

The Conductor's Story.

"When a man has been railroadin, twenty long years
 He gets kinder hardened an' tough,
 An' scenes of affliction don't trouble him much,
 'Cause his natur' is coarse like an' tough,
 But a scene that took place on my train one cold night
 Would a' melted the heart of a stone,
 An' among the adventures which I have been through
 That night jist stands out all alone.
 "'Twas a bitter cold night, an' the train was jam full,
 Every berth in the sleeper was taken ;
 The people had jist turned in for the night,
 An' the train for New York was a makin',
 When, jist as the people to snore had begun,
 An' I with a satisfied sigh
 Had sat down in a chair for a short rest, I heard
 The sound of a young baby's cry.
 'It was one of those loud, aggravatin' like yells,
 O' the pattern that makes you jist itch
 For a gun or an axe an' excites up your mind
 With wild thoughts o' murder an' sich,
 It went through the car, and I needn't remark
 That the snorin' 'ppel right there an' then,
 An' that sleeper was filled with a bilin' hot crowd
 O' mad women and wild, swearin' men.
 "The curtains jist then that concealed berth 16
 Were opened an' out came a man,
 As fine a young feller as ever I seen,
 But his face was all white like an' wan,
 'Tried the kid that was raisin' the row,
 'Commenced walkin' down through the aisle
 A tryin' to stop his loud screechin'—but pshaw !
 It seemed to get wuss every mile.
 "An idea seemed to strike one old feller jist then
 An' he said to the pale-faced young man,
 'I seems to me, stranger, that kid could be stilled
 By a simple an' feasible plan ;
 The noise that it's makin' betrays what it needs—
 The child wants its mother, that's plain ;
 An' why don't you call her ? Ten chances to one,
 She's sleepin' somewhere on the train.'
 "A look then came over that young father's face,
 A look full of anguish an' pain ;
 A look that will haunt me as long as I live,
 As long as I work on a train ;
 An' he answered that man, in a hoarse stifled voice
 That sounded as though from afar ;
 'Her mother is sleeping on board of this train
 In a box in the baggage car.'
 —Maurice E. McLaughlin in the New York Herald.

CELESTE'S MISSION.

I looked with an inward sigh at the row of black faces before me. It had been a hard day at school and I was rather weary for night work, but here were the pupils, waiting to be examin-

ed and placed in the class for which they were best suited. Half way down the row was a girl I did not remember having seen before. At first glance I thought her face unusually dull, but when she began speaking it brightened into quick intelligence.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Isabelle Violet Celeste," she answered, with evident pride, and, glancing quickly down the line of black faces, I could see that they all shared her respect and admiration for the name.

I afterwards learned that her father had given her the names of his old matter's three daughters, and I discovered, too, that she did not like any shortening of the appellation. Her father was dead, and she lived with her step-mother and four little half-brothers and sisters, whom she had promised her father to help care for. She had never had time for school, as she washed dishes all day at a hotel, and therefore was far behind other girls for her age. She was only fourteen, but looked older, and her face, which seemed all eyes, was worn and unchildlike.

This night class was held two evenings in the week. Celeste was an eager pupil, and sometimes it seemed almost pitiful to see her black face bending over the book, striving with all her powers to master some simple lesson that should have been easy for a child of six. The inaction of her poor dull brain for all the years of her childhood seemed to make it almost impossible for her to learn. Then, too, she only came to me after a day of hard work, and I often felt that her powers could not be justly tested. Certainly, her energy was untiring.

After lessons were over, I told them some simple Bible story, or read a chapter that they could understand. At this time Celeste was my most earnest listener, and I was sure to find her eager eyes fixed on my face when I ceased speaking. I shall never forget her excitement when, with my help, she spelled out her first chapter in the Bible. She accomplished this only after weeks of study, and I looked in wonder as she danced up and down, forgetting all her usual reserve and crying, 'Missy, missy, I done learned it. Now I kin go, praise de Lord !'

I was much astonished, for such an outburst was totally unlike Celeste, but finally I succeeded in getting her quieted and gathered her meaning.

Such a pitiful story it was, and she had told no one ! Two weeks before I came south there had been through the State a missionary who had preached a

week in Milton. He had lately returned from Africa, and his heart was full of a desire to make others feel the great opportunity for work which there was in this field. He had talked with the great explorer, Stanley, and agreed with him that the most effectual work could be done by educated colored people, who would go as from brother to brother and carry the Gospel tidings into that dark continent.

Celeste had heard him preach twice, and I listened with wonder as with eager face and trembling voice she told me about it. She could have been but a child at the time, but the conviction had come into her heart that the Lord had sent her this message and that she was set apart to aid in this great work. She had never had a chance even to learn to read until our night school was opened, and I understood better now her dogged determination to learn and her tireless energy.

"I done learn ter read at las', Missy, an' it jes' do seem dat der Lord fix eberthing for me. Mammy gwien ter marry agin, an' she tole me las' night Mr. Jones say he kin take kere of her and the chillen, 'cept me," she added bravely. "That ain't ter be 'spected," watching my face. But I had caught the quiver in her voice and look of pain in her eyes that she was too proud and too brave to show.

"Thar's nobody ter kere if I goes, and they are gwien ter be married in the spring, so the chillen won't need me no mor.' Will I know nuff by spring missy?" she asked anxiously. "That preacher says as how hundreds died 'thout ever hearin' 'bout the Lord, hundreds, missy !"

"You will know enough to come help us teach for a year or two, Celeste, then you will be old enough for the other work, if you still want to go."

She looked at me in wonder not unmixed with disappointment.

"I se sure ter want ter go. I ain't thought 'bout nuthin' else fer years," she said.

After this we had many little talks, and I encouraged her to speak to me freely, for her heart was often heavy with some unkind word of her step-mother's, who, feeling she would need her but little longer, seemed to forget the years of work Celeste had given her and her children. She never complained, but I learned to know the look of pain in her eyes.

The winter came on, with its short, sunny days and its sudden rain-storms so different from our northern winters. Celeste still worked at the hotel. She was slow, but could be trusted, and was more faithful than most girls, as I

learned from her mistress. For a month I had seen that she looked badly, but when questioned she answered cheerfully, "Why I feel well nuff, Missy."

But one Wednesday evening she was absent from class, and when Friday night came and she had not appeared I began to fear she was sick, so Saturday morning I sought out the tiny house where they lived. A tall colored woman, with a good-looking but hard face, answered my knock, and I at once recognized her as the prospective Mrs. Jones. She said Celeste was sick and had been for four days. She would not let them send for me, saying, "Missy so busy—I be well soon."

"I mighty feared she lose her place, she never could 'stan nothin'. She don' allers know me when I goes in, but you jist stan' thar and d'rectly she'll know yer," advised the mother.

I went in; Celeste was talking to herself and counting on her fingers.

"Fo'r dollars from las week; hat fer Lizzie Ann, shoes fer John Henry, an' dress fer little Mammy. I done promise him that. Mammy have ter wait till next week, all I kin do."

Her hand dropped by her side and her eyes closed wearily. Her face was so worn and thin it hardly seemed possible she had been sick less than a week.

I went back to the front room and sent the oldest boy for a doctor, and then seated myself by Celeste's side, thankful that as it was Saturday I could stay with her. When she awoke she knew me, and her face lightened up.

"I so glau yer come missy," she said, weakly, "so glad. I be well soon been workin' too much maybe. I tell yer bouten hit, I was gwien ter s'prize yer. I only goes two nights er week to school, an' I reason out ter myself; dar be dem five evenin's left, I mout as well be gitten money ter sen' somebody what would know nuff by spring. So I bin washin' dishes three evenin's a week in a rest'rant; got twenty five cents er night, only workin' ter twelve. Hits fer that other one what's goin' 'stead er me."

She stopped, exhausted, while I sat silently holding her work-worn hand in mine, and thinking of this ignorant, colored child who felt so keenly the responsibility of those thousands of perishing souls for whom Christ died, and thinking, too, of the tireless, faithful spirit in this poor emaciated body.

No wonder she looked so tired; working seven days a week and three nights, then at school for two more nights. No wonder the poor abused body rebelled.