

The New Age

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THE TELEPHONE SERVICE.

The New Age is increasingly convinced that public ownership and control of some public utilities should gradually be brought about in cities. One of these utilities that is necessary in these days to almost every person, in every business place and almost every home, is the telephone, and there appears to be no good reason why the people, since practically all of them have need of this instrumentality of modern civilization, should not own, control and operate a municipal telephone system, instead of allowing a private corporation to do so for the benefit, not so much of the public as of a comparatively few individuals. If such corporation would give the people first-class service, without doubt or delay, at a reasonable, moderate cost, and be satisfied to make a reasonable profit on the capital invested, there might be no advantage in the municipal ownership of telephone systems. But as almost everybody knows, the service is often defective, and the charges, it is reasonably believed, could and should be reduced, especially as a city grows and the number of patrons greatly increase. One aggravating feature of the present monopoly system is the nickle-in-the-slot injustice, mention of which has been made before in these columns, and which there seems little or no disposition to remedy. The person who pays his nickle is entitled to be put in communication with the person he asks for, and if such person cannot be secured the one at the pay phone should be so informed before he is required to drop his nickle. But too often, if not almost invariably, he is requested to "drop your nickle," before it is ascertained whether the service for which he thus pays can be rendered; and often, apparently his money is taken after it is known at the central office that he cannot be so served. This is simply a species of swindling the public that it ought not to tolerate. In fact, it is not certain that the "nickle-in-the-slot" phones ought not to be eliminated altogether, as they have been in San Francisco and Seattle. But if permitted to take multitudes of nickles, for which in many, if not most, instances no service is rendered—and often little or no attempt is made to render the service—the company ought to be made to pay an adequate tax. The company's headquarters was moved to Portland because it was taxed more than it liked in San Francisco, and it considered Portland an "easy" town to "work," by doing whatever this corporation pleased at the minimum rate of taxation. How long is the council going to permit the public to be served in this way, and in the respect mentioned, practically, if not legally, swindled out of nickles? Why not do as other cities have done, and tax the evil in this business out of it? Multitudes of complaints are made about this service, but the city authorities seem to take no heed of them, and neither do the daily papers. Why do not they make a righteous roar about this business? How have they been hypnotized into silence? It is certainly the moral duty of great daily newspapers to serve the interests of the public from which they receive most of their patronage, rather than to "lie down" and keep still the year through about the mistreatment of the public by a corporation.

There is another reason why public ownership would be preferable to monopoly ownership, and that is the ridiculously low wages paid to the girl or women employees. If they are sometimes indifferent to requests they have a large excuse in the inadequate pay they receive. To work in a central telephone office in a large city is exacting, wearing labor, and should be well paid. Under public ownership this service would undoubtedly cost more, for the public would pay better wages to these employees, but it is believed that this could be done at no greater and probably a less cost to the public for the service rendered. That is, while the public would only aim to make interest on its investment and perhaps provide gradually a sinking fund, the capitalists who own the telephone stock want and try to make a great deal of money out of the public, and so get rich rapidly.

Some of these reasons for public ownership of the telephone system do not apply to the street car lines, or to municipal lighting. In the first place, the service rendered by these

corporations is usually satisfactory. Then the cost of securing these properties would be far more. And usually there is competition, or an opportunity and probability for competition. The public ownership of water-works has proved a splendid success, that of the telephone system might probably be ventured upon with equally good results, at least The New Age believes the public should study into the question, and ascertain what the facts and circumstances are; and it may have more light to throw on the subject in the future.

GOOD SO FAR.

Not long ago Ex-President Cleveland presided at a meeting of the Bereau Manual Training School for Negroes in Philadelphia, and in his address to the students and visitors said:

"No one who has given the subject deliberate thought can doubt, if we are to be just and fair towards our colored fellow-citizens and if they are to be more completely made self-respecting, useful and safe members of our body politic, they must be taught to do something more than haul hay and draw water. The way must be opened for them for some better service and their interest must be aroused to rewards of intelligent occupation and careful thrift."

This is good as far as it goes, and it "goes" to a useful and helpful distance; yet it may be suspected or even very confidently affirmed that Mr. Cleveland does not want nor would support the proposition that the Negro voters should enjoy their constitutional privileges and rights. Evidently it is not time for this yet. In the South, nor for colored people to gain fully fair and reasonable recognition, in proportion to their faithfulness to the Republican party, in the Northern States. But we are living and learning and gradually evolving.

CHRISTMAS TIME.

This is Christmas week, and The New Age extends the compliments of the season to all its readers and patrons. The colored part of our population always enjoy such a season, and The New Age hopes that they will enjoy themselves this year more if possible, than ever before. The Negro race is naturally of sunny temperament, inclined to find happiness or contentment in almost every thing, and in all sorts of circumstances and conditions, and few of them will fall to be merry in some degree at this Christmas time. Most of them are also naturally inclined to religious emotions, and many really appreciate the great event that Christmas is supposed to commemorate as much, and worship with as true and intelligent devotion, as the more highly educated white people.

To all its patrons The New Age wishes a happy ending of the year, and an even better year in 1903 than this one has been. The New Age has been in the main kindly treated and liberally supported, and it hopes to deserve even larger patronage in the future. To everybody, an enjoyable Christmas time!

Negroes from all parts of Alabama, met at Salem, in that state, one day last week, to form a Colored Republican party. Resolutions were adopted indorsing the action of President Roosevelt in not recognizing the "Lily White" branch of the party. An address was issued to the Negro voters advising them to appeal to the Democrats to allow them register next week, when the registration books will be opened for the last time. It is not likely that the Democrats, any more than the Lily White Republicans, will recognize the practical right of the Negro Republicans to vote; yet this movement, if well conducted, is to be commended, and may be useful to the Negro voters in future years.

Nobody can intelligently predict now, any more than three months ago, who will be the next United States senator. Apparently nobody will start into the contest with nearly enough votes to win.

Brooker T. Washington is due in California next month, and may be induced to come to Portland, where he should receive a cordial welcome.

The nickle-in-the-slot phones seem to be gambling instruments, with the chances much in favor of the one investing his nickle losing.

Had Damages Enough.
 "Speaking to the point and saying exactly what you mean reminds me of an incident that I witnessed in Atlanta, Ga.," said Clifton H. Howard, of Rochester, N. Y. "An aged negro of the Uncle Tom type had been knocked down and mangled by a trolley car. The usual crowd gathered and as he was being placed in the ambulance one individual advised him to sue the company for damages. 'Damages,' said the old man, with a look of supreme disgust, 'got nuf damages—better sue for repairs.'"

British National Gallery.
 The value of the pictures in the National gallery, London, is about \$4,350,000.

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