

The Times-Dispatch

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SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 1908.

In the kingdom of life there is no heredity except from the man's own past.—Mabel Collins.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT. The Bristol Herald-Courier takes exceptions to some observations of ours on the benevolence of capital punishment. It calls attention to the fact, alleged, that the criminal record of the States in which the gallows exists is no better than that of the States in which the gallows does not exist. It indeed, it is as good, and then draws the conclusion that if capital punishment does not prevent crime, it cannot fairly claim to be either conservative or benevolent, and cannot be justified.

Admitting the premises, we should admit the conclusion. The Times-Dispatch does not sanction any form of punishment as a matter of revenge. It is contrary to the theory and spirit of civilized law. Punishment can be justified upon the plea only that it is preventive. Every law of nature carries its own penalty for violation, not because Nature is cruel, but because Nature is kind. The penalty is attached to prevent lawlessness. It is so also with the laws of man, if they are framed and enforced in the right spirit.

But is it true that the criminal record—the murder record—is no better in States where the gallows exists than in States which have abolished it? It is very hard to draw comparisons in a case like this, for conditions vary in different localities. But it is set down in the books that Switzerland abolished capital punishment in 1874 and murders increased, so that the right of the cantons to restore the gallows was recovered in 1879. On the other hand, England has never abolished the gallows, and no people set a higher value upon human life than the English.

Iowa abolished capital punishment in 1874, but was compelled to restore it in 1878, on account of the large increase in crime. New York had a similar experience. We conclude, therefore, that if capital punishment is deemed to be necessary and conservative in a State like New York and a country like England, there is at least much reason in it.

The Times-Dispatch would be glad to see the death penalty abolished in Virginia, if we believed it could be done in safety. But if it were done, there would likely follow an enormous increase in the number of lynchings.

THE DEADLY RAT. The common brown rat came to the white man from China, where many things in this world have originated at one time or another. He came by way of Russia, the natural link between white and yellow, spread over the face of Europe, and so, through his habit of stowing away on ships that didn't want him, scattered himself abroad over the planet. The rat is a good scavenger, and when he devotes his time and powers to that occupation he may be said to earn his board. That, however, is not his habit; and, besides, when that has been said to his credit, all has been said. His fierce voracity was very early noticed, witness the legend of the bad bishop, Hatto, of Mainz, immortalized by Southey's poem. The rat's unsanitary tendencies are a matter of later discovery. In an age when he has been made the object of special study by men of science and statistics. Now the rat against him may be concretely stated as follows:

1. He destroys every year in this country property worth many millions of dollars.

2. He is a prime agent for the carrying of murderous germs, particularly those of trichinosis and the bubonic plague.

The government Department of Agriculture recently announced that the rat annually destroyed \$60,000,000 worth of grain alone. A Danish authority declares that there is one rat in any country for every human being on it, and that each one causes a loss of about half a cent per day. If this estimate is accurate, the privilege of entertaining rats is costing this country some \$420,000 a day, which will strike many as excessive. The other point against the rodent is no less clearly proved. Rats, when they are not, as we virtual, caught him red-handed at germ dissemination. They have proved him guilty beyond the shadow of extenuating circumstances. Trichinosis and plague germs swarm in his system, and when he has been eliminated from districts once infested by the bubonic scourge, the scourge also has quickly disappeared.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the city of San Francisco has appropriated \$500,000 to abolish him, and has put a cash price upon his head; or that Denmark, in grimmer earnest, has started upon a bitter war of extermination in which no quarter will be asked or given. Other communities, we venture, will soon follow the lead of these. The rat is man's deadly and stealthy foe. There can be no friendship between them and there is not room enough in the world for both.

MR. MECK LEAVES. After two years of service on The Times-Dispatch to the very day, Mr. Samuel W. Meek has resigned his position to accept that of general manager of the Washington Herald. This position came to Mr. Meek unsought, and he had made for himself as a constructive force in the newspaper field. From the first day of his arrival in Richmond Mr. Meek threw himself heart and soul into the problem of developing the great resources of Richmond and Virginia, with such success that it is fully within the mark to say that no one has ever made more friends or established a wider circle of business and social acquaintances in less time than Mr. Meek. The basis of his work was faith in the possibilities of Richmond and Virginia, and he made this faith not only real for himself, but vital and effective for those with whom he came in contact.

What the world needs to-day is sane optimism, not the depression of a disappointed speculator or the wild dreams of a visionary promoter. The man that can inculcate belief in and wise appreciation of the basic forces that are making for wealth, better government and higher citizenship all over this country is rendering an indispensable service. We wish Mr. Meek well in his new associations, and trust that his broad optimism may bear fruit a hundredfold in his new field.

KENTUCKY'S BIG FOUR. Kentucky, like Virginia, now has a political Big Four, whose names will be indelibly inscribed in the records of the State. Whether or not they performed a public service and discharged what they felt to be a bounden duty in breaking the deadlock and electing Mr. Bradley as Senator, we know not. Most men and all partisans have a quitter, and the Kentucky Big Four will be forever despised—and it may be justly so—by Governor Beckham and his followers. But Governor Beckham is not without blame, if reports concerning him be correct. It was Beckham who put Senator Blackburn out of office, and it is charged that he and his friends plotted wickedly against Senator McCreary and took an unfair advantage of him in forcing a senatorial primary, in which Beckham won the nomination. It is further reported that Senator Bradley remarked in the early stages of the play that there were rich prospects ahead for the Republicans in Kentucky. And it seems now that he had a vision.

But however these things may be, the election of a Republican Senator by a Legislature which had a Democratic majority on joint ballot is a pretty defeat which will be charged up to the account of Beckham. He could have saved the day by withdrawing in favor of another Democrat, but he would not.

Kentucky is to be congratulated, however, that throughout the long contest there was no pistol play or bloodshed, and we learn that most of the colonels regard it as a very dull and unmanly campaign.

INTERURBAN LINES. Beginning with this issue The Times-Dispatch will print the first of its series of daily letters by Frederick J. Haskins. These letters touch on a wide variety of topics that do not naturally come up in the ordinary scope of a newspaper, but belong rather to the field of magazine work. Mr. Haskins has made such a remarkable success of these articles, and has been received so cordially wherever his work is known, that The Times-Dispatch is glad to be able to add this important and valuable feature to its daily paper. Especially will the article of to-day commend itself to the people of Richmond, for this city has already experienced the great value of interurban electric lines. From the start the line to Petersburg was a success, and so apparent was the value to Richmond and to the community generally of this new form of transportation that the demand to repeat the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac monopoly was irresistible when the charter was asked for the Fredericksburg line. The natural wealth of Virginia is very great, and it only needs transportation facilities to make our farming lands extraordinarily profitable. For this reason The Times-Dispatch has consistently urged the building of better roads, and for this reason we will hail with delight any extension of interurban electric lines.

Another of Mr. Haskins' articles will appear to-morrow.

FEBRUARY 29TH. Yesterday was the first February 29th that the world has seen since 1904 and the second since 1896. February 29th is the one freak in the cycle of orderly and normal days. It hops up every four years as a sort of fixed symbol of the trouble man has had in making his own charted year line with the immutable solar year. If the earth had provided itself with an itinerary around the sun which took an even number of days to complete, all would have been as simple as falling off a log. But the earth didn't. Its ordained revolution takes, not 365 days, but 365 days, five hours, forty-eight minutes

and fifty seconds—or, as some say, forty-eight minutes, forty-five and one-half seconds. Therefore, since the normal year accounts for only 365 days, it becomes necessary, periodically, to pause and make provision for the five hours and so forth thrown away each year. If this unaccounted time was exactly six hours, an extra day every fourth year would make it just right. But once again, it isn't, and hence every hundredth year, which should be a leap-year, is an ordinary year instead. And, furthermore, and finally, even this is not quite right, because it throws us a little behind time again; and for this reason every four hundredth year, which should be an ordinary year by the above rule, is a leap-year.

This is all rather complicated. It is not surprising, in view of the astronomical mathematics involved, that the calendar should have been giving trouble from the very earliest times. The Jews, Greeks and Romans all wrestled with it, with varying success. Julius Caesar, engrossed as he was with the Helvetians and other friends of our school days, found time to invent the leap-year, but the Roman calendar considered a year as 365 days and six hours long, and though it prevailed throughout Christendom for many centuries, it was bound to fall in the end. The so-called Gregorian calendar of to-day dates from 1582, and is now universally employed except in the Greek Church. Even this one, we are told by the wise ones, is inaccurate, and they are already suggesting what must be done with all years divisible by 4,000. Bridges of that sort, however, may well be left to cross to those who come to them.

"CHARITY." (Selected for The Times-Dispatch.) "Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

"And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

"Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.

"Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

"Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

"Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

"But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

"For now we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."—1 Cor. XIII.

A policeman arrested a man for whistling on the street, and charged him before the magistrate with showing—these are the cop's own words—"no technique and little regard for the laws of harmony." A nice prize to the cop who cannot guess whether this took place in Boston or somewhere else.

Northern visitors in our city did not fail to comment upon the marked difference between the splendid February 29th of Richmond and the puny, puny, puny day of February 29th as they had observed in Nutty New York and Willamstown, Virginia.

Now that it is alleged that the President is learning esperanto, we suppose it will only be a question of days before the reckless speaker wings of the Union has dubbed it desperanto.

"Nominate a good man for President," says L. S. Chanler to the New York World. "A?" Mr. Bryan naturally wonders why Chanler did not say "The."

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