

Some Current Opinions on Live Topics

A TRUST-RIDDEN CITY.

San Francisco and California at the Mercy of Extortionist.

(San Francisco Chronicle.)

The truthfulness of our expose of the condition of the commission and vegetable trade in this city, which appeared in yesterday's "Chronicle," was speedily made manifest by the rage of the extortionist. The contemptible character of many of them was also exhibited by abuse of our commercial editor—who, it may be said, had nothing whatever to do with the expose—and threatened assaults on him, as well as by the use of the telephone to anonymously abuse us. It was very gratifying.

We hasten to say that the conditions in this city are not unique. On the contrary, they are such as prevail in all parts of the United States. While we are making war on a great scale upon the big trusts, we are being eaten up alive by an infinite number of minor combinations and conspiracies which control almost every necessity of life and every kind of service. If there are three men anywhere we may assume that two of them are in a conspiracy to cinch the third. Some of these combinations are based on written agreements, some on membership in organizations whose rules are secret. Some agreements are verbal. Some, possibly, are based on a mere "understanding." All are in successful operation. The existence of all is self-evident. All are contrary either to State or to national law. All are very difficult of legal proof.

And it is not the business of the "Chronicle" to prove their existence in legal form. It is our business to state the facts and leave the matter with the public. So far as our State law is concerned it is made the duty of District Attorneys to "enforce" it. What does that mean? Is the District Attorney to set detectives to work as he would in a murder case, or wait for some "citizen" to swear to a complaint and be at the expense of hunting the evidence? As to one of our laws—the so-called free-market law—it is the specific duty of the Harbor Commissioners to enforce it. Again, what does that mean? Are the Commissioners to wait, as a court waits, for some citizen to be at the cost of starting a "suit," or are they to use due diligence through their wharfingers or others to know that the law is complied with? When an administrative board is charged with the care of public property it would seem to be its duty to know affirmatively that the property is used as the law directs.

But in the end it will rest with the people, for public sentiment controls. If they are willing to continue to pay 20 cents for cantaloupes which cost their dealer 4 cents, and 3 1/2 cents a pound for potatoes which cost two-thirds of a cent a pound, or 6 cents a pound for grapes which cost 2 cents a pound, or—if these are extremes—anything like it, they can do so. The "Chronicle" merely gives them the facts.

As for the people in the country who send their produce to commission men in this—or any other—city, it is for them to discover whether they get honest returns or not. The "Chronicle" does not see their returns, nor does it know the price obtained for any particular lot of fruit, or whether cartage is charged when no cartage is paid, or whether the commission men first "sell" it to themselves and then resell it to some one else. These things are hard to prove in any particular case. The "Chronicle" cannot undertake to prove them in any particular instance. There are doubtless honest and dishonest commission men, but we have reason to believe that there is much dishonesty. But no more here than elsewhere.

A Tidal Power Plant.

A plant for compressing air by the flow of sea water between large tidal basins is to be built next spring on the Maine coast near South Thomaston. The compressed air is to be transmitted a considerable distance through pipes and used to operate quarry machinery, trolley roads, and factories. The working of this plant will be watched with interest by engineers, for although "tide-mills" are as old as history, attempts to utilize tidal energy on a large scale have not met with success. William O. Webster, the designer, writes of the forthcoming attempt as follows in Engineering News (New York) as abstracted in the Engineering Magazine (January).

"Careful experiments upon a large working model, erected at South Thomaston, last summer, have fully demonstrated the peculiar application necessary for the utilization of the flow between large tidal basins and the ocean. . . . At South Thomaston there is a tidal basin with an area of slightly over a square mile, or 640 acres. The average rise and fall of the tide at this point is 12 feet. This would, therefore, realize about 5000 horse

power on the basis of 70 per cent efficiency of the compressing apparatus, which should be easily obtained, as the tests of other plants . . . have given much higher efficiencies. . . . At Rockland, Me., there is sufficient market for the available power in the stone and lime quarries and factories of the country within a 20 mile radius. Contrary to the usually preconceived notions, it is practicable to transmit compressed air through pipes, long distances, with comparatively slight losses. It has been demonstrated by the Popp system, in Paris, that the leakage is very slight, and the four years' experience at Norwich, Conn., shows the leakage to be nil. Hydraulically compressed air being a perfectly dry gas, the frictional resistance, in good, smooth-coated pipe, is remarkably low, and velocities of 50 to 70 feet a second are admissible. The cost of pipe lines is not so greatly in excess of electrical transmission lines, when the cost of step-up and step-down transformers, etc., is taken into consideration.

"There are many tidal basins along the coasts of the temperate zones, between the 40th and 50th parallels of latitude, which are commercially capable of developing in this manner an unfailing source of power. Moreover, this source of power has no dry season in the summer, and the cutting off of forests does not affect it. This power can be made available many miles inland from the shore at comparatively low cost, and, with the single exception of lighting, can be turned into useful work in direct competition with electrical power."

The Parcels Post.

(Portland Oregonian.)

For the first time in years the United States has a postmaster general who seems to appreciate the opportunities of his office. The post-office department might, under intelligent management such as prevails in other countries, become one of the principal means of enlightenment and comfort to the nation, but almost the sole concern of those who have conducted it in recent years has been to avoid infringement upon the privileges of private greed.

Mr. Meyer wishes to establish a genuine parcels post. He would raise the mailing limit to eight or 10 pounds. At present it is four pounds. The proposed reform is very moderate, but it is in the right direction, and, if it over-comes the opposition of the parasitic express companies, it will give the American people relief from numerous vexations. Our primitive postal facilities are a scandal in a country which boasts of its wealth and progressiveness. Even in Great Britain, where railroad influence is strong, the mailing limit is 11 pounds. In France it is 25, and in Germany 110 pounds. The United States charges 16 cents a pound for postage on parcels. In Great Britain it is 1 1/2 cents for a pound parcel and 25 cents for 11 pounds anywhere within the islands. The rate to Hongkong by the way of Suez, which is much farther than from New York to the Philippines, is 12 cents a pound. Everywhere on the continent of Europe small parcels are sent by mail at cheap rates, where we must submit to the extortion of the express companies. Families are served with groceries by mail. The laundry comes and goes through the postoffice. The tourist mails his small baggage. In France, Germany, Switzerland, it is thought better to serve the welfare of the people than to heap up big dividends for trust magnates.

Of course the express companies will continue to oppose the parcels post. Their graft is too lucrative to be given up without a struggle. Mr. Meyer says the parcels post will not compete with those overgrown parasites, but competition cannot be avoided. His reform would save enormous sums to the people, but it would cut off the same amount from the revenues of Senator Platt's trust. Hitherto the trust has been strong and wily enough to block every move to establish a parcels post but there is reason to hope that it may not be able to control the next congress. Mr. Meyer, speaking for the American people, will perhaps receive more attention than Mr. Platt speaking for his monopoly.

LaFollette, For Instance.

(Pendleton Tribune.)

Strange as it may seem, there are those who believe, or pretend to believe, that President Roosevelt is not nearly so popular as he was a year or two ago, and that he would not be a strong candidate for re-election. There are those, also, who think La Foltette is not strong with the common people, that he is a man who attempts to pose for popular approval and that the people at large do not fancy his methods in public affairs.

But there was never a greater mistake than this assumption. As one proof if evidence were necessary, turn to the little episode in Pennsylvania the other night when the master of ceremonies at large gathering where LaFollette was the chief speaker opened the program by notifying the

senator that he must not introduce political questions in the course of his address, but when that part of his speech was reached where it was customary to refer to certain votes on the celebrated railroad rate question, the presiding officer interrupted him with the statement that he must not proceed further along that line.

The result was an immediate appeal to the audience, which with practical unanimity demanded that he proceed and an adjournment was had to a street corner where the thousands heard with enthusiasm what he had to say.

Those who think the American people want any temporizing with the great questions of railroad regulation and curtailing within a reasonable bounds of the power of the trusts, or that they will tolerate it, had as well recognize the fact that the trimmers will have to go.

The Big Stick was never more popular than today and a wielder of it will be demanded as the occupant of the presidential office for the next four years, preferably Roosevelt, or, if not, then Taft, Hughes or LaFollette.

The people will tolerate no backward step and certain politicians will have but themselves to blame if they mistake the trend of the times.

Safety Appliances at Sea.

Despite the fact that the great size and power of transatlantic ships and the habit of following the same tracks in voyaging from points of departure to points of destination have greatly decreased the risks of life at sea, at the same time the long record of wrecks, accompanied by more or less loss of life, which is made up annually, proves that if the dangers of the sea have been diminished they have not yet by any means been eliminated. A very much heavier volume of traffic and a much larger number of voyagers are carried to sea than was ever before the case, hence when disasters do occur a very much larger number of people and a vastly greater money value are imperiled than has ever been the case heretofore.

In order to overcome this risk which the navigator is exposed in fog and thick weather a system of submarine signals has been invented and has been quite extensively adopted, which, if it proves to be all claimed for it, promises to relieve the proximity of treacherous coasts of much of their risk. The submarine signaling device consists of a bell submerged near the entrance to a port. The bells are automatically struck so that each bell gives a distinct and separate code signal. As is well known, sound travels a long distance under water, and under the new system of submarine signals ships are provided with receivers below the water line on each bow, with electrical attachments to receive and transmit the sounds picked up in the water. By means of a dial and telephone receivers in the pilot house or on the bridge of the ship, connected by wire with the apparatus on either bow below the water line, the bell signals can be distinctly heard by the navigator, and he is enabled to ascertain by manipulating the apparatus from what direction the sound comes and the approximate distance of the bell. As each bell strikes a peculiar signal, according to a published code, it is possible to determine by listening to the sounds just what particular bell is heard. This, of course, is important where several submarine bells are located in close proximity to one another.

Mono-Railway.

Formal announcement was made of a proposal to build a four-track elevated mono-railway between Newark and Jersey City. The necessary capital has been obtained to finance the undertaking, which, it is predicted by Rapid Transit Commissioner John H. Starin, will prove the forerunner of rapid changes in railroading.

The system is that invented by Howard H. Tunis, a civil engineer of Baltimore. The car is 47 feet long and 6 feet wide and pointed at both ends to diminish wind resistance. It is mounted on two trucks of two tandem wheels each, which are flanged on each side. The single rail car is held securely in an upright position by what is called the equilibrium device at the top.

Supported above the car by iron vents on each side of the track are two small L-shaped rails about 30 inches apart. On these rails run ball bearing guide wheels attached to the ends of X-shaped trucks which surround a long ladder-like trolley pole mounted at each end of the car. The ball bearing guide wheels also conduct the electric power from the two L-shaped rails to the motor. This device in addition to the insuring absolute equilibrium does away, it is claimed, with the present inefficient trolley pole and the deadly third rail.

A New Insecticide.

Chloride of borium, it is claimed, has recently been proved to be the most valuable insecticide known. Used in the proper proportions, it is fatal to almost all kinds of insects, yet injurious neither to man nor plant. It acts very slowly, sometimes requiring 10 days to take effect.

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