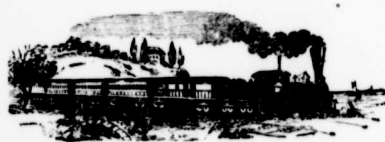


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Rail-riding with Christ.

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CHAPTER XII.

A RUNAWAY ON A RAILROAD.

IT was one cold March evening when the through freight, of which Joe Benton now had charge as conductor, was slowly climbing the long, heavy grades of Giant Mountain, in the teeth of a lead wind, which swept down the tortuous gorges with terrific violence. The engineer, fearful lest his train would be "stalled" on the incline, had been giving his locomotive all the steam it could safely carry.

Puffing and panting, the huge iron horse crept steadily up the grade, dragging its load of heavy cars slowly but resolutely on behind, like muzzling captives in its train.

Now just at the summit of the grade, on the ridge of the mountain, there was but a small bit of level track, after which the road began to pitch down the winding grades into the valley on the farther side.

It was a locality especially dreaded by freight engineers, since a cool head and steady hand were requisite lest, upon reaching the summit of the mountain, a sudden break should occur in the long train of cars at this point, where the track seemed fairly hog-backed.

Precisely such a mishap was it that occurred on the windy night referred to. The freight train was an unusually long one. The engine, from which steam had not been quickly enough shut off after its slow struggle up the eastern face of the ridge, made a sudden start down the westerly slope while the caboose at the rear of the train was still creeping up to the summit. The engineer, a comparatively inexperienced hand, failed to use the best of judgment, or the coupling on the freight car next but one to the caboose may have been weak. At any rate there came a violent break, and almost before Joe Benton, who was in the caboose, realized what had happened, the forward part of the severed train shot away down the incline on the farther side, while the section of three cars that had been left behind and had not yet quite gained the summit, began to move backward down the slope up which they had just previously been painfully crawling.

Instinctively Benton gave a shout as he saw the main part of his train rapidly leaving him, but the strong wind carried the sound of his

voice away in the wrong direction, and in the darkness and detachment of the three cars was not observed by any of the other train men. Meanwhile the speed of the descending cars began gradually to increase. Joe now vividly realized the peril of his position. There appeared to be small prospect of stopping the cars this side of the "Dugouts," though there might be a bare chance of doing so if Joe stuck to his post. In any case the speed gathered by the descending cars would be terrific, and there was great danger lest, while dashing down around some of the sharp curves they would leave the rails and topple over the cliffs. Then a sudden thought struck Joe which dampened his courage, while it also presented itself as an added argument for heroic exertion on his part. He had heard that a belated passenger train was to follow closely upon the freight that night, and there was every likelihood that if the runaway cars were not checked before long in their mad flight a most frightful collision would be the result. Now Joe Benton, as a railroad man, was accustomed to think quickly and clearly; and all this passed through his mind while as yet the caboose and its companion cars had not gained such headway as to make it at all perilous for Joe to jump off, if he had been inclined to save himself.

But Joe Benton had not that kind of disposition. He had risked his own life before in order to deliver others from danger, and he could do it again. He knew that he was the only man on the detached section of the train. If the speed of the runaway cars was to be checked at all, or if possibly they could be brought to a stop somewhere, before meeting the up-coming way train, he was the only man who could do it.

So the brave young conductor stuck to his post. First he set the brakes on the box-car as tightly as he could, putting every pound of strength he possessed into the effort—which, however, seemed to have no perceptible effect in delaying the rush of the cars. Then watching his chance he managed, though with great personal risk, to creep down to the caboose and grasp the hand-brakes on the rear platform. At these he toiled with a desperate energy. But meanwhile the cars kept rattling down the steep grade with a frightful velocity, and an irresistible momentum, which seemed helped on by the push of the wind against them from behind. As they rushed, or rather appeared to fly, along the rails, they swayed so from side to side that Joe thought more than once they would surely leap the track. He well knew that once three cars had toppled over one of those precipices, carrying down with them a number of men. Joe shuddered as he was swept along by one of the steepest of the cliffs, and reflected what might happen upon the sharpest of all the curves, just ahead.

Yet steadily he stuck to his work, and as he tried mechanically to tighten the brakes on the caboose by an additional cog or two his jacket flapped in the wind so rapidly that it seemed it would shortly be blown to ribbons.

Yet Joe had really little hope that he could stop the runaway cars anywhere on the immediate approaches to Giant Mountain. There was a chance, however, that they could be brought to a stand still somewhere between there and the "Dugouts" which lay a short distance farther on. While rushing down the grade, Joe's plan of action was carefully formed. On reaching the levels this side of the "Dugouts" he would desperately exert himself to overcome the remaining momentum of the cars, by some extra tugging at the brakes. If then he did succeed in stopping them there he would have his red

lantern all ready, and run at once down the track, hoping to arrive at a point far enough away from the caboose to allow of the signaling of the passenger train in time for it to slow up, if not to actually stop. But the way train was already due, he was sure; and at any moment he expected to see its headlight flash into view. Joe's suspense was intense. Unless he could actually stop the runaway cars, and put a little distance between them and the oncoming train, he did not see how a collision could possibly be avoided.

But after a short interval (which to the anxious young conductor seemed a century) the cars shot out onto the level at the base of the Mountain, and their speed gradually decreased. Now was Joe's chance! With an energy born of a great desperation he toiled at the brakes. There! he had made another cog! Now for still another one! Yes, the brakes did tighten somewhat. The cars were now running more slowly; and the momentum they had received from their mad rush down the mountain was becoming rapidly exhausted. Soon they seemed only to creep, and then came to a complete standstill. Joe was eagerly expectant of all this; and quickly jumping off ran as fast as he could down the track, waving his red light.

Just at that instant came the sound of a shrill whistle. Joe's face blanched, but he did not intermit his running. By the whistling he knew just where the way train was—since a warning blast was always given for a crossing just below, where a country road ran through the hills. Joe was now at the western end of the "Dugouts," which, at their eastern extremity, the train had just entered. His only chance now was to run into the dark cut ahead, and swing his red light trust that it would be seen in time to avert a collision. He knew, however, that the cut was very narrow; and in some places indeed there was hardly room enough for a man to crouch by the side of the track. Moreover, it was in that very cut that his brave father had been killed years before.

Yet from out the cut there seemed to call the voice of the father which said to the son, "Joe, be a man!" And never once did Joe falter. Springing forward into the cut, he hastily threw himself flat against its rocky side, holding out at arm's length meanwhile the warning red lantern. Hardly had his foot left the rails when there was a rush and a roar, with a swirling of dust—and the red lantern was dashed from Joe's outstretched hand.

To be Continued.

Be Just and Fear Not.

I knew once a very famous man (it was Adam Sedgwick) who lived to be eighty-eight years old, and who was the delight of every one about him. He always stood up for what was right. His eye was like the eagle's when it flashed fire against what was wrong. And how early do you think he began to do this? I have an old grammar which belonged to him, all tattered and torn, which he had when he was a little boy at school; and what do I find written in his own hand on the first page of it? I find these words:

"Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
To silence envious tongues."

"Be just, and fear not."

That was his rule all through life, and he was loved and honored down to the day he was borne to his grave. Be just, be good, and fear not. Let that be your rule.—Dean Stanley.