



REFLECTIONS

IIIII BY STAFF WRITERS IIIII

THE train despatcher is a man on whose vigilance depends the safety of many people. He has his times of trial and tribulation. Occasionally he is the leading figure in a tragedy. Not long ago, a despatcher

RAILWAY TRAGEDIES

in Toronto was controlling trains on a line in a certain district, when it occurred to him that a "special" freight had not been reported for some time. It should have been at a certain station. He touched his ticker and asked the stationmaster if it was there. The answer came back, "Just pulled out." He replied "Can you stop it?" Quickly he heard "No." He cut off and called the station to which it was heading. "Has No. 4 left?" No. 4 was a passenger train heading the other way. "Just pulled out" flashed back. The operator sat back and grew pale. The two trains were destined to meet and it was too late to prevent it. There was nothing to do but call up the company's doctor and order out the wrecking train, which he did four minutes before the wreck occurred.

Many will recall the famous Wanstead tragedy between London and Sarnia a few years ago, when the Grand Trunk despatcher at London tried in vain to call the operator of a certain office to stop a train which was rushing on to destruction in a similar manner. In that case the despatcher was to blame; in the case recited above, the train crew of the freight were at fault.

A somewhat similar case occurred recently at Myrtle, between Toronto and Montreal on the Canadian Pacific. Two trains were to cross at this little station and both had orders to that effect. The eastbound train ran in to Myrtle and the engineer saw another train on the siding. He supposed it was the westbound train, and when he got the signal from his conductor to go ahead he went without suspicion. He did not know until it was too late that the train he saw there was a third train and not the one he was ordered to cross. Just after the train pulled out, the station-agent saw that a mistake had been made. He got his velocipede and tried to catch the train. He could not do it. The collision occurred and lives were lost.

One must have great sympathy with these hard-worked men, even when one cannot justify their carelessness. All railways are working hard to perfect their system of despatching in order that such accidents as these may be avoided. The best system will fail, however, if the trainmen, operators and despatchers are not strictly accurate in their obedience.

SINCE 1867 Canada has spent approximately \$90,000,000 on its canal system. Eight-tenths of this sum has been expended on the route from Lake Superior to the seaboard by way of the St. Lawrence. Yet with

A NATIONAL CANAL POLICY

all this expenditure the canal system has fallen short of anticipations in attracting traffic. One great difficulty has been that the improvements in the canal system have not kept pace with the improvements in lake shipping. The lake vessels have been lengthened and deepened: the Welland canal with locks 270 feet in length and 14 feet in depth limits the efficiency of the through route.

Now it is being proposed by some that the Welland

Canal should be lengthened and deepened so as to permit the movement of the vessels from the upper lakes. Others propose that the improvement should be concerned simply with lessening the lighterage charges. In either case there should first be considered the price to be paid and the returns to be obtained. And along with this should be remembered that, since the government has adopted the principle of toll-free canals, this means an increase in expenditure without the direct increase in revenue. If, as has been urged, the improvements, whatever their scope, are to be concerned with the Welland Canal alone, leaving the portion of the route from Prescott down as it is at present, then the improvements would simply mean the deflection of more traffic to the seaboard of the United States since the lake vessels would be able to proceed to Ogdensburg either without breaking bulk or with smaller charges for lighterage. Already the shipments by way of Ogdensburg equal three-fourths of the tonnage carried down the canals to Montreal.

But it is not only the cost to the government that must be considered. The settlement of the Canadian West in connection with the earlier settlement of the North Western States makes the Welland Canal route of less importance than formerly. As settlement and grain production move west and north, the importance of direct lines of communication eastward from the upper lakes becomes more manifest. At present the railway lines from Georgian Bay ports have advantages in this respect. During 1906, 21.5 per cent. of the grain shipped from the head of Lake Superior went by vessel to points east of the Welland canal; while the rail shipments from Georgian Bay and other Canadian ports was 39 per cent. The railways have been improving their facilities, while the canal system below the upper lakes has remained practically constant. In addition, the railways have an advantage in point of time as compared with the long detour by way of the lower lakes.

Shall we then build the Georgian Bay Canal, taking advantage of a northern water route and saving 400 miles in the water journey to Montreal? But if this route is successfully opened it will increase the disadvantage under which the Welland canal route at present labours. It would be manifestly futile to build the Georgian Bay Canal and then improve the Welland Canal to offset this increased competition. Which shall be carried through? What is needed is a national policy, not opportunism concerned with expenditures proportioned to the urgency of local demand.

Too often Canada has generously devoted large sums for enterprises which time has shown to be crudely conceived. Expensive canals should not be undertaken except after the strictest and most thorough investigation.

IS Judge Taft acting as a stalking-horse for Theodore Roosevelt? It is true that in November, 1904, on the evening of his election as President, Mr. Roosevelt announced with all circumstantiality his determination to make this his last term. But the indications are that in the DEMOCRACY'S SINISTER FRIENDS North, at least, there is going on a reorganisation of political parties. The "Roosevelt Democrat" is to be found on every hand. Usually a prosperous citizen who possesses conservative interests, the