

IT CAME TO NAUGHT.

THE EFFORT TO CONTROL RAILWAYS BY A COMMISSION.

A Steppfather That Is Powerless Against the Influence of an Indulgent Mother—One Sure Solution of the Transportation Problem.

(Special Correspondence.)

Some 13 years ago so much complaint was made of the unjust discriminations of the "common carriers," the railroads, that, after much agitation, the interstate commerce commission was appointed to help enforce the laws which congress made for their control.

In its report of 1895 the commission, being about ten years old, explained to congress very fully its peculiar situation. It had understood that its powers were very much limited by the provisions of the act that created it.

At first the commission, considering itself only an experiment, modestly forebore to undertake any litigation, only advising as to the justice of a case.

Sometimes the commission seems to have occupied the unpleasant position of a steppfather to some uncontrollable, unreasoning children, while the court was the sympathetic mother jealously justifying all the cunning ways of her favorites.

Much of the 1895 report is given to an exhaustive argument to congress proving that the commission's powers should be defined by congress rather than left for costly litigation in courts to determine.

The latest report, that of 1897, adds: "The situation has become intolerable, both from the standpoint of the public and of the carriers. Tariffs are disregarded, discriminations constantly occur, the price at which transportation can be obtained is fluctuating and uncertain."

At this point the judge succeeded in wrecking the inquiry and substituting his favorite monologue on the impossibility of ever doing anything for poor people, so extravagant are they, so unwilling to receive advice, and withal so dishonest.

Let us turn to one of the prophets. One of the promoters of the interstate commerce bill, in a speech before the Antimonopoly league at Cooper's institute, New York, in 1881, said:

"History proves that the public will not proceed to the logical and final solution of a difficult question until all compromises have failed. The people will not believe that a mere makeshift policy is worthless until they have tried it. They will have no teacher but experience."

An instance: The roads carrying flour from Minneapolis and St. Paul to the east varied from their legally published rates by making large secret rebates to certain shippers. "The inquiry was greatly hampered," says the report, "by the disappearance of material witnesses before subpoenas for their attendance could be served, the inability of several who did testify to recall transactions of their recent date and the evident reluctance of others to disclose any information bearing upon the subjects involved. All of the railway witnesses denied any knowledge of violations of the statute and most of the accounting officers testified that if rebates had been paid they would necessarily know about them and that their accounts did not show any such payments."

Investigations of coal rates in Virginia brought out the excuse for varying from published rates that "none of the coal carrying roads were maintaining their established rates."

The report of 1898 tells of the Texas and Pacific and the Southern Pacific making the through rates on a large number of kinds of goods from Liverpool, London and other foreign ports to San Francisco \$1.07, while for the same kind of goods from New Orleans to San Francisco it charged \$0.70. The commission considered this unjust, but the supreme court of the United States decided—three of its members dissenting—that these rates were made necessary by the character of the competition of steamboat lines, which the court said

the commission had failed to consider. This rate to foreign goods was necessary to secure the business, and the rate to domestic goods, higher by more than two-thirds, was also necessary, despite the well known protection and patriotic (!) sentiments of all railroads, in order to make the loss on the foreign goods.

A road must pay running expenses whether its cars are loaded or not. A manager might start with the best of intentions to keep to the published rates, but when other roads by secret underbidding secured his business he would see that his own prospects depended on his ability to secure business and dividends for stockholders rather than to keep the laws which an unbelieving congress had made and which a patient commission gently urged him to keep so far as practicable.

A manager, knowing only of the secret rates of his competitors by the fact that he gets the business or that some other road gets it, large shippers sometimes secure lower terms by withdrawing their freight from one road to another, even though the other gives no lower rates. As a manager values his position, he must strive in every way to make such secret rates as shall make his road prosperous.

The small business men cannot ascertain what rates are obtained by their all mighty competitors. They cannot fix their prices so as to obtain business, because of the uncertainty of their future profits. With a small capital, careful figuring is necessary. A large difference in freight rates alone enables one to sell just enough lower than another to divert just enough business to cause a failure. The successful competitor strips his fallen foe of his goods, paying but a small percent of their worth, and is able to advertise such bargains as to divert more business to himself and crush more of the smaller kind. Thus failure after failure occurs as a final result of unjust discriminations. Were it not for combinations the logical sequence is seen to be that one of each of parallel roads which had the most capital and one of each of the merchants and manufacturers in a certain area would survive all others.

But combination saves those who most effectually combine. Groups of railroads combine and wreck competitors, buying them to use against other railroads, just as the merchants and manufacturers use the goods of those whom they have wrecked.

A judge who has had much railroad experience was inquired of as to what he thought should be the remedy for unjust discrimination. He replied that the people could do nothing, as a legal training and a legal mind was necessary to understand such affairs. He liked the custom once existing in a certain Italian state. If a man suggested a new law, he was required to argue it before legal powers, and if it were not adopted he was put to death. This made people realize the serious character of lawmaking.

The questioners, however, said that law breaking was also serious and pressed the judge for a remedy, who finally replied that it would be for the interest of the roads in which he had invested if a law were passed making all freight rates uniform.

"But," said his questioners, with nonlegal minds, "if roads can't keep to the rates which they themselves establish with some knowledge of local surroundings, how could they keep to rates arbitrarily made for them?"

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"History proves that the public will not proceed to the logical and final solution of a difficult question until all compromises have failed. The people will not believe that a mere makeshift policy is worthless until they have tried it. They will have no teacher but experience. For these reasons I am willing to aid you in securing the interstate commerce bill. But it will disappoint you in its operation. . . . There can be no complete solution of the railway problem but the natural and inevitable one of government ownership."

Eighteen years of strife since then, years in which the strongest men have learned how to combine most effectually, and the number of people who believe in the largest possible combination, that of government ownership of monopolies, is risen to a possible majority. Some of our strongest leaders, however, still cherish the idea of taming and teaching the fierce owners of monopolies—of an alert, eternally vigilant public strictly controlling them all in the interests of fair competition—and the taming and teaching will be tried for a longer or shorter time.

An antitrust president, with an army of investigating committees, courts of perfect purity and an attorney general invulnerable and omnipresent, would indeed worry the captains of industry with questions of right and wrong which they have long ago ceased to regard. Some adjustments would be made in places and temporarily. But the great tide that sets toward combination will not be swept back.

Soon the voices that will be heard above all those that call for reaction will be those that call for more combination, more progress in the interests of all people. The poorest employees of a railroad will be intrusted equally with the man of moderate wealth whose life has been wrecked by monopoly. The hand that can control the rapidly concentrating business of the country is in the hand of the whole people, finally reclaiming what was its own.

New Salem, Mass.

MILBURN'S PRAYER.

It Was Offered Thirteen Years Ago, But Still Fits the Case.

On March 27, 1886, the Rev. Dr. Milburn, chaplain of the house of representatives, offered the following prayer:

"Give ear, O God of Jacob, and awaken us to see the danger which threatens the civilized world, a revolution more tremendous than any of which history tells, in which the scenes of the reign of terror may be enacted in every capital of Europe and America. For long the few have mastered the many, because they understood the open secret, the tools to them that can use them, but now the many have learned the secret of organization, drill and dynamite. Rouse the rich of the world to understand that the time has come for grinding, selfish monopoly to cease, that corporations may get agate in them with justice, honor, conscience and human kindness. Teach the rich men of this country that great fortunes are lent them by thee for other purposes than to build and decorate palaces, to found private collections of art, to stock wine cellars, to keep racing studs and yachts and find better company than hostlers, grooms and jockeys, poolplayers and bookmakers. Teach them, O God, that it is thee who has given them power to get these fortunes; that it is to prove them to know what is in their hearts, whether they will keep thy commandments or no, and that those commandments are, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself;' that if the rich men of our land keep these commandments the poor will follow the example, and we at least will be saved from the days of tribulation that are fast coming on all the world. Help us, O God, and save us!"

The prayer was entered on the record on motion of Mr. Grosvenor of Ohio. The attention of all for whom the prayer was offered is respectfully called to it once more.—Journal of the Knights of Labor.

Economy in Combination.

"It is estimated that the consolidation of all the Pittsburgh mining companies will mean a saving of over \$100,000 per month in salaries of clerks, salesmen and office rents," said a Cleveland man interested in the Pittsburgh coal trust to a reporter. "Where there are 20 clerks employed by the individual companies, one will be retained by the trust, and where hundreds of traveling salesmen have been employed, half a dozen will be retained to show the goods of the trust to its patrons. Ninety-five per cent of the business heretofore done by traveling men will be transacted by mail after the trust has been formed. Not only the salaries of the salesmen, but the traveling expenses will thus be saved. Where now there are 20 offices where the individual companies transact business, it is figured the trust will retain one. With the saving of transacting business on this basis the trust cannot help being a paying one."

Comment would be superfluous at this point. Every intelligent reader can see for himself or herself the benefits of combination. But how about the ownership of the trust?—Cleveland Citizen (Socialist).

The Twentieth Century's Task.

In an article on "The Building of an Empire," John Brisson Walker, proprietor of The Cosmopolitan, says: "From the pulpit we have had for 1,800 years beautiful doctrines of love and charity, while the laws of business and the laws governing social requirements have come down to us almost unchanged and in unbroken succession from the most brutal of pagan times. The student of laws may in vain search the speeches of Christian lawmakers, since they began to be recorded, for any attempt to mold a system of society upon the teachings of Jesus Christ. Injustices have been lessened, the condition of the unfortunate has been alleviated. But these tasks have been done at the instigation of self interest. It is even possible to go further and say that no Christian lawmaker or writer has ever undertaken to work out in detail, even by way of suggestion, a code of laws which would closely conform to the teachings of Jesus Christ. This task has remained for the twentieth century, and will engage, above all others, the intellectual conscience of its people."

The Drummers and the Trusts.

Now that the traveling salesmen of the United States have taken up the fight against the trusts there would seem to be little prospect ahead of the latter except a forced unconditional surrender. The trusts may wax fat on the inactivity of Attorney General Griggs and may even prosper in spite of the random sills at law brought by state officials, but when the drummers of the country carry the antitrust sentiment into every corner grocery or other meeting place of village solons throughout the land the power of a wholesale antagonism to unjust monopolies should not be slow in asserting itself. At all events, the drummers can talk the monster octopus within an inch of his life if he is not cutely scotched.—Chicago Chronicle.

The trouble is that few of the drummers discovered the evil in trusts until they lost their jobs, and now they don't visit the corner grocery as of yore—as they did in 1894, for instance, when they were shouting for McKinley and "honest money."

Standard Oil Profits.

A person does not have to be very violent in his opposition to trusts to realize that such a corporation as the Standard Oil company should be prevented by law from laying such a heavy tax on the people as is necessary to pile up the enormous profits that it makes every year. It may be conceded that the Rockefellerers have wrought a beneficent work for mankind in building up such a complete and marvellously effective system as they have created for distributing oil at a comparatively low cost to consumers, and they are entitled to a fortune for it. But there is no justification from any public point of view for the extraordinary profits that the company is making.—Kansas City Star

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From this as citizens we wish to appeal. Not because smugly toward men we feel. But we bow that the policy of distant home, shall never be brought here to claim its home. We are all Americans and wish to be loyal to country and ever free. From marvelling our glorious nation's face, with expansion notes which mean disaster.

Shall we as citizens seek to ignore? The deeds of great heroes, who before our coming to this fair land fought the policy of distant home? Shall we trample blood so nobly spilt on country's altar, and assume the guilt of holding a nation's coffers to fill? Or the noble works of Hunter's Hill?

Shall we take the policy of foreign land, and bow in subjection when manhood demands our country's honor on his altar laid? To satisfy his greed for gain? Shall we trample the rights of justice dear and say to Mammon we have no fear? If he will but his greediness extend? To those who are crying to extend?

Ah no. 'Tis vain for man to ever think that this great nation will ever stoop and drink of that bitter staining cup of wrong which laid earth's greatest nation low. 'Tis the voice of Mammon crying to extend and not the man who did defend his country's flag on foreign shores. Pressing the oppressor of bloody wars.

Today Bill McKinley you are writing disgrace in great broad letters on your national face, you are assuming power that was never given to mortal man with the glowing heavens. Your policy is naught but the will of gain. You're trampling in the footsteps of typhoid Spain. Or selling the lives of American men. Your God gives privileges Filipinos defend.

Oh, God of the Heavens! as thou art watching these deeds, Will thou speak to the heartless who is trying to feed on his own privileges, thou hast given this race. Or they write distraction on our nation's face. Will thou bid them listen to the people today. As they call our soldiers from that land far away. Hiding the voice of oppression be still. Asking for naught to be done but thy will. Phillips, Neb. GEORGE S. HORN.

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