

# "SAFETY FIRST" CRUSADE IN ITS INFANCY

"Safety first" may to some seem to be an overdone phrase but to men like A. C. Littig, secretary of the Central Committee of Safety for the O.W., this all-important question is still in its infancy and will be pushed to the forefront until every man, woman and child is made to recognize the principles of "safety first."

## Principle's Apostle Here

Mr. Rittig was present at the monthly first meetings of the Second division at La Grande a day or two ago. He effervesces safety first, and when the employees themselves begin to slacken their pace at these meetings and think perhaps safety first is being over-worked, Mr. Rittig steps into the breach and literary hypodermics the men into greater enthusiasm about this safety first business. Mr. Rittig has been in this department of railroad but a comparatively short time—a year or so—but he verily radiates safety first and he talks of little else.

## Interesting Commercial Clubs

The company is holding meetings with commercial clubs in numerous towns, impressing upon such bodies the need of teaching the public the words "caution" and "safety first." One such meeting held at Walla Walla recently was exceptionally successful in clarifying the public mind on the real meaning of "safety first."

## Subject Tremendously Big

Books have been written on this subject—of its application to pedestrians crossing streets, to entering elevators, to hunting, to crossing railroad tracks, to keeping off rights of way, to this, that and the other thing, and even then the subject has only been scratched. "Safety first," said Mr. Rittig should be carried into the home, the playground, the work shop, the recreation hour, and kept continually in one's mind. The result would be less injuries, of that I am certain."

## Suitable Crossings Sought

At the present time the safety first department is working upon a scheme to install railroad crossing signs a considerable distance back from the crossing itself so that drivers of automobiles and vehicles of all sorts will recognize a crossing lies before them and allow time to apply safety first. Delay has been occasioned in actually putting this policy into practice for the reason the right material, best shape and other items of consideration must be adopted with care. Something that will withstand the elements, the boy with a rifle, and even which side of the road to put them is a puzzle for there are left-hand drive cars and also right-hand drives.

Sometime ago Hon. Alex. Gordon, commissioner of the California State Railroad commission delivered before the convention of Board of Supervisors of California, a strikingly pertinent address on this subject. He said in part:

While the operation of trains in the United States has become safer, so far as passengers and trainmen are concerned, it has become much more hazardous to those who are compelled to cross the tracks. The reasons for this increase are not difficult to find. Before the coming of the automobile, traffic on the highways was carried on by horse-drawn vehicles at a speed which rarely exceeded ten miles per hour and which probably averaged less than five. On account of the limitations of the horse, drivers were generally in territory which was so familiar to them that they knew where each crossing was located, its condition and surroundings, and were often even familiar with the time tables of the railroads. In the country, because many horses were unused to trains, drivers as a rule desired to be as far away as possible from a crossing when a train passed over it. This has all been changed. The coming of the automobile has vastly increased the mileage of good roads, and the two together have made it possible for much traveling to be done in territory unfamiliar to the traveler, while the speed of traffic on the roads has been very greatly increased.

During this period in which the automobile has been developing, there has developed also a desire on the part of those who work in the cities to live in the suburbs, and this has led to the construction of interurban railroads and the use of high-speed cars upon them, as well as additional high-speed service on the steam railroads. Population in and about the larger cities has also greatly increased during this time and the traffic on both rail and road has been intensified by this growth.

## Carelessness Responsible

We are horrified at the waste of human life going on in Europe, but we hardly give a thought to the absolute waste of life which is going on around us unless we happen, in a measure, to be charged with responsibility for it. Crossing accidents result from a very small percentage of the movements which are made over railroad tracks on highways, but we are appalled when we collect those accident statistics and find how large the total is. The Interstate Commerce Commission, the state commissions all over the country, boards of supervisors, city officials, railroad officials themselves and others are carefully investigating the matter and attempting to work out some solution of this grade crossing problem.

An unfortunate feature of the situation is found in the fact that many of these accidents are due to carelessness. The Southern Pacific Company recently made test observations at 34 crossings. They observed over 17,000 motor vehicle drivers and found that 69.1-2 per cent looked neither way before crossing the tracks, 2.7 per cent looked in one direction only, and but 27.8 per cent looked both ways. Nineteen and three-tenths per cent, or the incredible number of 3,300

drivers, ran over the crossings at a reckless rate of speed. Only 35 drivers, or two-tenths of one per cent, stopped their machines before crossing the tracks. Four thousand and nine hundred drivers of teams were observed, 39.4 per cent of whom looked in either direction, 8.6 per cent looked one way only, and 52 per cent looked in both directions. Of 6,300 pedestrians one-half of the total, looked neither way, 15 per cent looked in one direction only, and 35.9 per cent looked both up and down the track. The same company has tabulated the accidents on grade crossings which have happened during the last five and one-half years in an attempt to secure the reasons for these accidents: Ignored train and its warning—killed 35.0 per cent; injured 37.1 per cent.

Ignored train and its warning and warning of crossing bell, automatic and human flagman, and warnings of other persons—killed 13.8 per cent; injured 12.6 per cent.

Ran into side of train—killed 10.1 per cent; injured 15.3 per cent.

Stalled on track—killed 7.8 per cent; injured 4.2 per cent.

Tried to beat train to crossing—killed 16.0 per cent; injured 9.3 per cent.

Other causes—killed 17.3 per cent; injured 21.5 per cent.

This company during two years had 525 crossing gates broken by vehicles which drove into them while they were down.

In view of these figures the eventual solution of the crossing problem, it is plain, must be grade separation, but this solution is a long way in the future. There are over 10,000 grade crossings in California and \$30,000 would be a low estimate of the cost of eliminating one crossing. To separate grades at all of the crossings would cost over \$300,000,000 and it is of course, out of the question to consider any such expenditure at this time. Neither the people nor the railroads can stand it.

As long as the grade crossings must remain we must do what we can to make them as safe as possible.

There are three ways of protecting crossings. The most expensive is that of installing crossing gates with attendants. It costs \$700 to install a set of crossing gates, and \$900 per year to pay the wages of attendants and the cost of operation. Probably the next best method of protecting crossings is by human flagmen. The railroads have found that it costs them about \$600 per year to protect a crossing in this manner. The third type of crossing protection is by automatic bell, wigwag, automatic flagman or similar device, and while they are not as efficient as the other two types they are much better than no protection at all. These devices cost from \$350 to \$600 to install and the cost of maintaining them is from \$2 to \$10 per month. From this it can be seen that even the cheapest sort of protection cannot be installed at once at all the crossings in California—yet something must be done.

Remedies for Crossing Accidents

Meanwhile the existing situation must be met. It has been suggested that the legislature should pass laws requiring all motor vehicles to come to a full stop before passing over a grade crossing. In the opinion of many such a law would be unreasonable and because it was unreasonable would not be enforced. The city of Long Beach has an ordinance requiring all jitneys to stop before crossing a railroad track and it is reported to be very successful in its operation, but this is a different matter from requiring all motor vehicles to stop at all railroad crossings in the state and the difficulties of enforcing it are much less than they would be in enforcing a similar law that was statewide in its application. To my mind a better suggestion is a law requiring the drivers of motor vehicles to arrive slowly when approaching an intersection of a track and a highway. Such a law would not be unreasonable. The law-abiding drivers—and I believe they form a large majority—would be careful to observe it and those who would not otherwise respect it would be compelled to respect it by the same officers that make them respect the speed limit law.

Personally I have not a great deal of sympathy with the careless driver who gets hurt in a crossing accident. But our figures show that when a driver is hurt or killed three or four people with him are also hurt and killed. Last September may be taken as a typical month. Three auto drivers were killed in the state that month and 10 other occupants of the automobiles were killed at the same time. Nine drivers were injured and 37 other occupants of the vehicles struck by trains were in many cases—possibly in most cases—relatives of the drivers, often wives and children, and if the careless driver when left to himself so far forgets the safety of himself as to jeopardize their lives in this fashion, it is time for the law to step in and tell him what he must do to guard them.

It has been suggested that some state body—the railroad commission, for instance—should have the right to place distinctive signs in a conspicuous location at all exceptionally dangerous crossings which would, under the law, require automobile drivers to bring their vehicles to a stop before crossing the track. Such a law, in connection with a law requiring slow speed over all crossings, might have a very helpful effect. The commission is now investigating the subject and will make such recommendations to the next legislature as the result of these investigations seems to make advisable.

Foil of Railway Trespassing

Although the topic assigned to me was grade crossings, I cannot resist the temptation to say a few words about a near relative of the grade crossing in causing death and injury; and that is trespassing on railroad right of way.

In 1914, 5,396 persons were killed in the United States and 6,176 were injured while trespassing on railroads, and these figures are about the same as those reported for previous years. During that same year there were 165 trespassers killed and 217 injured in California.

In the last 25 years there have been over 212,000 people killed in the United States in railroad accidents and of this vast number over 112,000 were trespassers. This record would be bad enough if those who suffered were tramps and "hobos," but when we find that 75,000 of the total killed while trespassing, were citizens of the locality in which the accident occurred and 13,000 were children under 18 years of age, we must all admit it to be absolutely disgraceful.

The grade crossing problem is one which is met with, more or less, in all countries, but trespass accidents occur only in the United States. In Europe the property of the railroads is no more used for public thoroughfares than are the privately owned ranches and farms in this country, and even Canada, with more excuse than the United States for permitting trespassing in and around railroad tracks has rigid, anti-trespassing laws which are strictly enforced.

What would we think of the manufacturing plants of this country if they permitted anyone who so desired, to wander at will around dangerous machinery and, as a result of this, killed and injured between 11,000 and 12,000 people every 365 days? We would tell their owners, very shortly, that they would have to keep those people out and if they could not do it we would see to it that the police did. Yet the case is exactly parallel with railroad trespassing. The railroad companies are anxious to have strong anti-trespass laws and in the few states in the east where there are such laws, they do their best to enforce them. But they cannot keep people from their property unless laws have been passed and unless, when passed, they are enforced.

During the year ended June 30, 1914, there were, as I have said, 165 people killed and 217 injured in trespassing accidents in California, while during the same period there were 93 killed and 378 injured in grade crossing accidents. It would cost over \$300,000,000 to eliminate the grade crossing accidents by separating grades, but the cost of eliminating the trespassing accidents would be confined to a small extra cost of policing after the necessary laws had been passed.

It is sometimes so convenient to use the railroad track as a footpath, and we have grown so accustomed to considering ourselves entitled to walk on the track to save ourselves a little longer walk by road or street, that I am not very hopeful that I shall live to see the day when legislatures will pass and the people themselves will enforce, laws which will do away with this evil. But I believe the day will come when it will be done and those of us who are compelled to think of these things should do all we can to hasten its coming.

Accidents at Grade Crossings and to Trespassers

(An editorial on Commissioner Gordon's address reprinted from the Railway Age Gazette of June 16, 1916.)

The number of persons killed at grade crossings and while trespassing on railway property in the United States is about 6,000 annually. This is 60 per cent of all the fatal accidents which occur on our railways. It is double the number of passengers and employees killed. It is, therefore, a terrible anomaly that far more public attention is given, and far more regulation is directed to reducing accidents to passengers and employees than to other classes of persons. Neither the public nor most public authorities seem to understand the true situation with respect to these matters, or, if they understand it, do not appear disposed to deal with it intelligently, fairly and effectively.

Here and there, however, there is a public official whose utterances show he has studied the statistics regarding the causes of grade crossing and trespassing accidents; that he has arrived at correct conclusions as to the only practical preventives of them and that he has the courage to express himself frankly regarding them. A notable example is afforded by Alex. Gordon, a member of the Railroad Commission of California, whose recent address on accidents at grade crossings and to trespassers is published elsewhere in this issue. Mr. Gordon shows clearly that a large majority of grade crossing accidents are due to the needless multiplication of crossings of highways over railways, and to the carelessness of those using the crossings. The popular impression is that most grade crossings result from railways being opened across highways. As Mr. Gordon makes clear, the fact is that most of them are due to highways being opened across railways; and many of them are more of a menace than a convenience to the public. The remedy ordinarily suggested for grade crossing accidents is the elimination of the crossings, at the expense of the railways. In view of the fact that most grade crossings, result from highways being opened across railways, the adoption of this remedy is most unjust to the railways, unless they are allowed to pass the burden alone to the public through their freight and passenger rates. In the long run, this is what is bound to come. How impracticable, from the standpoint of both the railways and

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the public is the abolition of grade crossing accidents by the universal separation of grades, is indicated by some figures given by Mr. Gordon regarding the situation in California. There are 10,000 grade crossings in that state alone. Therefore, estimating the average cost of separating them at \$30,000, the cost of eliminating all of them would be \$300,000,000. But, as Mr. Gordon says, his estimate of \$30,000 as the average cost of separating grades is very conservative. The average cost throughout the country up to the present time has been nearer \$50,000. On this basis the total cost of separating all grades in California would be a half billion dollars; and California is but one state out of forty-eight!

The universal separation of grades as a remedy for crossing accidents is not practical because the cost of it would be prohibitive. There are other remedies the application of which would cost very much less, and which can be made effective. Mr. Gordon mentions a number of these. One point which his discussion brings out clearly, however, is that if this class of accidents is to be reduced there

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