Civil Sirvice Practice of a Great Railroad

TWO interesting facts are brought to mind by the recent voluntary retirement of James G. Taylor from the position of auditor and assistant treasurer of the B. & M. railroad: That Mr. Taylor was one man of hundreds who held the important office of auditor and that of assistant treasurer; that the Burlington has in vogue a civil service system similar in all essential respects to that one in operation with the federal postal department.

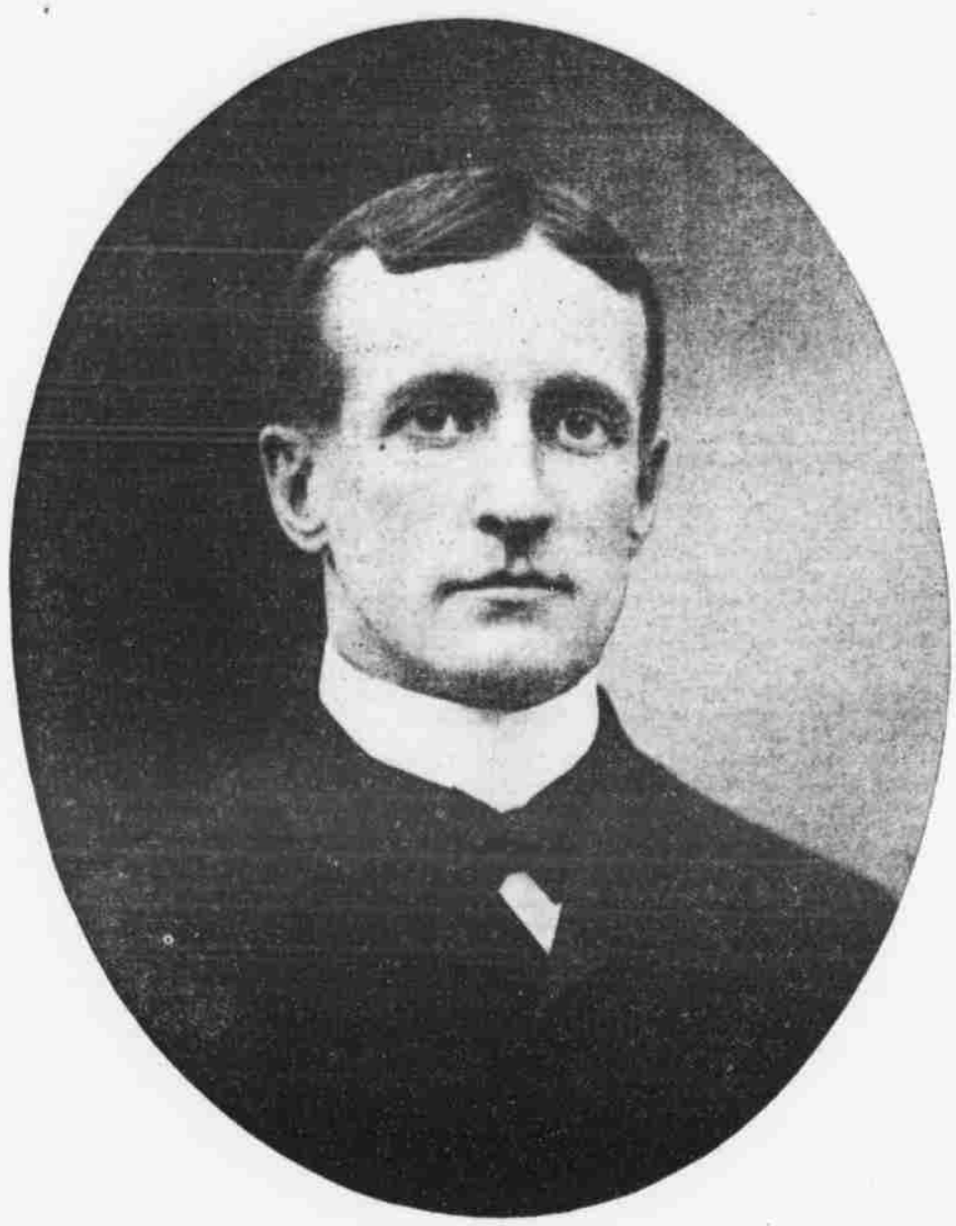
Seldom indeed in railroad management is one man charged with the important duties of auditor and at the same time given even partial custody of the treasury, each of which positions is regarded as a sort of check on the other. Yet Mr. Taylor, who served the B. & M. for a continuous period in various capacities of thirty-three years, left his combined office with an excellent record.

The line of successive promotions following Mr. Taylor's resignation serves to illustrate the effect of the civil service system. To the position of auditor goes W. P. Durkee, whose place is filled by H. D. Allee, another old employe who in turn is succeeded by E. B. Branch, another old employe. The idea is to fill the high places from within the ranks and not go outside the company's own list of employes and officials, thereby destroying all incentive and encouragement for subordinates.

The resignation of Mr. Taylor, who left for New York to engage in private business, was an event of unusual moment in Omaha railroad circles. On learning of his action several of the principal officials and employes of the B. & M. addressed this letter to their friend and associate:

OMAHA, May 28, 1903.—Mr. James G. Taylor, Omaha, Neb.: Dear Sir—The undersigned, your associates in the Burlington railroad, have heard with sincere regret that you are about to sever your connection with the company that has received and derived great advantage from your painstaking, efficient and valuable services for the past thirty-three years. This voluntary action on your part prompts us to extend to you our hearty wishes for your continued success. We, with other of your numerous friends in Nebraska, would be greatly pleased if you would permit us to extend a farewe'l dinner to you at the Omaha club at such time as may best suit your pleasure and convenience.

With assurances of our high personal regard, we are, very truly yours.



W. P. DURKEE, WHO BECOMES AUDITOR OF THE B. & M., SUCCEEDING JAMES G. TAYLOR.

Mr. Taylor's response was:

General C. F. Manderson, W. P. Durkee, D. O. Ives, J. Francis, et al.: I have just received your favor of May 28, in which you express to me an invitation to meet you and others at a dinner at some future date at the Omaha club. On account of my departure for the east during the next three days I find it impossible to comply, great as is my desire to do so.

Your letter touched me deeply and I only trust that I may prove worthy of a few of the kind words you use. It is impossible to fully express my feelings in parting with you all. It is like leaving a family, like going away from home.

I wish you all prosperity, happiness and plenty.

Sincerely your friend,

JAMES G. TAYLOR.

W. P. Durkee, who succeeds Mr. Taylor as auditor, has been in the Burlington's employ twenty-one years. He is an accountant of great ability. He entered the company's service as clerk in the car accounting department in 1881. December, 1881, he was promoted to the auditor's office as clerk and there remained in various capacities of clerkship until January 1, 1887, when he was made auditor to the treasurer. June 1, 1892, he was promoted to be assistant general auditor and filled that position until called to accept the high office of auditor. Omaha has been Mr. Durkee's home during all his manhood life and he is closely in touch with the city as well as the state.

H. D. Allee takes Mr. Durkee's place as assistant auditor. For years he has been auditor of the treasury. He is equipped with a thorough training and is regarded as a very valuable man. He has resided in Omaha for a number of years.

The responsible duties of assistant treasurer laid down by Mr. Taylor are taken up by C. J. Ernst, who came up from Lincoln, where he had been with the Burlington for many years. His chief position was land commissioner. As such a high official of the company attributes the sale of nearly all the Burlington lands and the excellent settlement of a vast territory to the benefit of states west of the Missouri river

"The Burlington recognizes worth and ability and meritorious service," said an executive official of that company, "and these qualifications take precedence over political pull or official favoritism with this road."

The Dare Devils of Coast and Port

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A TINY tugboat was threading its way full steam ahead, puffing and snorting, into the Brooklyn navy yard—dancing in and out among a flotilla of steam launches, rowboats and scows as cleverly as a lady in a crowded ballroom.

"Say, captain!" sang out an officer leaning over the rail of the cruiser Cincinnati. "Aren't you afraid to come into the navy yard like that?"

"Afraid!" retorted the tugboat skipper in scornful tones. "We aren't afraid of anything in this business. Give me a dozen old tugboatmen, and I'll come in and take your blessed navy yard, battleships and all!"

"By the Lord," said the officer to himself softly, looking at the old shellback's fierce, weather-beaten face, "I believe he'd be capable of it at a pinch."

This anecdote is illustrative of the frame of mind of the typical tugboatman. There is no peril too great, no chance too risky for those daredevils of coast and port—of New York, Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, San Francisco, New Orleans and a score of other American harbors.

Poet and novelist never tire of recounting the dangers to which the deep-water sailor is exposed. But he leads a safe and placid life compared to that of the tugboatman who picks up a living by plying to and fro among the crowded shipping of a busy port. Daily, almost hourly, the tugboatman faces such perils as come to the deep-water sailor only once in a voyage or once in a year. He knows this very well, and has a lofty contempt for "them that go down to the sea in ships and do their business on great waters."

"Steamer cap'ns?" said the skipper of a tugboat the other day. "Don't talk to me about 'em! They're as timid as girls. There's nothing I like better than hitching my boat 'longside of a tramp and just scarin' the life out of the old man on the bridge."

"How do you manage that?" he was asked.

The captain spat comprehensively.

"Why, we just creep up in the dark until we're right under his bows, and then let off an almighty big toot with the siren. Course, they haven't seen us. They never do see anything on them blessed steamers. Our toot jest about scares the old man out of his wits.

"When he gets over the shock we make a bargain to bring him up the river and hitch 'longside. Course we come up pretty fast. Time's money in our business. He soon gets scared to death running in and out among dozens of ships when he's been used to hundreds of miles of open water all around him. He stands it as long as he can, but at last he hollers down to us, 'Say, hadn't you better go a bit slower?' The pilot grins, and, of course, I jest signal my engineer to shove her along a bit faster. We take her full tilt on the wharf till that old man on the bridge is trembling like a jelly; and then we jest stop her a hundred feet off and land her 'longside as if she was glass. You bet we teach those merchant skippers that we know our business."

Standing by the side of Captain Peet as he steered the tugboat Baltic through New York's crowded harbor gave an insight into the daily perils of the business.

No sooner had Baltic got clear of its wharf than another tugboat bore down on its starboard side and a big ferryboat threatened to ram it on the port. It seemed impossible to escape a collision with one or both of them, but Captain Peet gave a little twist to the wheel and the Baltic glided out of danger, missing the stern of the ferryboat by a few feet.

"Wasn't that a pretty near thing?" the land rubber queried.

The captain looked surprised.

"We shouldn't call that near," he said. "If you want adventure you've chosen the wrong time. The river's empty today. A child could navigate it."

Empty! It seemed to the uninstructed eye of a landsman simply chock full of puffing tugboats, unwieldy ferry steamers and ocean tramps, all getting in one another's way and threatening to run one another down.

The tugboat passed within a few feet of a big passenger steamer which was coming down the river as if it were a torpedo boat. The skipper noticed his visitor's concern.

"Collisions are very rare," he said comfortingly. "A man gets so used to the business that he steers by instinct rather than reason. He dodges other boats without thinking about it, just as you would avoid bumping into people on a crowded sidewalk. A yard saves a collision over and over again, but we don't get rattled. A miss is as good as a mile.

"Our only worry is when some brass-bound captain of a nickel-plated yacht comes careering up the river. Ten to one he knows nothing about it, and he's just like a man trying to learn how to ride a bicycle in a crowded street. He falls over everything and gets in everybody's way. Yes, those yacht captains put the fear of death into us sometimes."

Talk to any old tugboatman and he will spin you yarns that would make the literary fortunes of half a dozen Clark Russells. Every one of them has his stories of storm and collision and fire to tell.

"I remember," said one, "ten years ago, we were boating about off Sandy Hook, twenty miles out at sea. It was a terrible night—dark and foggy with a high sea running. I had just stepped out of the galley after supper and happened to look up. There was the stem of a big liner towering right over us! Next moment it struck us amidships and cut us clean in halves. There was hardly a second for thought, but I knew in a flash that if I jumped to port of the steamer the sea would wash me into the propeller. So I jumped to starboard, and as its hull flashed past me I caught a rope dangling in the water, and they drew me aboard. Curious thing was, not one of our crew was drowned except my pet dog, that I wouldn't have taken $100 for."

"Talking of dogs," remarked another old shellback, "did you ever hear of a dog that saved a tugboat's crew? The boat was tied alongside the wharf one night, and all the crew were asleep aboard. Along about midnight it caught fire and blazed up beautifully. The dog howled and barked, but he couldn't wake the crew, so he trotted up to the cook and bit him in the leg. The cook's yell woke the rest and they just had time to get clear ashore before the boat was a mass of flames."

"We don't usually look on collisions as lucky things," said a third tugboat man, "but I know of a young fellow down Boston way who got a wife and a fortune through one.

"He was deckhand on a Boston tug, and it was run down one night by a tramp steamer outward bound for San Fernando, Trinidad. The captain was drowned, but the rest of them were picked up and carried to Trinidad. When they got there the others were sent back to Boston by the American consul, but the deckhand liked the place and stayed, getting a job to boss a gang of coolies on a cocoa plantation.

"He was a smart young fellow, and he made good. In a couple of years he was the planter's chief overseer, and had a small plantation of his own besides. Then the planter's daughter came out from England, where she had been finishing her education. They fell in love with each other and got married. The planter gave 'em a pretty good start and now that deckhand is one of the wealthiest cocoa growers in Trinidad and has a treasure of a wife. It was a lucky collision for him."

This story recalled a sadder tale which is related of an English tugboat skipper. It was told to Tennyson by the late Lord Action, and is supposed to have suggested "Enoch Arden."

The skipper's tug was cut down in Southampton water by a royal mail steamer bound to the River Plate. He was saved and carried thither. In Argentina he got mixed up in a revolution and was thrown into jail. After his release a series of misfortunes prevented him from returning home, and over two years had passed before he saw Southampton again. His home coming was like that of Enoch Arden. He found that his wife, believing him to be dead, had married another man. His house and his possessions were in the hands of a stranger. He did not languish and die, like the hero of the poem; he simply went back to South America, after a painful interview with his wife, who vainly implored him to stay, and he was never heard of again.

As a rule tugboatmen are happy, jovial fellows, full of fun and high spirits; but tragedy is never far removed from their daily experiences. Any day they may pick up a dead body floating in the harbor—some unhappy girl who has flung herself off the bridge, or some drunken deckhand who has fallen off the wharf while trying to stagger to his ship.

"I ought to be hardened to it by this time," said the mate of a tugboat, referring to this unpleasant part of his work, "and I don't mind pulling up a man's body so much as I used to do when I was a green hand. But every time we come across a woman floating in the water I turn sick and think of my little wife at home. My old captain, who'd been at the game for forty years, used to get hysterical sometimes when this happened. I've seen him cry like a child.

"A man needs to be pretty tough at this business," the mate continued. "I've seen some nasty sights. A few years ago I was in a tugboat about thirty miles off shore and we had picked up a leaky, rotten old tub of a schooner which had come through some heavy weather in the West Indies. A tearing gale caught us and the towline parted. We tried to beat up to it, but a terrible sea caught it on the beam and down it went before our very eyes with all hands aboard. We saw them struggling in the water, but could do nothing. By the time we reached the place there was nothing left but a few pieces of wreckage.

"There's another bad day I well remember. We had a cook aboard who was too fond of whisky. He went crazy with it one day and tried to throw himself overboard. I just managed to lay hold of him as he was half over the side and we locked him up in his bunk, taking away his jackknife and razor.

"Presently, passing by the door, I heard a low groan and went in. There he was, lying on the floor in a pool of blood, with a horrible gash in his throat. He had broken his looking glass and cut his throat with a piece of it. They tried to tinker him up at the hospital, but he died sure enough the next day."

"Once a tugboatman, always a tugboatman," said one of them. "It's a hard life and a dangerous life, but there's no other life on earth that I know of equal to it. Sometimes one of us goes for a voyage or two on a steamer, but he is always glad to come back to the tugboat business again."