

**Address delivered by Mr. James J.
Hill before the Brotherhood of
Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen**

St. Paul Auditorium, June 17, 1910.

Address delivered by Mr. James J. Hill

Before the

***Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen
and Enginemen.***

St. Paul Auditorium, June 17, 1910.

It is always a very great pleasure for me to meet the men who are engaged in railway service. I feel under deep obligations to them at all times; and I want to say to you that in traveling over the road, when I go to bed at night and know that the men on the forward end of the train are looking after me, I would not be the right sort of a man if I did not appreciate it deeply. I have sat up a great many nights without a light in the rear end of my car to see how the boys "did it." I have watched when they approached a station whether or not they have had the train under control; how closely they observe the rules; and as I look back through the years I do not recall a single instance where anything was done that should not have been done, or anything was left undone that should have been done on the part of the men on the forward end of the train.

It is a hard service. Sometimes things occur that ought not to occur. Sometimes it is very hard

to draw the line between what might be an error of judgment and what might be carelessness. If a man were sorting brick, or sorting boards, one brick or one board might go into the No. 1 pile that the next time would go into the No. 2 pile; and so with anything else that the human mind has to sort. I often think how difficult it is to draw the line between what is absolute neglect and carelessness, and an error of judgment. The most attentive man, the best on the train, whether he be an engineman or a trainman, with all the judgment and all the attention he can give, gets into trouble. The hard thing to do is to draw the line; and the men who have direct charge and responsibility over all of these questions must feel deeply their individual responsibility, because when the enginemen and firemen leave home, kiss their wives and babies good-by, do they know they are coming back? No act of theirs may put them in danger, but somebody else may send them home on a stretcher.

Those questions are hard ones, and they are the ones we have to consider and to deal with. Sometimes an individual may feel that the discipline rests too heavily on him, but all order and progress in the world are the result of good discipline. Where order is to prevail there must be direct responsibility and wholesome discipline; and while sometimes the boys may feel that it is a hardship on them—and maybe it is—the whole service has to be considered. Every man in it has to be considered; his life and the future welfare of those who depend upon his life and his work.

The railroad men in this country have a great deal to do. Much is expected of them. I will give you a few figures that may be of use and give you

a better understanding of the whole situation here as compared with the situation in other countries. We hear a great deal about the watered stock of railroads. According to the government's official figures, the railroads of the United States, in stocks and bonds, stand capitalized at less than \$60,000 a mile. With that machine, which costs \$60,000 a mile, they move in this country an average of 1,000,000 tons per mile of road per annum.

In Great Britain, with a machine that stands capitalized at \$275,000 a mile, or more than four times the capitalization of American railroads, they move an average of 500,000 tons per mile per annum, or one-half the average service rendered by the American roads. Germany, with an average cost per mile of railroad of \$109,000, against less than \$60,000 in the United States, moves 770,000 tons per mile, against 1,000,000 tons per mile per annum in the United States. In France, with railroads costing about \$137,000 per mile, or capitalized at that amount, or more than twice as much as the average cost in the United States, there is moved 410,000 tons per mile of road per annum, or less than one-half of what we do here.

The railroads of the United States, with a machine that costs \$60,000 per mile, or which stands capitalized at that amount, do from 50 per cent more to twice as much service for from one-quarter to one-half the cost to the public, and pay from twice to five times the rate of wages.

It would be a sorry day for you and for all of us if the railroad workmen here had to accept the scale of wages paid in these other countries. The average of the railroad earnings going as wages to men employed on the roads in Europe is about 30

per cent, while capital gets 40 per cent. In the United States labor gets 41 per cent and capital 21 per cent.

I am not here to find fault with the scale of wages. I like to see the boys do well. I like to see every one of them saving money. Youth won't be with them always. Their labor is hard. Take a day like this afternoon. This hot weather, on the west end of our road, I know that a fireman can train down as fast as Jim Jeffries is reducing his weight. I am reminded of the old darky preacher who got caught in emptying a smokehouse with a ham in it. The old man had been taught to pray when he wanted anything, and so he got on his knees and said: "Oh, Lawd, your servant am in great trouble. Your servant am in danger of going to the prison. Come down, oh, Lawd, an' help him. Come down you'self an' don't sen' you' Son. It's no boy's job." Now, boys, I know just as well as you do that throwing coal into a good big engine is no boy's job. Sometimes I have thought that we ought to select great big fellows for firemen, and then, again, once in a while I see a little bit of a wiry fellow doing it just as well as the other one could to save his life. You can't always tell by the size of a man.

The future of every railroad man in this country, high or low, is now approaching a crisis. The cost of living in this country has advanced enormously. Our public men, I am afraid, do not study the questions that affect the country at large and absolutely control the conditions that prevail. We are spending money so fast that in comparison with the people—I might say that there is practically no comparison—of other countries the amount of money

that we have taken out of the channels of industry and commerce is so large that today money in this country—the richest country in the world—is too scarce to actually handle the business the country has to handle. And it is only beginning to dawn on the people that the conditions approaching, not slowly, but very rapidly, are such that no amount of money in sight or available will be adequate to meet them satisfactorily. Last winter the railroads in the East and in the West were blockaded because they could not get the freight out of the terminals. I guess some of you roosted on engines waiting for a chance to get in a great many times, and the sixteen-hour law did not cover you.

It is a fact that the business of the country in the last ten years, that is, the number of tons moved one mile—if you consider the number of tons moved altogether, that does not mean anything because it takes more effort to move a ton of freight 1,000 miles than to move it fifty miles—in the United States has increased 15 per cent a year, or 150 per cent in ten years. At this time, and for the last eighteen months, it is increasing west of Chicago and northwest of Chicago at the rate of about 23 per cent or 24 per cent per annum. It is certainly doubling every five years.

Adequate terminals are necessary to handle that business, to handle it without delay, I mean, at places like Chicago, New York, Buffalo, Cleveland and here in the Twin Cities. This proposition is full of meaning to those who have to find the money to pay for them; and where is this money to come from if the business doubles every five years? Where are we going to get the terminals? Busi-

ness will simply be blockaded and cannot move every time that it is affected by the volume of a big crop, by the volume of business from all sources, increasing as it has increased for the past eighteen months.

Last winter it took sixty days to get flour over the road from the mills in the Twin Cities when the running time was not to exceed forty-eight hours. Railroad cars in this country average about twenty-three miles in twenty-four hours. You know that the ordinary movement of a freight train should be twenty-three miles in two hours. If railroad equipment is to stand still for twenty-two hours out of twenty-four, or if the railroad can only use its equipment two hours out of twenty-four, how can it last on any such basis? How can any business last on such a basis?

You men have this advantage; you are getting good pay. I am always glad to see you getting good pay, and I hope you will, after buying your high-heeled boots and fancy hat, hold on to some of your money and save it for a later day; save it as a prudent man ought to. But you cannot get this money, or continue to get this money, unless the railroad earns it. You do not want to work for a lot of bankrupt railways, and I never want to have anything to do with a bankrupt road. The people of this country—depend upon it—will learn that they must suffer, that it is their ox which has been gored when it is too late for them; when they cannot move their stuff, as was the case for four months last winter. The state railway commission of Iowa, after making two trips to Chicago, went back and said: "There is no use trying to send any more business into Chicago or east of there, be-

cause the congestion is so great that it only adds to the trouble and makes the time when the blockade can be raised away in the indefinite future." They published that statement. How few people took any notice! But they will have to take notice of it, when their business cannot move.

That time is coming, and it is almost here. If there is a good crop harvested this year it will be here next winter. It is of little help that we can handle this stuff at our own terminals if we cannot get rid of it, give it to others and put it on its way to its destination. The blockades last year in Chicago affected the entire country within 1,000 miles of that city. Flour shipped from the Twin Cities did not reach its destination for from sixty to seventy days. The flour dealer got his supply where he could; and later in the season, when these delayed shipments came to their destination, it poured in on him and he had more flour than he had demand for. The flour trade was dull. The millers in Minneapolis and throughout the rest of the country found that they had more flour than they could sell, and they had more wheat than they needed to grind. The result was that in eight or ten days the price of wheat dropped from 10 to 11 cents per bushel; and finally, owing to inadequate terminals between Chicago and New York, the bill was sent to the farmer up in North Dakota and he had to pay it.

I speak of that just to illustrate that those who are actively engaged, no matter in what department of the business, whether they are moving the freight train or the passenger train, or whether they are in the factory or behind the counter, have each to do with the prosperity of the whole coun-

try. They must work co-operatively and move forward together. Everything that affects the whole country affects each one who is actively engaged in any part of the service.

You have many questions to come before you. I hope it will be a long day before they come up; but no two countries in the whole civilized world are as widely separated today as the states of the Union were at the close of the Civil War in the matter of time and expense, in the matter of exchange of ideas, exchange of values or of commodities of any kind. The whole world is close together; and the conditions that affect other sections of the world will, to a great extent, finally affect us. That is what you have most to guard against.

I will cite a case. The first time I crossed the Atlantic, about twenty-two years ago, I went on a fine ship owned by that great German company, the North German Lloyd. That ship was built in Glasgow. About that time some inventive American had invented a steam riveting machine; but they could not use them in Glasgow because the men did not like them. They were going to have trouble. What was the result? The Germans took up that machine, started their own shipyards, and today they are building more ships than they are building in Great Britain. They are systematically pushing every industry they have. They are a little hard on their men. Sixty-six hours a week is their factory time, but they are taking possession of the traffic of the world. The workmen of Great Britain, standing in their own light, held back, would not do this, would not do that, until today not less than 1,500,000 of idle men walk the streets

of the large cities of that country looking for work.

I saw within a week, maybe within three days, a notice that our Canadian neighbors had put a new regulation in effect providing that no workman could come into Canada unless he had \$200 in money, or came from the United States. Now, let us see why they should put that condition upon immigration. I will tell you. Last winter they had long bread lines in Montreal, Toronto and the other large cities of Canada. Men were looking for something to eat; men who could find no work in the old country and had been aided to emigrate to Canada. They were helpless. Canada is an agricultural country. Ask men brought up in factories about farm work, and they will answer, "We never did it." They do not know how, and they have to commence to learn life's lessons over again.

Hold on to what you have. Remember that unless the railroad companies receive money for their service they cannot pay it to you. A railroad company is nothing but a piece of paper with the state seal on it; and what it does is what those who are actively engaged in its service do. If they do well, the result is well. If they do ill, the result is correspondingly ill. And while I am glad to meet the firemen in their national annual assembly, as I am always glad to meet anybody in the railroad service—and the more of them I meet the better I am pleased—bear this in mind; that the treasury that pays you cannot pay you if it is empty.

The cost of everything, as you know, has advanced in this country, not because of prices alone, but because our legislation tends that way. But tell me, if you can, where anybody has been willing that the railroad should get any increased return

for its service. If they do not get a chance, I give you my word that they will not be able to carry on their business as they have done. This will not only affect you, but also the men in the mine, whether it is a coal mine or an iron mine or a copper mine, and the men in the woods, and the men in every industry throughout the entire country. You had a little taste of it in 1907; but the next time a depression overtakes the business of this country its duration will not be measured by months, but by years. They will be years of great difficulty, because the men who are making the laws do not know the effect of their own acts; do not know what they are legislating about. They think, as one of them expressed it, that the railroads are there and cannot get away.

When a man is engaged in manufacturing he can run his factory three hours a day or six hours a day, or twenty-four hours a day, or he need not run it at all if he does not want to. He can close it out at any time and stop altogether. So with the banker and the merchant. Whenever either does not want to continue his business he can go out of it, liquidate it, take his money and do something else with it; but the railroad will be there and will be working for the people when you and I are dead. The railroad prospers with the country, and it will be poor with the country.

Let me say to you here that I should be very sorry to see conditions come about that would compel your chiefs to make new schedules and reduce the pay, perhaps increase the hours. Let us hope it will not come; but depend upon it that if it does come, it will be here for some time. It will be here longer than any of us are willing to admit; and we

hope it may be averted. We hope it will not come; but if things go on as they have there is no telling what may be the result. Many of the articles used by the railroads during the last ten years have advanced from 30 to 80 per cent, and some of them 100 per cent. It would be a very cold day and late in the afternoon for this country if the time came when the railroads should break down. But there is no justice in that and no need of it. They should never break down. If the railroad system of the United States can, with an investment of less than \$60,000 per mile, do from one and a half to twice the service that a railroad in Europe does, at a cost of from one-half to one-fourth as much, and pay the scale of wages that are paid in this country, that is, from twice to five times the wages paid in Europe, it is, to say the least, a creditable showing. Now, if that is true, and the figures of the United States government show that it is true, the railroad system of the United States is not a failure. It is something that the nation should be proud of. But a lot of men who have no knowledge of the situation, and who do not take time or make an effort to get the knowledge, are constantly and ignorantly attacking the railroads for personal and political ends. In the nature of things, if the railroads of this country cannot live, constructed so economically and operated so efficiently as they are, there is something rotten in the state of Denmark.

The reason why I say all this to you is because I have the greatest confidence in your common sense. I have found my men to be men whom I can trust in anything, as I have trusted them with my life, which is more precious to me than anything else. At times when there has been trouble, when there

was a strike, sometimes I have been advised not to be around too much. Well, if there is any place on the railroad where I need a guard to protect me I will look for it among the old men. If they will not take care of me, I have not judged them right.

I want to impress again upon your minds the few things that I have said, because I mean them for your interest. I want you to know this and realize it. I feel and always shall feel the greatest interest in the prosperity of the men who are trying to help themselves wherever they are; but particularly those engaged in the service in which I have spent most of my active life. For that reason I have wished that my connection with them should close under pleasant conditions. I hope that it will. But depend upon it, you and every one of your fellow workers, no matter what line you are engaged in, and those outside of the railroad service as well, will find yourselves against a stone wall unless there is more good, quiet, honest judgment and intelligence brought to bear on these matters.

I thank you all, and I wish you all well.