside by her hosts on their onward march to world dominion. Shall we not all gain vastly more than we can possibly lose if we are permitted to share in the benefits of her superior wisdom and efficiency? Is not one German soldier worth all the cathedrals and libraries of France, of Belgium, and all the women and children to boot? What a pother we make about a little inferior human life and about our antiquated art and architecture in the presence of the victorious march of the shining hosts of the army of the Lord!

How a little modesty would become them all! What a pity Germany's champions, both at home and in this country, could not have the art to conceal a little of the arrogance and impatience which they know our inferiority justifies! A little show of fair-mindedness and tolerance of our want of Kultur would go a long way with us. We have from of old heard of the pride that goes before a fall; are we witnessing it in this case?

We have seen mild outbursts of Anglophobia in this country, but never before has the world witnessed the distemper plunging its victim into such frothing and convulsive fury as Germany shows to-day. That dash of the German navy upon the coast of England was like an outburst of uncontrollable hatred and thirst for destruction. It was not the Germany we know in the peaceful walks of life; it was the Germany drunk with the spirit of war in its worst form. It indicates a reversal to the spirit of primitive savagery, which the whole world may well stand in dread of. The destruction of a battleship is legitimate warfare, but the murder of women and children in unfortified towns is the debauchery of war.

The total destruction of London with all its population by the Zeppelin airships would be in accord with the present temper of the Kaiser's army and navy. They are out to win, to dominate Europe by military might, and no considerations of humanity or of the rights of non-belligerents will for a moment stand in the way.

Let me add that in the present crisis this country should be very forbearing with the course of Great Britain on the high seas. England has everything at stake, and she is fighting our battles for us. We have nothing at stake but the big profits of some of our monopolies—our oil kings and copper kings—and we know that, by hook or crook, they will manage to survive.

JOHN BURROUGHS.

Yama Farms Inn, Napanoch, N. Y., Jan. 11, 1915.