

Railroading by Water.

(Argentine Republic.)

Last week the writer met an old-time railway friend in Kansas City, Mo., who resembled the ghost of a departed time, for he was believed to be dead for the past twenty-five years.

I had heard that he was dead, and the last time I met him in a distant State he was on a sharp curve at the foot of a long down grade, a spring-hanger gone, eccentric slipped and no water in the tank. In railway parlance, he was a total wreck cut loose at both ends; or, in other words, he was being taken to the lock-up by two policemen while suffering with the delirium tremens. So the reader can readily imagine my surprise on meeting him face to face at the Junction in Kansas City. He was elegantly dressed in tailor-made clothes, cleanly shaven, the old lines of dissipation faded from his handsome weather-beaten face, and reason shining from behind his bright soulful eyes. Seeing how greatly I was surprised, he smilingly remarked:

'You are only mistaken a little bit. I am "Robert Benjamin, general roadmaster of the P. D. and Q. Railway," and you are thinking of "Bob Benjamin, the old toper," who died in Lafayette, Ind., a long time ago. Come up to the Centropolis and take dinner with me, and I will tell you all about my death and resurrection.'

After dinner, he immediately led me to his room, when I remarked:

'No preliminaries, now; but pull the throttle wide open, for I'm dying to know all about your reformation and how it happens you are not dead.'

'Well, the reason that I am not dead is due entirely to a merciful God and my determination to reform, for as you know, I have sounded the lowest base string of humility. Several evenings after you saw me suffering with the tremens the last time, I was sitting in a Main street saloon and imagined I was dying for a drink of rum. The proprietor arose to close up for the night, and as I staggered for the door, he remarked to a wealthy patron who had not yet hit the rocky road:

"There goes a poor drunken fool who will be dead inside of two months."

'Drunk as I was, those cruel words stung me like a lash as I staggered out along the street. I knew the saloon man was telling the truth, and that in my present condition it would be impossible for me to live a month. I bared my fevered brow to the cool night air, and the bright old silver moon never shone more beautiful. Yes, I was a poor drunken fool! The saloon-keeper had told the truth, but at that moment I would have bartered my immortal soul for one drink and let the Letheian waters engulf me forever. I had sat down on the curbstone to try and think, but arose and gazed longingly into a saloon window at the bottles of red liquor ranged along the shelves, while I, "a poor drunken fool," was dying on the streets for one drink. I wanted to curse God and die!

'My intense suffering partially sobered me and I began to wonder why I had suffered through all those misspent years. "Must I continue to suffer on, and what would become of mother if I were dead?" I knew she would go broken-hearted to a pauper's grave "over the hill to the poor-house." "Never while God lives," I wailed to the night winds as I went reeling home to my angel mother and found her "waiting and watching for me."

'The moment I entered our little dwelling,

called home, she arose up in bed saying so kindly:

"Is that you, Robert?"

"Yes, mother, it is your poor drunken boy; but I have drank my last glass, mother—I have drank my last glass."

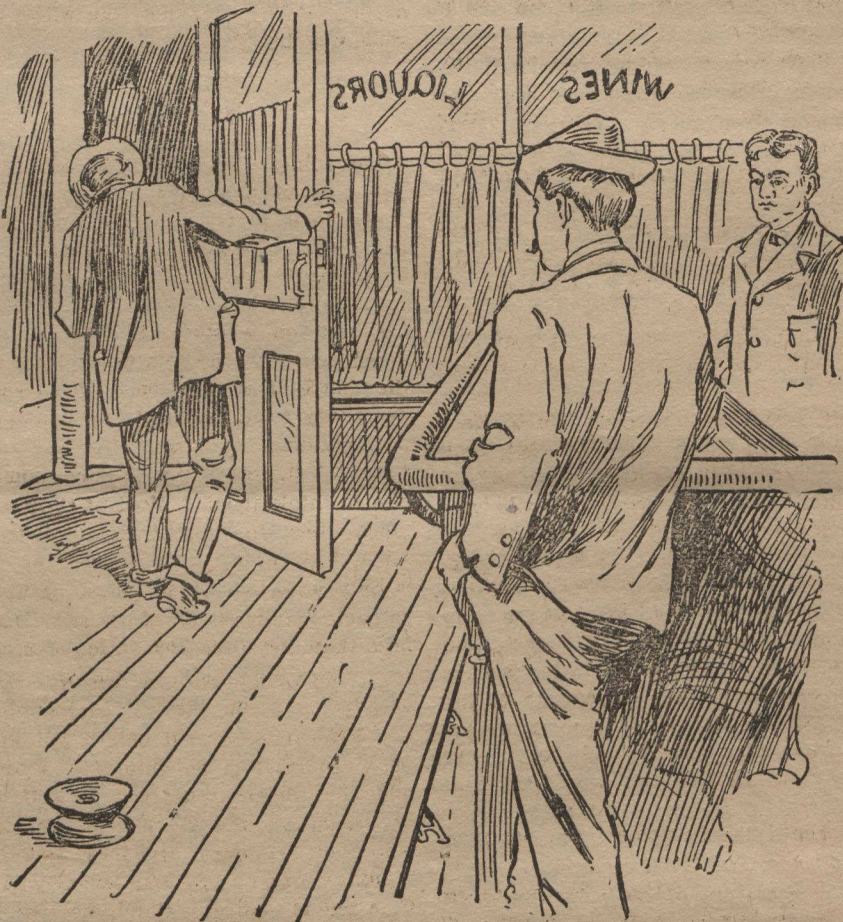
'Mother believed I was telling the truth, and was out of bed in a moment and putting the old battered coffee pot on the stove, saying:—

"I will make you a cup of good hot coffee, and I know you will feel better."

'Oh, woman! woman! The world may print volumes on the heroes of San Juan hill, but they should forever remain silent in thy presence! Thou goest to battle daily—not at the roll of the stirring drum and the trumpet that sings of fame—but she fights to the last gasp for her darling boy, and dies unwept, unhonored and unsung. Out in the farthest nook and corner of the old graveyard, where the sexton never stops, and the tall, lank grass waves in the wildest profusion, she sleeps well, for rum has done

years, but cursed rum had not only robbed me of manhood, but made me the veriest coward on earth. I was waiting to see the roadmaster of the P. D. & Q. Railway, who was expected in that morning on the pay car, and when it rolled into the depot I would surely have run away without speaking to him, but I happened to think of mother. I braced up and spoke to him; told him I was flat broke and out of a job, but would serve him faithfully and that I had no reputation to make as a railway man. He was an old-time Irishman and I imagined he was a regular old chaw, but God bless his old heart, he was a first-class trackman and proved the best friend I ever had. He spoke kindly to me, said he needed a foreman and would give me a trial the next day when he had time to take me out on the road. The next morning proved the test of my life. The old man appeared on the platform a few minutes before the train was due to leave and said:

"This is a terrible cold morning, let's



"THERE GOES A POOR DRUNKEN FOOL WHO WILL BE DEAD INSIDE OF TWO MONTHS."

its worst. She bathed my burning brow the same as when I was a child, and eagerly inquired:

"Have you really quit, Robert?"

'Yes, mother; God helping me, be my time here on earth long or short I will never touch, taste nor handle the cursed stuff again!'

'She was on her knees all night and God hearkened. I have never drank a drop of intoxicating liquor from that hour, but the most critical point in my career was yet to come.

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'One cold winter day in January, some three months after I had stopped drinking, I found myself at the Union Depot in Kansas City looking for a job. The world never looked darker to me than it did that day. I was cold and hungry, tramping around in the snow on the platform with seventy-five cents in my pocket and a linen duster for an overcoat. I was a first-class railway trackman and had been a foreman for many

step across Union avenue to the Blossom House and take something to keep us warm."

"Please excuse me, Mr. C—, I don't care for anything; you step across and get your drink and I will stay right here until you return," I replied.

"What's the matter with you this cold morning; come on and have something; you are not a Prohibitionist, are you?"

'I saw I was in for it and blurted out:

"Mr. C—I am as near a Prohibitionist as anything you could mention. I have drunk more liquor than ever you have, but I can't drink and be a man. As I told you before, I have no reputation to make as a railway man, but if you give me a section to-day I will surely run it by water."

'The old man didn't like it and said I must be a funny railway man to refuse a drink on a day like this, and we boarded the train as she was pulling out. We dropped off at a little station some thirty miles from Kansas City when the old man show-