

THE MILLION - DOLLAR FREIGHT-TRAIN.

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN.

It was the second month of the strike, and not a pound of freight had been moved; things looked smoky on the West End.

The general superintendent happened to be with us when the news came. "You can't handle it, boys," said he, nervously.

"What you'd better do is to turn over to the Columbian Pacific." Our contracting freight agent on the coast at that time was a fellow so erratic that he was nicknamed Crazyhorse.

"Turn it over to the Columbian," said the general superintendent; but the general superintendent was not looked upon as our division.

There were twelve car-loads; it was insured for \$85,000 a car; you can figure how far the title is wrong, but you never can estimate the worry that stuff gave us.

It looked as big as \$12,000,000, worth. In fact, one scrub-car tink, with the glory of the West End at heart, had a fight over the amount with a sceptical hostler.

What bothered us most was that the strikers had the tip almost as soon as we had it. Having friends on every road in the country, they know as much about our business as we ourselves.

"You don't show much sense, Reed," said he. "You fellows here are breaking your necks to get things moving, and when this strike's over they'll get it, and you'll be going to beat you."

"I'm here to obey orders, Stewart," I returned. "What was the use of more? I felt uncomfortable, but we had determined to move the silk; there was nothing more to be said."

"I'll put Bartholomew ahead of it," muttered Neighbor, tightly. A boy walked into the office.

It was plain that the master-mechanic hated to do it; it was simply sheer necessity. "He's a wiper," mused Neighbor, as Bartholomew walked springily away.

"How old is that boy?" I asked. "Eighteen; and never a kith or a kin that I know of," Bartholomew Mullen, mused Neighbor, as the slight figure moved across the flat.

"I heard once," he went on, "about a fellow named Bartholomew being mixed up in a massacre. But I take it he must have been an older man than our Bartholomew—nor his other name wasn't Mullen, neither. I disremember just what it was, but it wasn't Mullen."

"Well, don't say I want to get the boy killed, Neighbor," I protested. "I've plenty to answer for. I'm here to run trains—when there are any to run; that's murder enough for me. You needn't send Bartholomew out on my account."

"Give him a slow schedule and I'll give him orders to jump early; that's all we can do. If the strikers don't ditch him, he'll get through, somehow."

It stuck in my crop—the idea of putting the boy on a pilot engine to take all the dangers ahead of that particular train; but I had a good deal else to think of besides. From the minute the silk got into the McCloud yards we posted double guards around.

There was a lantern-jawed conference in the round-house. "What can you do?" asked the superintendent, in desperation.

"There's only one thing I can do. Put Bartholomew Mullen on it with the 44, and put McCloud to bed for No. 2 tonight," responded Neighbor.

"How is she steaming, Bartholomew?" I sung out; he was right in the middle of her. Looking up, he fingered his waste modestly and blushed through a dab of crude petroleum over his eye.

"Who's marked up to fire for you, Bartholomew?" Bartholomew Mullen looked at me fraternally.

"Neighbor couldn't give me anybody but a wiper," said Bartholomew, in a sort of a wouldn't-that-kill-you tone.

"I don't—think so, sir," I thanked you, because I am going down to Zanesville this morning myself and I thought I'd ride with you. Is it all right?"

"Oh yes, sir—if Neighbor doesn't care." I smiled. He didn't know who Neighbor took orders from; but he thought, evidently, not from me.

"You have been begging for a chance to take out an engine, Bartholomew," began Neighbor, coldly; and I knew it was on.

ly I felt the fill going soft under the drivers—felt the 44 wobble and slew. Bartholomew shut off hard and threw the air as I sprang to the window.

A soft track to stop on, a torrent of storm water ahead, and an hundred thousand dollars' worth of silk behind—not to mention equipment.

"Bartholomew!" I yelled; but he was head out and looking at his train, while he jerked frantically at the air lever. I understood: the air wouldn't work; it never will on those old tubs when you need it. The sweat pushed out on me.

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flag-men furious, and not even Bartholomew wanted to face an inquiry on a yard wreck. On the other hand, he couldn't afford to be caught by Foley, who was chasing him out of pure caprice.

"I saw the boy holding the throttle at a half and fingering the anxiously as we jumped through the frogs; but the roughest riding on track so far beats the ties as a cushion that when the 109 suddenly struck her paws through an open switch we bounced against the roof of the cab like footballs.

"No!" he cried, and his voice rang above at the back and leaped like a frightened horse. Away we went across the yard, through the cinders, and over the ties. My teeth have never been the same since. I don't belong on an engine, anyway, and since then I have kept off. At the moment I was convinced that the strain had been too much—that Bartholomew was stark crazy. He sat bouncing clear to the roof and clinging to his levers like a lobster.

"But his strategy was dawning on me; in fact he was pounding it into me. Even the shock and scare of leaving the track and tearing up the yard had not driven from Bartholomew's noodle the most important feature of our situation, which was, above everything, to keep out of the way of the silk-train.

"I felt every moment more mortified at my attempt to shut him off. I had done the trick of the woman who grabs the reins. It was even better to tear up the yard than to stop for Foley to smash into and scatter the silk over the coal-chutes. Bartholomew's decision was one of the traits which made the runner: instant perception coupled to instant resolve. The ordinary dabbler thinks what he should have done to avoid disaster after it is all over; Bartholomew thought before.

"On we bumped, across frogs, through switches, over splits and into target rods, when—and this is the miracle of it all—the 109 got her fore-foot on a split switch, made a contact, and after a slow or two like a bogged horse, she swung up sweet on the rails again, and all. Bartholomew shut off with an under cut that brought us up double and nailed her feet, with the air, right where she stood.

"We had left the track, ploughed a hundred feet across the yards, and jumped on to another track. It is the only time I ever heard of its happening anywhere but I was on the engine with Bartholomew Mullen when it was done. Foley choked his train the instant he saw our hind lights bobbing. We climbed down and ran back. He had stopped just where he should have stood if I should of shut off. Bartholomew ran to the switch to examine it. The contact light, green, still burned like a false beacon; and lucky it did, for it showed the switch had been tampered with and exposed Bartholomew to Mullen completely. The attempt of the strikers to spill the silk right in the yards had only made the reputation of a new engineer. Thirty minutes later the million-dollar train was turned over to the eastern division to wrestle with, and we breathed, all of us, a good bit easier.

"Bartholomew Mullen, now a passenger runner, who ranks with Kennedy and Jack Moore and Foley and George Sinclair himself, got a personal letter from the general manager complimenting him on his pretty wit; and he was good enough to say nothing whatever about mine.

"We registered that night and went to supper together—Foley, Jackson, Bartholomew, and I. Afterwards, as we dropped into the dispatcher's office, something was coming from McCloud, but the operators, to save their lives, couldn't catch it. I listened a minute; it was Neighbor. Now Neighbor isn't great on dispatching trains. He can make himself understood over the poles, but his sending is like a boy's sawing wood—sort of uneven.

"However, though I am not much on running yards, I claim to be able to take the wildest bait that was ever thrown along the wire, and the chair was tendered me at once to catch Neighbor's extraordinary passes at the McCloud key. They came something like this:

"To Op: Tell Massacre [that was the word that stuck them all, and I could perceive Neighbor was talking emphatically; he river division with Foley and the 216, but that Bartholomew was not only not at fault, but that he had actually saved the train by his nerve.

"I'll tell you, Neighbor," I suggested, when we got straightened around, "give us the 109 to go ahead as pilot, an run the stuff around the river division with Foley and the 216, but that Bartholomew was not only not at fault, but that he had actually saved the train by his nerve.

"Annul is west of McCloud," said I, instantly. "We've got this silk on our hands now, and I'd move it if it tied up every passenger-train on the division. If we can get the infernal stuff through, it will practically beat the strike. If we fail, it will beat the company."

"By the time we backed to Newhall Junction, Neighbor had made up his mind my way. Mullen and I climbed into the 109, and Foley with the 216, and none too good a grace, coupled on to the silk, and, flying, red signal, we started again for Zanesville over the river division.

Foley was always full of mischief. He had a better engine than ours, anyway, and he took satisfaction in the rest of the afternoon, crowding us. Every mile of the way he was on our heels. I was throwing the coal and distinctly remember.

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