

In the Dominion where there are yet immense tracts of country only sparsely settled, the so-called "light" railway should prove the solution of a problem that is not only giving our legislators much food for thought, but is proving a serious drawback to those who have taken up land at present unserved by any direct means of communication with the market centres. In this connection the report by Mr. F. W. Furket, Inspecting Engineer to the Public Works Department on the Belgian Light Railways, appearing in the Public Works Statement published last month, is of great interest.

Belgium is perhaps the most thickly populated country in the world, and the light railway system has covered the face of the country with a complete network of light lines which connect up the main lines traversing the state. While all main lines are directly under the State Railways Department the secondary or light lines are under the separate administration of the National Society for Vicinal Railways though of course the systems work in conjunction with each other and the light lines are as feeders to the State lines.

In going over the report one is inclined to criticise the wisdom of adopting varying gauges, for while the State lines are of standard 4ft. 8½ins. gauge, most of the light railways are built on the 1-metre gauge (3ft. 3½ins.) This must of course mean a great deal of handling of freight at all junctions, and must add very much to the delay and expense of working transport. This, however, does not affect the question of the excellence of the principle involved.

By all means let us have these light railways as soon as possible. Let them be as light as may be, built to our standard gauge, and traversed if need be by the lightest of steam or petrol-electric locomotives. Then at any rate we shall have the foundations of a railway system laid apart from the main arterial lines, and it will quickly become only a matter of revenue from at present virgin country, when successively heavier construction will be necessary and the light railways will develop into standard lines.

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It is interesting to hear the reason given by General von Lutwitz, Military Commander of the German troops in Louvain at the time of the burning of that city.

Mr. R. H. Davis who writes in the New York "Tribune," and who witnessed the vandalism of the Germans as a prisoner from a railway carriage says:—"The Germans sentenced Louvain on Wednesday to become a wilderness, and with the German system and love of thoroughness, they left Louvain an empty, blackened shell. The reason for this appeal to the torch and the execution of non-combatants, as given to me on Thursday morning by General von Lutwitz, military governor of Brussels, was this: On Wednesday, while the German military commander of the troops in Louvain was at the Hotel de Ville talking to the burgomaster, a son of the burgomaster with an automatic pistol shot the chief of staff and German staff surgeons.

Lutwitz claims that this was the signal for the Civil Guard, in civilian clothes on roofs, to fire upon the German soldiers in the open square below. He said also, the Belgians had quickfiring guns, brought from Antwerp. As for a week the Germans had occupied Louvain and closely guarded all approaches the story that there was any gun-running is absurd.

Fifty Germans were killed and wounded. For that, said Lutwitz, Louvain must be wiped out."

Assuming that this was true, that fifty German soldiers were killed or wounded, is this sufficient reason for a civilized nation to perpetrate such a shameless outrage as the wilful destruction of a whole city? There were enough German soldiers there to punish the Belgian civilians for firing from the houses after having been warned by their own Burgomaster that they were to refrain from any hostile action.

Louvain possessed a priceless library in the Clothworker's Hall; four colleges; the Hotel de Ville on the public square with its three stories of pointed windows one of the most elaborate examples of pointed Gothic in existence, the work of a master mason named Mathien de Lavens who laboured from 1448 to 1463; the church of St. Pierre, the church of St. Michael built by the Jesuits; the church of St. Gertrude with its wood carvings; and numerous other historical buildings which made Louvain such a feast for all lovers of the beauties of architecture. Definite information as to how many of these buildings escaped the vandals' torch is not yet to hand, but in any case Louvain can never again be what it was. No money can replace the loss suffered by civilisation through the destruction of Louvain's art treasures, and nothing the Germans could do will encourage the animosity of neutral powers so much as such brutal exhibitions of force. The Kaiser will find that the good feelings of neutral powers, especially America (whose goodwill the Kaiser seems so concerned about), will turn a deaf ear to entreaties emanating from a belligerent who practices such barbarous methods under cloak of civilized warfare.

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A cable, short but to the point appeared lately in the daily papers, and tucked away as it was in an obscure corner, it probably escaped the notice of most of our readers. It was to the effect that another bad slide had occurred in the Culebra Cut of the Panama Canal, and that the Canal was blocked to all traffic. A later cable stated that the damage had been repaired.

To understand the difficulty being met with here, it must be remembered that the whole portion of the high land covered by the Culebra Cut was at some time raised from the bed of the ocean by volcanic agency. When these volcanic agencies quieted down many centuries ago, the dry land thus formed consisted of ridges of hard igneous rock, between which lay masses of softer marine deposit in various stages of hardness but possessing very little resistance to crushing or sliding movements. Through these softer deposits the engineers have laid their canal bed, setting out to obtain a batter of one to two.