MC2289

POOR DOCUMENT

The Railroad and the Wreck

This was the way that the word came of the wreck:

It was a few minutes past midnight. The operator at Harpsburg reached under the grimy table on which his instruments had been noisily scolding away, pulled therefrom a dinner pail, healthy man size, and leisurely began investigating its contents.

He was a New Englander by birth and upbringing, though at the present moment a resident of a Middle Western State. Naturally, the first thing that he selected for storage beneath his belt was a generous slice of home made pumpkin pie.

"U-m-m-m," he said, softly, as he tenderly lifted the pie out of the pail.

"U-m-m-m," he repeated as the golden food began the short ascent toward his wide open mouth.

But it was a brief journey that was never completed. His watering mouth had all but closed on the first bite, when out of the stilly night there suddenly came the sharp sound of hurrying feet at the west end of the station platform. In all the ten years that he had been night operator at Harpsburg he had never before been so rudely disturbed. His attention was instantly diverted from the impending gastronomic treat.

Peering out of the bay window, commanding a full view of the platform in either direction, the operator made out the runner to be a man. The next moment, as he came within reach of the station lamp's rays, th operator saw that the man wore the railroad uniform. He also saw that the man's face was drawn and deadly white, not purpled as it should have been, by his evident sustained exertion.

At such an hour at night, with such a visitor, in such a state, a railroad man can think of but one thing, and that a thing that no railroad man thinks of without an involuntary shudder shaking his frame.

The operator sprang to the door and opened it, sprang back to his key and opened that. The runner staggered in. As he caught his breath for the first word the operator was already calling the dispatcher of the division.

"Wreck!" gasped the stranger, hoarsely. "Three miles—down the road. Number 16." He involuntarily wavered toward the chair drawn up beside the operator. "Bad—both tracks blocked." The despatcher was now on the wire and receiving the news. "Many—killed." And, his duty done, the man collapsed into the chair, his head striking gently into the operator's generous slice of homemade pie.

No, it was not the exertion of running the three miles that had caused the man to faint dead away. That was the operator's first thought as he indignantly beheld the complete ruin of his pie. But 15 minutes later when the village doctor, who lived half a block away from the station, had appeared in response to the operator's persistent halloos, the latter learned that his pie had been squashed all over the table because the still unconscious man in his office had run three miles with a broken arm. Therefore the village doctor's first work was over the plucky trainman. When he had been made fairly comfortable, the doctor, in company with a half dozen townsmen went tearing like mad towards the scene of the wreck.

HOW THE RAILROAD FORCES WERE SUMMONED

In the meantime this was the way that the dispatcher at division headquarters in Pomona immediately set in motion the machinery that a great railroad always employs to alleviate, as far as human beings can, the consequences of a railroad wreck.

"Number 16" was a through passenger. It almost invariably left Pomona, the road's terminal, heavily loaded. The dispatcher turned to the telephone at his elbow. This is the method that is employed nowadays to supplant the forces that cope with wreck since it is even speedier than the telegraph. And that the proper persons may be reached at once in emergencies, a railroad has telephones installed in their homes, and pays the bills.

The despatcher first summoned his chief, the superintendent of the division. A few seconds later he was ordering the boss of the wrecking crew to turn out his men at once—a division wrecking boss is always in constant touch with his men, who live near by. The roundhouse was notified to get out a locomotive for the wrecking train. Ting-a-ling! went the bell near the head of that sleeping local doctor who is the railroad surgeon for Pomona. As he started to scramble into his clothes, the Pullman people were told to rush blankets, sheets and mattresses to the wrecking train, all but ready to start; the dining car department had begun preparing gallons of stimulating hot coffee, while the local hospital nearest to the railroad yards had started a supply of lint, bandages, antiseptics and medicines on its way to the wrecking train.

As the first of the rescuers were hurrying to the station, the wife of the railroad surgeon was busy notifying her husband's fellow practitioners to proceed at once to the depot after scaring up all the available nurses. The superintendent's wife was engaged in similar work. So were several men in the dispatcher's office. The despatcher, with a mental picture of his entire division before him, was busy issuing the necessary orders to tie up all trains at convenient points till the tracks could be cleared, and to assure a clear track for the wrecking train all the way to the scene of the wreck, forty-five miles away.

No wilder night ride was ever made than the one that was experienced, during the forty-two minutes that it lasted, by the wrecking crew, the superintendent of the division, the railroad surgeon, the hospital interne, who brought the first lot of first-aids-to-the-injured, a dining car service cook, and a sole nurse, who had hailed a cruising cab and peremptorily ordered the driver to turn stationward. But what mattered it if they were continually tossed from side to side? Every second gained meant a life saved, perhaps. The frame of mind of all was that of the superintendent's:

"My God, I'd have given all I own to have been able to prevent the wreck!"

AT THE WRECK.

Since the wreck was three miles distant from the nearest telegraph station, one of the first things that the superintendent did on assuming charge was to see to it that telegraphic communication with the despatcher was opened by the side of the wreck. The surviving trainmen, the uninjured passengers and the band of volunteers from Harpsburg had already, under the direction of the badly bruised but plucky conductor, been doggedly at work on the work of rescue. Indeed, with wreckage piled all about them, with groans and shrieks and pleas and curses issuing from every part of the debris, with a fire to combat, with only the dim light of lanterns to work with, after the blaze had been miraculously got under control, they had accomplished wonders. Ten bodies had been laid in a row on the embankment a short distance from the wreck. The lone doctor from Harpsburg was treating a dozen badly injured victims who had been released from their perilous prisons and placed on bedding from the one unharmed Pullman of the train. And from the little stream that trickled at the foot of the steep embankment brave women, all forgetful of their scanty coverings, were carrying water in hats—in anything that would hold the precious liquid—to the parched lips of the sufferers.

Under the skilled guidance of the superintendent, who saw no reason for summoning his immediate superior, the work speedily became scientifically systematic. By the time the second rescue train arrived with sufficient doctors, nurses, medicines and dressing the most of the dead and injured had been removed from the wreckage, the locomotive having been lifted by the gigantic crane of the wrecking train off the crushed body of the poor engineer, who had reversed his lever in vain. One track also had been opened.

The injured were laid on cots, placed in rows in baggage cars; the dead were put in a separate car. The surviving passengers were assisted into coaches, where they were furnished with stimulating food and coffee and such garments as could be hurriedly secured. The baggage that was not destroyed by the fire, which had started in the baggage car and been confined there, was also placed on the rescue train, and as speedily as circumstances would permit this train was despatched Pomonaward.

PREPARATIONS FORTY-FIVE MILES AWAY.

When it reached the terminal it took no sharp eye to tell that some one had been busily engaged in preparing for its arrival. That someone was the general superintendent, who had kept in close touch with the work at the wreck. Practically all the ambulances in town met the train, and a strong squad of police to keep back the crowds. A formidable corps of doctors and nurses was on hand, and as fast as the injured could be removed from the train, and placed in the ambulances they were speeded to the various hospitals. There beds had been made ready for their reception and skilled surgeons were in readiness to perform any operations that might prove to be immediately necessary in order to save life.

Those unharmed survivors living in Pomona made at once for their homes, those survivors living beyond Pomona who were fortunate enough to have garments on their backs, were sent direct to three hotels in the immediate vicinity of the station.

The others were taken into the terminal waiting rooms, where they were supplied with clothing received from two or three of the town's big stores. Then they, too, were sent to the hotels. A physician went to each hotel to look after the hysterical ones, or to be close at hand should nerves give way—nerves of men as well as of women.

To save the feelings of the relatives of the dead as much as possible, the bodies were taken, not to the Morgue, but to reputable undertaking establishments. They had been identified by survivors and railroad claim agents, who had gone to the wreck on the second train, that an accurate of the passengers, dead, injured and living might be secured. A number of the dead had lived in Pomona. It was a comparatively easy task to notify the relatives. As for the rest, telegrams were sent to the addresses found in letters, or identification cards, etc., on the bodies, and to the police of the various cities from which the dead had hailed. Nothing more in this direction could be done until word was received concerning the disposition to made of the bodies.

HOW THE DISPATCHER HANDLED TRAFFIC.

Just about the time that the last of the injured were being received in the hospitals, the wrecking crew succeeded in clearing the second track. In a short while the damage done to the road bed was repaired sufficiently to permit of the safe passing of trains. That part of the wrecked train which was still on wheels was hitched to the wrecking train for hauling away to Pomona. The debris, having been rolled down the side of the embankment, was set fire to, and the wrecking crew's work was over.

When the wrecking train reached Harpsburg on the way back to Pomona, it went on to the turnout there, as per orders sent to the Harpsburg operator, by the dispatcher. A few minutes later the first train to use the east track since the wreck occurred went past Harpsburg, and thenceforth traffic went on uninterruptedly on both tracks.

But while the west track only was clear, the dispatcher, with that sharp mental picture of his division in his mind, shuttled his trains back and forth around the wreck, on the one clear track. This he was able to do by issuing the necessary orders to this or that or the other train to cross over from the east track above the wreck at a designated cross-over, and to cross back at a designated cross-over below the wreck. And while such a train was on the clear track all the trains properly belonging to that track were held on side tracks and turn-outs at points outside the distance between the two designated cross-overs until the train from the east track had crossed over to its proper track.

The dispatcher was able to do this because in a dispatcher's hands lies the power over all trains. A dispatcher is the czar of railroad operation. By means of his train sheets he knows where every train is every minute that it is on his division. And so, this particular dispatcher, in order to move his various trains with as little delay as possible on account of the wreck, began running his trains on "orders" as soon as he received word that the west track had been cleared.

With the skill of a great general consummately moving his men into battle, he sent orders to the operator at Merian to hold on the side track there the fast freight then approaching the station on the west track until No. 7, the eastbound "limited," had gone by. The operator at Hemstead station hung out his order board for the "limited," and when it slowed down, handed the engineer a duplicate order for himself and his conductor to cross over at Harpsburg to the west track and to cross to the east track at Merian. Passengers were given the right of way, and before the east track had been cleared, four had been sent by the wreck, their occupants all unconscious of the tragedy that had so lately been enacted right beyond their windows.

WHERE THE CLAIM DEPARTMENT CAME IN.

It was early morning when traffic was running smoothly again. With their nerves steadied by the advent of full daylight, not a few of the survivors after sending messages that they were safe, began making preparations to continue their respective journeys, or to turn back home. There was a general inquiry for baggage. Naturally, some baggage checks had been lost, as well as baggage and garments which had been doffed by occupants of sleepers less than twenty hours before.

The claim department now came prominently to the fore. That passenger who could satisfactorily prove that such and such a trunk was his, got it, after releasing the railroad from further responsibility in the matter—provided, of course, that the passenger was satisfied that his possessions had come through the wreck unharmed. In other cases claims for damages were filed, and in still others survivors were started on their way who did not so much as breathe the word "baggage" or "claim" until days after. Their frame of mind was, evidently, what is a matter of a little thing like lost baggage so long as we and ours have escaped with our lives?

The claim department did not hear the last of the wreck for months. A majority of the claims, however, were settled without recourse to law, simply by conferences between the railroad's lawyers and those representing the families of the dead and injured. All told, eight cases dragged their sinuous way through the courts. In six of them the railroad had verdicts pronounced against it for larger amounts than it considered just, and all were sustained on appeal. The remaining cases turned out victorious for the railroad. Both complainants had declared themselves to be permanently disabled and incapacitated for work, hence they wanted enourmous damages. The railroad felt that two sly attempts were being made to victimize it. Detectives were put on the trail of the men, who were shadowed for months, and the evidence that the sleuths gave at the trials led to the conviction later of the complainants on indictments, presented against them for perjury.

It is the fraudulent attempts to bleed a railroad, declares the average railroad official, that cause a self-respecting railroad to fight any claim that does not seem straight or just, or appears to have a flaw in it somewhere. Hence runs the argument there is frequently a resultant feeling on the part of the public that when a wreck occurs the railroad experiencing it seeks to avoid the consequences of the wreck.

It is safe to say that the cases which appear in court growing out of a wreck are relatively small, as a general rule, compared with the number settled out of court. Indeed, the big majority are settled "outside" as soon as possible, releases being taken by the railroad.

As a usual thing it is not difficult for the injured and the railroad to reach a working basis. While they are in the hospitals the injured received the best of care, the railroad paying all bills. Nothing is left undone that may contribute to their comfort. This solicitude serves to lead the injured to the belief that the railroad desires to do the square thing by them, and when the claim agent comes around he finds his path to have been smoothed in advance.

THE OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION.

But the claim department is not the only branch of the service that is busy with affairs connected with the wreck for a considerable time after it has occurred. The operating department starts a rigid investigation into the cause of the wreck synchronous with the arrival of the superintendent at the wreck and it is followed until the cause is decided beyond a doubt. Then, if any employ has been to blame, there swiftly comes the railroad's punishment—instant dismissal. There also practically every big body connected with the safe movement of trains tries to puzzle out some way to prevent a similar wreck from occurring again.

Such a scheme is rendered possible to think out in these days of scientific railroad, when the chief end of railroading may be said to be the safeguarding of passengers, that a railroad's business may prosper, to say nothing of the humane reasons actuating the operating department to employ all the safeguards that human ingenuity invents.

MODERN SAFEGUARDS AGAINST WRECKS.

There is the automatic electric block signal system, which protects a train from the one immediately following. Even should the current that controls the system be interrupted, the semaphore is so set that the force of gravity will throw it up to danger.

Another great safeguard is the high speed power brake, giving the engineer instant control over the entire train. All he has to do is to release—"cut his air"—in the train line, and the outside atmospheric pressure of fifteen pounds to the square inch sets the brakes—the emergency brakes, so called.

There is the train crew, a picked body of men from conductor down, drilled by years of experience in minor positions and selected for passenger runs only after severe physical and mental tests, not the least of the tests being that of colors.

Whenever a passenger train makes a stop not scheduled, it is not enough that the automatic block signal system is protecting it in the rear. Back goes the flagman to the prescribed distance, with his flag by day, or light by night, as the case may be. There he remains to flag any approaching train till he is called in by the locomotive whistle signal. Then, before he returns, swinging flag or lantern, by day he places a torpedo on the track, and by night a slow-burning color fuse. These precautions survive from the days when the automatic block signal was not known. Every railroad equipped with the block signal system still employs these men "to make assurance doubly sure."

Again, there is the despatcher, as expert a man in the safe movement of trains as can be hoped for while human nature is such as it is at present. Every minute he is on duty he knows where every train on his division is. He knows every side track, switch, cross-over, turn-out. The whole division is ever before him as he sits at his key; his one aim and purpose is to run all these trains so that all will reach their respective destinations in safety. That he may do this, he is in constant touch with all the railroad's telegraphers placed at stations along the division. To them he issues orders on the minute, knowing that they will be executed as speedily.

THE ONE GREAT CAUSE OF WRECKS.

All these men are carefully picked. So, also, are the men in the maintenance of way department, whose duty is to see that the track is in perfect condition, to the slightest detail. The maintenance of way men work at the track all day long, particular portions are patrolled day and night by track walkers, bridges are sedulously inspected and guarded. Yet half an hour after a section gang has been working at some spot in its section, to make it perfect, a train may be wrecked right there by a broken rail.

The simple truth of the matter is that by far the big majority of the wrecks occurring on railroads are due, not to the negligence of the responsible officials to throw all the safeguards possible around the travelling public, but to the breakdown, often unaccountable, of one or more of the human cogs in the intricate system maintained to safeguard the public. An engineer with a clean record reaching back a score of years, runs by a signal set dead against him. A splendid telegrapher translates an order wrong, or trusts its delivery to a station lounger. A switch is set wrong by an old hand. A mistake is made by some one, it is not caught in time, and the result is—a wreck.

This, in spite of scrupulous selection of men all along the line. The railroads have not yet hit on a plan of making all their men, or even one of them, infallible. If any one has such a scheme and desires a large fortune, let him hie himself to the nearest general offices of a big railroad. For the railroad official hates a wreck above everything else. He would make great sacrifices to prevent one on his line.

ANYTHING TO PREVENT A WRECK.

"Putting aside our natural horror over such a catastrophe," said a well-known official recently, "we also loathe a wreck for a purely selfish reason. The last wreck we had cost us a little over two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in rolling stock repairs, and damage settlements. To have prevented that wreck we would have been willing to spend several times that sum of money, in order to keep unshaken the travelling public's confidence in us. It is the public's confidence in a railroad's ability to carry it and its freight about safely that is a railroad's best asset. Let that confidence be shaken by a wreck—one wreck will often do it—and the road stands to lose many, many more thousands of dollars than by the wreck itself.

"A thorough understanding on this head should dispel the notion entertained by many that even railroads with rather strong monetary resources are reluctant to safeguard their trains until driven to it by public opinion aroused by a series of bad wrecks."

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The Practice of Make-Believe Not Always Unpardonable

What sort of a world would it be if we all left off makebelieve—the pardonable little glossing over of unpalatable truth?

A German daring to question that commodity called American Humor, was regaled by a Yankee friend with choicest examples, rehearsed in his nation's defence. When he had finished the Teuton was grave still. "You calf that wit," he said; "we should call it tam lies."

In make-believe also there is the point of view.

For poetical justice of the biter-bit variety, retaliatory take-in is unsurpassable. A French nouveau-riche—a manufacturer—related, with gusto, at a luncheon party how last New Year he had deceived his foreman by giving him a present of cheap cigars, from which he had put the bands taken from the expensive brand he smoked himself.

"What do you think of that wine?" said his host, pushing towards him a claret jug—"rather curious, eh?"

Monsieur, the manufacturer, whiffed, sipped, eyed, and declared himself enamoured of its fire, its rare bouquet; then hazarded a date.

"Ah," said his host quietly, "I wanted an unbiassed opinion of it, as compared to your vin ordinaire. That's Australian at one-and-twopence a bottle. I'm glad that you like it so well."

Exquisitely provocative of the private chuckle are some of the little errors folly makes, which it would be as much folly to correct.

"You have poetry in you," urged the sentimental aunt to the uncommonly dull nephew, who was acquiring the German language in the Black Forest; "the beautiful scenery around you should be an inspiration. Send me some verses when you write again."

The unsentimental youth had an admiration for Byron, so he copied out a fine stanza from "Childe Harold" and sent it.

"Excellent for a beginner," was the delighted criticism; and when, later on, he put together some halting lines of his own, she declared them "a great improvement!"

The latest development of minor hypocrisy is the preponderance of motor-clad over motor-borne. No one who visited a watering-place last August could fail to remark that if a census of the obvious by "motoring" were taken, what a lot of cars would be required. But perhaps the purchase of those coats and veils was dictated by something of the sentiment that bids childhood covet caps labelled "Fury," "Defiance," and "Terrible"—smoking the symbols of cherubic owners—and 'tis but a relic of the Golden Age.

"Please, mistress says, will you leave some for the next visitor?" was the candid message, plainly delivered, that disturbed a guest in the pleasant devotion to the raspberry canes she foundmitigated the dullness of a country rectory visit. She had been invited to partake freely, but here was the limit. What could be wished more in a Palace of Truth?

"Painless extractions, from a shilling upwards," is the cheap dentist's cheerful announcement. What would be gained if they said "painful?" It enlightens nobody to tell what everybody may guess.

Remarked a once-noted beauty, who did not take kindly to time's inevitable consequence—"I'm tired of hearing people say, 'You don't look very well,' when they mean 'old and ugly.' If they'd say 'How old and ugly you look,' there would be some sense in it."

Perhaps; but who would like to begin?

Thirty Years' Work Among Eskimos.

The Rev. E. J. Peck, who has returned to England after conducting missionary work in the Arctic regions for thirty years has given a vivid account of life among the Eskimos.

His mission station is one of the most lonely and inaccessible in the world. The headquarters are on the south shore of Cumberland Sound, at Blacklead Island, a little spot two miles long and 700 yards broad, round which it is possible to wlak in a couple of hours.

"There are no trees and vegetation, except moss and very light grass, and no fuel," Mr. Peck informed Reuter's representative. "It seems like the last place on earth.

"There is no food in the country except seal, and for all our stores we have to be dependent upon what we take out from England. Our only communication with the outside world is by means of a trading ship, which, specially chartered, visits us once a year.

"Our little settlement consists of a church, a hospital and two dwelling-houses—one for the two traders and one for my colleague and myself. There are, of course, all of the rudest description, being fashioned out of materials shipped from home.

A CHURCH OF SEALSKINS.

"Our earliest church was made of sealskins, but had to be replaced by a wooden structure, as it was destroyed by the dogs. The scene from Blacklead is the most desolate one imaginable, nothing but snow and ice being visible in any direction.

"The most trying time we have known was last winter, when the usual relief ship failed to reach us. It came to within fifteen miles of our station and was within range of our glasses, and yet it was not until ten months afterwards that she reached Blacklead.

"For fourteen days we watched her struggle amid the ice-barriers, and despite the most gallant attempts to afford us the needed relief, she was eventually driven back.

"We suffered considerably from cold, as our new supply of coal was on board the missing vessel, and we had to bury our houses in snow to keep out the cold.

"The Eskimos were not the only sufferers from want or food, for one night in January, 1905, a pack of hungry wolves surrounded our house and attacked the dogs, eventually escaping into the darkness. Afterwards they devoured one another."

Early in July the long expected relief ship arrived ten months over her time.

Lawyer—You want a divorce, do you? For what reason may I ask? It will have to be stated in the application. Charming Soubrette—I find I have married the wrong man. Isn't that reason enough?