

THE FARM BULLETIN.

A Letter from "Eagle Eye."

By Peter McArthur.

It has seldom been my lot to get a letter which gives me so much solid satisfaction as the one I am about to quote. It is from a railway engineer, who is evidently a thoroughly good fellow, and he states the case about whistling at level crossings with a frankness that leaves nothing to be desired. You can easily see that from his point of view he is entirely right and I haven't a leg to stand on. However, I shall not give his name or address, because I doubt very much if either the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers or the railway companies will feel properly grateful to him for his defence. He need not worry, however, I shall not give up his name whatever happens. It is one of the strictest rules of the newspaper man's profession never to reveal the sources of his information. I want you to read his letter carefully and then we will discuss its amazing wrong-headedness in an entirely friendly spirit.

"Dear Sir,—As a reader of the Farmer's Advocate, I note in some of your articles your comments on the neglect of Loco. Engineers to blow whistle or ring bell at level crossings. As I am a Loco. Engineer probably I know something about this so-called neglect. Now, Peter, permit me to say that railroad engineers are, I think, the best trained skilled laborers that I know of. They are "schooled" by qualified experts from start to finish and a travelling engineer is on the road at all times to see that they perform their duties in accordance with the company's rules. Otherwise they would soon find themselves up on 'the carpet.'

"I do not deny that you can find cases of engineers passing level crossings without whistling. And why? Because if you observe there was not a pedestrian or vehicle of any kind within a quarter of a mile of any crossing or a possible chance of anyone being on said crossing before the train reached it. And now, Peter, what in the name of common reason do you want the whistle blown for, frightening the horses in the barnyard, or when ploughing in the field, and to the great annoyance of the passengers which this continual blowing of the whistle causes? You know the whistle boards are very frequent on the line of a railroad and on the average call for the blowing of the whistle about every thirty seconds.

"Just lately I read in the Toronto papers that the citizens of North Toronto are petitioning the Railway Board to stop this whistling in that district, as they cannot sleep at night and their nerves are terribly racked thereby. Now, I imagine the Railroad Board must be in a terrible dilemma as to how to settle these vexatious questions and at the same time please everyone. You say eighty per cent. of the accidents are caused by neglect to blow the whistle. Now, Peter, did it ever occur to you that if a person or persons approaching a railway crossing would look in both directions first that there is absolutely no danger of an accident, but the great trouble is people neglect to do this. At all railway crossings there is a signboard which reads thus: 'Railway Crossing. Look out for the cars.' How many people read this or obey its instructions? I will venture to say that eighty per cent. pay no attention to it whatever or heed the warning. It is remarkable how people are so careless in passing over railroad tracks and no one can judge this better than the Loco. Engineer. Yes, Peter, this is the whole trouble. We cannot get people to look out for their own safety. They seem to think there is no one else in the world but only them. Now, what do you think of a man or woman deliberately walking on the track right in front of a monster locomotive and not looking where they are going? That is just what they do when these accidents occur. Whistle or no whistle, look out for your own safety and do not depend on others, and if you see an approaching car or motor car keep well back and do not make the foolish attempt of so many to get across first. The people need to be educated on this subject and I know it well.

"Railroad engineers deplore these accidents more than anyone, and if it was not for their care and watchfulness the list of level-crossing accidents would be astounding. The blowing of the whistle at country crossings in an open field and no one within range makes it a common nuisance to the travelling public, but, of course, judgment must be used.

"Yours for the public safety,  
"EAGLE EYE."

I venture to think that few more sincere letters than this have ever been written, and it carries with it such an air of conviction that it almost "puts me from my faith." But let us examine it for a moment. To begin with, let us

take the last clause of the last sentence. "Of course judgment must be used." I have read that Railroad Act pretty carefully, but I can find no hint that there is any room for "judgment" in the matter. It is explicitly stated that the signals must be given at all level crossings under pain of heavy penalties to be borne by the engineer and the railway alike. My dear Eagle Eye, almost the entire business of the courts of our country is to deal with men who used their own judgment as to when the laws should be obeyed. When a law is there the citizen has no right to question it. It is not left to private individuals to say when a law shall be obeyed and when it shall not. The only thing you can do is to obey or suffer the consequences! And don't you think you are a trifle absurd when you say that the Railroad Commission must be in something of a dilemma as regards knowing when whistles should be blown and should not. You undertake to settle that whole matter all by yourself while sitting in your cab. I grant all you say about the intelligence and skill of railway engineers, but I do not think that we can quite trust them to exercise the functions of a judge of the Supreme Court while attending to their other work. And I will venture the opinion that if the Railway Board orders that whistles be not blown in North Toronto they will order at the same time that all crossings in the district be protected with bells, gates or watchmen. The simple fact is that every time you neglect to blow the whistle you are a law-breaker and open to punishment. There is no getting around this. Now, let us consider the wisdom of this law which you feel can be enforced or neglected according to your judgment. It strikes me that the men who framed that law and spread it on the statute books had a well-founded belief that engineers are human beings just like the rest of us. Just like people on foot they are apt to be overtaken by the idea that they are the only people in the world and may forget to look carefully on both sides of the track to see that there is no one in danger of being hit. It is a peculiarity of the human mind that we can think of only one thing at a time. A man travelling along a lonely country road is very liable to get thinking so intently about something that he will forget his surroundings and not notice the railway crossing when he reaches it. Engineers, in the same way, are liable to forget. As you are the person who is in danger of killing people I think the law-makers were very wise in putting on you the burden of giving adequate warning of your approach.

There is another sound reason why the framers of the law did not leave it to you to decide just when the signals should be given. If you were allowed any option in the matter the importance of giving the signals would be greatly decreased and you would be tempted from time to time to neglect giving them. I am told that when a heavily-loaded engine is working on an up-grade an engineer is frequently so busy between handling the sand and looking after the steam pressure that it is practically impossible to give the signals, leave alone keeping watch to see whether there is anyone approaching on the highway. And at night, when most of the worst accidents occur, the engineer cannot possibly see for more than a few rods on either side of the crossing where the light strikes. I quite agree with you that people are as careless as you say, but while human nature is what it is we cannot expect them to be otherwise. And it is doubly necessary for anyone like yourself who is driving a dangerous engine through the country to obey the law to the full. You at least, on account of your work, are supposed to be alert at all times and I think the law-makers were entirely wise in placing on you the burden of warning forgetful pedestrians and drivers. If your judgment leads you to neglect giving the signals at one point your carelessness, or the fact that you are thinking only of yourself, may lead you to neglect it at the next.

Another point in your letter that interests me very much is your statement that engineers must perform their duties in accordance with the company's rules or they will soon find themselves "on the carpet." This makes it quite clear that the General Manager of your company has not made obedience to the law about whistling one of the rules of the company.

I am more thankful to you, Eagle Eye, than I can say for your very frank letter. It will help me more than anything that has happened since this campaign began. I am inclined to think that the Railroad Commissioners will find your letter most interesting reading, but you need not be alarmed, I shall cut off your signature before I send it to them. If your argument had been that it was impossible for you to give all the signals and attend to your other work, I would have fought for you tooth and nail to see that you got the necessary assistance, but when you make obedience to the law a matter of your

personal judgment I am afraid I must oppose you to the end.

The remarks about scaring the horses in the fields need no comment. As for the annoyance to the passengers, I can only say that when travelling on the train to Toronto last week I listened carefully and found it very difficult to hear the whistle at all. The comforts of the passengers do not enter into the question, and I cannot see that any of the arguments advanced excuse the engineers or the railways from obeying the law that was meant to safeguard the general public. Where human lives are at stake, Eagle Eye, you cannot be allowed to use your judgment.

"Sir Peter McArthur."

Editor "The Farmer's Advocate":

I have been a subscriber to "The Farmer's Advocate" for over twelve years, and have often thought of testifying to the pleasure and profit I have received from its pages, but have hitherto refrained.

The illuminating thought-inspiring articles of "Sir" Peter McArthur, (if he isn't a knight I am sure he is more deserving of the honor than many that have it), are worth many times the cost of the whole paper. I wonder he isn't afraid Sir Jingo McBore will call him a demagogue, and accuse him of trying to set class against class. That I have noticed is often thrown at whoever attempts to expose the schemes of the big interests.

There is a rumor that Sir Jingo and some of his financial associates are going to finance an agricultural paper to be published in the city of Toronto, to educate farmers along proper economic lines, and teach them their duty to their betters. I suppose the old Farmer's Advocate will be put out of business. Luckily you have a farm to retire to.

If they haven't yet engaged an editor, I would respectfully nominate Peter McArthur, for editor-in-chief, and E. C. Drury, Past Master of the Dominion Grange, as associate editor. If they will accept this well meant advice, and give the gentlemen named a free hand in the management of the paper, I am sure they will make a howling success of the venture, besides doing educational work of real value.

Wishing "The Farmer's Advocate" the success it deserves, and Mr. McArthur an abundant harvest from his orchard and farm, and that a sound, healthy public opinion may spring from the seed he has sown in the public mind.

Essex Co., Ont. COLIN BOTSFORD.

Dr. Matheson Goes to Truro.

Robert Matheson, Ph. D., Cornell, at present Assistant Professor of Biology at Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y., has been appointed Provincial Entomologist for the Province of Nova Scotia and Professor of Zoology at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, Truro. Mr. Matheson is a native of Picton County, Nova Scotia, and graduated from the School of Agriculture under the management of Prof. H. W. Smith. After taking his master's degree at Cornell, for two years he occupied the position of State Entomologist for North Dakota. Returning to Cornell, he took his doctor's degree with high honors, and was immediately appointed to the staff of that institution.

The greater part of Dr. Matheson's work will have to do with the investigation of entomological problems in the Province of Nova Scotia and the administration of various measures for the prevention and extermination and control of insect pests.

With the large additional space which the new building, now in course of construction at the Agricultural College, will afford, and the strong additions to the staff which have been made during the past summer, the Nova Scotia Agricultural College is in a better position than ever to carry on its work for the advancement of agriculture in the East.

September Very Wet in P. E. I.

The September circular of the Department of Agriculture at Charlottetown, P.E.I., issued on the tenth of the month, stated that the weather there had continued rainy and cold. With the exception of two weeks, one in the middle of August and one beginning September 1st, rain has fallen on almost every day. Haying was not completed till the last week of August. The yield was about average. A lot of it was spoiled in the making, and much more of it was of poor quality on account of being overripe. Wheat is below average. The growth on the ground was heavy, but in some sections it rusted very badly. At the time of writing, less than half the oats and barley is cut, and some saved. Much that is cut is not sufficiently ripe to make the best quality of seed. Unless the weather becomes more favorable much of the late-sown oats will not ripen. The