

A TERRIBLE RIDE

A Thrilling Story.

[From the Milwaukee Catholic Citizen.]

I began life on one of the big railways as a "cleaner" in an engine shed. I had been employed in the shed at Louisville for about fifteen or sixteen months when I went on my first trip as a fireman.

It was very near being my last.

I firmly believe all the years of flying about in an express since I was made an engineer have not taken as much out of me as that single turn of an hour and a half. It occurred in this way:

One evening the superintendent at Louisville received a wire from Weston—a station about seventy miles down the line—to send an engine to replace one which had broken down. He came to the shed and selected the General Grant one of the finest locomotives on the road. Then he sent word to the engineer and fireman to come on duty and start on their journey at seven o'clock.

The engineer, Ben Norris, was there in good time, and busied himself with his oil-can. But Jim West, the fireman, did not turn up punctually.

At last, when it was near the hour for starting, he came into the shed.

One glance at his bloodshot eyes and unsteady walk showed that he was the worse for drink. Poor fellow! I knew the cause of this, and from the bottom of my heart I pitied him. The week before he had lost his little daughter Kate, and to drown his grief he had taken to liquor.

I knew he was utterly incapable of going on duty, and I also knew that if he was discovered in this state it would mean instant dismissal.

There was only one thing for it—another fireman must be found immediately. If the matter was referred to the superintendent it would be all up with my friend Jim. From that moment I made up my mind to take his place myself.

I gave him in charge of one of my mates, who promised to take him home quietly. I thought that within a few hours he would have slept off the effects of the liquor, and I left word to have him come on by the night train to Weston. I had to explain matters to the engineer, but he made no objections to my plan. It struck me at the time that he took the matter very coolly; in fact, he seemed perfectly indifferent as to who went with him.

Time was up. I took my place in the cab. Norris set to work at once and we moved slowly out of the shed. We were off!

While in the station I took care to keep bending down, as if examining the fire, so that I should not be recognized. But once clear of the town, I stood upright and looked around.

It was a glorious summer evening. We skimmed rapidly past meadows and cornfields and then dashed along the bridge over the river. I began to think I would enjoy the ride immensely.

I returned my attention to the engine. As I ran my eye over the shining machinery I felt gratified to think that its neat order was due to my care. I was proud of the Grant, and wondered if the time would ever come when I should have charge of it myself.

I was so elated that I thought my companion ought to be more lively. Ben seemed to think of nothing but his work. He stood with his hand on the throttle and his eyes steadily fixed upon the track ahead. I made one or two remarks, but he scarcely answered me. While I was wondering at his silence he suddenly appeared to rouse himself. He glanced at the steam-gauge, muttered something which I did not understand, then bent down and examined the fire box.

"More coal!" he cried, in a voice which almost startled me.

I complied without a word. Instead of throwing in the coal recklessly, which I knew would only deaden the fire, I piled it up carefully around the sides. Very soon the speed of the engine increased. We were rattling along at a grand rate. I examined the gauge and saw that the hand pointed to 195. I could not see the necessity for this rapid travelling.

My companion's attention was again fixed upon the road before him. Presently he turned toward me and exclaimed excitedly:

"Who says that the Grant is not the fastest engine on the road?"

"Mostly declared that the President was faster," I replied.

"Then he lied!" cried Norris. "The President faster? We shall see, we shall see!"

I thought his manner very strange, to say the least of it. But I knew his ways and said nothing. He was always considered rather eccentric. Besides, he was easily excited and could not bear to be contradicted. Still there was not an engineer on the line better acquainted with his business.

And, by the way, I have forgotten to say a word as to his appearance. Well, then, he was a big, powerful fellow, with a broad, red face and a bushy beard. It was hard to deal with such a man. If he once put his foot down there was no getting him to budge until his humor changed.

We were now coming close upon Waterford station, and had already done about twenty-five miles of the journey. Ben's eyes were still upon the track. It was all clear ahead, yet I expected to see him close the throttle and slow down while passing through the station.

But I was mistaken. With a roar and a rush we dashed right through, and the next minute we were tearing along a level stretch on the other side.

"More coal!" Not only the words themselves, but the manner in which they were uttered caused me serious alarm. I began to suspect that something was wrong. Still, if I hesitated, it might only irritate him, so I flung in a small quantity.

"Go on—go on!"

What was I to do? I didn't dare to refuse. The wild look in Norris' eyes frightened me, and I went on shoveling in the fuel. I glanced at the gauge. Great heavens! it marked 230. This pressure of steam, where no cars were attached to the engine, meant a fearful rate of speed.

The engineer's manner was strangely altered. Instead of being silent and morose, he was now excited and talkative.

"That's it!" he cried, and I could barely catch the words above the roaring of the engine. "Now we're travelling! Hal hal! The President faster than the Grant? Not likely! I'll catch up to her yet, see if I don't!"

Shall I ever forget those terrible words! They actually seemed to paralyze me. As I stood there, clinging for support to the side of the cab, the awful truth flashed through my mind. The engineer was mad. And, worse still, he was under the delusion that the President was on in front. With this insane idea in his head he determined to try the speed of the two engines.

My first impulse, when I had partly recovered from the shock, was to spring forward and grasp the reversing rod. But a moment's reflection showed me that this might instantly seal my doom. Norris would have grappled with me and if it came to a struggle I was lost. He would fling me headlong from the engine.

Then another thought occurred to me. Heaven forgive me!—but I must strike him from behind in order to save my life. I looked around for a weapon. As I did so, he seemed to guess what I was at, and turning round thrust his hand into his breast. The next moment he held a revolver toward me, while his blazing eyes threatened instant death if I did not desert.

After that I gave myself up for lost. Unless Providence interposed in my behalf a horrible end awaited me. Up to this time I had felt the heat oppressive, but now I shivered. My hands were cold and clammy. A band of iron seemed to encircle my head.

On we tore, the engine swaying fearfully. Every moment I expected to be blown to atoms by the bursting of the boiler. Norris never ceased to rave about the race with the President. And yet, though he was so absorbed in his work, he kept his eye on me the whole time.

Then it was that an idea flashed across me. A faint hope sprang up in my mind. I must overcome him by cunning: it was the only chance.

I advanced to examine the indicator, and though my heart sank when I saw the hand quivering at 250, I made it appear as if I were delighted.

"Good!" I cried, "we'll beat her yet! But we want more coal."

I made toward the tender, placed my feet upon a lump of coal, and

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struck it across the back with the sharp edge of the shovel. The blow left a gash from which the blood flowed freely. I gave a cry and Norris instantly turned round.

I held up my right hand that he might see the blood dripping from it. Then I stood with my back toward him and pretended to bind up the wound. But I only wrapped a handkerchief round it, and quick as lightning drew out my pocket-book. I tore away the leaves which were written on, and placing the book upon my knees scrawled these words on the first page:

"Engineer mad. Wire: grease rails."

Then holding it in my injured hand I thrust it under my jacket and returned to the engineer's side.

We were now rapidly approaching Weston, but I knew that Norris did not intend to stop. And I was right. He blew a long whistle, as if to startle the officials, and the engine shot through the station like a rocket.

But I had managed to drop my pocket-book at the side of the track.

I did not dare to look back or make the slightest sign to the Weston officials. If I had done so, I certainly would have got a bullet through me. Still I fancied I had caught a glimpse of a man hurrying forward to where the book had fallen.

The suspense was terrible. Even if they noticed the pocket-book, they might not be able to understand what was written inside; for it may be imagined that under the circumstances the scrawl was barely legible.

I had made up my mind what to expect. The next station was Red Fork, but fifteen miles farther on. I was sure the track would be clear as far as this place, but once past it, we might encounter an up train at any moment.

If the Weston people discovered my message they would wire at once to Red Fork, and there would be time enough for the officials at that station to grease a portion of the rails before we came to the scene. Should this be done on any sort of an incline the wheels would slip on the track and the engine soon come to a standstill. It was with a thrill of joy I remembered that there was such a piece of road just outside Red Fork station.

But if it turned out otherwise, and we passed the place without being stopped, I resolved to lose no time in grappling with the engineer. Come what might, I would spring upon him and try to wrench the revolver from his hand. The case would then be desperate; and it was as well to die in a fight for life as to wait patiently and be mangled in a collision.

When I arranged all this in my mind I endeavored to resign myself to fate. I could do no more at present. But the agonies I suffered during that short run from Weston to Red Fork I can never describe. The terrible strain of suspense, the wild rush, swaying from side to side, made me feel sick and faint. I clung on without daring to look on either hand; if I had done so I think I could not have resisted the temptation to fling myself from the engine.

It was getting dusk. I was dimly conscious of the hedges, telegraph poles and bridges skimming past me like so many flashes. The hoarse shouts of the mad man made my blood run cold. He seemed to be working himself into a regular frenzy.

Red Fork one mile ahead!

One minute more would decide the question of life and death.

I drew my breath hard; I trembled like a child. We had reached the incline. The engine went at it with a dash. I glanced out to see if any friendly figures were on the track.

Not a soul was in sight. I groaned and almost fell on the floor of the cab. The surrounding objects seemed to fade from my view, and in their place rose up a picture of the old home away in England. I saw the little cottage; I looked into my mother's face—

"Oh, thank God!"

Never before nor since did such a cry of joy escape from me, for at that moment I felt the wheels of the engine slip.

Gradually the furious speed declined. Norris dashed about the cab storming and swearing. Very soon we were almost at a standstill. The next second I had jumped to the ground.

Only just in time. The madman had turned savagely upon me, I suppose suspecting that I had something to do with the stoppage. I saw his purpose and ducked my head as a bullet from his revolver whizzed over it. Then I ran for dear life down the track.

When I was out of range I sat upon the bank, completely overcome. The reaction was too much for me, and I believe for a minute or two I was quite unconscious. But before I became insensible I heard another report from the pistol. I knew what had happened.

I was aroused by a confused hum of voices. Upon opening my eyes I saw four men standing around me. I got up at once and we hurried back to the engine.

There stood the Grant upon the track with full speed up, the wheels revolving with frightful rapidity, but without making the least headway.

One of my companions sprang on board and shut off steam. Then he came to the side, looked down, and exclaimed:

"I say, boys, Norris has put a bullet through his brain!"

I knew it.

A BOOK FOR YOUNG MEN.

An immeasurable amount of suffering and injury to the human race is due to the ignorant violation of physiological laws by the youth of our land. Ruinous practices are indulged in, through ignorance of the inevitable injury to constitution and health which surely follows. By every young man, the divine injunction, "Know Thyself," should be well heeded. To assist such in acquiring a knowledge of themselves and of how to preserve health, and to shun those pernicious and most destructive practices, to which so many fall victims, as well as to reclaim and point out the means of relief and cure to any who may unwittingly have violated Nature's laws, and are already suffering the dire consequences, an association of medical gentlemen have carefully prepared a little book which is replete with useful information to every young man. It will be sent to any address, securely sealed from observation in plain envelope, by the World's Dispensary Medical Association of 663 Main Street, Buffalo, N.Y., on receipt of ten cents in stamps (for postage), if enclosed with this notice.