

ple have turned away from the sea and in their eagerness to unlock our continental treasure-house have forgotten the ancient highways of their race. To-day a tide, set in motion by the World War, carries the thoughts of Americans again to far horizons. Even in the heart of the country there is a growing understanding of the influence of ocean-borne commerce upon our internal prosperity. In the valley of the Mississippi and along the shores of the Great Lakes there has been born anew a demand for access to the sea. As Salem was, so the Lake ports hope to be; and the farmers of the present West think as eagerly of a new water route as did the settlers along the Ohio of untrammelled navigation down the Mississippi to the Gulf.

This new understanding of the significance of sea-borne commerce offers no encouragement to those who would deny the Nation the Navy to which it is entitled. The naval policy of Cleveland, Roosevelt, and Wilson represents both the part of wisdom and the path to political approval. The naval policy of Thomas Jefferson and Calvin Coolidge is not in tune with the times.

A Tragedy of the Alphabet

TO those in search of something to reform, we commend the names of the letters of the English alphabet. This has appealed to some of us as a field potentially fruitful, but, as professional reformers appeared to have plenty to do and as we ourselves were not in the reform business, nothing was said about it. Now an incident—a tragedy—makes such mention imperative. The nomenclature of our alphabet has deprived heroism, not merely of reward, but of fruition.

A young wife, alone but for her baby, in a dark house in Washington, heard stealthy steps on the stairs. She peered down. A man was creeping up. She snatched a pistol from a drawer. It was empty, as she knew, but as the intruder did not know. She pointed it at him, made him put up his hands. She backed him downstairs and along a hall. She held him at the point of the pistol while she took down the telephone receiver and called the police station. To the sergeant who answered she said, "Send a policeman right away to 3534 T Street, Northwest, or I shall have to shoot a man I am holding at bay." The policeman was despatched at once by motorcycle.

An hour and a half later a male member of the T Street household came home. In the almost dark hall he stum-

bled over the unconscious body of the woman.

The policeman never came. The brave young woman's bluff could not last forever. As the minutes dragged out to an hour, the strain told. Her pistol hand faltered. The now desperate intruder hurled a heavy book, knocked her down, stepped over her, and fled to the street, expecting, of course, to encounter the policeman. But the policeman was back at the station-house complaining to his companions of persons who call for a policeman and then say they did not.

And all of this was not the fault of anybody—not, that is, of anybody at all directly concerned in the tragedy. It was the fault of those who devised the names of the letters of the English alphabet, possibly of those who have permitted those names to remain as they are. When the woman said "T Street," the desk sergeant heard "P Street." It was a rush order. He did not take time to query, "P as in Peter?" and to have her reply, "No, T as in Thomas." Of course, he would not take time for that, even if policemen have learned this art of the switchboard girls and even if the woman could have followed the code. To the P Street address the policeman went, and there was nothing wrong there.

But for the fact that it is in another police precinct, he would have been as likely to go to B Street. Or to C Street, or D Street, or E Street, or G Street, or V Street, or Z Street—just as likely to go to any of these seven as to T Street, where he was wanted, or to P Street, where he went and was not wanted.

No, the Police Department was not greatly to blame. Nine letters that sound alike are simply too many for any one alphabet. Tragedies from their confusion are inevitable. Of course, this particular tragedy would not have occurred if the east and west streets of Washington had been given good, honest, mouth-filling names instead of letters. But that would have been merely one tragedy averted of the many that are potential in nine letters indistinguishable over the telephone except by the device of inquiring, "B as in Bartholomew or Z as in Zarubbabel?" And, even so, there are those who, with an inherent twist toward the alliterative, would hear that query, "Z as in Zartholomew or B as in Barubbabel?"

Unless we are to admit inferiority to the ancients, reform is imperative. A night-desk sergeant of the glory that was Greece, being urged to send quickly a policeman to Tau Street, never would have made the mistake of sending him to Pi Street.

Communizing City Transit

CONDITIONS of transit in New York City are bad. Before they can become better they will probably become worse. They are unsatisfactory alike to those who own the lines and those who use them. The companies blame the five-cent fare. This, however, the city administration has refused to abandon. It has allowed its own share of the losses to fall upon the taxpayers. The corporations have apparently won Governor Smith over to a plan to abolish the city commission in charge of transit and turn control over to the Public Service Commission of the State. Such a plan, even though the members of the State Commission that will control the transit are citizens of the city, is not in the direction of municipal home rule. Surely there is nothing over which a city ought to have more direct control than the transportation of its own citizens within its own borders. The State too, of course, has an interest, for some of the lines extend beyond the city limits, and all of the lines have to be financed under State auspices. The conflict for control will delay the increase in facilities. It is argued that the city has no adequate funds to be used in extension. Politics is partly to blame; but also bad management and a lack of corporation statesmanship.

Ninety miles away from New York there is an example of city transit that not only provides facilities but pays dividends. This is in Philadelphia, where the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company has just passed its fifteenth year under the management of Thomas E. Mitten. When he took hold after the strikes of 1909-10, the company had, to use his own phrase, "nothing but debts and deprivations and no prospects of anything better in sight." All these have vanished. Mr. Mitten has not only placed the finances of the corporation upon a sound basis, but he has conducted a successful experiment in co-operative endeavor to the vast benefit, not only of the community and the stockholders, but the employees as well. We quote a bulletin for the employees:

To-day, you have more than a \$12,000,000 interest in the stock of P. R. T. which—due to your effectiveness—earns and pays 2 per cent quarterly; you have more than \$3,000,000 in your savings and pension funds; and more than \$15,000,000 in your home ownership and life insurance. This gives you a grand total of more than \$30,000,000—averaging over \$3,000 each.

Not only this, but the men operating

the cars sold \$18,000,000 worth of securities to the passengers. Thus the company, through its employees, did away with all underwriting and syndicating operations, received full value for its obligations, and enlisted popular support. It has been easy to persuade people to buy a security the return from which will pay their car-fare. This is, of course, communism, but without red flags and humbug. It is competent industrial democracy.

Employees are also paid higher wages there than on any other traction line in the country, the cars are better cared for, and there has been a reduction in the amount of carelessness and resulting damage that has a marked effect upon the cost of operation.

Besides the investment phase carried on co-operatively through the Employees' Association, a benefit fund exists ample for all emergencies. It gave liberally to the families of policemen killed on duty, gave Dr. Russell H. Conwell a needed lift, made a liberal contribution to the Florida storm sufferers, and even helped out the Sesqui-Centennial.

To all this has now been added a co-operative bank, also under Mitten management. Of its purpose the founder says:

Mitten Men and Management Bank is the ultimate expression of the Mitten plan of helping labor to become capital. You men who have now learned to appreciate the great happiness that comes from giving, are in 1926 here pledging your time and money—through the activities of this bank—to magnify by 10,000 times the great work of doing good to others which I here struggled alone to accomplish at the outset in 1910.

Mitten Men and Management Bank is not out to earn or to pay big dividends. The policy of this bank is to help others to help themselves, even as P. R. T. men have been helped to help themselves. The family that has but \$100 needs the aid of this bank to increase its estate—one hundred times more than the man who has \$10,000. Safe deposit boxes at \$2 a year—free advice on the making of wills to protect the families of workers, and not more than actual cost of administering the estates of poor people, will not be productive of big dividends in money, but will pay big in helping to increase the savings of the workingman.

To reach this point the Philadelphia public had to pay dearly. Under the Widener-Elkins syndicate investors were fleeced, just as they were under the Whitney-Ryan combination in New York and the Long Island Traction Group in Brooklyn. Yet the vast wreckage in Philadelphia has been reclaimed.

The great part of the reclamation was

on a five-cent-fare basis. The present rate is seven cents, with free transfers. This was forced on Mr. Mitten by the controllers of the overhead securities, very much against his will. He wished to continue the five-cent fare and make a charge for transfers, but was outvoted, with the result that 100,000,000 short riders, the most profitable sort, were lost in the first year, and the benefits aimed at were not achieved.

The Philadelphia Company has taken over all forms of transit, including not

only the city-owned subway, but even taxicab service. It has developed bus lines where trolleys do not pay, has established parking places for auto users on the edge of the town where they may transfer to transit lines, and during the Sesqui-Centennial successfully operated an air line to Washington.

This shows what can be done by common sense, co-operation, and freedom from financial exploitation. It is the thing all cities are entitled to, but which Philadelphia has alone secured.

How to Tell a Classic

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THE word "classic" is anathema to a good many of the young people of the day. Classic music, classic paintings, classic poems, and even classic novels they avoid if they can. They appear to regard the adjective classic as a synonym of boring. Unfortunately, there is too much justification for their attitude—not in the real classics, but in the methods which our schools and colleges adopt in initiating young students into the so-called mysteries of classical literature. When the preparatory-school pupil is plunged head first into Xenophon's "Anabasis" or Caesar's "Commentaries" and told that this is the way to become familiar with "the classics," no wonder he gets a repellent shock like that of a douche of cold water. In French he is told to read Corneille and Racine—or at least he used to be in my student days—and in English he is made to pull Shakespeare to pieces like a treatise on chemistry or is set to work on the novels of Richardson and Fielding or the most antiquarian of the tales of Scott.

If I were trying to interest a group of school boys or girls in classical literature, I should begin by saying to them some of the things set down in this article. In fact, I recently did say them to a high school assembly in one of the boroughs of New York City when invited to do so by the head of the Department of English. I infer from the attitude of my audience that they were interested. Whether their teachers approved is more doubtful. These boys and girls were not studying Greek and Latin, but they were supposed to be learning something about the classics of English literature. If what I said is true of English classics, it is also true—although doubtless not the whole truth—of Latin, Greek, French, and Italian classics.

The word classic comes from the Latin adjective *classicus*. Now *classicus*

had to do with the classes or divisions of society under one of the Roman constitutions. The word gradually came to mean belonging to the first class. And so we use the word class in American slang to mean first rate, tip-top, or, as the English say in their slang, "topping." If you ask an Eton boy whether he had a good time at a party, he will answer, "Topping!" You ask an American schoolboy about some pretty girl he knows, and perhaps he will reply, "I'll say she has some class!" The word class, therefore, means of extra fine quality.

In literature the word classic was originally limited to Greek and Latin prose and poetry. It has now come to mean any piece of literature whose quality is such that it has survived for fifty or a hundred years and is by common consent regarded as so good as to be permanent. A literary classic should possess one or all of the following qualities:

I. It should reflect the mode of thought and the customs and manners of its time.

The travels of Herodotus, the dialogues of Socrates, and the novels of Jane Austen are examples.

II. It should be written in a beautiful and striking style.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Speech is an example.

III. It should spring from and appeal to a cultivated imagination.

The poems of Keats are an example.

IV. It should be a contribution to the thought of the world and should stimulate the thought of the world.

The essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson are an example.

V. It should possess a universal human interest and express all phases of human experience.

The Old Testament and Shakespeare's plays are examples.

No one generation can determine what classics it is producing. The final judg-