

XIV

SPECKLES

THIS happened at a period in the history of the Hill Division when trade was very bad, and the directors, scowling over the company's annual report, threw up their hands in holy horror; while from the sacred precincts of the board-room there emanated the agonized cry:

"Economy!"

The general manager took up the slogan and dinned it into the ears of the division superintendents.

"Operating expenses are too high," he wrote. "They must be cut down." And the superintendents of divisions, painfully alive to the fact that the G. M. was not dictating for the mere pleasure of it, intimated in unmistakable language to the heads of departments under them that the next quarterly reports were expected to show a marked improvement.

John Healy had charge of the roundhouse at Big Cloud, in those days, and the morning after the lightning struck the system he came fuming back across the yards from his interview with the superintendent, stuttering angrily to himself. As he stamped into the running-shed his humor a shade worse than usual the first object that caught his eye was Speckles, squatted on the lee side of 483, dangling his legs in the pit.