

## Letters to the Editor

### ARTICLES FROM MAINTAINERS

#### TO THE EDITOR:

I am glad to see the *Railway Signal Engineer* start to devote more space to the maintainer. The paper has some very interesting articles and I have always hoped that space would be provided for maintainers to exchange opinions on various cases of trouble and methods of doing their work. The old saying is that "a good, competent, reliable maintainer is worth more to the company than the signal and signal apparatus he maintains."

Atoka, Okla.

G. A. GUCHENER.

(The *Railway Signal Engineer* will be glad to receive descriptions of peculiar cases of trouble and the causes and articles dealing with maintenance and construction; short cuts in doing work; kinks and similar articles for publication.—Editor.)

### GRADE CROSSINGS AND ACCIDENTS

#### TO THE EDITOR:

It may be impertinent for a layman to venture two questions anent the Porter, Indiana, accident, but after reading your description and editorial I am led to inquire:

First: Would not a reasonably safe application of "safety first" operation demand reduced speed on approaching and passing over such an important grade crossing as that at Porter?

Second: Would not the two roads be money in pocket if one line were depressed underneath the other, eliminating the interlocking plant, attendant operators and any possibility of such a disaster as that which cost so dearly on February 27?

It seems to the outside observer that to cross two high-speed lines at grade is expensive and dangerous practice.

New York.

A. C. M.

### THE USE OF A STANDARD SYSTEM OF NOMENCLATURE

#### TO THE EDITOR:

This has nothing to do with the accident at Porter, though I admit that it is inspired by something I read in one of the accounts of that accident in the daily papers.

We all of us are, or ought to be, now engaged in rebuilding the railroad business, or profession, as it had better be called, along more systematic lines than it has followed in the past and what we need, and need badly, is a standard system of nomenclature or a standard language in which to express our thoughts. To some extent this has been furnished by the American Railway Association and the various technical societies in their lists of definitions, but this authorized language is used entirely too little by persons in authority and therefore fails to be impressed on the minds of the masses. English is a good voluminous language, and yet in our everyday conversation few English-speaking people even try to speak it either correctly or to the best advantage. We all use slang much more than we should and many of us are ungrammatical in our use of words where we are not using slang. This seems to be a purely Anglo Saxon trait. Every Frenchman, every German, every Italian, and every Russian, the latter especially, tries to speak his native tongue correctly and is proud of himself if he succeeds, while an Englishman or an American would

blush with shame were he caught answering a question as to his health with: "I feel very well today, thank you," instead of "Bally well, old top;" or a request to do something for someone else with: "I shall be glad to do so," instead of: "Sure," or "Bet your life, I will." In my school days I studied English grammar under a teacher who ding-donged in the ears of the class each day an axiom which, though I did not think so much of it at the time, is very near the truth. It was: "Slovenly speaking indicates slovenly thinking."

Now, in my particular branch of the railroad service, which has grown from infancy to full manhood in the last 20 years, we have a very complete and carefully considered set of definitions. Yet I frequently handle correspondence and have conversations with officers of much higher rank than myself, in which they designate railroad apparatus by names entirely unauthorized by any set of definitions. There is no such thing officially as a passing track, an order board, a green blade, a yellow blade, a red blade, a pot signal, and these expressions should be dropped from the vocabulary, written and oral, of every railroad man from trainmaster up. When this class of official does this it will not be long before train and enginemen acquire the habit, too. Siding, train order signal, distant signal, home signal and dwarf signal are no harder to write or to speak than the above misnomers.

Conductor of M. C. No. 20 is reported as having testified that the engineman of his train after the accident at Porter told him that the fireman had said: "All the way, Bill," meaning the line was clear. Had he been trained to say: "Signal clear, signal caution or signal stop," perhaps he would have been more careful in watching the indications.

Chicago.

J. B. LATIMER.

### CONSERVATION PREFERRED TO RECLAMATION

#### TO THE EDITOR:

For the past eighteen months several of the railroads have been carrying on a campaign for saving material by various means. Someone has called this a *reclamation* feature, although, for my part, I should rather call it *conservation*. However, it is purely a question of economics, no matter by what name it is called.

The question of reclaiming material taken from the discard as well as that which has become obsolete through improper storage is not so much a problem as that of proper conservation. Modern methods of welding and brazing, and machines for making bolts and nuts, used by an organization properly supervised, will bring the desired results.

On the other hand, it does not occur to me that the process of saving material should necessarily follow its way through a machine. We are not so much interested in knowing how to turn a piece of material into something different as we are to know how to prevent the necessity for having to do this.

Abnormal conditions during the past two or three years, the unwarranted tendency to waste, the spirit of discord among the men, the lack of pride in things which used to be a hobby with us; these things all have a bearing on our material situation today.

Someone has said that the solution of the problem is purely a matter of education. I would rather suggest that it seems more of a lack of interest in most cases. It is not a question of knowing how, but more the spirit of really wanting to do something which will count.

It seems to me that we should begin at the bottom and reclaim some of our lost ideas. We want to bring back the time when pride in the condition of our territories was the only incentive needed to bring about any neces-