

Letters to the Editor

[The RAILWAY AGE welcomes letters from its readers and especially those containing constructive suggestions for improvements in the railway field. Short letters—about 250 words—are particularly appreciated. The editors do not hold themselves responsible for facts or opinions expressed.]

The Annual Total of Automobile Fatalities

NEW YORK CITY.

TO THE EDITOR:

I have read in the *Railway Age* of February 23, page 462, the abstract of the address given by me at Michigan University on February 12, and I appreciate your attention to this very important subject. You are in error, however, in saying that I made no mention of automobile casualties at places other than railroad crossings. On page 15, I said, " * * * considering travel by automobiles the death rate in a period of five years increased 600 per cent; and in 1922 there was an average of 38 fatalities per day. It is true that the number of fatalities per million cars registered shows a decrease in 1922 over 1917; but if the reverse were true we should indeed have sufficient tragedies to occupy the entire space of the public press. If the same ratio of increase obtains in 1924 as during the last few years, we may expect a toll of 46 deaths per day from this cause alone."

And if the ratio of increase recorded for 1923 shall obtain in 1924, we may expect in the current year no less than 11,500 fatalities, in connection with the operation of automobiles, exclusive of those occasioned by collisions with trains at railroad crossings.

CHAS. E. HILL.

Railroads and Federal Taxes

NEWARK, N. J.

TO THE EDITOR:

Now that discussion of income tax legislation in Congress has quieted down somewhat, perhaps the time is not inopportune to raise a question about the railroads' attitude on the problem.

Many railroads in statements and posters and on dining car menus advocated the Mellon program for the reduction of high surtaxes, doubtless with the idea that somehow or other the passage of this tax bill would help them in some indirect way. But how about a little direct relief in the form of tax reduction for the railways? Why did they not say something about that?

In 1921 when the excess profits tax on corporations was repealed, the flat corporation tax rate was raised from 10 per cent to 12½ per cent. The railroads, not having earned enough to come under the excess profits provisions, had their taxes raised at the time when practically all other taxes were being lowered. The Mellon plan carried no provision for direct tax relief to the railroads. Rather than giving unqualified support to the Mellon or any other plan for tax reduction not affecting the railroads directly would it not, perhaps, have been more seemly for them to have called attention to the fact that *the railroads form the only considerable group either of persons or corporations which since the war have not only had no tax relief from the government but have actually had their rate raised?*

E. P. T.

Grade Crossing Puzzles Yet to be Solved

PLATTSBURG, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

Here are a few platitudes from Plattsburg. Those of your readers who heard Mr. Rudd and saw his reels at the New York Railroad Club the other night will, like myself, have a good many conflicting emotions in regard to the grade crossing problem; and in the confusion which results from contemplation of such disturbing perplexities, they will probably be glad to look for a moment on the calmer side of the situation.

Mr. Rudd estimates that three per cent of motorists are reckless; did it ever occur to him that probably these three per cent are incurable? Or, if you could reform them, or kill them off, a new three per cent would arise to take their places. Look at recklessness in other lines of human activity; it will be seen that 97 per cent of correct behavior is a very good percentage. The careful crossing campaign and other safety movements become very tiresome to the people (97 per cent of the whole) who do not need such elementary instruction. Examination of motorists to guard against color-blindness, heart disease, deafness, etc., would be well enough if not so costly and so liable to be often done by incompetent or lazy examiners; but the reckless or pig-headed motorists would slip through the net.

The fundamental inconstancy of the human mind is responsible for a good deal of this crossing recklessness. A certain man is sane and sober at one time but unreliable at another.

A considerable percentage of the locomotive engineers who get into trouble are men who would never have been detected by any amount of examinations; that is, they are what we call good men; all right most of the time, but liable to inexplicable lapses. Mr. Rudd himself, approaching a crossing, stopped his auto; but, the next time he came to that crossing did not think to stop.

Don't try to accomplish the impossible.

When you consider all of these causes which cannot be reached it will be seen that striving after perfection is a waste of energy. If the railroads and the towns co-operate to provide uniform signs, gates, lights and other protective fixtures and rules, they will have done their duty. To prevent the three per cent from killing themselves and wrecking express trains you will have to put a crook or a hump in the highway, so as to make it absolutely impossible for an automobile to approach the crossing at other than very low speed. You cannot make them stop their cars before crossing, even then, unless you arrest and fine hundreds of them in every city every year. To do this you would have to greatly improve the courts and the police departments; for, as we see in connection with motorists' offenses at other places than railway crossings, the courts are too lenient, the police are too busy or there are too few of them and the city councils are too stingy with appropriations for policemen's salaries.

I have called these thoughts platitudes because they are known to everybody. Why do we continue to burden our linotypers with ponderous printed discussions of multitudinous details while yet omitting to recognize these obvious primary elements of this very practical side of the question? To effect any change in the present state of things you have got to go to a dozen State legislatures and secure the passage of some very restrictive laws; and, having done that, you will probably find that the laws are a constant inconvenience to the millions of careful motorists, while yet they are not rigid enough to prevent the heedless driver from continuing his heedless course.

N. HERO.