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THE IDAHO TRIAL

A criminal trial that deserves more attention than the one now attracting public attention—though it will not get it—is soon to begin in Idaho. This is the trial of Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone, officials or former officials of the western miners' federation, for the murder of ex-Governor Steunenberg of Idaho. The trial of one Adams for complicity in the crimes charged to these three was held last week, but his case was different. He had confessed to committing crime under their direction. They deny all knowledge of his crimes.

In brief, the undisputed facts are these. On December 30, 1905, ex-Governor Steunenberg, who had incurred the hostility of the miners while governor by using troops to suppress strike violence, was killed by the explosion of a bomb so adjusted to the gate of his yard as to explode when he opened it. One, Harry Orchard, has confessed to a James McPartland, the detective who exposed the Molly Maguires in Pennsylvania, to having fixed the bomb to the gate. He implicated Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone, leaders in the federation of miners who were then in Colorado. His confession is alleged to have revealed the existence of an organized system of violence on the part of the federation of miners. The Independence explosion of 1905, in which nineteen non-union miners were killed, was the result of a plot of the union miners' according to the Orchard confession.

The arrest of the accused men was made sensational in the manner of their extradition from Colorado. Following Orchard's confession warrants were secretly issued and Idaho officials applied to the governor of Colorado for extradition papers before making the arrests. Having received these they secretly arrested the three men, placed them aboard a special train and rushed them across the state line without giving them time to employ counsel or notify their families of what had occurred. On account of the means employed to get the men to Idaho they appealed to the local federal courts for writs of habeas corpus. These being refused they appealed to the supreme court, which last fall decided it had no right to interfere.

The men of the miners' union assert that the whole prosecution is a plot of mine owners to break down their organization. The state authorities claim on the other hand that the accused men are undoubtedly guilty, and that the future peace of the mining states depends upon their punishment. Feeling on both sides runs high, and the trial bids fair to be a dramatic one.

FEBRUARY.

Harry Thaw for human interest, the railroads in politics and business, between them absorbed public attention throughout the four weeks of February to a degree approaching exclusiveness. The San Francisco school question, the closing days of the fifty-ninth congress, and the Russian elections received less consideration than their importance would have warranted lacking these two overshadowing subjects.

The only really winterish week of the year for Nebraska came in February, but the railroad managers were in hot water through it all. The trouble of the railroads came from all quarters. The car blockade continued, though in a

less acute degree. This gave rise to reciprocal demurrage bills in a score of state legislatures. The wreck record, already so bad for January and the year before as to excite general indignation, grew steadily worse in February. A stringency in the money markets, caused according to the railroad managers by distrust of railroad credit due to anti-railroad agitation, hindered the efforts of the roads to borrow money and tended to retard the improvements needed to solve the car shortage. An epidemic of two-cent fare and anti-pass bills broke out in the middle west legislatures and in some eastern and southern states. The LaFollette bill for analyzing the capitalization of the railroads with reference to dropical conditions was in prospect of passing to the great agitation of the railroad masters, until a stroke of sharp practice in a senate committee put it out of the way. The week ended with Mr. Harriman before the interstate commerce commission giving his version of his stock watering and railroad merger deals, and with railroad men the country over threatening that unless the efforts to curb the methods and rates of the roads ceased, all railroad building and improvement would be stopped.

Congress devoted its dying month to piling up appropriations past the billion dollar mark for the session, making itself the first two-billion dollar congress. The senate ratified the San Domingo treaty. The one important act of more than routine legislation was the passage of the immigration bill, adding slightly to the restrictions upon immigration, but chiefly important because it opened the way to the exclusion of Japanese coolies and the settlement of the San Francisco school trouble.

In place of the drama dissolved last year by the czar for its over-radicalism there was elected in February another apparently no less radical. Unless the government finds a pretense for delaying, it will meet on the fifth of the present month. The British parliament met for the winter session with blood in its eye, and the house of lords is waiting to see what reprisals the majority in the house of commons will make for the sacking of their education bill last fall.

The Nebraska legislature devoted itself mainly to getting ready to pass bills. The five or six great measures on which public sentiment has been intent, the two-cent fare, the direct primary, the anti-pass law, laws putting the railroad commission on an efficient basis, the terminal tax, have been shaped up by special committees and presented. The conduct of the legislature thus far has been such as to win rare confidence from the public regardless of party either of members or of their critics.

Senator Burkett proposes an investigation of the business of the express companies that may result in the uncovering of additional commercial abuses. If the abuses are there, the facts may as well come out now as later. The country is cleaning house, and another room or two can be gone through without much additional trouble or expense.

There will be no ship subsidy legislation for at least two years. The next session of congress will precede a presidential and congressional election.

AFFAIRS IN GENERAL

Ever so often it becomes necessary to repeat the difference between a franchised public service corporation and a dry goods store or other private business. A railroad brakeman terrified by threats of reduced wages complains of the two-cent fare bill: "You pay a liveryman \$2.50 to drive you ten miles, and yet you are not satisfied when a railroad carries you for thirty cents." Mr. Morell of Gothenburg writes in opposition to the anti-pass bill: "You and I and every individual has his friends, and if we come along the road with a conveyance, we ask our friends to ride with us. So has the railroad company friends whom they like to favor in the same way, and why should they not?"

Both these gentlemen would fit square pegs into round holes. The liveryman and the individual with the conveyance are acting for themselves, with their own private property. The railroad is a semi-public institution, owing its existence to a contract with the public to perform certain services at reasonable rates and subject to other regulations and restrictions which the public may impose. Though the liveryman charged ten or a hundred or five hundred times \$1.50 for his ten mile drive, yet the railroad under its contract with the public is not justified in charging half of thirty cents if a less amount is sufficient to allow it a fair profit. Though Mr. Morell give a hundred friends a day a free lift in his carriage, the railroads are not justified in carrying one friend free in case the public, having learned that the carrying free of one makes the service cost more to all the rest, decides that the service of the roads must in justice be equal to all. Mr. Morell as a merchant may properly give free goods to friends whom he wishes to favor. That is a private matter. Mr. Morell as a county treasurer may not give free tax receipts to friends whom he wishes to favor. Rates are likewise a public matter. All discussion of railroad questions is idle where this is not understood.

STRANGLING A STEAL.

The house committee on postoffices and postroads has determined to recommend to congress that it stop further swindling of the government by the railroads on their mail carrying contracts. The committee has adopted the proposition that hereafter the railroads shall be paid only for the actual amount of mail carried, and the enormous graft now admitted to have been long enjoyed under the existing system of weighing, with the sanction of law and with the oft expressed rulings of the postoffice department, is to be cut off.

Under the graft-tainted system of weighing mails the average weight of mail carried daily by the railroads has been ascertained by dividing the total weight obtained during the weighing periods by the number of working days in that period. That was the system required by the law.

In other words the mails carried every day, including Sundays, were weighed during the weighing period and the daily results all added together. Then, instead of dividing the total by the actual number of days included in the weighing period, the department would drop out the Sundays and divide the total only by the number of working days.

This had the effect of swelling the fictitious daily average beyond the actual weight carried, and payment for the extra weight was just so much money presented through a recognized system of government graft to the railroads, from which the public derived no benefits and for which the railroads performed no service. The system gave the railroads pay for just one-sixth more mail than they actually carried, so that just one dollar out of every seven paid them for this service was simply stolen from the people.

When one considers how easy it would have been to protect the masses from this monstrous extortion, he can but wonder that it has so long been permitted to continue without protest. All in the world that is necessary is to strike the word "working" as applied to days out of the general provision for weighing, so that the total weight obtained during the weighing period will be divided by the actual number of days consumed in arriving at that total and the daily average for the quadrennial contract period thus obtained.

It is figured that this change will reduce the compensation paid the railroads for carrying the mails five million dollars annually. If that estimate be correct, the conclusion is inevitable that heretofore every time the quadrennial contracts for transportation of the mails were renewed congress and the postoffice department have made the railways a present of twenty million dollars of the people's money without expecting or exacting any service for it whatever.

This proposition to change the system of striking an average, or rather the average, is a humiliating admission that for many years the railroads have been getting pay for transporting about one-sixth more mail than they actually carried, and that one-sixth of the money they received ostensibly for carrying mail was simply stolen, with the sanction and connivance of congress and the postoffice department.

It is stated that five million dollars is a conservative estimate of the amount that will be saved to the government by the proposed change.

It is any wonder that, with this five million dollars flowing annually into their coffers, the railways were quite liberal in carrying congressmen and other influential government officials, and such others as they might recommend, around over the country on passes? Surely not.

Nor is it any wonder that congressmen felt at liberty to ask without embarrassment for as many passes as they or their friends might feel the need of, for they could not begin to reach the value of the five million a year with which congressmen, knowingly and perfidiously, were feeding the railways.

In contemplation of the sequence of events one must be driven to the conclusion that this five million annually was allowed the railways for the passes bestowed, for as soon as the passes were cut off someone, in the person of Representative Murdock of Kansas, rose up with a proposal to stop that monstrous annual steal. It is a long way from Kansas to Washington. And now the wonder is that congress was so long in developing a man with such an honest impulse. In addition to this proposed economy