

**The Alliance Herald**  
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**AN END TO SLIPSHOD METHODS.**

Considerable comment has been aroused among the voters of the county by the article in the last issue of *The Herald* which explained the impossibility, in view of the way the records of county road expenditures have been kept for the past five years, of getting together any accurate data to present to the state committee which next Tuesday will begin to investigate the matter of whether roads can be built and maintained cheaper by counties or under state and federal control. The article was not primarily intended as any direct criticism of the Box Butte county commissioners. In days past, both Alliance newspapers have pointed out some of the bad results of the rather slipshod methods then in use in handling the county finances, especially in regard to road making.

The evils are not those of Box Butte county alone. The legislature has been meeting regularly every two years for over four decades, and each session finds a number of new laws on the statutes. Some of these impose new duties on county commissioners. These officials, until a few years ago, held office for but two years. The job is not attractive. The salary is low, and there are all kinds of kicks and complaints. The result has been that in most counties, commissioners do not long stay with the job. About as soon as a man gets on to the ropes, he retires or is retired, and another man has to learn all the dope, and in turn he makes way for a fresh victim.

It's safe to say that there are a good many laws on the books that are disregarded by the commissioners of most of the counties of the state. Perhaps these officials do not know of them. Perhaps the taxpayers pay less attention to this office than they do to others. Undoubtedly, the constant change in the personnel of county boards has much to do with the situation.

Thus, the law requires some county supplies, such as printing, shall be purchased only by bid. It would be a safe bet that half the counties in the state buy their supplies wherever the individual county officials or the commissioners desire. The proper procedure is to draw up a list of probable requirements in pens, pencils, carbon paper, typewriter ribbons, stationery, blank books and other forms, and ask for bids. It has never been done here—it has not been done in many other counties. Undoubtedly the different officials do their best in buying supplies, but there is no competition among the dealers, and this is what the law apparently desires.

And so, when the legislature some years ago, passed a law requiring that counties appoint a highway commissioner and keep a systematic record of expenditures on all county roads, giving each a number and keeping a separate ledger account for each separate road project within the county, a number of counties overlooked it or passed it up. As a matter of fact, it has only been within the past few years that road expenditures were of any great importance. Five or ten years ago, the entire sum spent for road improvements was only about \$5,000. Now it is six times that amount, and more, in Box Butte county. Where, formerly, any commissioner could keep the various claims in his head, now, with that amount of money spent yearly, it is well nigh impossible.

The commissioners have found that the road expenditures have been increasing faster than they realized. They have this year taken steps, following Highway Commissioner Knight's plan of last year, to see to it that a systematic record of claims of all kinds is kept. From now on, even though claimants submit a number of duplicate claims, the duplicates will be weeded out before the commissioners have to consider them. In the past, with the old careless system in vogue, there were very few claims that slipped by and were approved—and in every one of these cases, the commissioners say, the error was discovered sooner or later and correction made. In the future, with an up-to-date claim register, it will be impossible. The commissioners cannot be particularly blamed for not immediately adopting businesslike methods, for it is only in the past few years that the volume of money handled was large enough to demand systematized accounting. It has always been possible, with a lot of

extra work, to sort out claims and make tabulations, but this will not, in the future, be necessary.

It's a cheering reflection that, despite the methods used in approving claims, the county has not lost any money. In the future, there will be no possibility of approving the wrong claims or allowing the duplicates to pile up until there is an opportunity for overpayment.

The chief danger in the prevalence of these methods among commissioners over the state is that the counties, by their careless financial methods, may damn themselves. The state committee investigating roads will bring in a recommendation to the next legislature concerning the discontinuance of federal aid and state supervision. Many counties have built better roads at less money than the state highway bureau. But, with a hodge-podge assortment of figures such as must necessarily go forward from Box Butte county, will they be in any position to prove it?

The chief blessing will be that public attention will be called to the old methods, and it should be impossible, in the future, for a relapse to the old slipshod ways.

**ARGUING BY THE BOOK.**

There may be other methods that are "just as good," but experience is, after all, the best guide. A man gifted with a good imagination may be able to picture the discomforts of the frozen north, the mental agonies of prison life, or the evils of the dance, but, as a rule, unless he has been there himself, his arguments lack conviction.

There are too many reformers these days who go by the book—someone else's book. This, it would seem, is the case with the Rev. Mearl C. Smith of this city, who is giving a series of sermons against the dance. The sermons are exactly what might be expected in the investigator who has done comparatively little research work of his own, but bases his conclusions upon evidence secured by others. The conclusions, of course, have no more value than the evidence upon which they are based. This evidence it is impossible to evaluate, for it isn't first hand. It's something like the case of Kipling's "Tomlinson":

"Nay, this I ha' heard," quoth Tomlinson, "and this was noised abroad, And this I ha' got from a Belgian book on the word of a dead French lord."

"Oh, this I have felt, and this I have guessed, and this I have heard men say, And this they wrote that another man wrote of a carl in Norrway."

Thus, we would conclude from Mr. Smith's sermon that "the degrading animal dances" are no longer an art, but an excitement. "Starting in resorts and among the more depraved members of the '400', the hugging capers called trots and whirls have invaded schools and homes. And thoughtful observers, as they have watched the degraded animal dances have wondered just what was expressed in the 'tango,' the 'grizzly bear' and the 'bunny hug.'"

This brings us to the important point that if one is to argue by the book, it is well to choose a book that is up-to-date. For in Alliance—and these sermons are apparently intended for home consumption—these so-called "animal dances" went out many moons ago during the great war. If Mr. Smith were carrying on a personal investigation, he would have discovered this. The important thing for an Alliance audience is what, if anything, is wrong with the dance in Alliance—today. Everyone will agree that Salome's dance was a vicious thing, and accomplished a vicious purpose, but aside from the fact that it is historically interesting, it bears a little relation to the dance in Alliance today as the animal dances that are anathema to Mr. Smith and the dancing master whom he quoted.

If Mr. Smith will investigate the dancers and the conditions under which they dance in Alliance, he will find that "the books" have been a most treacherous guide. He'll find people with as strong a sense of right and wrong as his own who will uphold this amusement. He'll discover that many of his arguments intended to influence Alliance people, do not fit the community or the people he is trying to convince, just as his exceptions of the dance do not correspond with the facts. And he will also find that there is room for improvement in the dance. By damning the dance in its every phase, he will get nowhere. By intelligent criticism, he could bring about needed reforms, locally, and we assume that is where he expects to see the fruits of his sermons.

There is room for improvement in the dance in Alliance, although not in the way he suggests. The chief evil does not lie in the dances themselves, for present day dances are comparatively simple and sensible—easy to do, pleasant to take and harmless. The trouble lies with the dancers. Little high school girls, early in their teens, attend public dances, and, unchaperoned, stay there until midnight. Public dances draw a crowd that, to say the

least, is not all select. It's true that the floor managers are conscientious and careful, but unchaperoned girls cannot be prevented from dancing with boys and young men with whom they would not dance were their parents or an older friend present. Don't mistake us—the dances are not immoral—but at public dances girls are not so choice of partners as they would be under sympathetic supervision.

The remedy lies in Alliance taking the same step that other cities have taken when confronted with a similar evil. Instead of condemning the dance and making a futile oratorical effort to do away with it, why not make the amusement innocuous? In the larger cities, and some of the smaller, there are high school dances, with teachers as chaperones. Music is furnished by victrola or school orchestra. The fun is over at a reasonable hour. The immoral and suggestive influences simply aren't present. The young people are together, with undesirables excluded. It has been shown that where there are dances of this nature open to the younger generation, the public dances lose their appeal. But dance they will, and if not at school or church, under proper influences, they will dance elsewhere under conditions that are not so wholesome.

All over the country schools and even some churches are doing this. Alliance school authorities have never favored it. If the Rev. Mr. Smith wants to do this city a signal service, he will change his mode of attack. If he were to demand supervised dances for school children, under adequate supervision, there would be some opportunity to put it across. Otherwise, he will succeed only in stirring up strife—for his too general statements will have this effect.

To condemn the dance because some people go to perdition though it is like condemning food because some men and women overeat. Food fills a natural want, and the dance a natural desire. Because some men suicide with rope, shall the manufacture of rope be forbidden? Men have gambled on horses. Shall horses be abolished? Some men and women spend more money on automobiles than they can afford. This may endanger their immortal souls. Let us haste to outlaw the automobile. There's no limit to the possibilities of such a line of argument.

**MORALS AND THE MOVIES.**

One swallow doesn't make a summer, according to the old proverb. It's probably as true as any of the ancient sayings that have come down to us and have been rather overworked along the way. Arguing from that basis, it is but fair to concede that one instance of crime by movie people—or half a dozen, if we want to be liberal—should not be accepted as conclusive proof that the personnel of the movie industry is rotten to the core. A few instances of booze parties; more than a few cases of illicit love, and a murder or two—these things are not sufficient to brand the entire galaxy of screen stars. Nor, because we find sweet, mild-mannered, angelic Mary Miles Minter writing mash notes to a director who seems to have been a fairly successful Lothario, are we justified in concluding that all the angel-faced stars are merely posing. At least, this is the way certain producers are talking since the Taylor murder, and they seem to be sincere in thinking that they have an unassailable argument.

However, when one bases an argument upon the old proverbs, the effect is something like wordy controversies in which the Bible is accepted as the authority. Almost anything can be proved by Holy Writ if one is well enough acquainted with it. Proverbs and wise sayings have like-wise a sort of universal application. Thus, we recall that "Where there is much smoke, there must be some fire." Then wife comes home after a week's visit with mother dear, and discovers the library table cleared of its cover, poker chips scattered about the house, corks over the rug and the stale air bearing the scent of many cigarettes and other stimulants, who will say she is not justified in drawing certain conclusions? If there is a strange perfume lingering near the fireplace, and if a lace handkerchief is discovered in hubby's coat pocket, it may be a perfectly innocent matter, or a prank of some kind on the part of his pals, but friend wife, in view of the circumstances, rightly concludes that it's up to hubby to explain.

That's about the position that the movie people are finding themselves up against. Some of the larger and the better class of producers realize that they have the floor right now, and they are coming out with frank statements of conditions and are promising to do better. Adolph Zukor has a plan for a vigilance committee, composed of men and women with a keen sense of responsibility and a fair degree of personal honor, who shall keep an eye on the movie folk, attend their social gatherings and keep their eyes and ears open. When any star, or any lesser screen light, shall prove to be unfit to associate with decent people, the

axe will fall. Contracts will be abrogated, and a black list will be established. Mr. Zukor believes, and rightly, too, that public opinion will stand back of such a move.

Of course, that is all from the standpoint of the producers. These fellows are interested in the box office receipts. They realize that there are certain offenses the public will overlook—such as the marriage of Doug and Mary—and others that are unpardonable—such as the Arbuckle affair. The big objection to moral censorship of this kind comes from the stars themselves. These stars are, for the most part, men and women who, without the tremendous advertising on the part of the producers, could not have attained their present prominence. Now, since they have received stellar honors, they forget that it wasn't entirely due to their personal merit. Arbuckle was a ham actor until some screen producer discovered him on the kerosene circuit, educated him and "made" him. There are dozens of players as capable as Mary Pickford or Doug Fairbanks, who saved their salaries, capitalized the publicity that others paid for, and are now doing their own producing, when they are doing anything. The headlines are the people who now consider themselves above censorship.

Thus, Doug and Mary are now taking a high and mighty attitude in regard to insinuations against their profession. "America is going to lose its motion picture industry unless criticism of its people stops," says Doug, and Mary bobs her little flaxen head in approbation. "Unless the intolerant critics of our industry quit attaching the stigma of narcotics, scrambled domesticity, purple loves and all the rest of it to our people, maybe Paris or some other capital will be the future center of picture manufacturers."

Bosh! Doug is talking through his hat. The one thing that movie producers in this country are worried about now is the strong foreign competition. Germany, for instance, makes as good films at much less cost than America, and only a few weeks ago the producers were waiting for a tariff protection. If the American film industry moves, it will have to take its chances with its competitors, and Doug doesn't want it, nor does Mary. Whenever producers or actors talk this way, the

thing to do is to turn them over the knee and apply the paddle where it will do the most good. The country managed to scrape along pretty well without either Doug or Mary for a

good many years, and it might decide, if they call too much attention to themselves, that they are drawing more money than they are worth.

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