GREAT FALLS DAILY TRIBUNE

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EDITORIAL PAGE

RAILROADS IN 1920.

THE railroads of the United States are certainly deserving of high praise for the record they have made since they were turned back to private operation in the light of the statement made by Thomas DeWitt Cuyler, chairman of the Association of Railway Executives, and made public the other day in a Washington dispatch. They took hold of their properties less than nine months ago. They found them in a very much disorganized condition, and soon after they started in to run them they were confronted with "outlaw strikes," and other obstacles which added to their difficulties. There can be no doubt that increased efficiency as compared with government operation has marked their return to their private owners. The shippers know that from their own experiences without having the figures given us by Mr. Cuyler to guide them. But these are interesting and convincing in themselves. They tell a remarkable story of good work. Each freight car has averaged to move six and one-third miles per day more than it did under government ownership, and it now travels on the average a little more than 28? miles per day. It also carries a heavier load by 1.7 tons, to be exact. Cars standing loaded but unmoved have declined more than seventy-five per cent and now number 21,991 as against 103,237 on March 1, when the government turned over the roads to the private owners. They have substantially reduced the number of cars and engines which were idle because laid up for repairs. With this record it is not so strange to learn that with the deteriorated plant they have turned over to them they have have handled a larger business in the last nine months in tonnage than they ever handled before. It is a splendid record and one the railroad executives and the public may well view with great satisfaction.

Yet when we turn to the financial side of their record it is less assuring. They failed to make six per cent net on their operations based on the actual value of their property used in transportation. They failed by a pretty wide margin at that. No doubt there are special reasons for this. In the first place a good many states have refused to permit them to charge the rates fixed by the Interstate Commerce Commission as necessary to produce six per cent net. While they have enjoyed these new rates on interstate business they have not as yet been able to get them on intra state business. In a good many states like Montana the statute has fixed the maximum rate they may charge and it is lower than the rate on which the Interstate Commerce Commission figured when they made the new rate. This has made it necessary for the railroads to go into the federal courts to assail such denials. While so far court decisions have been generally in favor of the railroads in these cases, yet they are not as yet actually getting the money. Then in recent months there has been considerable reduction in railroad traffic due in part to slowing down of industries and in part to a pretty general tendency on the part of farmers and producers of livestock to hold their products from the market in the hope of higher prices.

Now in order to get and keep good railroad service it is necessary to pay for the service adequately and even liberally. That is as truly a fundamental principle as it is that it is necessary to feed a horse well if it is to haul for you a maximum load and keep it up. Cut down the horses's rations below a reasonable feed, and its efficiency as a draught horse will surely decline after a short time. It is the same with a railroad. Therefore it is with some concern and misgivings that we learn that the railroads of the country only earned about four per cent on the actual value of their property used in transportation. Four per cent may give a moderate kick to beer, but it will not stimulate railroad investment any. Six per cent is too low also though that is all the law contemplates their earning. It ought to be eight per cent at least, for that is only the normal wages of capital in these days when it is scarce and all the nations of the world are competing for its services at that price. So the railroads of the country are working on a half price wage scale for the capital invested in them. As long as that condition exists they will get no private capital to invest in them. And they need it not by millions, but by billions, to make the extensions needed and furnish new and better equipment. It is true the government proposes to loan them small dabs of money for equipment at low rates, but such loans are only a drop in the bucket of their needs.

That is why we say that while the record made by the railroads since they took them back from the government is cheering so far as increased efficiency is concerned we do not feel that the record is satisfactory or will be permanent until we are shown that the net profits made by the railroads are sufficient to furnish an adequate return for the capital invested in them.

GREAT BRITAIN'S NAVY.

GREAT BRITAIN is not building any more capital war ships just now. Japan and the United States have both an ambitious program of dreadnaught construction under way, but Great Britain is not laying down a single new keel. Still if any one thinks that Britain has lost her determination to rule the waves they have another think coming. The fact seems to be that the British admiralty have a hunch that these great monsters costing thirty to thirty-five million dollars apiece are out of date and wasted money, and that better results in naval power can be had by spending the money in other ways, and that is why they are not building new capital ships just now. They are turning their attention to naval weapons that cost a good deal less and may be more efficient because they fight from the air above and the water underneath the big dreadnaughts. The London Times speaks quite plainly and frankly on the subject when it declares that Great Britain will make any sacrifice necessary to preserve the old tradition that "Britain rules the wave." It says:

"If the British admiralty hold to their present policy of inaction in construction, Great Britain will, in some three years' time, be the third naval power in tonnage of capital ships. This country has no battleship which wholly embodies the lessons of the Jutland battle, though modifications in the design of the hood were made after the battle. The fleet is a pre-Jutland fleet; whereas, both in the United States and Japan there are building capital ships as superior to the pre-Jutland ships of the British navy as the dreadnaught was superior to any warship afloat in her day.

"These facts reduce to their true proportions the recent utterances of the spokesmen of the board of admiralty upon economies. They are insignificant to the point of pettiness unless the admiralty have a definite policy as regards construction. In the arcana of the admiralty, plans may already exist for another revolution in naval shipbuilding as important as that effected by the production of the first dreadnaught. But we doubt it; and even if it were true, we should still regard it as a matter requiring the gravest consideration. This country will not likely return to that stealthy rivalry in naval armaments which it supported with difficulty before the war. Rivalry in actual building there may still have to be, and a measure of secrecy about plans and designs is a dictate of common sense. But rivalry in the pre-war sense of hostile intention masked by every device of political protestation and espionage—for this there should be no place as between the United States, Great Britain and Japan.

"Before the war the fleet of the United States was never reckoned by the British admiralty as among the possibly hostile naval elements upon which the two-power standard was based. The common achievements of the two fleets during the war—of which Admiral Sims has just reminded both countries in his book—have certainly not weakened this tradition. So with Japan. She has long been our ally; her great ships swept the oceans in close co-operation with ours throughout the war; she shares the national pride of our island people in a great and formidable fleet. Yet we have to realize that as matters now stand, events will relegate the British fleet, in a very few years, to the third place, reckoned by capital ships, among the fleets of the world. Nothing, in a matter of this kind, can be more mischievous than over-reticence.

"Defense by sea is still the very condition of the existence of the British empire; and the debt of the world to the pacific influence of the British navy is wholly beyond calculation. Whether the continuance of these two great functions of the British navy—the indispensable functions of defense and the incidental, but indisputably valuable function of policing the seas—can still be insured without the retention of the old primacy in capital ships cannot yet be determined. But the moment is at hand when it will have to be determined, for it is certain that the peoples of the whole empire will santion no navy policy that should jeopardize their absolute security by sea. If security still depends upon a sufficiency of capital ships, then the peoples of the empire will provide them, as their forefathers did, at whatever financial sacrifice. The duty of primary decision lies upon the admiralty; and it must be quick decision, for the empire peace cabinet, when it meets in June, will expects to have adequate plans for empire security by sea ready to its hand."

The SPIRIT of AMERICA

DAILY EDITORIAL DIGEST

Exclusively for The Tribune by the Consolidated Press Association

Today's Subject:

THE CRY STILL "MORE SHIPS."

With the question of disarmament again to be discussed in Europe and with America outside the league and unrepresented at the naval conferences, this country is presented with a problem, upon the solution of which editorial writers are unable to agree. Just what America's course should be is solved by various newspapers in various ways, or, in most cases, left unsolved. Some of the League of Nations enthusiasts put down the country's inability to act as a result of refusing to accept the covenant. On the other hand, many consider that Mr. Wilson was wrong in declining to join informally with the other nations' negotiations for disarmament.

The Pittsburg Leader (Prog.-Rep.) believes that the whole question is based upon the power of the peoples rather than the wishes of the governments. It says:

"There is only one way in which disarmament can be affected. Only one way in which war can be prevented. Every statesman and politician in Europe and America knows what that way is. Every statesman and politician in Europe and America hesitates to try it. The majority are afraid to try it. The way is to leave the decisions to the will and wish of the people, the cannon fodder, the actual victims of war."

Some writers feel that disarmament itself is a duty that can be accomplished. Among them is the Springfield Republican (Ind.), which believes that America's path is clear. "She is in a position of leadership," it says, "in the matter of reduction of expenditure on armaments." The rest of the world naturally waits on America's decision." Writers holding this opinion condemn the action of the president in not sending representatives to take part in the discussion to that end and the New York Evening Mail (Ind.) expresses this sentiment by declaring that this refusal on the "technical grounds" that we are not in the league, "will appear to most Americans regrettable." The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune (Rep.) adds: "The League of Nations can go right ahead with its disarmament program confident of American co-operation in or out of the league membership."

But there are a great number of newspapers which seem to feel sincerely that we cannot take our part in the task of reducing the possibilities of war outside the pale of the league. The Sioux City Tribune (Ind.) thinks that "not only can we not take part" in this effort, "but our non-participation is bound to hold up others." This leaves a responsibility upon the United States, the Norfolk Virginian Pilot (Ind. Dem.) declares, that can be avoided "only by joining the league members" and the Lynchburg News (Dem.) supplies the point to these remarks by citing Japan's excuse for not supporting a naval holiday; namely, "that America was not a member of the League of Nations." Japan's course in this matter, the Milwaukee Journal (Ind.) considers "justifiable" and "by staying out of the league, America, foremost among the nations desiring peace, places herself in the strange position of being the one nation which bars the world movement to minimize war."

Then there are those who, while they do not urge conquest and decry imperialism, are so convinced that there is no hope of securing unity among the great military powers, that they feel attempts are useless and that old policies must be continued. "Human progress has not reached the point where justice rather than might is the rule of conduct among nations," says the Birmingham Age-Herald (Dem.) and the Seattle Times (Ind.), recalling the lesson of 1917, asserts:

"The good faith of Europe is decidedly open to question. If it really favors disarmament it can proceed with its own program, relying upon the reasonableness and peacefulness of America. But America would blunder grievously if it reposed overmuch confidence in Europe's protestations not backed by action in the way of actual reduction of armaments."

The Savannah News (Dem.) appears to favor "safety first" or at least, "meanwhile":

"Months are but days in the development of a navy," it says. "The safest thing to do is to keep the navy at the top point of preparedness until there is an agreement to cut down armaments and a means of seeing that agreement is kept. That is business. It is national life insurance."

A number of representative arguments, among them the menace of bolshevism (which the Detroit Free Press (Ind.) also mentions) are mustered by the Albany Knickerbocker Press (Rep.) for maintaining large navies under the present conditions. It further suggests that an agreement, or even a tripartite covenant binding Japan, Great Britain and America, would result advantageously. The Press says:

"One outstanding factor in world affairs which must be resolved before talk of disarmament can go beyond the stage of theory is the condition of Russia. With Russia stabilized so that the world could be assured of its safety in that direction, much could be done. Japan understands well enough what is to be feared from the quality of madness which now controls in that unhappy land. And another factor to be considered is that the falling apart of the British Empire—the loss of India, say—would be distinctly a bad thing for the world and for humanity.

"Great Britain's need for an armament sufficient to assure the maintenance of its empire must be admitted, just as the United States must be permitted a force that is adequate to protect its interests in the Americas, and just as any nation must be allowed the right to maintain itself against the possibility of its own destruction. You will never get disarmament below that level, this side of the millenium."

Some of the newspapers find the Republican party the obstacle in the way. The Rochester Herald (Ind.), describes the "attitude of the President-elect" as "opposed to all concerted action with other nations to avert war" and "the result of the election shows" it declares, that the people are apparently "bent on maintaining huge military and naval preparations." The Johnstown Democrat (Dem.) feels that "Harding nurses imperialistic dreams" and sees "no hint of a pause in the mad career" of expansion, and no hope until "a saving remnant" of Americans brings the nation back to sanity.

But more sanguine is the New York Tribune (Rep.) urging a status quo in naval affairs here,—then an argument; for, it concludes, "we can and we must subdue the fool jingoes in our midst. Let us have peace—with honor."

The Haskin Letter

By FREDERIC J. HASKIN

JAIL-BREAKERS.

Washington, D. C., Dec. 26.—Prison escapes seem to be unusually numerous of late. One man miraculously departs from jail with three fellow-prisoners and no clue is found. At a reformatory several desertions lead to the suspicion that a key is being circulated among the inmates. And there are similar stories in the papers almost every day. They suggest that jail-breaking is a frequent occurrence.

We put the question up to Earl Dudding, head of the Prisoner's Relief society, and got this reassuring answer:

"There is no great menace from escaped convicts. There are four million inmates in penal institutions in this country. Half a million men, women, boys and girls are convicted of some offense every year, and as many more are freed from prisons. Compare these big figures with the average number of escapes a year, which is almost five hundred."

Five hundred convicts break away, but Dr. Dudding explains that where even 50 years ago they might have stood a fair chance of permanent freedom, today they are often retaken immediately. A comparatively few years ago a refugee had a chance to cover his tracks and lose his identity in the time it took to notify sheriffs and spread word of the escape. Now cables, the telephone, railroads, even airplanes, if necessary, can be called on to speed in pursuit.

If he is not taken at once, the convict's manner betrays him. Publicity may have gone ahead of him, he fears, and so he is wary of every one he meets. The man across the lunch room table who inquires between bites of a sandwich where he works may be a detective. A policeman looks at him and he is thrown into a panic. Eventually he gives himself away in his efforts to be inconspicuous.

Getting Back In

"Nearly every day," says Doctor Dudding, "one of more men of this type come to me for help because the situation is too much for them. There was a typical case just a few days ago. The man came in and asked to talk with me. He kept looking at me, trying to decide whether he could trust me with his secret.

"'Well,' I said to him, 'when did you escape?'

"The blow nearly knocked him over. He had no idea he showed his fear so plainly. Then he looked relieved. We talked the matter over and I showed him that the only thing to do was to go back and finish his term. Then he could walk the streets a free man. 'You aren't free now,' I told him. 'You don't dare talk to anyone.'

"'That's true,' he said 'But if I go back I'll be put in irons, and I was a trusty.'

"'No, not if you give yourself up,'" I told him. "I will write to the superintendent and tell him that you are coming back voluntarily, and ask him to give you your old place."

The man agreed, and here is the surprising part of the story, to one who does not understand prisons and prisoners as Dr. Dudding does. The man was not put under guard or handcuffed. Dr. Dudding told him to come back at a certain time. When he came he was given a ticket to the jail town and a letter which had been obtained from the superintendent of the prison saying that he was traveling by permission of the prison authorities. The convict was to carry this letter with him, for he was wanted by the police and might have been arrested on his way. This man did not make any attempt to use the letter or the ticket to escape. The adventure was over for him.

Something like this happens about a hundred times a year. Escaped prisoners from all over the country come in to an office of the Prisoners' Relief Society or write to Dr. Dudding to know what to do. He tells them, as he told the man just mentioned, that they cannot expect to live honorably or in peace until they have been freed by the state, and then, when he has their permission, he does what he can to make the return to prison easy for them. He says that he has never failed to convince anyone who appealed to him of the wisdom of this course—even in cases of escapes from life imprisonment.

He Lost His Nerve.

Such an instance occurred when Dr. Dudding was on a western trip some time ago. A man read in the newspaper of the work of this Dr. Dudding, who had been a prisoner himself, and came to see him. The man explained that 15 years before he had, in a fit of anger, killed a girl who refused to marry him. He was given life imprisonment, but served only a few months when friends, who were indignant at what they felt was an unjust sentence, helped him to escape. He went west and built up a business and a name for himself. But the shadow of fear was always worrying him. After consulting Dr. Dudding, he went back to the prison. He served four years and was pardoned.

As Dr. Dudding says, escapes of any kind are rare, and the romantic escape, from prison at least, is seldom heard of any more. William Hohenzollern, interned in a Dutch castle, apparently never thinks of putting poison in the guards' afternoon tea or of burrowing his way out of the grounds of his estate, as any high-spirited monarch used to do in like circumstances. Louis Napoleon got out of a similar awkward situation quite naturally by strolling out of prison disguised in workman's clothes, and carrying a plank on his shoulder.

Still more ingenious was the famous Casanova. He was not of royal blood, but his exit from a prison cell over the room where the dreaded inquisition met is one of the most famous escapes in history.

Casanova's escape has been spread out over several volumes. The most amusing incident is that in which he desires to send a crowbar to a fellow-prisoner. He planned to conceal the crowbar in a big Bible, but it stuck out a few inches beyond the covers, so he arranged with the jailer—who was either naturally or intentionally half-witted—to carry a dish of macaroni and the Bible to his friend. The platter was very large and very full. The crowbar was placed in the Bible and the dish was laid on top of the Book. The idea was that the jailer would have to walk so cautiously to avoid spilling the sauce that he would not notice the crowbar projecting from the book below the dish.

An Ingenious Escape

You can imagine a modern prisoner evolving such a wild plan or a modern warden guilelessly bearing unexamined gifts from one cell to another. Yet the ruse succeeded, and with many more breathlessless adventures, Casanova and a fellow-prisoner battered their way out of one of the best prisons of 18th century Italy.

In Casanova's day, a prisoner was shut up in a fortress six feet thick and then left alone to get out any way he liked. Once a day somebody came around to see that he was there and after this interruption, digging, rope-making, and other preparations went on undisturbed. Now watchful guards in the corridors, and walls too thin to shut out the noise from pounding, seriously interfere with the traditional methods of a dramatic escape.

Once in a great while, indeed, guards are still hoodwinked by an audacious trick. Some years ago, in Newgate, Connecticut, a very unusual and original departure from prison occurred.

A prisoner had died, and his body was lying in a pine box in the chapel ready for burial. A colored prisoner realized the possibilities of that box. Pretending illness with convincing realism at the dinner table, the negro was permitted to leave the room and go to his cell unattended. Instead, he went to the chapel, removed the body from the box and hid it in a corner. Then he fixed the nails in the lid so that the box would open easily, and got inside.

After dinner, three Irish prisoners and a guard were sent to get the box. The four got into the prison wagon with their burden, and drove off to the cemetery. As they set the box down by the grave a moan came from it. The men stood staring at it with bulging eyes. Then a louder groan arose.

"Howly murthur!" yelled the Irish convicts. "The corpse is aloive!" and they tore back to the jail, the guard only one step behind them.

The "corpse" lost no time in coming out of his hiding place. The guard's gun lay where he had dropped it in his flight, and the prison wagon was also conveniently left. With these to help him, the fleeing convict had a good start before the pursuit began and he got away.

This is an escape after the pattern of medieval affairs. There is adventure in it. But such tricks are rarely planned, let alone executed. Mostly, prisoners who depart unofficially from jail do so by collusion with a guard, by force (in small jails not strongly policed) or occasionally by breaking their word when given liberties under the honor system. And when the prisoner does carefully break out of jail by one of those methods he usually ends by coming to Dr. Dudding to help him break in again.

Pungent Paragraphs

The Cream of the Nation's Humor

Selected for The Tribune.

The landlord who asks others to join him in putting rents down to a reasonable basis is not yet the center of a crowd.—Pittsburgh Gazette.

It must be hard to have such a large income that one can't pay the tax on it.—El Paso Herald.

Federal enforcement officer says it is a "citizen's duty, whenever he scents liquor to trail it." We are good citizens, but one has to work once in a while.—Richmond Times Dispatch.

New York makes a great show of catching steel men and stone men, but it's nothing to the show New York makes chasing iron men.—Philadelphia North American.

Boy, brush the dust off last New Year's resolutions.—Rock Island Argus.

Baron Goto refused a request that he become mayor of Tokyo. He said—oh, you say it yourself.—Wilmington (Del.) Journal.

Order issued by military authorities in Ireland says persons who appear with hands in pockets will be shot on sight. It must be a terrible place for poor father.—Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

When Venus de Milo submitted to disarmament she had no idea the world would make such a fuss over following her example.—Los Angeles Express.

One sport writer says Jack Dempsey takes better care of himself than any former champion. This care doesn't date just back to the Willard fight, either. It extended clear back through the war.—Kansas City Star.

SOMEBODY IS ALWAYS TAKING THE JOY OUT OF LIFE.