

## LETTERS ON RAILWAYS.

### "LOCKING IN" ON RAILWAYS.

*To the Editor of the Morning Chronicle.*

SIR,  
IT falls to my lot to travel frequently on the Great Western Railway, and I request permission, through the medium of your able and honest journal, to make a complaint against the directors of that company.

It is the custom on that railway to lock the passengers in on both sides — a custom which, in spite of the dreadful example at Paris, I have every reason to believe they mean to continue without any relaxation.

In the course of a long life I have no recollection of any accident so shocking as that on the Paris railway — a massacre so sudden, so full of torment — death at the moment of pleasure—death aggravated by all the amazement, fear, and pain which can be condensed into the last moments of existence.

Who can say that the same scene may not be acted over again on the Great Western Railroad? That in the midst of their tunnel of three miles' length the same scene of slaughter and combustion may not scatter dismay and alarm over the whole country?

It seems to me perfectly monstrous that a board of ten or twelve monopolists can read such a description and say to the public, "You must run your chance of being burnt or mutilated. We have arranged our plan upon the locking-in system, and we shall not incur the risk and expense of changing it."

The plea is, that rash or drunken people will attempt to get out of the carriages which are not locked, and that this measure really originates from attention to the safety of the public; so that the lives of two hundred persons who are not drunk and are not rash are to be endangered for the half-yearly preservation of some idiot upon whose body the coroner is to sit, and over whom the sudden-death man is to deliver his sermon against directors.

The very fact of locking the doors will be a frequent source of accidents. Mankind, whatever the directors may think of that process, are impatient of combustion. The Paris accident will never be forgotten. The passengers will attempt to escape through the windows, and ten times more of mischief will be done than if they had been left to escape by the doors in the usual manner.

It is not only the locking of the doors which is to be deprecated; but the effects which it has upon the imagination. Women, old people, and the sick, are all forced to travel by the railroad; and for 200 miles they live under the recollection not only of impending danger, but under the knowledge that escape is impossible—a journey comes to be contemplated with horror. Men cannot persuade the females of their family to travel by the railroad; it is inseparably connected with abominable tyranny and perilous imprisonment.

Why does the necessity of locking both doors exist only on the Great Western? Why is one of the doors left open on all other railways?

The public have a right to every advantage under permitted monopoly which they would enjoy under free competition; and they are unjust to themselves if they do not insist upon this right. If there were two parallel railways, the one locking you in, and the other not, is there the smallest doubt which would carry away all the business? Can there be any hesitation in

which timid women, drunken men, sages, philosophers, bishops, and all combustible beings, would place themselves.

I very much doubt the legality of locking doors, and refusing to open them. I arrive at a station where others are admitted; but I am not suffered to get out, though perhaps at the point of death. In all other positions of life there is egress where there is ingress. Man is universally the master of his own body, except he chooses to go from Paddington to Bridgewater: there only the Habeas Corpus is refused.

Nothing, in fact, can be more utterly silly or mistaken than this over-officious care of the public; as if every man who was not a railway director was a child or a fool. But why stop here? Why are not strait-waistcoats used? Why is not the accidental traveller strapped down? Why do contusion and fracture still remain physically possible?

Is not this extreme care of the public new? When first mail coaches began to travel twelve miles an hour, the outsides (if I remember rightly) were never tied to the roof. In packets, landmen are not locked into the cabin to prevent them from tumbling overboard. This affectionate nonsense prevails only on the Great Western. It is there only that men, women, and children (seeking the only mode of transit which remains) are by these tender-hearted monopolists immediately committed to their locomotive prisons. Nothing can, in fact, be so absurd as all this officious zeal. It is the duty of the directors to take all reasonable precautions to warn the public of danger—to make it clear that there is no negligence on the part of the railroad directors; and then, this done, if a fool-hardy person choose to expose himself to danger, so be it. Fools there will be on roads of iron and on roads of gravel, and they must suffer for their folly; but why are Socrates, Solon, and Solomon to be locked up?

But is all this, which appears so philanthropical, mere philanthropy? Does not the locking of the doors save servants and policemen? Does not economy mingle with these benevolent feelings? Is it to save a few fellow creatures, or a few pounds, that the children of the West are to be hermetically sealed in the locomotives? I do not say it is so; but I say it deserves a very serious examination whether it be so or not? Great and heavy is the sin of the directors of this huge monopoly, if they repeat upon their own iron the tragedy of Paris, in order to increase their dividends a few shillings per cent.

The country has (perhaps inevitably) given way to this great monopoly. Nothing can make it tolerable for a moment but the most severe and watchful jealousy of the manner in which its powers are exercised. We shall have tyrannical rules, vexatious rules, ill temper, pure folly, and meddling and impertinent paternity. It is the absolute duty of Lord Ripon and Mr. Gladstone (if the directors prove themselves to be so inadequate to the new situation in which they are placed) to restrain and direct them by law; and if these two gentlemen are afraid of the responsibility of such laws, they are deficient in the moral courage which their office requires, and the most important interests of the public are neglected.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

SYDNEY SMITH.

May 21. 1842.

## "LOCKING IN" ON RAILWAYS.

*To the Editor of the Morning Chronicle.*

SIR,

SINCE the letter upon railroads, which you were good enough to insert in your paper, I have had some conversation with two gentlemen officially connected with the Great Western. Though nothing could be more courteous than their manner, nor more intelligible than their arguments, I remain unshaken as to the necessity of keeping the doors open.

There is, in the first place, the effect of imagination, the idea that all escape is impossible, that (let what will happen) you must sit quiet in first class No. 2., whether they are pounding you into a jam, or burning you into a cinder, or crumbling you into a human powder. These excellent directors, versant in wood and metal, seem to require that the imagination should be sent by some other conveyance, and that only loads of unimpassioned, unintellectual flesh and blood should be darted along on the Western rail; whereas, the female homo is a screaming, parturient, interjectional, hysterical animal, whose delicacy and timidity, monopolists (even much as it may surprise them) must be taught to consult. The female, in all probability, never would jump out; but she thinks she may jump out when she pleases; and this is intensely comfortable.

There are two sorts of dangers which hang over railroads. The one retail dangers, where individuals only are concerned; the other, wholesale dangers, where the whole train, or a considerable part of it, is put in jeopardy. For the first danger there is a remedy in the prudence of individuals; for the second, there is none. No man need be drunk, nor need he jump out when the carriage is in motion; but in the present state of science it is impossible to guard effectually against the fracture of the axle-tree, or the explosion of the engine; and if the safety of the one party cannot be consulted but by the danger of the other, if the foolish cannot be restrained but by the unjust incarceration of the wise, the prior consideration is due to those who have not the remedy for the evil in their own hands.

But the truth is—and so (after a hundred monopolising experiments on public patience) the railroad directors will find it—there can be no other dependence for the safety of the public than the care which every human being is inclined to take of his own life, and limbs. Everything beyond this is the mere lazy tyranny of monopoly, which makes no distinction between human beings and brown paper parcels. If riding were a monopoly, as travelling in carriages is now become, there are many gentlemen whom I see riding in the Park upon such false principles, that I am sure the cantering and galloping directors would strap them, in the ardour of their affection, to the saddle, padlock them to the stirrups, or compel them to ride behind a policeman of the stable; and nothing but a motion from O'Brien, or an order from Gladstone, could release them.

Let the company stick up all sorts of cautions and notices within their carriages and without; but after that, no doors will be locked. If one door is allowed to be locked, the other will soon be so too; there is no other security to the public than absolute prohibition of the practice. The directors and agents of the Great Western are individually excellent men; but the moment men meet in public boards, they cease to be collectively excellent. The fund of morality becomes less, as the individual contributors increase in number. I do not accuse such respectable men of any wilful violation of truth, but the memoirs which they are about to present will be, without the scrupulous cross-examination of a committee of the House of Commons, mere waste paper.

But the most absurd of all legislative enactments is this hemiplegian law — and act of Parliament to protect one side of the body and not the other. If the wheel comes off on the right, the open door is uppermost, and every one is saved. If, from any sudden avalanche on

the road, the carriage is prostrated to the left, the locked door is uppermost, all escape is impossible, and the railroad martyrdom begins.

Leave me to escape in the best way I can, as the fire-offices very kindly permit me to do. I know very well the danger of getting out on the off-side; but escape is the affair of a moment; suppose a train to have passed at that moment, I know I am safe from any other trains for twenty minutes or half an hour; and if I do get out on the off-side, I do not remain in the valley of death between the two trains, but am over to the opposite bank in an instant—only half-roasted, or merely browned, certainly not done enough for the Great Western directors.

On Saturday morning last, the wheel of the public carriage, in which a friend of mine was travelling, began to smoke, but was pacified by several buckets of water, and proceeded. After five more miles, the whole carriage was full of smoke, the train was with difficulty stopped, and the flagrant vehicle removed. The axle was nearly in two, and in another mile would have been severed.

Railroad travelling is a delightful improvement of human life. Man is become a bird; he can fly longer and quicker than a Solan goose. The mamma rushes sixty miles in two hours to the aching finger of her conjugating and declining grammar boy. The early Scotchman scratches himself in the morning mists of the North, and has his porridge in Piccadilly before the setting sun. The Puseyite priest, after a rush of 100 miles, appears with his little volume of nonsense at the breakfast of his bookseller. Every thing is near, every thing is immediate—time, distance, and delay are abolished. But, though charming and fascinating as all this is, we must not shut our eyes to the price we shall pay for it. There will be every three or four years some dreadful massacre—whole trains will be hurled down a precipice, and 200 or 300 persons will be killed on the spot. There will be every now and then a great combustion of human bodies, as there has been at Paris; then all the newspapers up in arms—a thousand regulations, forgotten as soon as the directors dare—loud screams of the velocity whistle—monopoly locks and bolts, as before.

The locking plea of directors is philanthropy; and I admit that to guard men from the commission of moral evil is as philanthropical as to prevent physical suffering. There is, I allow, a strong propensity in mankind to travel on railroads without paying; and to lock mankind in till they have completed their share of the contract is benevolent, because it guards the species from degrading and immoral conduct, but to burn or crush a whole train merely to prevent a few immoral insiders from not paying, is I hope a little more than Ripon or Gladstone will bear.

We have been, up to this point, very careless of our railway regulations. The first person of rank who is killed will put everything in order, and produce a code of the most careful rules. I hope it will not be one of the bench of bishops; but should it be so destined, let the burnt bishop—the unwilling Latimer—remember that, however painful gradual concoction by fire may be, his death will produce unspeakable benefit to the public. Even Sodor and Man will be better than nothing. From that moment the bad effects of the monopoly are destroyed; no more fatal deference to the directors; no despotic incarceration, no barbarous inattention to the anatomy and physiology of the human body; no commitment to locomotive prisons with warrant. We shall then find it possible

"Voyager libre sans mourir."

SYDNEY SMITH

June 7, 1842.

## BURNING ALIVE ON RAILROADS.

*To the Editor of the Morning Chronicle.*

SIR,

HAVING gradually got into this little controversy respecting the burning human beings alive on the railroads, I must beg leave, preparatory to the introduction of the bill, to say a few more words on the subject. If I could have my will in these matters, I would introduce into the bill a clause absolutely prohibitory of all locking doors on railroads; but as that fascinating board, the Board of Trade, does not love this, and as the public may, after some repetitions of roasted humanity, be better prepared for such peremptory legislation, the better method perhaps will be to give to the Board of Trade the power of opening doors (one or both), with the customary penalties against the companies for disobedience of orders, and then the board may use this power as the occasion may require.

To pass a one-legged law, giving power over one door and not the other, would, perhaps, be too absurd for human endurance. If railroad companies were aware of their real and extended interests, they would not harass the public by vexatious regulations, nor, under the plea of humanity (though really for purposes of economy), expose them to serious peril. The country are very angry with themselves for having granted the monopoly, and very angry for the instances of carelessness and oppression which have appeared in the working of the system: the heaviest fines are inflicted by coroner's juries, the heaviest damages are given by common juries. Railroads have daily proofs of their unpopularity. If Parliament get out of temper with these metallic ways, they will visit them with Laws of Iron, and burst upon them with the high pressure of despotism.

The wayfaring men of the North will league with the wayfaring men of the West; South and East will join hand in hand against them. All the points of the compass will combine against these vendors of velocity, and traders in transition. I hope a clause will be introduced, compelling the Board of Trade to report twice a year to Parliament upon the accidents of railroads, their causes, and their prevention. The public know little or nothing of what happens on the rail. All the men with letters upon the collars of their coats are sworn to secrecy—nothing can be extracted from them; when any thing happens they neither appear to see nor hear you.

In case of conflagration, you would be to them as so many joints on the spit. It has occurred to 500 persons, that soft impediments behind and before (such as wool) would prevent the dangers of meeting or overtaking. It is not yet understood why a carriage on fire at the end of the train cannot be seen by the driver of the engine. All this may be great nonsense; but the public ought to know that these points have been properly considered; they should know that there are a set of officers paid to watch over their interests, and to guard against the perpetual encroachments, the carelessness, the insolence, and the avarice of monopoly.

Why do not our dear Ripon and our youthful Gladstone see this, and come cheerfully to the rescue? and, instead of wrapping themselves up in transcendental philosophy, and the principles of letting-aloneness, why do they not at once do what ought to be done—what must be done—and what, after many needless butcheries, they will at last be compelled to do?—  
Yours,

SYDNEY SMITH.

June 18. 1842.

