

An American Transportation System

III. Seaports

THERE are three links in the chain of transportation between interior America and overseas: the railroad, the port and the steamship line. Today perhaps the weakest link in that chain is the port.

A port is a funnel through which are poured into ships the exports of a great hinterland. It is a clearing house for the goods in international trade. It is a piece of trans-shipment machinery between land and water carriers—sometimes direct trans-shipment, sometimes with a period of storage intervening.

Whatever interferes with the funnel function of a port does it the greatest injury possible. Most of our American ports today are "railroad ports." That is, the overseas pier groups are owned by the various railroad lines terminating in the port. Each railroad tries to prevent all other railroads from carrying any of the freight of the steamship lines docking at its pier group. The funnel is blocked.

Consider a port as it should be laid out and operated. Back of the piers should run a belt line with spur tracks on each pier. The belt line, independently operated, should intersect each rail carrier at the classification yard where its trains are broken up. The belt line would at a low uniform charge move cars between all railroads and all steamship berths. Every steamship line would have all railroad lines working for it, all competing in the vital matters of car supply and inland solicitation of freight. From a traffic viewpoint this port is a perfect funnel.

Such a port is provided by the public belt lines at Montreal and New Orleans. All other ports on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts are "railroad ports," with the single exception of New York. There the harbor waters act as a belt line. Ocean-going vessels had already established themselves in Manhattan when the railroads were built. They terminated on the New Jersey shore, across the Hudson from the piers. The only way for the railroads to reach the vessels was to unload their freight and barge it across the river. This they do; the barging is called lighterage. Each railroad can with equal facility lighter alongside each steamship line; no road can monopolize any berth. So the Hudson serves to neutralize the Manhattan pier locations, lighterage being quite comparable with switching on a belt line.

A vital problem of American transportation

is to clean out the funnels at the railroad ports. Consider one of them, Baltimore, Maryland. In Baltimore are three roads: the Baltimore & Ohio, the Western Maryland, the Pennsylvania. Each owns a terminal devoted to the storage of overseas freight and its trans-shipment between rail and ocean carriers. Each terminal has extensive railroad yards; it has elevators; it has open and covered piers, some for package freight, some for bulk freight like coal and ores; it has expensive machinery for handling bulk freight between car and ship.

A steamship line settling at Baltimore can get the use of one of those railroad piers free of charge, a berth that would cost \$75,000 per year, or more, in New York. The Baltimore rail carrier expects to recoup itself by freight earnings on the traffic passing over its piers. The railroad—say, the B. & O.—which has thus subsidized the steamship line to locate upon its rails, tries to monopolize the inland carriage of all its exports and imports.

The steamship line is obligated, or made to feel obligated, to send via the B. & O. all freight whose routing it can control. The B. & O. refuses to switch to its piers cars with export freight brought by the Pennsylvania or the Western Maryland. If these roads want to carry traffic for a B. & O. steamer, they must bring the car into their own terminals, unload and lighter its contents to ship-side. The B. & O. figures that the added expense of such delivery will discourage the other railroads from trying to serve its steamers, and that the re-handling, incident to lighterage, will discourage the shipper from using any route but the B. & O. The Western Maryland and the Pennsylvania pursue precisely the same policy with respect to their piers.

At banquets each road talks eloquently about the stupendous sums it spends for the development of the port of Baltimore. Then all roads proceed to operate their water terminals in such a way as to split Baltimore into three sub-ports and to confine each steamship line to the car supply, carrying power and soliciting force of a single rail line. Baltimore enjoys only one-third its rightful freedom of traffic flow with respect to the highly competitive middle western territory.

The Baltimore railroad treats the steamer which backs up to its pier just like a dray that has backed up to its freight house. Instead of a funnel, a syphon. The steamer pays such a heavy price for its free berth that most of the steamship lines prefer to shoulder the high rentals at New York piers, which are immune from railroad domination and

for whose traffic all rail carriers compete actively and on equal terms.

"Very well; why not build public piers in Baltimore, self-supporting, as at New York?" Impossible. If the city builds a pier for the use of an oversea line, the rental will be that established by the adjacent railroad piers; namely, nothing at all. In the course of time, as the ocean lines realized the advantage of an independent berth, Baltimore could begin to command rentals for its facilities, but the free railroad piers would always make the return less than self-supporting. The Maryland legislature has authorized Baltimore to issue \$50,000,000 in bonds for port development, on condition that such improvements shall be on a self-supporting basis. For the reasons given, no steamship line will lease a pier. The Port Commission is apparently about to build one for lease to the Western Maryland. It is a great mistake, public credit advanced to perpetuate the evils the railroads created.

Illustrations have been taken from Baltimore; the situation there is typical of all the railroad ports.

There is a solution. The funnels can be cleared.

First, the present piers must be made accessible to all carriers, not simply the railroad owner. This can be accomplished by the institution of reciprocal switching, common enough in domestic rail traffic. To illustrate in the instance we have taken: the B. & O. would be obligated to switch to its pier a Western Maryland car of exports. The B. & O. for this service would, of course, collect a remunerative terminal charge. The charge should cover the cost of the switching movement, unloading, wharfage for use of the pier shed. This charge, which the Western Maryland would pay, would be no greater than the present cost of putting that carload on a Western Maryland pier, preparatory to lightering to the B. & O. steamer. The Western Maryland would then have as great an incentive to solicit and carry for B. & O. steamers as its own. The funnel would be clear.

There is no doubt that the Interstate Commerce Commission can compel reciprocal switching on this export and import traffic, under its power to establish through routes and joint rates. The Commission may prescribe the divisions of joint rates where carriers cannot agree. Thus the Commission if necessary could fix the reciprocal switching charges.

It is well in the range of probability that before long we shall demand compulsory consolidation of all railroad terminals in our great cities. We have no room for their duplicate yards, stations, tracks, approaches. Under such consolidation in Balti-

more, the Consolidated Terminal Company would hold and operate all rail terminals in the district, whether for domestic or foreign freight. Automatically perfect coordination between all carriers and all piers would ensue.

Baltimore's problem is not solved with the clearing of the funnel as to existing piers. For nearly two decades, in every railroad port, the railroads have spent little or nothing on new steamship berths. They have been too poor. No one else could afford to build piers and offer them at the prevailing free rentals. So none have been built save at Philadelphia. There the city has built piers and carried the resulting loss. Few municipalities can afford it, and Philadelphia is about through. So at the railroad ports there is a dearth of modern piers, and no prospect of getting them.

The Consolidated Terminal Company would be the agent of new port development, as well as the operator of facilities now in existence. The city would properly advance to this company the funds necessary to build a coordinating belt line and new piers reached by it. The new facilities should be built with the cooperation and approval of the city and leased by it to the Consolidated. This would save the company four and a half percent annually on the capital cost of the improvement: three percent taxes, since there would be none on city property, and one and a half percent in interest charges. The city could borrow that much cheaper.

In view of the peculiar situation in railroad ports, city-owned and city-operated piers would be a solution less desirable and less promising than the Consolidated Terminal Company. From a traffic viewpoint, the piers under its control can be as completely neutralized as if under public operation. They will be more efficiently operated, better coordinated with the rail lines behind them. The city, in its lease, can provide for proper treatment of the railroad rivals: coastwise lines and motor trucks.

In some of the railroad ports, no new construction need be immediately undertaken. It will suffice if the Consolidated leases the great army war bases as they are cleared of Quartermasters' stores and made available for commercial use. Such bases are at Boston, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Norfolk, Charleston and New Orleans, these six representing the finest ocean terminals in the world.

Reciprocal switching; consolidated rail terminals; public credit for new pier developments to be leased to a consolidated terminal company; operation by the company of the commercialized army war bases; these not revolutionary developments are needed to clear the clogged funnels of traffic at most of our ports and set them free to render their maximum of service to the interior.

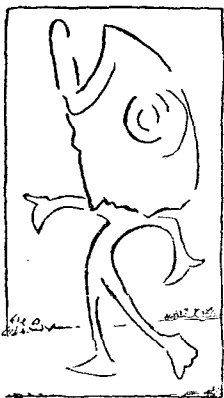
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The Crow's Nest

THE two most picturesque sights in Mezca, when I stopped at the Cape, were two natives who walked around talking to themselves all the time. They talked about the state of the nation, and sometimes of the world. As each had his own ideas about this, they usually went around separately. One of them owned a series of rocks, which he had placed by the roadside, and which he had carved with long thoughtful hieroglyphs when feeling impassioned. He used these to throw at passers-by to emphasize his remarks. He also wore a large bulging mask, resembling the head of a Drum Fish, and he liked to have his views referred to as the Great Drum Fish's views. As to the other native, he delivered his addresses perched on tall stilts, and spoke with a dignified bellow, and called himself Truth. (The Mezcan word is Zumpa, and means not only Truth but All-Wisdom.)

These two rivals, between them, had in a way hypnotized the inhabitants. People not only listened to their numerous views and opinions, and let them throw rocks at them and scold them, but paid them for doing it. They didn't pay them well (these two men were most sarcastic about this) and they didn't often listen attentively to what the men said. But it seemed to impress them to have a Great Drum Fish around.

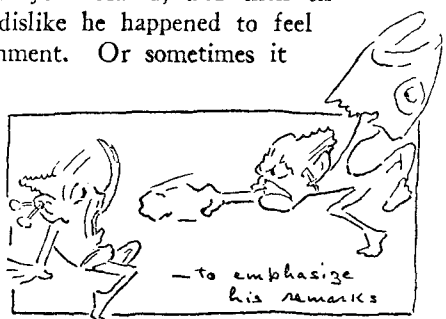
In fact he was so much a public character that I supposed, when he died, they would hold some general election to choose his successor. But not at all; a young native came along named Charlie Sniff, who bought the mask from the family and became the great Drum Fish by purchase; and after a day or two of practice he began to throw rocks. He was most energetic too, and announced that he meant to throw them much harder. He called this procedure, "adopting a more vigorous policy."



In the old Hebrew days when a man wished to behave in this way, yet, not being a priest or a ruler, had no public standing, he went off to some place in the desert and dressed up in goat-skins, and then he presently came back to town and said he was a prophet. Any political opinions he was full of he said were the Lord's.

This interested everyone, even the rulers and priests. If he had just walked around and talked naturally to the crowd, man to man, he wouldn't have been impressive—unless his views made him so, gradually. And that gradual way is too slow for a man in a hurry, as men with opinions that they wish to express mostly are. But when he declared these were the Lord's views, that got him a hearing. So he spoke in an oracular manner and put dust on his head, and danced and rent his garments in twain, and got everyone scared, and then expressed whatever dislike he happened to feel toward the government. Or sometimes it

was his fellow-citizens' habits that he didn't approve of: he then would say the Lord hated the way the women were dressing



for instance. He would get up and shout at the top of his voice "Give ear, O Earth! This people are an offence and an abomination! Thus saith the Lord."

If he hadn't put in "Thus saith the Lord" quickly, the crowd might have stoned him; in fact they did anyhow sometimes, not liking abuse. But they certainly stood a lot of it, first and last, for there were no end of prophets, and they mostly were irascible men who wanted the world changed at once. If one of them felt a grudge toward some particular town, he would go about prophesying against it in the most poisonous way, declaring in his wrath that he hoped the whole place would be ruined. And he insisted on being listened to: when people got tired, and wished to stop listening, that made him indignant. No matter how longwinded and incoherent a speaker he was, he said it was their duty to "hearken to the word of the Lord."



One prophet, Jeremiah, a most positive old man with a short temper, used to become awfully exasperated when his advice wasn't taken. "I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you," he sometimes would scream, "which will not be charmed" (so you needn't plan to escape any such way) "and they shall bite you," he'd howl, with great fierceness; and hurriedly add, "saith the Lord." (Jer. viii, 17.)

No matter what policy a government adopted, or didn't, there was always some prophet who didn't feel satisfied with it, and who felt that if he wasn't satisfied the whole thing was evil. He would then go into action, not by arguing—he didn't bother with arguments—but simply by predicting the most dismal results he could think of. He would say, for instance, that if So-and-so were elected, thorns would come up in the palaces, and nettles and brambles; and the land would become a hissing, and desolate.

Nowadays, when some private citizen feels public-spirited, and wants to say "Woe, Woe," to other citizens, and "Beware," and all that, he too feels an instinct to be as impressive as can be about it. One obvious way to be impressive is to become a great man. But that takes a long time. And even if you do become one, or even if you are one already, people half the time won't believe it till after you're dead. This is not only irritating to a publicist, it's a practical difficulty. Still, it isn't important, for he doesn't need to become a great man. His problem is merely to seem one. What is the best way to do it?

Every age has its method. Yet at bottom each method's the same. The great point is never to admit it's only you who are talking. The modern Jeremiah or Charlie Sniff accordingly rents a small office, and talks his opinions onto paper as fast as he can; and then instead of signing them C. Sniff, he signs them The Editor.

The Editor is a self-bestowed title, yet people respect it. They observe that any man who is an editor takes himself seriously. And not only himself but other editors—he takes them all seriously—they all pretend to take each other that way, same as Kings or High Priests. They quarrel, and they criticize each other, but that doesn't hurt—the main thing is for each of them to speak of himself by his title, and never allude to himself as "I" or to his views as "my" views, but to call himself "We," so as to sound like a bishop, or King.