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THAT CENTRIFUGAL GUN AGAIN.

It would seem as though every field of engineering had its particular and perpetually recurring monstrosity, which, in spite of the ridicule that invariably greets its reappearance, seems to have a wonderfully tenacious hold on the inventor. One of the most persistent of these is the centrifugal gun, a device with which it is attempted to hurl projectiles into space in somewhat the same way as a boy throws a stone from a sling. Only a few years ago an illustration went the rounds of the press, showing a huge disk which was to be rotated at unheard-of speeds by means of a steam engine, with pulleys and belt attachment, and which carried on its periphery a series of steel shells that were to be automatically released at the critical moment, and were to start on their tangential flight with a velocity of so many thousand feet per second. Apart from the physical impossibility of making a disk which would carry holding and releasing mechanism capable of withstanding the strains due to a peripheral speed of several thousand feet per second, these would-be artillerists evidently overlooked the fact that if there should be a delay of an infinitesimal fraction of a second on the part of the releasing gear, the shell would be thrown rearwardly into the fort, the casemate or the between-decks battery, as the case might be, and the gunner "hoist with his own petard."

The centrifugal gun idea is apparently by no means dead, for a recent issue of so staid a journal as The London Times devoted about a half column to a detailed description of a gun invented by a Mr. James Judge, which is "intended for battleships, earthworks and garrison purposes," and is described as "a huge slug on a centrifugal-fire machine gun." As usual, a disk is caused to revolve at a very high speed, power being, of course, provided by the inevitable electric motor. The "bullets" are introduced into the interior of the disk at the axle and travel along curves which lead to the circumference, where they are impelled through a barrel at the modest rate of 3,000 per minute, or 50 per second. With a muzzle velocity of 2,000 feet per second, penetration was effected through a $\frac{7}{16}$ inch plate placed at a distance of 400 yards. We are informed by our contemporary that there is no excessive heating of the gun, because of the continuous stream of cold air which is impelled through the barrel by the motion of the disk. It is bad enough when a journal whose technical information is usually so correct as that of The London Times lends itself to such a piece of self-evident humbug as this; but the case is even more aggravated when a technical journal in this country, which is devoted to naval and military interests, gravely repeats the story with manifest belief in its possibilities.

AMERICAN ENGINEERING METHODS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIA.

In a supplement to an article published in Blackwood's Magazine on the subject of irrigation in India, Major-General F. C. Cotton, of the British army, shows not only how the country will be rescued from periodical famines and enriched by the water of its great rivers, wherever that water is carried, but at the same time how irrigation will enhance the value of the railways, on which the government has expended so large a sum of money. Referring to objections raised against a former article advocating extensive irrigation works, on the ground that India is a poor country and cannot afford great expenditures, the writer says that the same objection was held some seventy years ago when engineers were urging the extension of various hydraulic works; and that as at that time it appeared to him that the engineering methods of the United States, where capital at that time was scarce, were better suited to the needs of India than the engineering methods of England, where capital was so much more abundant and more easily obtained, he determined to visit the States and study the problem on the ground. He found that the sections of the States which he visited were financially little better off than India. But although capital was scarce, and credit was at a low ebb, "the rulers were men of unlimited energy and determination, with statesmanlike views of the future."

He quotes the case of the Augusta Railway, which "was approaching completion without a cent of metal money being spent upon it. It could hardly be said that paper money was used, for the notes had no equivalent in money, but were good for so many tons carried so many miles on the railway when it was completed." While the writer disclaims any intention of quoting this fact as a precedent to be followed in India, but simply as "serving to show how difficulties are met by those remarkable people who are still acting broadly upon the same far-sighted policy" in other enterprises, "I must say," continues the General, "that I long to carry such statesmanship as I saw there to the country I love so well in the East." He attributes the terrible famines which have periodically swept the country to the lack of adequate farsightedness and enterprise, and points to the fact that while famine is raging over 440,000 square miles of India, all the great rivers are pouring their flood waters into the sea. This, he maintains, would not to-day be the case if such a policy as he found in America had been followed in India.

There is unquestionably much truth in the candid statements of this army officer. Although the case quoted of the Augusta Railway is one which would form a rather perilous precedent for the financiering of modern enterprises, there is no question that in the main the writer is correct; for although what he calls the far-sighted policy which has governed the development of the natural resources of this country has in many cases been productive of temporary disaster, there is no question that to the daring methods pursued by the early promoters the wonderfully rapid industrial growth of this country is largely due.

STEAMSHIP COMPETITION ON THE ATLANTIC.

As far as the question of speed is concerned, the development of the fast transatlantic steamship has reached a critical stage. Regarding the advisability of building high-speed vessels, there is, among the shipping men, a division of opinion. On the one hand, the British and American companies, apparently convinced that the maximum economical speed has been reached and passed, profess to be content for the future to build vessels of 20 knots or under; while, on the other hand, the German companies are continuing to bring out larger and faster vessels at a rate which was never approached in any previous period in the history of the transatlantic steamship.

The English companies, after having developed the high-speed liner to the stage represented by the "Campania" and "Lucania," boats which are clearly entitled to rank as the prototypes of the modern high-powered vessel of vast dimensions, have of late produced no fast ship of the first rank; for the "Oceanic," although unapproached in point of displacement, is of moderate speed (20 knots), and is, therefore, not to be reckoned in the present consideration. Indeed, it may be said that this vessel was a protest on the part of the White Star Company against the tendency to cram the modern liner with engines, boilers and coal in the effort to keep in the front rank of competition. Since 1893, the year of the Chicago World's Fair, the British steamship companies have apparently been content to drop out of the race, and yield to their younger competitors across the North Sea the distinction, once so highly prized among themselves, of building and operating the fastest ships in the world. Judging from the present trend of affairs, British ship-owners are drawing out of the competition altogether and are contenting themselves with the construction of less showy but, as they persistently affirm, more profitable vessels, half cargo and half passenger, of the "Ivernia" type, a sectional view of which is given elsewhere.

We should be more inclined to believe these oft-repeated assertions as to the unprofitable character of the modern express steamship, were it not for two considerations: In the first place, as the London Engineer remarks in a recent editorial, we heard very little from the English press about the dangers to the passengers and the financial loss to the shareholders entailed in running high speed vessels until the Germans made their wonderfully successful venture with the "Kaiser Wilhelm," a vessel which not only easily outdistanced her competitors, but has been a strong drawing card, to judge from the standpoint of the passenger agent, with the traveling public. In the second place, the fact that the North German Lloyd Company, after three years' experience in running an expensive vessel of this class, should have deliberately placed an order for two larger, more powerful and much more costly boats, involving an outlay of, surely, not less than $7,000,000, is to us proof positive that the "Kaiser Wilhelm," at least, has not proved a losing venture. It is true, as the English journals point out, that the German subsidies given to these vessels are liberal, but it is absurd to suppose that they are sufficiently generous to cover the deficiency on such an enormous investment of capital as will be involved in the production and maintenance of these new ships. Elsewhere in this issue we present figures that give good reason to assume that the latest and most costly of these vessels is far from being a losing venture, the full passenger lists, the high prices paid and the frequency of the round voyages, enabling the vessel to roll up a balance to her credit during the summer season that must more than offset the deficiency during the winter months, and this without taking into consideration the postal subsidies.

A most important consideration, and one to which competing companies cannot afford to shut their eyes, is the world-wide prestige which accrues to the line that can run a 23-knot boat on a 3-week schedule with something of the regularity of railroad service. The fame of such a vessel attracts a large amount of travel that otherwise would find its way through other channels. Thus, an inquiry into the statistics of a recent week's sailings from this port showed that while the American line carried 90, the White Star line 60, and the "Fuerst Bismarck" 55 first-class passengers, the "Deutschland" took out 281 in the first cabin—figures which need no comment.

While no one begrudges the credit which is due to the German companies for having figured so brilliantly in the modern development of the transatlantic steamship, we cannot but hope that the American Line will have the courage to order a couple of fast boats which will surpass all others in speed and accommodations. There is not the slightest doubt that our builders are equal to the task of constructing such ships, and judging from the success which has attended the "Lucania" and "Campania" and their successors of the German lines, we do not doubt that these vessels would be a profitable investment.

LAKE TANGANYIKA EXPLORATIONS.

An English explorer, Mr. J. E. S. More, who is one of the members of a scientific expedition sent to the lake regions of Central Africa, has recently made a report to the Geographical Society of London; one of the most important points is the rectifying of the position of Lake Tanganyika upon the existing maps. Mr. More had, in a previous expedition to this region, made a number of soundings and dredgings in the lake, and in a note presented to The Journal of Microscopical Science he shows the presence, in the waters of this lake, of a fauna of very different form from that which is typical of soft water, and including forms which are identical with those of the Jurassic earths. To complete these observations upon the fauna of the lakes and the general configuration of the region, Mr. More made a second trip, accompanied by Mr. Malcolm Fergusson, who was especially charged to study the structure of the mountains which bordered the lake and with the cartographic work. The expedition left London on April 19 of last year, and arrived at Blantyne in Nyassaland in the latter part of June, and from there passing to Zombaa, Fort Johnston and Lake Nyassa. After remaining near the lake for about one month, they came in the latter part of September to Ktiotua, at the southern end of Lake Tanganyika. Mr. Fergusson has taken by astronomical observations the exact situation of a certain number of points situated on both banks of the lake, Soumbou, Loukega, and two others on the west bank and Msamba, Oujiji and five others on the east bank. The sketch which has been established from these co-ordinates shows that if the southern part of the lake, from Soumbou to Ktiouta, remain fixed, as also the beginning of the eastern and western sides, the axis of the lake, and in consequence the whole ensemble of the basin, should be carried considerably to the east. On the other hand, the outline given to the lake at the present time does not appear to be modified appreciably. It is toward the central part of the lake that the greatest differences from the admitted position appear. This position has been determined from measurements made by Capt. E. C. Hore, combined with the longitude of Oujiji as found by Lieut. Cameron. It is the latter explorer who traversed the region in 1874–75 and was the first to give an exact idea as to the hydrographic system of the lake. His observations agreed with the opinion of Livingstone, who supposed that the lake emptied into the River Loualaba. Cameron was the first to establish with certainty that it belonged to the basin of the Congo, by the discovery he made of the River Loukouga, which proceeds from the west bank of the lake. It is an affluent of the Loualaba-Congo, but it is only an intermittent outlet of the lake, as it is sometimes obstructed by a dam of sand and débris which stops the outflow of the lake and causes its level to rise. This explorer fixed the longitude of Oujiji at 29° 59′ 30″ east, by lunar observations, which comes close to the figures recently obtained.

The present expedition visited the mouth of the Loukouga where it joins the lake; the mountains, which are very high along the western coast, decrease gradually from Mtova, on the right bank of the river, toward the north, and also from Temboni to the southern extremity of the lake. The entrance of the Loukouga forms a kind of delta of sand, where the water flows in several small streams which unite about a mile from the lake to form the river; this flows between banks of soft and sandy earth, 50 to 100 feet high. The mountains, which are lower to the north of the river,