

The Home Mission Journal.

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Railroading with Christ.

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CHAPTER III.

SMOOTHLY and swiftly, drawn by one of the newest and most powerful locomotives on the road, the morning express, of which John Benton was the proud engineer, rushed along over mile after mile of level, solid road-bed. Benton was a careful engineer, and thoroughly acquainted with every foot of the track over which he was running. He knew every fence along the way and every barn in the neighboring fields. All the switchers were perfectly familiar to him, and on a dark night he could judge, from the jolting of his engineer, over just what frogs the huge machine was rattling. The railroad management thoroughly trusted Benton, who had worked his way up from the humble position of a "hostler" in the round-house to engineer of one of the fastest expresses on the road. This particular train had formerly been run by Bill Summers, until his inability to make fast, reliable time had been so clearly revealed that he had been degraded to a comparatively unimportant position as engine runner. Benton's appointment to Summers' former post had come to him entirely without any personal solicitation; but Summers had never forgiven him for "supplanting a comrade," as he falsely put it. And there were those who said that they had heard Summers utter threats on more than one occasion that he would be even with Benton sometime. When these remarks were repeated to Benton he looked grave, but said nothing, and went quietly on with his daily work, apparently undisturbed by any suspicions. Yet his fireman imagined that the wary engineer thereafter kept a sharper watch upon the track, especially at night.

It was a bright, clear morning when John Benton's train pulled out of the yard of the division terminus, after his disagreeable experience with Summers and the others at the round-house, and Benton's spirits rose the higher the further his pet engine, Number 305, flew down the line. Orange Junction had been passed, and it was now only a stretch of ten miles to Walnut Siding—so called because of a walnut tree which showed conspicuously by the side of the track. Beyond the siding came a succession of tortuous cuts, styled in railroad parlance the "Dugouts," where the track began to wind up the approaches to Giant Mountain. Then came the heavy grades which led up to the summit of the moun-

tain. On the other side of the ridge lay the fertile valley in which was situated the thriving manufacturing town of Hammerville.

Now, it happened that while the express was running along through the rough country, just west of Orange Junction, a hot box on one of the cars caused a delay of ten minutes. The road was a single track line, with no blocks to protect it, and flagmen were hurried out at once in both directions. The delay was a trying experience for Benton, who prided himself on the regularity of his runs. However, the trouble was finally remedied, the flagmen were called in, and the heavy train began slowly, yet doggedly, to ascend the long, curving grades of Giant Mountain.

And so it came about that, when Walnut Siding appeared in sight from the cab window, it was already a minute or two past twelve. Now John Benton had his orders well in mind. He had been told that if the special did not arrive at the siding by twelve he was to take it for granted that his own train had the right of way over it—which would mean that in such an event the special had been held at Hammerville, on the other side of the mountain. Benton's orders were explicit and were written as well as oral.

Fully persuaded, therefore, that the track was all clear, and determined, if possible, to make up at least a little of the time lost so unfortunately on account of the hot box, Benton pulled the throttle wide open, and shot by the siding at a very high rate of speed. Through the tortuous cuts of the "Dug-outs," and up the still heavier grades beyond, every pound of steam would be needed in order to carry the long train swiftly and surely over the mountain.

Into the "Dugouts" the train dashed, and the huge engine thrilled convulsively, as it panted up the slopes with its heavy load. The roar, as it struggled through the deep cuts, was terrific. Curve after curve was successfully passed. Again and again it seemed as though the train would be torn to pieces against the jagged sides of the cuts, but inevitably every time the guiding and restraining rails held the trucks just so far from the threatening rocks, and the passengers in the parlor coaches rode in safety, and reclined luxuriously back in their easy chairs, quite indifferent to the strenuous exertions of the locomotive and entirely unconscious of any approaching danger.

Not quite satisfied with the speed his train was making grimy but honest-faced John Benton, ahead there in the cab, had just called to his fireman to look to the fire a little more carefully, when there came a rattle and a roar which would have instantly and utterly unnerved a man less cool, less steady, less self-forgetful. Down through the cuts, with mad defiance of the upcoming express, the special was rushing. There was a gleam of iron and brass, a horrible grating and clashing of brakes on two trains; an awful shock; a sudden and hideous roar of escaping steam, a splashing of scalding water, and a promiscuous splintering of telescoping cars.

Of course, the papers were full the next day of details of the disaster. It was narrated how the catastrophe, bad as it was, would have been far worse if it had not been for the splendid heroism of Benton, the engineer of the express, who had stuck to his cab to the last, and only lived a half-hour after having been extricated, horribly scalded as he was, from under the debris of the wreck. It was mentioned, too (with a few editorial comments of strong commendation) that the dying engineer had gasped, when they laid him on a quickly extemporized stretcher, "Flag the other train!"—meaning by that the freight train which would follow soon.

But there were a few details of the event which the newspapers failed to get. Benton's fireman could have told (as he did tell Mary Benton, the newly-made widow) how the tortured sufferer had murmured, just before he died: "Bid my Mary trust in God! Tell my little Joe to be a man!" It might have been mentioned, too, that a Mr. Morris, a wealthy merchant of Carter City, who had been riding in one of the parlor cars (which were attached to the end of the train, and so had escaped being telescoped), was among the first to reach and minister to the injured engineer, and was profuse in his commendations of his bravery.

Another circumstance, too, in connection with the disaster, would have proved of great interest to the daily journals if they could have been apprised of it. When word of the accident was wired to the yard in Carter City, orders were immediately issued that the wrecking train should proceed with all haste to the scene of the trouble. But when they looked for Bill Summers, the engineer of the extra engine which was assigned for that duty, he was nowhere to be found.

"Worry hold it, sir!" exclaimed his fireman, a worthy Englishman, when questioned by the official who brought the order. "I just seed 'im a-oln' of the engine a minute or two ago!" But there was no time to waste in looking for Summers; and so another engineer was detailed at once to run the wrecker to the gloomy "Dugouts" where help was so sorely needed.

When, however, the company's detectives took pains to look Summers up, it was found that he had left town very suddenly and mysteriously, leaving behind him an unsettled score for drinks at the saloon which was nearest the round-house.

Still another curious circumstance developed later by an official enquiry, was the fact that the train-dispatcher positively swore that he had written an order for the express to wait for the special at Walnut Siding until twelve ten. He admitted, when cross-questioned, that, on returning to his office, from a short absence on the forenoon of the day on which the wreck occurred, he had missed a book of order blanks; and when examined further, recalled the circumstance that, before the express started out, he had noticed the engineer, Summers, loitering about, but gave the matter no thought at the time. But when afterward he missed the book there came vividly to recollection the face and figure of the inquisitive engineer. The evident conclusion now to be drawn was that Summers had surreptitiously possessed himself of the book and managed to have the order reach the hands of the conductor indirectly with the "ten" erased after the "twelve."

If the "ten" had remained in the order as at first written, it would have saved John Benton's life.

Summers' motive could only have been jealousy and a desire to avenge a "wrong" which really had never been committed by the victim of his malevolence.

(To be continued.)

A Southern paper reports that one of the best features of recent revivals in the churches there, is a marked increase in the support of missions. This is, certainly, a sign of the genuineness of the work of grace in the churches. When men and women are truly indwelt of the new life they are ready and even eager to do their utmost to extend the Kingdom of Christ.