A TRIP ON THE STREET CARS

Timon Expatiates on the Delights of Travel on a Montreal Trolley.

IT would baffle even the most astral of the Mahatmas to predict with any kind of exactitude the time at which the average man will reach his suburban home if he is forced to take a car down-town anywhere in the vicinity of six o'clock at night. Car after car may pass him, it is true. But their back platforms are a tightly wedged mass of struggling humanity on which only a dynamite cartridge could make any impression, and whose centre a Yale half-back might hesitate to "buck." How the conductor wedges his way through the crowd no one can imagine who does not know what marvels in the way of compression the human frame can withstand. And the manner in which respectable citizens cling desperately to the rear rail, with their legs streaming out behind the car, shows that—taken in the light of a gymnastic exercise—a ride on the street cars is not without its compensations.

Say that our citizen is sufficiently active to spring upon the two inches of vacant space on the footboard and force his way on to the platform. Inside of 10 seconds he wishes he had not. On one side he is ground against a horny-handed son of toil with a few hundredweight of plaster on his clothes. On the other is wedged a grimy individual who has apparently been bathing in machinery oil and dried himself with lamp-black. Behind him is a fat man with a red nose smoking a pipe, one whiff of which would drive a dog out of a tanyard. Honest wage-earners, more or less grimy, are ground slowly against him until, by the time he has gone two blocks, his new overcoat presents a spectacle that causes his wife to burst into tears. By the time the motorman has taken him 50 yards beyond his crossing, and started the car with a jerk that sends him off the footboard on to his hands and knees in the mud, he is mad clear through. He says things that would make a porcelain pug turn pale. And, although he may be naturally as harmless as a stuffed canary, one short trip on the cars converts him into as great a menace to society as an unripe apple. When he arrives at his domicile there is a look in his eye that would make a cigar-store Indian crawl under the counter. His wife never ventures to ask him as to the whereabouts of the groceries he was told to order when he went down town. It would be as much as her life was worth. She peeps through the keyhole, while his remarks take the varnish off the wainscoating, in readiness to fly into the back kitchen and hysterics in case trouble should arise over the baby. But relief often comes when least expected. It is about this time that the cross-eyed woman over the way steps over to borrow the front steps to receive her beau on. Then the volcano explodes. The children take refuge in the coal bin and the family dog crawls under the refrigerator for safety. But the worst is over. The paroxysm is past. His language dies away into a series of cursory remarks that gave the Recording Angel time to get his second wind. Time pours vaseline on his frayed sensibilities. The cat is able to emerge from its sojourn in the coal scuttle, and the baby can be rescued from the back bedroom and brought into the light of day before it becomes black in the face from suppressed gratitude. Benzine and the clothes brush work wonders on the coat. And by the time night has settled her dark canopy over a slumberous world, and the elusive Leonid has started in to dodge the astronomers, he is once more a Christian and a father.

But think how much more beautiful his homecoming would be, if he were treated on the cars more like a human being and less like a bale of rags! Fancy if he could step on to a comfortable car, and, as he snuggled into a cosy seat, where the stove could burn a hole in his wristbands, ask the conductor pleasantly about his family and whether he abstained from the demon rum! Imagine him ascending the car like a civilized Christian, instead of being hauled on by the nape of the neck, having the box jammed under his nose before he can gasp for breath, and then being thrown off in a dazed condition at the wrong corner to the accompaniment of a fantasia on the gong! Suppose that we were deprived of that delicious uncertainty as to whether our next stopping place would be in the bosom of our family or in the morgue? Would it have any deleterious effect on the company's dividends? or, would it make Montreal too like Heaven?

At the present moment, a ride on the cars is attended with all the excitement of a meeting with a mad dog in a dark lane. We may attain the end aimed at, or we may not. If we arrive at the crossing a second late, we may yell and wave our arms until the whole neighborhood have their heads out of the window. But it will not attract the attention of the conductor. He chooses that moment to go to the front of the car to tell the motorman a funny story about his aunt. Then comes the nice long wait, while we figure up how it is that with a three-minute service it is 20 minutes before the next car comes along, going so slow that there is moss on the hind wheels. This is bad enough. But it is worse when we get to where we want to transfer. There we are usually treated to a panorama of every one of the various lines that the company operates—except the one we want. Cars from all kinds of queer routes, where they have a passenger once a week, and the motorman shakes hands with him and calls him "Billy," and the conductor gives him a cigar, shamble along. And then the roadway becomes so bare that the victim begins to be afraid that the company has no more cars.

But everything comes to him who waits. At last, the right car looms into sight, at the very verge of the horizon. It stops at every corner, and dawdles along until the waiting crowd dance an exasperated war-dance upon the pavement. But the motorman knows his business. He waits until a timber-truck, three-quarters of a mile long, gets between him and the intending passengers. Then he puts on a burst of speed. It is in vain for them to shriek or wave their umbrellas. He receives their comments on the brazen buckler of a sardonic smile. The conductor is inside putting a piece of wood the size of a clothes-peg into the stove, with all the solemnity of a religious function. He is far too busy to be worried by the public. So the car flashes past with the velocity of a scalded dog, and the crowd has a chance to exhaust its vocabulary before they can make up their minds whether to go through the whole experience again or walk. And yet we wonder why men drink!

TIMON.

THE Winston Churchill who has been distinguishing himself in South Africa, is not the Winston Churchill who won distinction as the author of "Richard Carvel." The one in Africa is the late Lord Randolph Churchill's son, and went to the front as one of the two correspondents of The Morning Post. His father's versatility and unconventionality are said to be his. He has served in the army as a cavalry officer, but he was so seldom with his regiment, and so often engaged in recording and criticizing the deeds of generals in the field, that he fell in with the growing opinion that there was something irregular in a subaltern holding such a position with regard to his military superiors, and resigned his commission to devote himself to novel-writing, politics, and war correspondence. He was in Cuba with Martinez Campos during the first stage of the insurrection, and he saw fighting among the northwestern passes of India, and on the "stricken field" of Omdurman. It is remarkable that there should be two Winston Churchills—the name being an odd one—and more remarkable still that they should both be writers of growing fame. The author of "Richard Carvel" is a citizen of the United States, but this does not prevent his being constantly confused with his namesake in South Africa by the press of his country.