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IS AN AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE DESIRABLE?

Is it worth while to attempt to restore our flag to the high seas? Do we in war or in peace need an American merchant marine? Should we attempt to reverse the national policy that has all but driven our flag from the over-sea commerce?



While it is no more necessary, economically speaking, that a nation should carry its products in its own ships, than that a merchant should haul his goods in his own drays, yet conditions may arise to make a merchant marine desirable both in war and in peace.

The American battleship fleet that went around the world demonstrated more than was intended. Battleships without coal are as useless as guns without powder; and in case of hostilities not one of the twenty-seven colliers that waited upon the fleet would have dared approach it.

True, we could have sent out some of our coasting fleet, but these vessels are smaller, slower, and in every way inferior to the great over-sea ships.

And the disadvantage of transporting troops would be still greater. It was a simple matter to throw a few troops into near-by Cuba, with only Spain to oppose us; or to send men to the Philippines with no naval opposition; but how would it have been in the face of England, Germany or Japan?



But it is in time of peace that ships render the best service.

So long as the dominant force in this country strove by means of high tariffs to make of it a hermit nation, the question of over-sea shipping

did not matter. But somehow the laws of trade have not respected the laws of man.

Our foreign commerce, in spite of restrictive tariffs, has increased five-fold in the past fifty years. And since trade will continue in spite of artificial barriers, and in view of the fact that even Protectionists are now seeking by means of reciprocity, subsidies, and dollar-diplomacy to find new markets for American goods, the question arises as to whether our goods should be carried in American or foreign bottoms.

There is a sense in which trade does follow the flag.

Where the smaller and newer trade routes are controlled by the ships of a single nation, it is but human nature in action that prompts shipowners to favor their own countrymen. This has been brought vividly to view by the recent efforts of our merchants and manufacturers, who are trying to build up trade with South American countries.

Nearly all the commerce between this country and Brazil, for instance, is carried by foreign ships, most of which have a triangular course, taking manufactured goods from Europe to Brazil, where they load with coffee for this country, and return to Europe with our products; and so meager is the direct service, that passengers from New York to Rio de Janeiro can save time by going via Liverpool.

A merchant of Rio, responding to the stimulus of the dollar-diplomacy that had secured a reduction of twenty per cent of the Brazil tariff on American cement, ordered a consignment in February, 1910, which he disposed of at a profit. In January, 1911, he placed a larger order, but this the British steamship company refused to carry at the former rate. It was, however, finally prevailed upon to observe its own tariffs, and the second consignment of cement was disposed of at a profit. In June, 1911, a third, and still larger, order was placed for American cement; but the British shipowners advanced the freight rate to a point that covered the difference between the tariff on English and German cement, and the lower rate on American cement that had been secured by our dollar-diplomacy.

The same condition obtains in regard to American flour. The United States Government secured a reduction of twenty per cent in the Brazil tariff on American flour; but the British steamship companies immediately advanced the freight to correspond. Later, our government secured a further reduction of ten per cent in the tariff on flour, and again the freight rate was advanced, so that, in the words of F. Kramer, the Rio merchant who

ordered the cement, "the U. S. Government practically worked for the British companies, and the cost today, taking equal prices into consideration, is higher for American flour."

This is a startling reminder of the action of our own trans-continental railroads, which, when the California fruit growers had secured higher Protection in the Aldrich tariff, advanced their freight rates to absorb it.

It is also an illustration of the power of transportation companies over the production and distribution of wealth. Ships of all nations compete for our trade with Europe. It is there that our four steamships ply—the sole remnant of our once great trans-Atlantic fleet. But between this country and South America, where the service is so largely in the hands of the British companies, it is not surprising that there should be discrimination. It is to meet this condition of affairs that the Pan-American Mail was formed this year to operate ships between New Orleans and Brazil and Argentina.



The condition of American over-sea shipping would be amusing, were it not so pathetic. Our exports to Brazil for the year ending June 30, 1911, amounted to \$26,431,857,¹ of which English ships carried \$19,473,855, and American ships, \$136—one hundred and thirty-six dollars. We did better with Argentina, where \$577,954 was carried in American bottoms, and \$39,120,509 in British. Of our imports from Brazil for that year \$93,191,117² came to us in British ships, and \$620—six hundred and twenty dollars—came in American. How the British ship owners must smile when they see us raving over the Monroe doctrine!

Whoever it was that said Americans had lost their sense of humour spoke without regard for the fact. We have humour in abundance; but it has been commercialized, and our Artemus Wards have taken to writing Protective tariff schedules and shipping laws.

STOUGHTON COOLEY.

CONDENSED EDITORIALS

SCHOOLS FOR FOLK CENTERS.

Louis F. Post in the Chicago Daily Press of September 6.

Two Presidential candidates urge the use of school houses for political meetings. Good. There

¹Table No. 6, page 771, of the Annual report on Commerce & Navigation for 1911, U. S. Dept. Com. & Labor.

²Table No. 3, page 361, of the Annual Report on Commerce & Navigation for 1911, U. S. Dept. Com. & Labor.

is no reason for shutting out political education. It is the most important kind, and the best place for it is at neighborhood meetings in schoolhouses.

Objections to such meetings were well enough in a way, when politics were in the "dirty pool." Perhaps, though, the "dirty pool" wouldn't have lasted so long if such meetings had been common; political education earlier might have ended political skulduggery sooner. But, anyhow, those objections don't hold now. People are more democratic in the fundamental sense.

Didn't the election in Ohio prove it? Those "Buckeyes" were undemocratic enough to vote down woman suffrage. But they adopted the Initiative and Referendum. They made Ohio the first old and big State east of the Rockies to welcome this advance agent of fundamental democracy. We ought to install that mechanism of people's power in Illinois before we permit any other Constitutional reform. The people of Illinois could then get anything they want, and head off anything they don't want. But it will be installed in Illinois. It is coming in every State. Parasites of politics may delay it, but nothing can stop it. How to use their power for the common good is now the question for the people throughout the Union.

What better way of learning could there be than at folk centers in school houses? Of course the rooms would have to be cared for specially. They must be made as orderly and clean for school children the morning after a folk-center meeting as the morning before. But this is only a matter of money, and not much money, either. And it would be the most profitable kind of investment for everybody.

Folk centers in schoolhouses would dry up the local ginmills and saloons, almost the only hospitable folk centers we have now. They would center attention upon the public affairs of neighborhood, city, county, State and Republic. The folks about home would grow familiar with common interests and turn from heedless citizens into intelligent and eager voters. We should have politics for political principle instead of graft. Under the Initiative and Referendum, the people would rule; and at their schoolhouse centers they would learn to rule wisely and fairly.

The schools themselves would progressively improve, in accommodations for children and in educational service to children, if the advice of Mr. Wilson and Mr. Roosevelt to open the schoolhouses for political folk centers were adopted.

NEWS NARRATIVE

The figures in brackets at the ends of paragraphs refer to volumes and pages of The Public for earlier information on the same subject.

Week ending Tuesday, September 24, 1912.

Presidential Campaigning.

The Progressive Party's candidate for President, Mr. Roosevelt, is on a continental speaking tour. At Tucson, Arizona, on the 17th, he made