



that some duty will come up in the performance of which the signal will be neglected until too late.

"Well! upon receiving the assurance that the flag was out at A—, I gave the order corresponding to the one above, but addressed to No. 102. Thus I had all arranged according to rule, for a crossing at C—. Soon came the answer from No. 65:

two freight trains at C—, a small station upon our line about thirty miles east of here.

"You must know that all regular trains upon our road are run upon schedule time, or, in other words, upon that laid down in the time-tables of the company. But extras of any sort, or regular trains when off their schedule time, must be helped along by telegraphic orders, issued by, or in the name of, the train dispatcher. This, upon a single track road, carrying so much traffic as ours, is constantly occurring.

"As I might weary you by details, if I entered into too minute an explanation of how this is done, I will give you the system in as few words as possible.

"For an example: we will say the regular crossing-point for No. 34 going west, and No. 35 going east is B—. Now, all trains are reported by telegraph from each station as they pass. We are on the lookout for these reports, and before us is the *train sheet* upon which must be noted the time of departure of each train from any station. Thus we can tell, at a glance, the position of every train upon the road. We will say these reports show No. 35, going east, to be thirty minutes late. Since No. 34 would be obliged to wait at the usual crossing point for the laggard, we give it an order to proceed to C—, ten miles beyond, and cross No. 35 there, thus keeping it on time while causing no further delay to the delinquent. Of course it is necessary to notify both trains of the change in crossing points, and right here is where my trouble occurred.

"One day, sitting at my instruments, busily employed as you saw me a few moments ago, I discovered that freight No. 102 was losing time. Soon it was thirty minutes behind, and wishing to help along freight No. 65, which usually crossed at B—, I concluded to push it along to C— for a crossing. Accordingly I called up D—, the next station beyond the usual crossing point, and upon receiving the response went ahead with this order:

"To Conductor and Engineer No. 65:

'You will proceed to C— and cross No. 102 there.

(Signed) HOBBS, Dispatcher.

"The next move was to protect them in thus passing their usual crossing point, by giving the same order to No. 102 at A—.

"Calling up A—, I said in the cipher used on such occasions: '14 for No. 102,' which means, 'Put out blue signal to hold No. 102.' This blue signal, a flag by day and a lantern by night, conspicuously displayed in front of a station, means telegraphic orders, and by this signal no train is allowed to pass. Instantly came back the reply from the operator at A—: '15 for 102.'

"Now, every operator's duty is to put out the signal before replying with 15, which means: 'blue signal is displayed and will hold the train.' You see the use of the cipher figures is a great saving of time and space. The most imperative orders are issued, and the utmost care taken in moving trains by telegraph; and to answer with 15 before the signal is displayed, is contrary to all rule, as in doing so there is a chance

"To Hobbs, Dispatcher

'We understand we are to proceed to C—, and cross No. 102 there.

(Signed)

BRUCE, Conductor, } No. 65.  
COSTAR, Engineer, }

"To this I promptly gave O. K., and they were dispatched. As No. 102 had not arrived at A—, and no reply could be received from them until conductor and engineer had signed the order, which, of course, the blue flag would notify them was there, I turned my attention to other duties, and thought no more of that crossing, until some time after, it occurred to me that No. 102 was slow about replying.

"So calling the operator at A—, I asked: 'Has No. 102 arrived?'

"Arrived and gone,' was the reply.

"Gone without receiving the orders I gave you? impossible! Did you not display the blue flag?'

"No!' was the reply. 'Having received no orders to do so, I did not.'

"The operator at A— was comparatively a new man, a nephew of an influential member of our Board of Directors, through whom he had obtained his position, and through whose influence I was soon to lose mine. His deliberate falsehood astounded me, as well it might, for allowing the train to proceed without the orders meant for them to run by C— and endeavor to reach their usual stopping place at B—, as soon as possible, to save delay to 65, which was rushing along expecting to reach them at C—. The result must be a collision.

"The thought drove me nearly frantic. Further questioning only resulted in further denial from the operator of having received any orders to hold the train, which he accused me of having failed to send.

"With fast-beating heart, and a terrible faintness upon me, I dropped my head upon the instruments and prayed for the poor fellows upon the trains. How many of them would survive the wreck, which now it was impossible to prevent, for between the two trains rushing toward each other so swiftly, no operator was on duty with busily clicking instruments to warn them of their fate.

"Noticing my actions the dispatcher eagerly inquired the trouble. I could not reply in words, but noticing my instrument calling, I grasped a pen, and with my trembling fingers copied this message, which relieved my mind of the heaviest load I have ever known. It was addressed to the superintendent from the conductor of No. 65 and ran thus:

"Freights Nos. 65 and 102 met in head collision one mile east of C—, speed of fifteen miles per hour. Crews of both trains escaped uninjured. Fifteen cars derailed, five of them wrecked completely, badly blocking the main line. Will report in person by first train.'

"My greatest fear had been that loss of life would result. Now that was past. I was ready to explain.

"As is usual in such cases, all the participants in the affair were called before the superintendent. Each man told his story. The operator at A— firmly adhered to his falsehood

YES, SIR! the boy there, though but five years old and not knowing a dash from a dot, stands upon the company's pay-roll as Telegraph Operator, at fifty dollars per month. 'How did it come about?' you ask. Just wait a few moments until my relief comes, and as we walk to the house for supper, I will give you the story."

The speaker was an old school friend of mine, whom I had hunted up after a long absence from my native city, and found busily employed in the Train Dispatcher's office of the — Railroad, as chief operator. Upon his telegraph instruments rested the cabinet photograph of a little boy, and my remarking upon the smart appearance of the little fellow elicited the above reply.

"Not much time for conversation here," continued my friend, as if in apology for not commencing at once, "what with ordinary messages, train reports, and the all-important orders, we are kept pretty busy; the hours are short though, and, by the way, here comes my relief now."

Here followed an introduction to the relief, a pleasant-looking young man of twenty-one or two, whose duty it was to remain all night at the post my friend was just vacating, to whom was given some general information as to how the trains were running upon his division, and what orders had been issued; and then, with a pleasant good-night, we were off.

"Now, for the story!" continued my friend as we emerged upon the street, and turned our steps towards his home.

"One year ago I was discharged from the very position I now hold, for having, as was charged, caused the wreck of