

## THE EXPRESS TRAIN.

## A PERILOUS RAILWAY RIDE.

Two or three of us had lounged out of the club one night into Stanley's office, to find out the news coming in by telegraph, which the sleeping town could not hear until the paper would be out to-morrow. Stanley was editor of the "Courier." He was scribbling away at a driving speed, his bat on, and an unlighted cigar in his mouth.

You're at it late, Ben?

Accident—sixty lives lost—with-out looking up.

We seized the long white slips, which lay coiled over the table, and read the dispatch.

Tut, tut!

Infamous!

Nobody to blame, of course.

I tell you the officers of the road where such an accident is possible should be tried for murder! cried Ferrers.

Stanley gave his copy to the boy, and lighted his cigar.

I think you're wrong, Ferrers.

Instead of being startled at such casualties, I never travel on a railway that I am not amazed at the security of them. Just think of it! Thousands of trains running yearly on each, with but a minute to spare between safety and destruction, the safety of these trains depending upon conductors, telegraph clerks, brakemen, men of every grade of intellect, their brains subject to every kind of moods and disease and temper.

The engineer takes a glass of liquor; the conductor sets his watch half a minute too fast; the signalman falls asleep, and the train is dashed into ruin! It is not the accident that is to be wondered at—it is the escape that is miraculous!

We had all dropped into seats by this time. The night was young, and one after another told some story of adventure or danger. Presently, Stanley said: There was an incident that occurred on the Bamber road a few years ago, which made me feel as I do in the matter. I happened to be an eye witness to the whole affair.

What was it, Ben?

It's rather a long story—

No matter. Go on. You can't go home until your proof comes in.

No. Well, to make you understand, about five years ago I had a bad break-down—night work, hack-riding, and poor pay. You know how fast it wears out the machine.

The doctor talked of diseases of the gray matter of the brain, etc., and prescribed, instead of medicine, absolute rest and change of scene. I would have swallowed all the nostrums in a drug shop rather than to have left the office for a week.

I'll take country board and send in my work, I said.

No; you must drop office and work utterly out of your life for a month, at least. Talk and think of planting potatoes, or embroidery—anything but newspapers and politics.

Well, I obeyed. I started on a pedestrian tour. Finally I brought up, footsore and weary, in Stock-hunt. While there I fell into the habit of lounging about the railway station, studying the construction of the engines and making friends with the men.

The man with whom I fraternized most readily was a skilled mechanic. He had a degree of common sense—a store of certain facts which your young doctor or politician is apt to lack.

Besides, he is absolutely sure of his social standing ground, and has a grave self-respect which teaches him to respect you.

The professional lad just started on his career is uneasy, not sure of his position; he tries to climb perpetually.

I tell you this to explain my intimacy with many of the officials of the road, especially with an engineer named Blakeley.

This man attracted me first by his ability to give me the information I wanted, in a few direct, sharp words. Like most retired men, he knew the value and weight of his words. I soon became personally much interested in him. He was about forty, his hair streaked with gray, with a grave, worn face, which hinted at a youth of hardships and much suffering.

How, Blakeley had found his way to the brighter land at last. Three years before he had married a bright, cheerful, woman. They had one child—a boy. He had work and very good wages, and was, I found, high in the confidence

of the company. On one occasion, having a Sunday off, he took me up to where his wife and boy lived. He was an exceptionally silent man, but when with them was garrulous and light-hearted as a boy.

In his eyes, Jane was the wisest and fairest of women, and the boy a wonder of intellect. One great source of trouble to him was, as I found, that he was able to go home but once in three weeks. It was necessary for the child's health to keep them in the country air, and indeed he could not afford to leave them elsewhere, but this separated him from them almost wholly.

Jane was in the habit of coming with Charley down to a certain point of the road every day, that Blakeley might see them as he dashed by.

And when I found out this habit, it occurred to me that I would give Blakeley a great pleasure. How often have I reproached myself for my meddling kindness since.

January 25th was the child's birthday. I proposed to Mrs. Blakeley that she and Charley should board the train which her husband drove, unknown to him, and run up to Harridge, where he laid the night off.

There was to be a little supper. Charlie was to appear in a new suit. Of course the whole affair was at my expense—a mere trifle, but an affair of grandeur and distinction which fairly took Jane's breath.

She was a most innocent, happy creature; one of those women who are wives and mothers in the cradle. When Blakeley found her she was a thin, pale little tailoress—a machine to turn out badly made shoddy clothes. But three years of marriage, and petting of Charley had made her rosy, and plump, and pretty.

The little Highland suit was bought complete, to the tuck and feather, and very pretty the little fellow looked in it.

I wrote down to order a superior to be ready at eight. Jane and the boy were to go aboard the train at shore, a queer little hill village near which they lived. Blakeley ran the train from Stockhunt down to Hedge that day.

His wife being in the train before he took charge of the engine, of course he would see and know nothing of her until we landed at Harridge at seven.

I had intended to go down in the smoking carriage as usual, but another fancy, suggested I suppose, by the originator of all evil, seized me.

No need to laugh.

My fancy, diabolic, or not, was to go down on the engine with Blakeley. I hunted up the fireman, and talked to him for an hour. Then I went to the engineer.

Blakeley, said I, Jones (the fireman) wants to night off.

Oh! Oh, no doubt! he's taking to drink, is Jones. He must have been drinking when he talked of that. It's impossible. I explained to Blakeley that Jones had a sick wife, or sweetheart or something, and finally owned that I had an unconquerable desire to run down the road on the engine, and that knowing my only chance was to take the fireman's place, had bribed him to give it me. The fact was in my idleness and the over worked state of my brain, I craved excitement as a confirmed drunkard does liquor.

Blakeley, I saw was angry, and exceedingly annoyed.

He refused at first, but finally gave way with a grave civility, which almost made me ashamed of my boyish whim. I promised to be the prince of firemen.

Then you'll have to be treated as one, Mr. Stanley, said Blakeley, curtly. I can't talk to gentlemen aboard my engine. It's different from here on the platform, you'll remember. I've got to order and you obey, in there, and that's all there is of it.

Oh, I understand I said, thinking it required but little moral effort to obey, in the matter of shovelling coal. If I could have guessed what that shovelling coal was to cost me! But all day I went about thinking of the fiery ride through the land, mounted literally on the iron horse.

It was in the middle of the afternoon when the train rushed into the station.

I caught a glimpse of Jane, with Charley, magnificent in his red and green plaid, beside her.

She nodded a dozen times and laughed, and then hid behind the window, fearing her husband should see her. Poor girl! It was the sec-

ond great holiday of her life, she had told me, the first being her wedding day.

I had an old patched suit on, fit, as I supposed, for the service of coal heaver; but Blakeley, when I came up, eyed it and my hand sardonically. He was in no better temper, evidently, with amateur firemen than he had been in the morning.

All aboard! he said, gruffly. You take your place there, Mr. Stanley. You'll put in coal just as I call for it, if you please, and not trust to your own judgment.

His tone annoyed me. It cannot require much judgment to keep up a fire under a boiling pot, and not make it too hot. Any woman can do that in her own kitchen.

He made no reply, but took his place in the little square box where the greater part of his life was passed. I noticed that his face was flushed, and his irritation at my foolish whim was surely more than the occasion required. I watched him with keen curiosity, wondering if it was possible that he could have been drinking, as he had accused poor Jones of doing.

It strikes me as odd, interrupted Ferrers, that you should have not only made an intimate companion of this fellow, Stanley, but have taken so keen an interest in his tempers and drinking bouts. You would not be likely to honor any of us with such attention.

No, I have something else to do. I was absolutely idle then. Blakeley and his family for the time, made up my world. As for the friendship, this was an exceptional man, both as to integrity and massive hard sense.

The knowledge that comes from books counts with me but for little, compared with the education given by experience and contact with facts for forty years. I was honored by the friendship of this grimy engineer.

But the question of his sobriety that day was a serious one. A man in charge of a train with hundreds of souls aboard, I felt ought to be sober, particularly when I was shut up in the engine with him.

Just as we started, a slip of paper was handed to him, which he read and threw down.

Do you run this train by telegraph? I asked, beginning to shovel vigorously.

Yes. No more coal.

Isn't that unusual?

I began to think I had little to pay for my grimy hands and face, when we slowed at the next station. One or two passengers came aboard the train. There was the inevitable old lady with bundles, alighting, and the usual squabble about her trunk. I was craning my neck to hear, when the boy ran alongside with the telegram.

The next moment I heard a low exclamation from Blakeley.

Go back, said he to the boy. Tell Sands to have the message repeated. There is a mistake.

The boy dashed off, and Blakeley sat waiting, coolly polishing a bit of the shining brass before him. Back came the boy.

Had it repeated. Sands is raging at you. Says there's no mistake, and you'd best go on, thrusting the second message up.

Blakeley read it, and stood hesitating for half a minute. I never shall forget the dismay, the utter perplexity that gathered on his thin face as he looked at the telegram, and then at the long train behind him.

His lips moved as if he were calculating chances, and his eye suddenly quailed, as if he saw death at the end of the calculation.

What's the matter? What are you going to do? I asked.

Obey.

The engine gave a long shriek of horror, that made me start as if it were Blakeley's own voice.

The next instant we rushed out of the station, and dashed through the low-lying farms at a speed which seemed dangerous to me.

Put in more coal, said Blakeley.

I shoveled it in.

We are going very fast, Blakeley, I ventured.

He did not answer. His eye was fixed on the steam gauge; his lips closely shut.

More coal!

I threw it in.

The fields and houses began to fly past but half seen. We were nearing Sunbury. Blakeley's eye went from the gauge to the face of the timepiece and back. He moved like an automaton. There was little more meaning in his face.

More!

I took up the shovel—hesitated. Blakeley, we're going very fast. We're going at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

Coal!

I was alarmed at the stern, cold rigidity of the man. His pallor was becoming frightful.

I threw in the coal.

At least we must stop in Sunbury. He told me that was the next halt.

The little town approached. As the first house came into view, the engine sent out its shriek of warning; it grew louder, louder. We dashed up to the station, where a group of passengers waited, and past it without the half of an instant. I caught a glimpse of the appalled faces of the waiting crowd. Then we were in the fields again.

The speed now became literally breathless; the furnace glared red hot. The heat, the velocity, the terrible nervous strain of the man beside me, seemed to weigh the air. I found myself drawing long, stentorian breaths like one drowning. I heaped in the coal at intervals, as he bade me.

I'd have done nothing of the kind! interrupted one of the listeners. The man was mad.

I did it because I was impressed by an odd sense of duty, which I never had in my ordinary brain-work. I had put this mechanical task on myself, and felt a pressure upon me to go through with it at any cost.

I know now how it is that dull, ignorant men without a spark of enthusiasm, show such heroism sometimes, as soldiers, engineers, captains of wrecked vessels.

It is this overpowering sense of routine duty. It is a finer thing than sheer bravery, to my notion.

However, I began to be of your mind, Wright, that Blakeley was mad, laboring under some frenzy from drink, though I had never seen him touch liquor.

He did not move hand or foot, except in the mechanical control of the engine, his eye going from the gauge to the timepiece with a steadiness that was more terrible and threatening than any gleam of insanity would have been.

Yes. There are two special trains on this road this afternoon.

Is it difficult to run a train by telegraph? I said presently, simply to make conversation. Staring in silence at the narrow slit in the gloomy furnace or out at the village street, through which we slowly passed, was monotonous.

No, not difficult. I simply have to obey the instructions which I receive at each station.

But if you should happen to think the instructions not right?

Happen to think! I've no business to think at all! When the trains run by telegraph the engineers are so many machines in the hands of one controller, who directs them all from a central point. He has the whole road under his eye. If they don't obey to the least tittle their orders, it is destruction to the whole.

You seem to think silent obedience the first and last merit in a railway man!

Yes, dryly.

I took the hint and was dumb.

We were out of town now. Blakeley quickened the speed of the engine. I did not speak to him again. There was little for me to do, and I was occupied in looking at the flying landscape.

The fields were covered with a deep fall of snow, and glanced whitely by, with a strange, unreal shimmer. The air was keen and cutting. Still the ride was tame. I was disappointed. The excitement would by no means equal a dash on a spirited horse.

Once he glanced back at the long train sweeping after the engine, with a headlong speed that rocked it from side to side.

You would catch glimpses of hundreds of men and women talking, reading, smoking, unconscious that their lives were all in the hold of one man, whom I now strongly suspected to be mad.

I knew by his looks that he remembered their lives were in his hand. He glanced at the clock.

Twenty miles, he muttered. Throw on the coals, man. The fire is going out.

I did it. Yes, I did it. There was something in the face of the man that I could not resist. Then I climbed for ward and shook him by the shoulder.

Blakeley, I shouted, you are running this train into the jaws of death!

I know it, quietly.

Your wife and child are on it.

Ha. He staggered to his feet. But even then he did not move his eyes from the gauge.

In a minute—

Make up the fire, he said, and pushing in a certain valve.

I will not.

Make up the fire Mr. Stanley, very quietly.

I will not. You may murder yourself and wife and child but you shall not murder me.

He looked at me. His kindly gray eyes glared like those of a wild beast. But he controlled himself in a moment.

I could throw you out of this door, and make short work of it. But look here; do you see the station yonder?

I saw a thin whip of smoke against the sky about five miles in advance.

I was told to reach that station by six o'clock. The express train meeting us is now due. I ought to have laid by for it at Sunbury. I was told to come. The track is a single one. Unless I can make the siding at that station in three minutes, we will meet it yonder in the hollow.

Somebody has blundered?

Yes, I think so.

And you obeyed?

He said nothing. I threw on coal. If I had had petroleum I would have thrown it on. But I never was calmer in my life. When death has a man actually by the throat it sobers him.

Blakeley pushed in the valve still farther. The engine began to give a strange panting sound. Far off to the south I could see the bituminous black smoke of a train.

I looked at Blakeley, inquiringly. He nodded. It was the express. I stooped to the fire.

No more, he said.

I looked across the clear, wintry sky at the gray smoke of the peaceful little village, and beyond, that black line coming closer, closer, across the sky. Then I turned to the watch.

In one minute more!

Gentlemen, I confess; I sat down and buried my face in my hands. I don't think I tried to pray. I had a confused thought of a mass of mangled, dying men and women, mothers and their babies—of little Charley with his curls and pretty suit—

"There was a terrible shriek from the engine, against which I leaned. Another in my face. A hot tempest swept past me.

I looked up. We were on the siding, and the express had gone by. The hindmost carriages touched in passing.

"Thank Heaven! You've done it, Blakeley! Blakeley!" I cried.

But he did not speak. He sat there immovable, and cold as a stone. I went to the carriages and brought Jane and the boy to him, and when he opened his eyes and took the little woman's hands in his, I came away.

An engineer named Fred, who was at the station, ran the train into Harridge. Blakeley was terribly shaken. But we went down and had our little feast, after all. Charley, at least, enjoyed it.

What was the explanation? A blunder of the director, or the telegraph operator?

I don't know. Blakeley made light of it afterwards, and kept the secret. These railway men must have a firm brotherhood among them.

All I know is that Blakeley's salary was raised soon after, and he received that Christmas a very handsome testimonial for "service rendered," from the company.

## Psychological Mysteries.

Will some philosopher, de-learned in the mysteries of the human heart, take a week off and try to find out why even single men turn pale when about to enter a goods store? Why the soldier who has walked calmly up to the cannon's mouth trembles and looks like a sneak thief when commanded to buy a yard of ribbon? Some domestic tyrant in the country, and why a married man who has agreed to match a piece of silk by carrying the color in his eye, ways impresses the public with the conviction that he has just failed for a million dollars, or is on his way to the wharf to commit suicide.—San Francisco Post.

GILLET'S YEAST POWDER. The best never fails to please. d&w