

OUR PECULIAR STREET RAILWAY CONDITIONS

It would seem that there is no longer any reason why the general public should refrain from admitting that it was beautifully "gold bricked" in the matter of the Citizens' Street Railway Co. We were all sore at the disgraceful service offered by the Traction Co., and sore against the non-resident boss whose sole desire seemed to be to get all out of it he could and give back as little as possible in the way of service. We hailed with joy something that promised relief.

When a number of reputable business men banded themselves together and organized a competing company we rejoiced. First, because it seemed to us that competition would give us increased service, extension of lines and emancipation from a seemingly insolent management. The city council granted about everything the new company asked for, and pretty soon we were all as happy as clams because we were getting needed lines into new sections of the city, increased service in old sections, and betterment in all directions. But it was all a dream soon to be dispelled. We were so all-fired anxious to force the old company to do something that we failed to realize that competition in such a public utility was not only impracticable but really impossible. Some there were who knew it all the time—and they are the ones who have profited by the deal.

In a short time—shorter than might have been expected—the merger took place. The new company swallowed the old, and by the usual process. Holders of stock in the old company gave it up in return for an increased number of shares in the new company. A sort of bonus, you know, for getting into the game.

What is the situation now? The present Traction Co. managers, who were the managers of the once Citizens' Co., want relief from a lot of things that they professed to be delighted with when they were asking favors from the municipality. They have secured a reduction in the occupation tax that they really asked permission to pay a couple of years ago. They have abandoned in whole or in part service along the newer lines, despite the fact that many people invested their money along those lines under the impression that they were to have superior street car service. Today, after giving up many valuable concessions, presenting an opportunity for a pretty bit of "high financing," Lincoln is no better off, all things considered, in the way of car service than it was before the Citizens' Co. began business, and certainly not nearly so well off as it was six months before the merger. The Traction Co.'s claim of "car mileage" may be quite correct, but any man of ordinary intelligence can take a pencil and a bit of paper and demonstrate beyond a peradventure that fully 25 per cent of the boasted car mileage is of no practical benefit to the people. Take the main stem from Ninth street to Twenty-seventh street—eighteen blocks. That is a mile and a half, or three miles for the round trip. Seven car lines use this—East S, Cemetery, Thirty-third and Vine, Havelock, University Place, State Farm and Havelock. Approximately 376 cars travel between Ninth and Twenty-seventh every day, covering approximately 1,128 miles a day, or 400,000 miles a year. This is 25 per cent of the total car mileage boasted of by the Traction Co. Will any sane man contend that this is the kind of car mileage service that is of practical benefit? The car mileage boasted of might all be confined between Ninth and Twenty-seventh—but it wouldn't help 97 per cent of the population a single bit.

But all this is neither here nor there in the present contention. In the language of the good old lady of our acquaintance, "Lincoln having burned herself ought to sit on the blister." That's what we actually did when we boosted the Citizens' Co. and then permitted the merger. And if we had possessed ordinary horse sense, the merger would have struck us as an assured fact from the very start.

In brief, and to the point, should we take our medicine gracefully, or should we plead the "baby act?"

When the two street railway companies were consolidated the old company owned property to the value of about \$1,250,000. The Citizens' Co. possessed about \$400,000 worth, and the Citizens'

Interurban about \$100,000 worth. The consolidated company owned property not to exceed \$1,750,000 in value. So far so good. But that wasn't enough. As soon as possible after consolidation the hydraulics were set to work and the water began flowing in. The first act was to issue and sell preferred stock to the amount of \$1,020,000. Then there was issued and distributed among the stockholders common stock to the amount of \$1,651,800. This is a total issue of \$2,671,800 on property worth less than \$1,750,000—or aqua pura to the amount of practically one million dollars. County Attorney Tyrrell sets the water at approximately \$2,000,000, but we want to be conservative.

But what of it? Did we not invite the hydraulic game when we consented to give the Citizens' Co. permission to lay the foundation for the pumps?

Doubtless the new management, for all its activity in hydraulics, is up against it. Certainly the public is—no doubt about that. And the company says it is unable to do anything to afford relief because it has no money available, and is unable to raise money because of the unfavorable light thrown upon its financial efforts by the county attorney. We can offer no possible solution unless it is this: Let the company retire all that common stock. It was issued for no consideration. Then let it proceed to sell some stock, investing the proceeds in betterments. This may not be possible—we can not say, for we admit our ignorance of high finance. But we are not ignorant of the fact that the car service is not what it should be.

County Attorney Tyrrell is seemingly determined to prosecute his case against the Traction Co. to the limit. The company ought to welcome this if it is honest in its contentions. The public ought to back the county attorney, for if his contention is right the public wants the mess straightened out. If he is wrong the company is entitled to pursue its way unhampered by litigation.

In the meantime disgusted and disappointed patrons are holding indignation meetings and kicking about rotten service—or no service at all. The cars are becoming dilapidated, and some of them are really offenses to public decency and menaces to public health.

The situation is not a pleasant one. Would it be possible for the city to condemn the street railway, get it for a reasonable price, issue bonds in payment therefor, and operate it just as it operates the water department? If it is, isn't that the logical as well as the sensible solution of the whole problem?

Times in Nebraska have changed since the days when the booze dispensary of the state house was in the northwest room on the first floor and the penitentiary contract was a lucious graft for party workers.

If Mr. Whedon's letters to Senator Burkett are written in the Funke building, we advise the insurance companies carrying the fire risks to cancel their policies and demand a higher premium for new ones.

And just to think that after all the trouble this county option issue has forced upon us, we'll have to fight it all over again, no matter how it goes this time.

Senator Burkett's campaign managers will have to score Whedon's latest as "too hot to handle."

By the way, is there any congressional campaign in the First district this year?

The attention of the state department of public health is called to the odiferous condition of Nebraska politics just now.

A lot of men are finding it extremely difficult to keep their political millinery on straight this year.