Spearman Frank Hamilton

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Содержание

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The Nerve of Foley

There had been rumors all winter that the engineers were going to strike. Certainly we of the operating department had warning enough. Yet in the railroad life there is always friction in some quarter; the railroad man sleeps like the soldier, with an ear alert – but just the same he sleeps, for with waking comes duty.

Our engineers were good fellows. If they had faults, they were American faults – rashness, a liberality bordering on extravagance, and a headstrong, violent way of reaching conclusions – traits born of ability and self-confidence and developed by prosperity.

One of the best men we had on a locomotive was Andrew Cameron; at the same time he was one of the hardest to manage, because he was young and headstrong. Andy, a big, powerful fellow, ran opposite Felix Kennedy on the Flyer. The fast runs require young men. If you will notice, you will rarely see an old

engineer on a fast passenger run; even a young man can stand only a few years of that kind of work. High speed on a locomotive is a question of nerve and endurance – to put it bluntly, a question of flesh and blood.

"You don't think much of this strike, do you, Mr. Reed?" said Andy to me one night.

"Don't think there's going to be any, Andy."

He laughed knowingly.

"What actual grievance have the boys?" I asked.

"The trouble's on the East End," he replied, evasively.

"Is that any reason for calling a thousand men out on this end?"

"If one goes out, they all go."

"Would you go out?"

"Would I? You bet!"

"A man with a home and a wife and a baby boy like yours ought to have more sense."

Getting up to leave, he laughed again confidently. "That's all right. We'll bring you fellows to terms."

"Maybe," I retorted, as he closed the door. But I hadn't the slightest idea they would begin the attempt that night. I was at home and sound asleep when the caller tapped on my window. I threw up the sash; it was pouring rain and dark as a pocket.

"What is it, Barney? A wreck?" I exclaimed.

"Worse than that. Everything's tied up."

"What do you mean?"

"The engineers have struck."

"Struck? What time is it?"

"Half-past three. They went out at three o'clock." Throwing on my clothes, I floundered behind Barney's lantern to the depot. The superintendent was already in his office talking to the master-mechanic.

Bulletins came in every few minutes from various points announcing trains tied up. Before long we began to hear from the East End. Chicago reported all engineers out; Omaha wired, no trains moving. When the sun rose that morning our entire system, extending through seven States and Territories, was absolutely paralyzed.

It was an astounding situation, but one that must be met. It meant either an ignominious surrender to the engineers or a fight to the death. For our part, we had only to wait for orders. It was just six o'clock when the chief train-dispatcher who was tapping at a key, said:

"Here's something from headquarters."

We crowded close around him. His pen flew across the clip; the message was addressed to all division superintendents. It was short; but at the end of it he wrote a name we rarely saw in our office. It was that of the railroad magnate we knew as "the old man," the president of the system, and his words were few:

"Move the trains."

"Move the trains!" repeated the superintendent. "Yes; but trains can't be moved by pinch-bars nor by main force."

We spent the day arguing with the strikers. They were friendly,

but firm. Persuasion, entreaties, threats, we exhausted, and ended just where we began, except that we had lost our tempers. The sun set without the turn of a wheel. The victory of the first day was certainly with the strikers.

Next day it looked pretty blue around the depot. Not a car was moved; the engineers and firemen were a unit. But the wires sung hard all that day and all that night. Just before midnight Chicago wired that No. 1 – our big passenger-train, the Denver Flyer – had started out on time, with the superintendent of motive power as engineer and a wiper for fireman. The message came from the second vice-president. He promised to deliver the train to our division on time the next evening, and he asked, "Can you get it through to Denver?"

We looked at each other. At last all eyes gravitated towards Neighbor, our master-mechanic.

The train-dispatcher was waiting. "What shall I say?" he asked.

The division chief of the motive power was a tremendously big Irishman, with a voice like a fog-horn. Without an instant's hesitation the answer came clear,

"Say 'yes'!"

Every one of us started. It was throwing the gage of battle. Our word had gone out; the division was pledged; the fight was on.

Next evening the strikers, through some mysterious channel, got word that the Flyer was expected. About nine o'clock a crowd of them began to gather round the depot.

It was after one o'clock when No. 1 pulled in and the foreman of the Omaha round-house swung down from the locomotive cab. The strikers clustered around the engine like a swarm of angry bees; but that night, though there was plenty of jeering, there was no actual violence. When they saw Neighbor climb into the cab to take the run west there was a sullen silence.

Next day a committee of strikers, with Andy Cameron, very cavalier, at their head, called on me.

"Mr. Reed," said he, officiously, "we've come to notify you not to run any more trains through here till this strike's settled. The boys won't stand it; that's all." With that he turned on his heel to leave with his following.

"Hold on, Cameron," I replied, raising my hand as I spoke; "that's not quite all. I suppose you men represent your grievance committee?"

"Yes, sir."

"I happen to represent, in the superintendent's absence, the management of this road. I simply want to say to you, and to your committee, that I take my orders from the president and the general manager – not from you nor anybody you represent. That's all."

Every hour the bitterness increased. We got a few trains through, but we were terribly crippled. As for freight, we made no pretence of moving it. Trainloads of fruit and meat rotted in the yards. The strikers grew more turbulent daily. They beat our new men and crippled our locomotives. Then our troubles with

the new men were almost as bad. They burned out our crown sheets; they got mixed up on orders all the time. They ran into open switches and into each other continually, and had us very nearly crazy.

I kept tab on one of the new engineers for a week. He began by backing into a diner so hard that he smashed every dish in the car, and ended by running into a siding a few days later and setting two tanks of oil on fire, that burned up a freight depot. I figured he cost us forty thousand dollars the week he ran. Then he went back to selling windmills.

After this experience I was sitting in my office one evening, when a youngish fellow in a slouch-hat opened the door and stuck his head in.

"What do you want?" I growled.

"Are you Mr. Reed?"

"What do you want?"

"I want to speak to Mr. Reed."

"Well, what is it?"

"Are you Mr. Reed?"

"Confound you, yes! What do you want?"

"Me? I don't want anything. I'm just asking, that's all."

His impudence staggered me so that I took my feet off the desk.

"Heard you were looking for men," he added.

"No," I snapped. "I don't want any men."

"Wouldn't be any show to get on an engine, would there?"

A week earlier I should have risen and fallen on his neck. But there had been others.

"There's a show to get your head broke," I suggested.

"I don't mind that, if I get my time."

"What do you know about running an engine?"

"Run one three years."

"On a threshing-machine?"

"On the Philadelphia and Reading."

"Who sent you in here?"

"Just dropped in."

"Sit down."

I eyed him sharply as he dropped into a chair.

"When did you quit the Philadelphia and Reading?"

"About six months ago."

"Fired?"

"Strike."

I began to get interested. After a few more questions I took him into the superintendent's office. But at the door I thought it well to drop a hint.

"Look here, my friend, if you're a spy you'd better keep out of this. This man would wring your neck as quick as he'd suck an orange. See?"

"Let's tackle him, anyhow," replied the fellow, eying me coolly.

I introduced him to Mr. Lancaster, and left them together. Pretty soon the superintendent came into my office.

"What do you make of him, Reed?" said he.

"What do you make of him?"

Lancaster studied a minute.

"Take him over to the round-house and see what he knows."

I walked over with the new find, chatting warily. When we reached a live engine I told him to look it over. He threw off his coat, picked up a piece of waste, and swung into the cab.

"Run her out to the switch," said I, stepping up myself.

He pinched the throttle, and we steamed slowly out of the house. A minute showed he was at home on an engine.

"Can you handle it?" I asked, as he shut off after backing down to the round-house.

"You use soft coal," he replied, trying the injector. "I'm used to hard. This injector is new to me. Guess I can work it, though."

"What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say."

"What is it?" I asked, curtly.

"Foley."

"Well, Foley, if you have as much sense as you have gall you ought to get along. If you act straight, you'll never want a job again as long as you live. If you don't, you won't want to live very long."

"Got any tobacco?"

"Here, Baxter," said I, turning to the round-house foreman, "this is Foley. Give him a chew, and mark him up to go out on 77 to-night. If he monkeys with anything around the house kill

him."

Baxter looked at Foley, and Foley looked at Baxter; and Baxter not getting the tobacco out quick enough, Foley reminded him he was waiting.

We didn't pretend to run freights, but I concluded to try the fellow on one, feeling sure that if he was crooked he would ditch it and skip.

So Foley ran a long string of empties and a car or two of rotten oranges down to Harvard Junction that night, with one of the dispatchers for pilot. Under my orders they had a train made up at the junction for him to bring back to McCloud. They had picked up all the strays in the yards, including half a dozen cars of meat that the local board of health had condemned after it had laid out in the sun for two weeks, and a car of butter we had been shifting around ever since the beginning of the strike.

When the strikers saw the stuff coming in next morning behind Foley they concluded I had gone crazy.

"What do you think of the track, Foley?" said I.

"Fair," he replied, sitting down on my desk. "Stiff hill down there by Zanesville."

"Any trouble to climb it?" I asked, for I had purposely given him a heavy train.

"Not with that car of butter. If you hold that butter another week it will climb a hill without any engine."

"Can you handle a passenger-train?"

"I guess so."

"I'm going to send you west on No. 1 to-night."

"Then you'll have to give me a fireman. That guy you sent out last night is a lightning-rod-peddler. The dispatcher threw most of the coal."

"I'll go with you myself, Foley. I can give you steam. Can you stand it to double back to-night?"

"I can stand it if you can."

When I walked into the round-house in the evening, with a pair of overalls on, Foley was in the cab getting ready for the run.

Neighbor brought the Flyer in from the East. As soon as he had uncoupled and got out of the way we backed down with the 448. It was the best engine we had left, and, luckily for my back, an easy steamer. Just as we coupled to the mail-car a crowd of strikers swarmed out of the dusk. They were in an ugly mood, and when Andy Cameron and Bat Nicholson sprang up into the cab I saw we were in for trouble.

"Look here, partner," exclaimed Cameron, laying a heavy hand on Foley's shoulder; "you don't want to take this train out, do you? You wouldn't beat honest working-men out of a job?"

"I'm not beating anybody out of a job. If you want to take out this train, take it out. If you don't, get out of this cab."

Cameron was nonplussed. Nicholson, a surly brute, raised his fist menacingly.

"See here, boss," he growled, "we won't stand no scabs on this line."

"Get out of this cab."

"I'll promise you you'll never get out of it alive, my buck, if you ever get into it again," cried Cameron, swinging down. Nicholson followed, muttering angrily. I hoped we were out of the scrape, but, to my consternation, Foley, picking up his oil-can, got right down behind them, and began filling his cups without the least attention to anybody.

Nicholson sprang on him like a tiger. The onslaught was so sudden that they had him under their feet in a minute. I jumped down, and Ben Buckley, the conductor, came running up. Between us we gave the little fellow a life. He squirmed out like a cat, and backed instantly up against the tender.

"One at a time, and come on," he cried, hotly. "If it's ten to one, and on a man's back at that, we'll do it different." With a quick, peculiar movement of his arm he drew a pistol, and, pointing it squarely at Cameron, cried, "Get back!"

I caught a flash of his eye through the blood that streamed down his face. I wouldn't have given a switch-key for the life of the man who crowded him at that minute. But just then Lancaster came up, and before the crowd realized it we had Foley, protesting angrily, back in the cab again.

"For Heaven's sake, pull out of this before there's bloodshed, Foley," I cried; and, nodding to Buckley, Foley opened the choker.

It was a night run and a new track to him. I tried to fire and pilot both, but after Foley suggested once or twice that if I would tend to the coal he would tend to the curves I let him

find them – and he found them all, I thought, before we got to Athens. He took big chances in his running, but there was a superb confidence in his bursts of speed which marked the fast runner and the experienced one.

At Athens we had barely two hours to rest before doubling back. I was never tired in my life till I struck the pillow that night, but before I got it warm the caller routed me out again. The East-bound Flyer was on time, or nearly so, and when I got into the cab for the run back, Foley was just coupling on.

"Did you get a nap?" I asked, as we pulled out.

"No; we slipped an eccentric coming up, and I've been under the engine ever since. Say, she's a bird, isn't she? She's all right. I couldn't run her coming up; but I've touched up her valve motion a bit, and I'll get action on her as soon as it's daylight."

"Don't mind getting action on my account, Foley; I'm shy on life insurance."

He laughed.

"You're safe with me. I never killed man, woman, or child in my life. When I do, I quit the cab. Give her plenty of diamonds, if you please," he added, letting her out full.

He gave me the ride of my life; but I hated to show scare, he was so coolly audacious himself. We had but one stop – for water – and after that all down grade. We bowled along as easy as ninepins, but the pace was a hair-raiser. After we passed Arickaree we never touched a thing but the high joints. The long, heavy train behind us flew round the bluffs once in a while like

the tail of a very capricious kite; yet somehow – and that's an engineer's magic – she always lit on the steel.

Day broke ahead, and between breaths I caught the glory of a sunrise on the plains from a locomotive-cab window. When the smoke of the McCloud shops stained the horizon, remembering the ugly threats of the strikers, I left my seat to speak to Foley.

"I think you'd better swing off when you slow up for the yards and cut across to the round-house," I cried, getting close to his ear, for we were on terrific speed. He looked at me inquiringly. "In that way you won't run into Cameron and his crowd at the depot," I added. "I can stop her all right."

He didn't take his eyes off the track. "I'll take the train to the platform," said he.

"Isn't that a crossing cut ahead?" he added, suddenly, as we swung round a fill west of town.

"Yes; and a bad one."

He reached for the whistle and gave the long, warning screams. I set the bell-ringer and stooped to open the furnace door to cool the fire, when – chug!

I flew up against the water-gauges like a coupling-pin. The monster engine reared right up on her head. Scrambling to my feet, I saw the new man clutching the air-lever with both hands, and every wheel on the train was screeching. I jumped to his side and looked over his shoulder. On the crossing just ahead a big white horse, dragging a buggy, plunged and reared frantically. Standing on the buggy seat a baby boy clung bewildered to the

lazyback; not another soul in sight. All at once the horse swerved sharply back; the buggy lurched half over; the lines seemed to be caught around one wheel. The little fellow clung on; but the crazy horse, instead of running, began a hornpipe right between the deadly rails.

I looked at Foley in despair. From the monstrous quivering leaps of the great engine I knew the drivers were in the clutch of the mighty air-brake; but the resistless momentum of the train was none the less sweeping us down at deadly speed on the baby. Between the two tremendous forces the locomotive shivered like a gigantic beast. I shrank back in horror; but the little man at the throttle, throwing the last ounce of air on the burning wheels, leaped from his box with a face transfigured.

"Take her!" he cried, and, never shifting his eyes from the cut, he shot through his open window and darted like a cat along the running-board to the front.

Not a hundred feet separated us from the crossing. I could see the baby's curls blowing in the wind. The horse suddenly leaped from across the track to the side of it; that left the buggy quartering with the rails, but not twelve inches clear. The way the wheels were cramped a single step ahead would throw the hind wheels into the train; a step backward would shove the front wheels into it. It was appalling.

Foley, clinging with one hand to a headlight bracket, dropped down on the steam-chest and swung far out. As the cow-catcher shot past, Foley's long arm dipped into the buggy like the sweep

of a connecting-rod, and caught the boy by the breeches. The impetus of our speed threw the child high in the air, but Foley's grip was on the little overalls, and as the youngster bounded back he caught it close. I saw the horse give a leap. It sent the hind wheels into the corner of the baggage-car. There was a crash like the report of a hundred rifles, and the buggy flew in the air. The big horse was thrown fifty feet; but Foley, with a great light in his eyes and the baby boy in his arm, crawled laughing into the cab.

Thinking he would take the engine again, I tried to take the baby. Take it? Well, I think not!

"Hi! there, buster!" shouted the little engineer, wildly; "that's a corking pair of breeches on you, son. I caught the kid right by the seat of the pants," he called over to me, laughing hysterically. "Heavens! little man, I wouldn't 've struck you for all the gold in Alaska. I've got a chunk of a boy in Reading as much like him as a twin brother. What were you doing all alone in that buggy? Whose kid do you suppose it is? What's your name, son?"

At his question I looked at the child again – and I started. I had certainly seen him before; and, had I not, his father's features were too well stamped on the childish face for me to be mistaken.

"Foley," I cried, all amaze, "that's Cameron's boy – little Andy!"

He tossed the baby the higher; he looked the happier; he shouted the louder.

"The deuce it is! Well, son, I'm mighty glad of it." And I certainly was glad.

In fact, mighty glad, as Foley expressed it, when we pulled up at the depot, and I saw Andy Cameron with a wicked look pushing to the front through the threatening crowd. With an ugly growl he made for Foley.

"I've got business with you – you – "

"I've got a little with you, son," retorted Foley, stepping leisurely down from the cab. "I struck a buggy back here at the first cut, and I hear it was yours." Cameron's eyes began to bulge. "I guess the outfit's damaged some – all but the boy. Here, kid," he added, turning for me to hand him the child, "here's your dad."

The instant the youngster caught sight of his parent he set up a yell. Foley, laughing, passed him into his astonished father's arms before the latter could say a word. Just then a boy, running and squeezing through the crowd, cried to Cameron that his horse had run away from the house with the baby in the buggy, and that Mrs. Cameron was having a fit.

Cameron stood like one daft – and the boy catching sight of the baby that instant panted and stared in an idiotic state.

"Andy," said I, getting down and laying a hand on his shoulder, "if these fellows want to kill this man, let them do it alone – you'd better keep out. Only this minute he has saved your boy's life."

The sweat stood out on the big engineer's forehead like dew. I told the story. Cameron tried to speak; but he tried again and again before he could find his voice.

"Mate," he stammered, "you've been through a strike yourself – you know what it means, don't you? But if you've got a baby –

" he gripped the boy tighter to his shoulder.

"I have, partner; three of 'em."

"Then you know what this means," said Andy, huskily, putting out his hand to Foley. He gripped the little man's fist hard, and, turning, walked away through the crowd.

Somehow it put a damper on the boys. Bat Nicholson was about the only man left who looked as if he wanted to eat somebody; and Foley, slinging his blouse over his shoulder, walked up to Bat and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Stranger," said he, gently, "could you oblige me with a chew of tobacco?"

Bat glared at him an instant; but Foley's nerve won.

Flushing a bit, Bat stuck his hand into his pocket; took it out; felt hurriedly in the other pocket, and, with some confusion, acknowledged he was short. Felix Kennedy intervened with a slab, and the three men fell at once to talking about the accident.

A long time afterwards some of the striking engineers were taken back, but none of those who had been guilty of actual violence. This barred Andy Cameron, who, though not worse than many others, had been less prudent; and while we all felt sorry for him after the other boys had gone to work, Lancaster repeatedly and positively refused to reinstate him.

Several times, though, I saw Foley and Cameron in confab, and one day up came Foley to the superintendent's office, leading little Andy, in his overalls, by the hand. They went into Lancaster's office together, and the door was shut a long time.

When they came out little Andy had a piece of paper in his hand.

"Hang on to it, son," cautioned Foley; "but you can show it to Mr. Reed if you want to."

The youngster handed me the paper. It was an order directing Andrew Cameron to report to the master-mechanic for service in the morning.

I happened over at the round-house one day nearly a year later, when Foley was showing Cameron a new engine, just in from the East. The two men were become great cronies; that day they fell to talking over the strike.

"There was never but one thing I really laid up against this man," said Cameron to me.

"What's that?" asked Foley.

"Why, the way you shoved that pistol into my face the first night you took out No. 1."

"I never shoved any pistol into your face." So saying, he stuck his hand into his pocket with the identical motion he used that night of the strike, and levelled at Andy, just as he had done then – a plug of tobacco. "That's all I ever pulled on you, son; I never carried a pistol in my life."

Cameron looked at him, then he turned to me, with a tired expression:

"I've seen a good many men, with a good many kinds of nerve, but I'll be splintered if I ever saw any one man with all kinds of nerve till I struck Foley."

Second Seventy-Seven

It is a bad grade yet. But before the new work was done on the river division, Beverly Hill was a terror to trainmen.

On rainy Sundays old switchmen in the Zanesville yards still tell in their shanties of the night the Blackwood bridge went out and Cameron's stock-train got away on the hill, with the Denver flyer caught at the foot like a rat in a trap.

Ben Buckley was only a big boy then, braking on freights; I was dispatching under Alex Campbell on the West End. Ben was a tall, loose-jointed fellow, but gentle as a kitten; legs as long as pinch-bars, yet none too long, running for the Beverly switch that night. His great chum in those days was Andy Cameron. Andy was the youngest engineer on the line. The first time I ever saw them together, Andy, short and chubby as a duck, was dancing around, half dressed, on the roof of the bath-house, trying to get away from Ben, who had the fire-hose below, playing on him with a two-inch stream of ice-water. They were up to some sort of a prank all the time.

June was usually a rush month with us. From the coast we caught the new crop Japan teas and the fall importations of China silks. California still sent her fruits, and Colorado was beginning cattle shipments. From Wyoming came sheep, and from Oregon steers; and all these not merely in car-loads, but in solid trains. At times we were swamped. The overland traffic alone was

enough to keep us busy; on top of it came a great movement of grain from Nebraska that summer, and to crown our troubles a rate war sprang up. Every man, woman, and child east of the Mississippi appeared to have but one object in life – that was to get to California, and to go over our road. The passenger traffic burdened our resources to the last degree.

I was putting on new men every day then. We start them at braking on freights; usually they work for years at that before they get a train. But when a train-dispatcher is short on crews he must have them, and can only press the best material within reach. Ben Buckley had not been braking three months when I called him up one day and asked him if he wanted a train.

"Yes, sir, I'd like one first rate. But you know I haven't been braking very long, Mr. Reed," said he, frankly.

"How long have you been in the train service?"

I spoke brusquely, though I knew, without even looking at my service-card just how long it was.

"Three months, Mr. Reed."

It was right to a day.

"I'll probably have to send you out on 77 this afternoon." I saw him stiffen like a ramrod. "You know we're pretty short," I continued.

"Yes, sir."

"But do you know enough to keep your head on your shoulders and your train on your orders?"

Ben laughed a little. "I think I do. Will there be two sections

to-day?"

"They're loading eighteen cars of stock at Ogalalla; if we get any hogs off the Beaver there will be two big sections. I shall mark you up for the first one, anyway, and send you out right behind the flyer. Get your badge and your punch from Carpenter – and whatever you do, Buckley, don't get rattled."

"No, sir; thank you, Mr. Reed."

But his "thank you" was so pleasant I couldn't altogether ignore it; I compromised with a cough. Perfect courtesy, even in the hands of the awkwardest boy that ever wore his trousers short, is a surprisingly handy thing to disarm gruff people with. Ben was undeniably awkward; his legs were too long, and his trousers decidedly out of touch with his feet; but I turned away with the conviction that in spite of his gawkiness there was something to the boy. That night proved it.

When the flyer pulled in from the West in the afternoon it carried two extra sleepers. In all, eight Pullmans, and every one of them loaded to the ventilators. While the train was changing engines and crews, the excursionists swarmed out of the hot cars to walk up and down the platform. They were from New York, and had a band with them – as jolly a crowd as we ever hauled – and I noticed many boys and girls sprinkled among the grown folks.

As the heavy train pulled slowly out the band played, the women waved handkerchiefs, and the boys shouted themselves hoarse – it was like a holiday, everybody seemed so happy. All

I hoped, as I saw the smoke of the engine turn to dust on the horizon, was that I could get them over my division and their lives safely off my hands. For a week we had had heavy rains, and the bridges and track gave us worry.

Half an hour after the flyer left, 77, the fast stock-freight, wound like a great snake around the bluff, after it. Ben Buckley, tall and straight as a pine, stood on the caboose. It was his first train, and he looked as if he felt it.

In the evening I got reports of heavy rains east of us, and after 77 reported "out" of Turner Junction and pulled over the divide towards Beverly, it was storming hard all along the line. By the time they reached the hill Ben had his men out setting brakes – tough work on that kind of a night; but when the big engine struck the bluff the heavy train was well in hand, and it rolled down the long grade as gently as a curtain.

Ben was none too careful, for half-way down the hill they exploded torpedoes. Through the driving storm the tail-lights of the flyer were presently seen. As they pulled carefully ahead, Ben made his way through the mud and rain to the head end and found the passenger-train stalled. Just before them was Blackwood Creek, bank full, and the bridge swinging over the swollen stream like a grape-vine.

At the foot of Beverly Hill there is a siding – a long siding, once used as a sort of cut-off to the upper Zanesville yards. This side track parallels the main track for half a mile, and on this siding Ben, as soon as he saw the situation, drew in with his train

so that it lay beside the passenger-train and left the main line clear behind. It then became his duty to guard the track to the rear, where the second section of the stock-train would soon be due.

It was pouring rain and as dark as a pocket. He started his hind-end brakeman back on the run with red lights and torpedoes to warn the second section well up the hill. Then walking across from his caboose, he got under the lee of the hind Pullman sleeper to watch for the expected headlight.

The storm increased in violence. It was not the rain driving in torrents, not the lightning blazing, nor the deafening crashes of thunder, that worried him, but the wind – it blew a gale. In the blare of the lightning he could see the oaks which crowned the bluffs whip like willows in the storm. It swept quartering down the Beverly cut as if it would tear the ties from under the steel. Suddenly he saw, far up in the black sky, a star blazing; it was the headlight of Second Seventy-Seven.

A whistle cut the wind; then another. It was the signal for brakes; the second section was coming down the steep grade. He wondered how far back his man had got with the bombs. Even as he wondered he saw a yellow flash below the headlight; it was the first torpedo. The second section was already well down the top of the hill. Could they hold it to the bottom?

Like an answer came shorter and sharper the whistle for brakes. Ben thought he knew who was on that engine; thought he knew that whistle – for engineers whistle as differently as they talk. He still hoped and believed – knowing who was on the

engine – that the brakes would hold the heavy load; but he feared – A man running up in the rain passed him. Ben shouted and held up his lantern; it was his head brakeman.

"Who's pulling Second Seventy-Seven?" he cried.

"Andy Cameron."

"How many air cars has he got?"

"Six or eight," shouted Ben. "It's the wind, Daley – the wind. Andy can hold her if anybody can. But the wind; did you ever see such a blow?"

Even while he spoke the cry for brakes came a third time on the storm.

A frightened Pullman porter opened the rear door of the sleeper. Five hundred people lay in the excursion train, unconscious of this avalanche rolling down upon them.

The conductor of the flyer ran up to Ben in a panic.

"Buckley, they'll telescope us."

"Can you pull ahead any?"

"The bridge is out."

"Get out your passengers," said Ben's brakeman.

"There's no time," cried the passenger conductor, wildly, running off. He was panic-stricken. The porter tried to speak. He took hold of the brakeman's arm, but his voice died in his throat; fear paralyzed him. Down the wind came Cameron's whistle clamoring now in alarm. It meant the worst, and Ben knew it. The stock-train was running away.

There were plenty of things to do if there was only time; but

there was hardly time to think. The passenger crew were running about like men distracted, trying to get the sleeping travellers out. Ben knew they could not possibly reach a tenth of them. In the thought of what it meant, an inspiration came like a flash.

He seized his brakeman by the shoulder. For two weeks the man carried the marks of his hand.

"Daley!" he cried, in a voice like a pistol crack, "get those two stockmen out of our caboose. Quick, man! I'm going to throw Cameron into the cattle."

It was a chance – single, desperate, but yet a chance – the only chance that offered to save the helpless passengers in his charge.

If he could reach the siding switch ahead of the runaway train, he could throw the deadly catapult on the siding and into his own train, and so save the unconscious travellers. Before the words were out of his mouth he started up the track at topmost speed.

The angry wind staggered him. It blew out his lantern, but he flung it away, for he could throw the switch in the dark. A sharp gust tore half his rain-coat from his back; ripping off the rest, he ran on. When the wind took his breath he turned his back and fought for another. Blinding sheets of rain poured on him; water streaming down the track caught his feet; a slivered tie tripped him, and, falling headlong, the sharp ballast cut his wrists and knees like broken glass. In desperate haste he dashed ahead again; the headlight loomed before him like a mountain of flame. There was light enough now through the sheets of rain that swept down on him, and there ahead, the train almost on it,

was the switch.

Could he make it?

A cry from the sleeping children rose in his heart. Another breath, an instant floundering, a slipping leap, and he had it. He pushed the key into the lock, threw the switch and snapped it, and, to make deadly sure, braced himself against the target-rod. Then he looked.

No whistling now; it was past that. He knew the fireman would have jumped. Cameron too? No, not Andy, not if the pit yawned in front of his pilot.

He saw streams of fire flying from many wheels – he felt the glare of a dazzling light – and with a rattling crash the ponies shot into the switch. The bar in his hands rattled as if it would jump from the socket, and, lurching frightfully, the monster took the siding. A flare of lightning lit the cab as it shot past, and he saw Cameron leaning from the cab window, with face of stone, his eyes riveted on the gigantic drivers that threw a sheet of fire from the sanded rails.

"Jump!" screamed Ben, useless as he knew it was. What voice could live in that hell of noise? What man escape from that cab now?

One, two, three, four cars pounded over the split rails in half as many seconds. Ben, running dizzily for life to the right, heard above the roar of the storm and screech of the sliding wheels a ripping, tearing crash, the harsh scrape of escaping steam, the hoarse cries of the wounded cattle. And through the dreadful

dark and the fury of the babel the wind howled in a gale and the heavens poured a flood.

Trembling from excitement and exhaustion, Ben staggered down the main track. A man with a lantern ran against him; it was the brakeman who had been back with the torpedoes; he was crying hysterically.

They stumbled over a body. Seizing the lantern, Ben turned the prostrate man over and wiped the mud from his face. Then he held the lantern close, and gave a great cry. It was Andy Cameron – unconscious, true, but soon very much alive, and no worse than badly bruised. How the good God who watches over plucky engineers had thrown him out from the horrible wreckage only He knew. But there Andy lay; and with a lighter heart Ben headed a wrecking crew to begin the task of searching for any who might by fatal chance have been caught in the crash.

And while the trainmen of the freights worked at the wreck the passenger-train was backed slowly – so slowly and so smoothly – up over the switch and past, over the hill and past, and so to Turner Junction, and around by Oxford to Zanesville.

When the sun rose the earth glowed in the freshness of its June shower-bath. The flyer, now many miles from Beverly Hill, was speeding in towards Omaha, and mothers waking their little ones in the berths told them how close death had passed while they slept. The little girls did not quite understand it, though they tried very hard, and were very grateful to That Man, whom they never saw and whom they would never see. But the little boys – never

mind the little boys – they understood it, to the youngest urchin on the train, and fifty times their papas had to tell them how far Ben ran and how fast to save their lives. And one little boy – I wish I knew his name – went with his papa to the depot-master at Omaha when the flyer stopped, and gave him his toy watch, and asked him please to give it to That Man who had saved his mamma's life by running so far in the rain, and please to tell him how much obliged he was – if he would be so kind.

So the little toy watch came to our superintendent, and so to me; and I, sitting at Cameron's bedside, talking the wreck over with Ben, gave it to him; and the big fellow looked as pleased as if it had been a jewelled chronometer; indeed, that was the only medal Ben got.

The truth is we had no gold medals to distribute out on the West End in those days. We gave Ben the best we had, and that was a passenger run. But he is a great fellow among the railroad men. And on stormy nights switchmen in the Zanesville yards, smoking in their shanties, still tell of that night, that storm, and how Ben Buckley threw Second Seventy-Seven at the foot of Beverly Hill.

The Kid Engineer

When the big strike caught us at Zanesville we had one hundred and eighty engineers and firemen on the pay-roll. One hundred and seventy-nine of these men walked out. One fireman – just one – stayed with the company; that was Dad Hamilton.

"Yes," growled Dad, combating the protests of the strikers' committee, "I know it. I belong to your lodge. But I'll tell you now – an' I've told you afore – I ain't goin' to strike on the company so long as Neighbor is master-mechanic on this division. Ain't a-goin' to do it, an' you might as well quit. 'F you jaw here from now till Christmas 'twon't change my mind nar a bit."

And they didn't change it. Through the calm and through the storm – and it stormed hard for a while – Dad Hamilton, whenever we could supply him with an engineer, fired religiously.

No other man in the service could have done it without getting killed; but Dad was old enough to father any man among the strikers. Moreover, he was a giant physically, and eccentric enough to move along through the heat of the crisis indifferent to the abuse of the other men. His gray hairs and his tremendous physical strength saved him from personal violence.

Our master-mechanic, "Neighbor," was another big man – six feet an inch in his stockings, and strong as a draw-bar. Between Neighbor and the old fireman there existed some sort of a bond

– a liking, an affinity. Dad Hamilton had fired on our division ten years. There was no promotion for Dad; he could never be an engineer, though only Neighbor knew why. But his job of firing on the river division was sure as long as Neighbor signed the pay-rolls at the round-house.

Hence there was no surprise when the superintendent offered him an engine, just after the strike, that Dad refused to take it.

"I'm a fireman, and Neighbor knows it. I ain't no engineer. I'll make steam for any man you put in the cab with me, but I won't touch a throttle for no man. I laid it down, and I'll never pinch it again – an' no offence t' you, Neighbor, neither."

Thus ended negotiations with Dad on that subject; threats and entreaties were useless. Then, too, in spite of his professed willingness to throw coal for any man we put on his engine, he was continually rowing about the green runners we gave him. From the standpoint of a railroad man they were a tough assortment; for a fellow may be a good painter, or a handy man with a jack-plane, or an expert machinist, even, and yet a failure as an engine-runner.

After we got hold of Foley, Neighbor put him on awhile with Dad, and the grizzled fireman quickly declared that Foley was the only man on the pay-roll who knew how to move a train.

The little chap proved such a remarkable find that I tried hard to get some of his Eastern chums to come out and join him. After a good bit of hustling we did get half a dozen more Reading boys for our new corps of engine-men, but the East-End officials

kept all but one of them on their own divisions. That one we got because nobody on the East End wanted him.

"They've crimped the whole bunch, Foley," said I, answering his inquiries. "There's just one fellow reported here – he came in on 5 this morning. Neighbor's had a little talk with him; but he doesn't think much of him. I guess we're out the transportation on that fellow."

"What's his name?" asked Foley. "Is he off the Reading?"

"Claims he is; his name is McNeal – "

"McNeal?" echoed Foley, surprised. "Not Georgie McNeal?"

"I don't know what his first name is; he's nothing but a boy."

"Dark-complexioned fellow?"

"Perhaps you'd call him that; sort of soft-spoken."

"Georgie McNeal, sure's you're born. If you've got him you've got a bird. He ran opposite me between New York and Philadelphia on the limited. I want to see him, right off. If it's Georgie, you're all right."

Foley's talk went a good ways with me any time. When I told Neighbor about it he pricked up his ears. While we were debating, in rushed Foley with the young fellow – the kid – as he called him. Neighbor made another survey of the ground in short order: run a new line, as Foley would have said. The upshot of it was that McNeal was assigned to an engine straightway.

As luck would have it, Neighbor put the boy on the 244 with Dad Hamilton; and Dad proceeded at once to make what Foley termed "a great roar."

"What's the matter?" demanded Neighbor, roughly, when the old fireman complained.

"If you're goin' to pull these trains with boys I guess it's time for me to quit; I'm gettin' pretty old, anyhow."

"What's the matter?" growled Neighbor, still surlier, knowing full well that if the old fellow had a good reason he would have blurted it out at the start.

"Nothin's the matter; only I'd like my time."

"You won't get it," said Neighbor, roughly. "Go back on your run. If McNeal don't behave, report him to me, and he'll get his time."

It was a favorite trick of Neighbor's. Whenever the old fireman got to "bucking" about his engineer, the master-mechanic threatened to discharge the engineer. That settled it; Dad Hamilton wouldn't for the world be the cause of throwing another man out of a job, no matter how little he liked him.

The old fellow went back to work mollified; but it was evident that he and McNeal didn't half get on together. The boy was not much of a talker; yet he did his work well; and Neighbor said, next to Foley, he was the best man we had.

"What's the reason Hamilton and McNeal can't hit it off, Foley?" I asked one night.

"They'll get along all right after a while," predicted Foley. "You know the old man's stubborn as a dun mule, ain't he? The injectors bother Georgie some; they did me. He'll get used to things. But Dad thinks he's green – that's what's the matter. The

kid is high-spirited, and seeing the old man's kind of got it in for him he won't ask him anything. Dad's sore about that, too. Georgie won't knuckle to anybody that don't treat him right."

"You'd better tell McNeal to humor the old crank," I suggested; and I believe Foley did so, but it didn't do any good. Sometimes those things have to work themselves out without outside help. In the end this thing did, but in a way none of us looked for.

About a week later Foley came into the office one morning very much excited.

"Did you hear about the boy's getting pounded last night – Georgie McNeal? It's a shame the way these fellows act. Three of the strikers piled on him while he was going into the post-office, and thumped the life out of him. The cowardly hounds, to jump on a man's back that way!"

"Foley," said I, "that's the first time they've tackled one of Dad Hamilton's engineers."

"They'd never have done it if they thought there was any danger of Dad's getting after them. They know he doesn't like the boy."

"It's an outrage; but we can't do anything. You know that. Tell McNeal to keep away from the post-office. We'll get his mail for him."

"I told him that this morning. He's in bed, and looks pretty hard. But he won't dodge those fellows. He claims it's a free country," grinned Foley. "But I told him he'd get over that idea

if he stuck out this trouble."

It was three days before McNeal was able to report for work, though he received full time just the same. Even then he wasn't fit for duty, but he begged Neighbor for his run until he got it. The strikers were jubilant while the boy was laid up; but just what Dad thought no one could find out. I wanted to tell the old growler what I thought of him, but Foley said it wouldn't do any good, and might do harm, so I held my peace.

One might have thought that the injustice and brutality of the thing would have roused him; but men who have repressed themselves till they are gray-headed don't rise in a hurry to resent a wrong. Dad kept as mute as the Sphinx. When McNeal was ready to go out the old fireman had the 244 shining; but if the pale face of his engineer had any effect on him, he kept it to himself.

As they rattled down the line with a long stock-train that night neither of them referred to the break in their run. Coming back next night the same silence hung over the cab. The only words that passed over the boiler-head were "strickly business," as Dad would say.

At Oxford they were laid out by a Pullman special. It was three o'clock in the morning and raining hard. Under such circumstances an hour seems all night. At last Dad himself broke the unsupportable silence.

"He'd have waited a good bit longer if he had waited for me to talk," said the boy, telling Foley afterwards.

"Heard you got licked," growled Dad, after tinkering with the fire for the twentieth time.

"I didn't get licked," retorted Georgie; "I got clubbed. I never had a chance to fight."

"These fellows hate to see a boy come out and take a man's job. Can't blame 'em much, neither."

"Whose job did I take?" demanded Georgie, angrily. "Was any one of those cowards that jumped on me in the dark looking for work on this engine?"

There was nothing to say to that. Dad kept still.

"You talk about men," continued the young fellow. "If I am not more of a man than to slug a fellow from behind, the way they slugged me, I'll get off this engine and stay off. If that's what you call men out here I don't want to be a man. I'll go back to Pennsylvania."

"Why didn't you stay there?" growled Dad.

"Why didn't you?"

Without attempting to return the shot, Dad pulled nervously at the chain.

"If I hadn't been fool enough to go out on a strike I might have been running there yet," continued Georgie.

"Ought to have kept away from the post-office," grumbled Dad, after a pause.

"I get a letter twice a week that I think more of than I do of this whole road, and I propose to go to the post-office and get it without asking anybody's permission."

"They'll pound you again."

Georgie looked out into the storm. "Well, why shouldn't they? I've got no friends."

"Got a girl back in Pennsylvania?"

"Yes, I've got a girl there," replied the boy, as the rain tore at the cab window. "I've had a girl there a good while. She's gray-headed and sixty years old – that's my girl – and if she can write letters to me, I can get them out of the post-office without a guardian."

"There she comes," said Dad, as the headlight of the Pullman special shone faint ahead through the mist.

"I'm mighty glad of it," said Georgie, looking at his watch. "Give me steam now, Dad, and I'll get you home in time for a nap before breakfast."

A minute later the special shot over the switch, and the young runner, crowding the pistons a bit, started off the siding. When Dad, looking back for the hind-end brakeman to lock the switch and swing on, called all clear, Georgie pulled her out another notch, and the long train slowly gathered headway up the slippery track.

As the speed increased the young man and the old relapsed into their usual silence. The 244 was always a free steamer, but Georgie put her through her paces without any apology, and it took lots of coal to square the account.

In a few minutes they were pounding along up through the Narrows. The track there follows the high bench between the

bluffs, which sheer up on one side, and the river-bed, thirty feet below the grade, on the other.

It is not an inviting stretch at any time with a big string of gondolas behind. But on a wet night it is the last place on the division where an engineer would want a side-rod to go wrong; and just there and then Georgie's rod went very wrong indeed.

Half-way between centres the big steel bar on his side, dipping then so fast you couldn't have seen it even in daylight, snapped like a stick of licorice. The hind-end ripped up into the cab like the nose of a sword-fish, tearing and smashing with appalling force and fury.

Georgie McNeal's seat burst under him as if a stick of giant-powder had exploded. He was jammed against the cab roof like a link-pin and fell sprawling, while the monster steel flail threshed and tore through the cab with every lightning revolution of the great driver from which it swung.

It was a frightful moment. Anything thought or done must be thought and done at once. It was either to stop that train – and quickly – or to pound along until the 244 jumped the track, and lit in the river, with thirty cars of coal to cover it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.