

# STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN

## The Danger To Automobiles At Grade Crossings.

Washington, D. C., Aug. 8.—The following letter has been addressed to the public by Mr. Fairfax Harrison, president of the Southern Railway Company:

"The automobile has greatly increased the comfort and convenience of life, and it has been an important factor in the improvement of country highways and so has contributed to the progress of civilization of our time, but, just as the railroad did when it revolutionized commerce, the automobile has introduced new social complications and new risks, moral as well as physical.

"The American people are said to be characteristically reckless of human life, and perhaps in nothing is this statement more justified at the moment than in relation to the use of automobiles—not even the railroads. My particular interest in the question is, where my public responsibility lies, in the combination of the two—in the accidents which occur to automobiles and their occupants where highways cross railways at grade: and this is a question of sufficient importance to warrant the attention of every thinking man in the South.

### RECORD FOR ONE YEAR.

"The following table shows the appalling record of such accidents on lines operated by Southern Railway Company in the South during the year ended June 30, 1915:

	Number of Accidents.	Fatal Injuries.	Personal Injuries.	Automobiles damaged or demolished.
Alabama . . . . .	10	0	1	10
Georgia . . . . .	6	2	10	6
N. Carolina . . . . .	27	7	21	27
S. Carolina . . . . .	14	2	17	14
Tennessee . . . . .	5	0	8	5
Virginia . . . . .	7	2	1	7
Total . . . . .	69	13	58	69

"Without seeking to avoid just responsibility for what the officers or employees of the railroad do or omit, but recalling that a railroad employee whose carelessness causes an accident is, in the public interest, subject to discipline which affects his livelihood, it is probably fair to say that a large proportion of these accidents happened solely through the carelessness of the drivers of automobiles, or their lack of experience in dealing with vehicles at high speed. There are among them also well authenticated cases of deliberate assumption of risk by the drivers of automobiles from pure love of excitement and speed, evidenced by racing with trains and seeking the thrill of a narrow escape. Our engineers report such occurrences daily. If fortunately they are without fatal consequences in the great majority of cases, they are always paid for by a heavy strain on the nerves of all concerned, particularly those of the locomotive engineer, who maintains speed from duty and not for fun. It is not too much to claim for the locomotive engineer a larger equipment of experience and a greater habit of precaution than the average automobile driver. As a class the locomotive engineers are sober, steady and conservative men of long experience in meeting and

avoiding risks, for theirs is a dangerous occupation. Their every effort of character, of instruction and of interest is to avoid an accident. Most of the accidents to automobiles at railway grade crossings could be avoided if there was the same restraint of experience and attention at the wheel of the automobile as at the throttle of the locomotive.

### PUBLIC VITALLY INTERESTED.

"It does not suffice the public in any moral sense that the fund made up of the revenues collected by the railroad is usually made to respond in damages for consequences of such accidents. Suicide to collect life insurance has never been deemed honorable, while no one would deliberately sell the life of a mother or wife, son or brother for money; on the other hand, the collection of damages out of railroad revenues, as a punishment for an avoidable accident, when there can be no real compensation, is an economic waste; it punishes the public more than it punishes the stockholders, as it deprives the public by exactly the amount of the damages of the ability of the railroad to provide additional permanent facilities for the use or convenience and safety of the public. Given the progressive policy of Southern Railway Company to make such improvement to the extent of its ability, it is of interest to note that, in the last year a dividend was paid by the Company, 3.80 cents of every dollar of revenue collected from the public went in payment of damages of all kinds, practically the same amount, 3.38 cents, went to the stockholders, while only thirteen-hundredths of one cent of each dollar of revenue could be applied on permanent improvements. Such other improvements as were made were necessarily charged to new capital, thereby increasing the demands on the fund in which the public has so vital an interest. It would be the pleasure of the management always to apply as much of the revenues on permanent improvements as on dividends if that was possible. There is, then, a basis of interest as of morals for co-operation between the public and the railroads to prevent the recurrence of these tragedies.

"With a deep sense of responsibility of management in this matter and pledging this Company to do everything in its power which is reasonable and consistent with the functions for which it was chartered, I appeal to the public generally for such co-operation in avoiding these serious and distressing accidents. In practically all cases they can be, and in most cases are, readily and easily avoided by the automobile driver acting upon the familiar warning to stop, look and listen at railway crossings. While familiarity with the crossing sign-posts and the regular schedules of trains may breed contempt of danger, surely every one of us when using a highway can afford to sacrifice enough of his time and his pride of opinion to have a practical assurance of safety. On the other hand, the demands of commerce and of

public transportation do not permit a railroad to stop all its trains at all highway crossings: if that was possible it would be cheaper for the railroad to do so than to pay the damages. It is clear, however, that it is necessary that one or the other of the parties to a crossing shall stop if the largest measure of protection of life and property is to be secured. If not from self-interest, can not the automobile driver yield the precedence as a matter of courtesy to age, for the railroad is older than the automobile?

### ELIMINATING GRADE CROSSINGS.

"The ideal of safety will be accomplished only when all grade crossings of railroads are separated. In this respect the Southern Railway Company is doing something every year and as much as its resources and other obligations make possible; indeed, it may be claimed that the Company is, speaking generally, making progress more rapidly than most municipalities which have an obligation in the premises; but by co-operation of municipalities and railroads many dangerous crossings have been eliminated throughout the South, and more will be every year. Furthermore, on every bit of construction work of Southern Railway Company now in progress, or recently completed, involving the location or double tracking of line (nearly four million dollars has been spent on such work during the past year,) provision has been made at large additional expense to separate all important highway crossings of the revised line, wherever physically practicable, and this policy will be continued for the future.

"Given the history of our transportation and highway systems and the enormous cost of adjusting them to modern conditions, the elimination of grade crossings is and in the very nature of the problem must be a gradual development with the growth of population and wealth, but, meanwhile, good judgment on the part of all concerned can do much to anticipate the benefits of the admittedly desirable expenditure of large sums of money. The same sober sense of responsibility for life on the part of automobile drivers which actuates most locomotive engineers, and in addition the willingness of the automobile driver in such a high interest to subordinate his time and convenience to that of the greater number represented by a railroad train, can check a waste of life and limb and property which is now increasing every year.

"To this end I appeal confidently for the counsel of every responsible man and woman in the South, whether or not he or she drives an automobile. Words of caution and common sense around the family dinner table can have more influence and can save more lives at railway grade crossings than all the warning whistles ever blown by a locomotive engineer."

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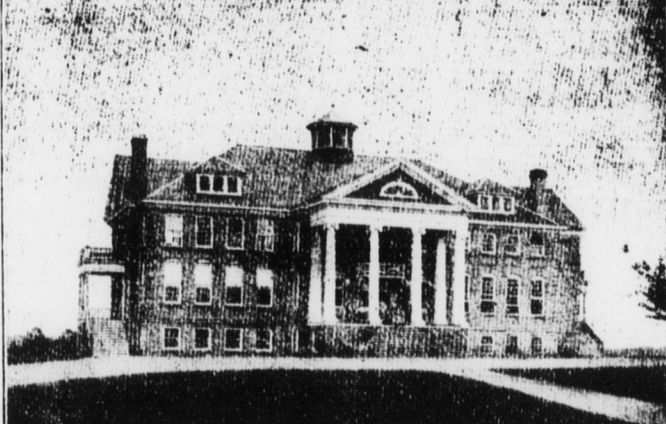
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