SAVED BY LIGHTNING

The effect of the electrical phenomenon on the nerves of finely strung individuals is not unlike that communicated by a sudden and severe fright when the controlling power of the brain seems entirely cut off from action. In persons of stronger nerves the effect is not so great unless at some former period the nervous system has been severely shocked, and even stunned, by the force of an electric current.

No person has had more frequent demonstration of this fact than myself.

I am strong and robust by nature and would scorn the idea of being nervous. I have several times been placed in peculiarly dangerous positions, where considerable nerve and pluck were required for the right performance of my duty, and on all such occasions I have acquitted myself to the satisfaction of all my friends. But brave and strong as I am in the face of most dangers, I am weak and helpless in a heavy thunderstorm.

Since a certain memorable night in 1883 I have been absurdly susceptible to the influence of electricity in any form, and it is no easy matter for me to predict a rising storm long before it has come up by the condition of the atmosphere and the effect it has upon my nerves.

I was telegraph operator at a small way station on a northern railway. My duties consisted in signaling the trains that passed by my door, selling tickets and acting as telegraph operator.

These combined duties kept me busy, and as there was scarcely a house within two miles of the station the quietness of the place would have been unbearable had I been at leisure to notice it. But when my work was finished, late in the afternoon, I always found a short time to devote to reading before the evening express came in, and this was soon looked forward to with genuine delight by me as a relief from my other duties.

The express was not always up on time, and I frequently found myself waiting until 8 o'clock before she arrived, reading, walking and otherwise passing the time as pleasantly as possible.

I was engaged in the former occupation rather earlier than usual one warm, sultry afternoon in August.

The weather had been so excessively hot that I had been compelled to lay aside all superfluous garments and to do my work in my shirt sleeves. It was just such a day as always closes with a heavy thunderstorm.

About 8 o'clock the atmosphere began to change. A few clouds appeared upon the western horizon, and the sounds of distant thunder could be faintly heard.

A gentle breeze swayed the pines and rustled the green leaves of the tall oaks. I thought at the time that it had a mournful, ominous sound, and as the distant cry of a loon fell upon my ear an unaccountable shiver ran through me.

I laughed at my own fears and arose from my feet to dispel all gloomy forebodings, and began to lock up things around the freighthouse before the storm was upon me. When this was finished, I returned to my seat and watched the clouds scud across the now dark heavens.

In a little while the rain began to descend in torrents, pattering upon the tin roof of the station house like leaden bullets. The thunder pealed out with heavy reverberations, and the lightning was fairly blinding.

I closed up my instrument in the office and did not approach it again until the storm had passed. To have tampered with it in such tempest would have been folly. The lightning, as it was, played with the wire and the keys in an unpleasant manner and made me more farther away from it.

For half an hour the storm continued with unabated fury, and all along the track little rivers of rainwater were surging and rushing. The afternoon had grown suddenly dark, and it was impossible to discern an object twenty yards off. The usual time for the arrival of the evening express had passed, and still no indication of her coming had been received. This did not seem strange to me, as there was some danger of the track being washed out at different crossings, and it was probable that some delay would be caused.

I felt the lonesomeness of my position extremely that night. When I glanced out of the window into the murky darkness and heard the fitful rush of the wind through the pines and tremble at the heavy crash of the thunder, I was forced to admit that I did not enjoy the situation.

Twice I went out on the platform to see if I could hear anything of the coming train, but on each occasion I wasnext with such a blast of wind and rain that I was only too glad to seek the shelter of the house again.

When the small office clock struck 9, I could stand it no longer, but donning my cloth cap and coat I opened the door to sally forth again. As I did so the shrill shriek of a woman greeted my astonished ears.

At first I concluded that it was the work of the wind, but a second time the cry rose above the roar, clear and distinct. There was no mistaking the sound. It was the cry of a woman in distress, and came out of the storm not far distant

I started along the platform with an answering shriek and had not gone far before I encountered a woman staggering along the track.

"What's the matter?" I inquired in as loud a voice as I could command.

"For heaven's sake, come quick!" she shrieked wildly. "Come quick! The train has run off the line! All are lost—my husband—my child—dead—dead!"

The horrible situation flashed over my bewildered senses in a moment. Just around the curve was a deep crossing, and the rain must have washed down the embankment in time to wreck the coming express. This woman was the only one saved, and she had managed to crawl up to the station for assistance.

I helped the woman up on to the platform, and told her to hurry into the station house and wait until my return. Then, with lantern in hand, I started on a run toward the scene of the disaster. It was barely a quarter of a mile to the crossing, but it seemed ages to me before I reached it.

All was quiet; not a moan nor shriek of any kind could be heard. The storm still raged around. I looked down the embankment, expecting to see a loop of broken, twisted iron mixed up with the dead and dying passengers.

I then examined the crossing and found the line in good condition. A small culvert had been caused by a large current of water, but everything—so far as I could see—was in perfect order.

What could it all mean? And in an agony of fear and dread I stood still and thought. In my excitement I had not asked the woman where the accident had happened, but took it for granted that it was at the crossing.

It might be half a mile farther on, or it might be a mile or more, I remember. But, at all events, it would be better to return to the station and get the right place from the woman's own lips. So I turned my face in the direction of the station once more and began running with all my strength.

As I hurried along I glanced occasionally at the line to see if it was in good condition. When I reached the new switch, which was used for siding trains, I suddenly stopped. The switch was turned. I could not believe it possible that I had been so careless as to leave it in such a condition. If the express should come along when it was turned, nothing could save her from being dashed down a steep embankment.

While I was still wondering at the strange condition of things I heard the long, shrill shriek of the belated and, so I supposed, wrecked express. The next moment the headlight of the engine rushed in sight around the curve and made a long path of light along the line.

There was evidently no accident, but there would be one in a few moments if the brake was not turned back.

This could be done in one way only—by reaching the station before the train reached the switch, and turning the heavy lever that connected the two. Could I do it? I started for the station on a dead run.

I do not know how I reached it. I was dimly conscious of running blindly through the darkness, stumbling against the rails, and finally leaping upon the platform, seizing the iron lever desperately in both hands.

I heard the heavy bolts fly into their sockets, and then, before I could "key" it, the heavy wheels rumbled over the switch. It seemed for a moment that the heavy pressure would jerk the lever out of my hands, but I clung to it tenaciously, and finally the last wheel rumbled over the fatal place.

The evening express did not usually stop at the station, but merely showed up to see if there were any passengers. But before I could recover from my excitement the long line of black carriages were brought to a standstill and the guard was hurrying toward me.

"Jim," he said, "take this package and lock it up securely in the safe until called for. Be very careful of it, for it is something valuable. I will explain later."

Then, without waiting for a reply, he shoved a small, heavy parcel into my hands, blew his whistle and leaped upon the train.

The next moment the long line of carriages was swiftly flying southward, and I was once more alone.

By this time I felt so thoroughly exhausted by the excitement and strain upon my nerves that I reeled into the station like a drunken man.

I dropped into a chair, completely bewildered. The parcel lay before me, but I took no notice of it, my thoughts being busy with the strange events of the evening.

There were no signs of the woman who had started me off to find the wrecked train. In fact, I felt too tired to search for her. She had sent me on a wild goose chase and came near causing the death of many people, and to say mind she seemed to deserve punishment little short of death.

The storm was still raging without. The thunder shook the station to its foundation, and the wind helped to make it seem like a cradle rocked with invisible hands.

I remained seated in my chair, staring blankly at the wall for probably 10 minutes. A thousand thoughts and conjectures flashed through my brain during the intervals, and then, as I involuntarily turned my head, I started back with a nervous jump. In the doorway stood the woman who had told me about the accident.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "what is the meaning of this?"

She smiled, displaying her white teeth. "The meaning of what?" she asked in the quietest manner possible.

I jumped from my chair.

"Of what?" I shouted. "Of telling me that the express had jumped the track—that your husband and child were dead. That's what, madam."

She laughed softly.

"That was a ruse to get you to leave the station," she replied. "You are such a house body that I couldn't get you to go out in the storm unless I resorted to a trick. But you came near defeating my purpose, after all. You turned that switch back in its proper place just in the nick of time."

"Yes, and you turned it wrong in the first place, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"You she fiend!" I cried as I glared on her in utter abhorrence.

"Don't call me hard names. It makes me think that you don't appreciate my company, and I'm so sensitive!"

"Do you know what would have happened if I had not turned that switch into its proper position?"

Another fiend laugh.

"Oh, yes, I know," said she.

"I don't think you do."

"You want to draw me out, I see. Man, if you hadn't righted that switch a dozen or more mortals would have been buried into eternity, and you would be tried for murder. I had no grudge against you and should have preferred to have the train wrecked near the crossing, but as that couldn't be I thought I'd throw her off near the switch. But you saved her and come near balking my plans. That stupid guard, who imagines himself so clever, arranged everything so nicely that he will be surprised tomorrow when you tell him the whole story."

"Are you crazy?" I asked.

"No, not due. I never was saner than I am at this moment."

"Pray what are you driving at then. I'd like to know?"

"I will enlighten you. You see that little parcel on the table which your friend the guard let you keep for him?"

I laid my hand on the parcel and gave her a sinister look.

"Well, what of it?" I asked.

"It contains a sum of money anywhere between £5,000 and £10,000."

"Indeed!" I said contemptuously.

"Yes. It was to be sent to Edinburgh today, and as two or three of us got wind of the affair we concluded to stop it. [illegible] you

part the guard heard of our little plan at the other end of the road, and so to balk us he left it here with you. At the same time I concluded to play a double game and get the whole treasure for myself. For that purpose I called you out and turned the switch in order to wreck the train and so get hold of the money. You interfered and saved the train, but not the parcel. It is now in your hands, and I will ask you to hand it over without demur."

She moved one step toward the door, but I leaped toward it and grasped the parcel in both hands.

"Never!" I shouted. "This goes into the safe, and I warn you to get out before I pitch you out."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" she laughed derisively; "what pluck! I didn't think you would make such a fight over mere money. But this will bring you to your senses."

Throwing back the cloak which enveloped her small form, she stood before me a very looking man, with piercing dark eyes. In the right hand a leveled pistol glistened in the lamp light, and the hand that held it was as cool and steady as possible. I glanced into the small barrel of the pretty plaything and shuddered.

"You needn't be frightened," continued my strange visitor in the same easy tones, "I don't care to commit murder if I can help it, but don't drive me to desperation."

At this I recovered my self possession and began to think of a way to get near enough to grapple with this desperate villain. In such an encounter I knew I could easily handle him. A sudden, heavy blast of wind, followed by a blinding flash of lightning, fairly stunned us for a moment.

"That was a terrible flash," I said, noticing that my companion slightly paled. "You are not afraid of thunder, are you?"

He recovered himself in a moment.

"Afraid! No, you think!" he replied. "But give me that money, or I'll send a bullet through your head."

"One moment!" I cried.

"Not a"——

The sentence was never finished. There was a peal of thunder that seemed to rent the heavens in twain, and then a brilliant streak of fire flashed between us. I felt the building tremble, heard a confused murmur of strange noises—and then a blank.

When I awoke to consciousness, daylight was just breaking in the east. The sky was clear as on a summer morning, and the birds and woods were vocal with the songs of birds. But in my office everything was changed. At my feet lay the stranger of the previous night, with a little dark spot near the left temple. The heavy timbers of the station were burned and cracked, and my papers were scattered all about. The work of the thunderbolt had been effective, but as the table by the money untouched.

When the guard came, I handed him the property. The stranger was identified as a notorious thief, and I was duly rewarded by the company for my work in saving the money. But since that terrible shock a thunderstorm has been to me the most unbearable thing on the face of this earth.—True Flag.

Handshaking in the Morning.

Speaking of "little things that sweeten life," the English have a pretty custom in the matter of handshaking. One hears a good deal from time to time about shaking hands being good form, then again not being good form, and one can't help thinking what a vapid nonsense it is—quite on a par with that style of handshaking that was introduced by a lady under a fashionable arm. But, to get back to the English, in every household—middle class or aristocratic—it is the custom for every one to shake hands with every one else when they meet in the morning and when they separate at night.

The children of the home come into the breakfast room, and instead of sliding into place at the table with a mumbled "Good morning" they greet father and mother with a kiss on the cheek and a cheery "Good morning, papa," and "Good morning, mamma," and then go through the same little ceremony with brothers and sisters, giving to the guests a hand and the pleasant words.—Washington Post.

Interesting Potato Experiments.

The experiments with potatoes, conducted and reported upon by Professor Goff, of the Wisconsin station, included a test of fifty-nine varieties. Tabulated data are given for the ten most productive varieties. These were Burpee Superior, Maine Champion, Pride of the West, Bill Nye, Northern Spy, Delaware, Harris No. 1, Duplex, Dandy and Season Red Jacket.

Experiments at this same station in 1890 in planting Rose Seedling potatoes in hills and drills agreed with those of the previous year in showing no great difference in yield from the two methods. "The thirty-four drilled rows yielded 1,626 pounds of merchantable potatoes and 344 pounds of small potatoes, against 1,597 pounds of merchantable and 321 pounds of small potatoes from the thirty-four rows of hills."

Notes and tabulated data on an experiment in which potatoes were planted whole, cut lengthwise and cut to two eyes, with and without removing the seed ends: "When whole tubers were used there was a loss of 22.4 per cent. in the yield from removing the seed ends. When the seed was cut to two eyes there was a loss of 3.6 per cent., and when the seed was cut lengthwise there was a very slight loss. The results agree in general with those of the previous year."

A Bachelor's Reason.

The people of Wyoming who permit women to vote are apparently not in sympathy with the English bachelor of long ago who got himself into a controversy on the subject of women's rights with his tea-urn at dinner. After pouring and cooling for a few minutes the lady asked, "Cundidly, sir, why do you express giving the franchise to women?"

"You will excuse me for saying it, madam," he replied, "but I have not sufficient confidence in their capacity to conduct government affairs."

"But what evidence of women's mental inferiority to man can you adduce?" persisted the lady.

The bachelor thought a moment and then answered slowly, "A simple fact is enough to satisfy my mind, and that is the frightful way in which they tip up their back hair."—Harper's Bazar.

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