

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

TIM HAMMOND'S PROMOTION.

The "Sunset Special" was five minutes overdue.

"Any word yet?" asked a tall, dignified-looking individual, impatiently pacing up and down the narrow platform at Rangeley.

"Yes, sir; two hours, ten minutes late, blocked by a freight wreck at Cedar River, eleven miles this side of Shirley." And James Ellis, station agent at Rangeley, hurried back to his instrument, for his practiced ear had caught his "call."

"Interesting condition of things!" exclaimed the president of the Great Overland Eastern, irritably. "That means a run to Hamilton in an ordinary coach!" And Alexander D. C. Van Pelt, head official of the great trunk line, started ill-humoredly towards the train on the siding, that had been waiting to attach the "Elmore," the president's private car, on its arrival, with the "Sunset Special."

"Carelessness; probably nothing else in the world! It's the cause of half the railway accidents, were the truth but known—a result of incompetent men."

The president's attention was at that moment attracted to Tim Hammond, who had just set the switch for a long through freight.

"Too young for a position like that; can't be over fifteen! I fail to see what anyone could be thinking of, appointing a mere boy to such a responsible place;" and the man made a hurried entry in his memorandum. "Another cause of accidents—inexperience;" and the determined expression on the official's face was sufficient proof that before the end of another week, Tim Hammond would be without a job—his position would be filled by another.

"All aboard!"

It was impossible to hold the train longer, however much the president of the line was to be inconvenienced. It must reach Hamilton on schedule time or the passengers aboard would miss connections for points East—and already eleven minutes were lost.

Slowly the heavy train pulled on to the main track, and, after the last car had rolled by, Tim Hammond went whistling back to the station.

"He wasn't feeling what you might call pleased over that freight accident." James Ellis stood in the office door as Tim came up the platform.

"He—who?" Tim stopped whistling.

"Why didn't you see? The tall fellow in the black coat—he with the gray beard?"

"I saw him; remember his looking at me, but I didn't know who he was. Any one special?"

"Only Alexander D. C. Van Pelt, president of the road," imparted the station agent, dryly.

"Whew! Ought to have taken another look at him. I don't see, though, why the wreck at Cedar River need bother him very much. Number Nine wasn't delayed only about ten minutes."

"He was expecting his private car to attach to the special, and Number Nine was going to take it on to Hamilton from here. But then," continued Ellis, "it isn't really so annoying for him as it is for the passengers who were delayed by the accident. 'Twon't do a railway president, to my way of thinking, any great amount of harm to ride as ordinary folks do, once in his life. But he didn't take it with any too much good humor."

A click! click, and the station agent went back to his post.

As the president of the road had intimated, Tim Hammond was young; he hadn't yet reached his sixteenth birthday.

While his father was laid off with a crushed hand, caused when coupling cars, Tim had substituted for him; and, after Howard Hammond's death, due to blood poison resulting from the wound, his son had received the permanent appointment.

"It's due him," wrote the agent to headquarters. "He's strong, quick and reliable; you will make no mistake in giving him the place."

And now, for nearly a year, Tim had supported the family, doing his father's work acceptably, young as he was.

"He's one of the best hands I ever worked with," more than once mentally commented Ellis; "and such a youngster, too; but he's got it in him. I predict he won't always be second hand at a small station like Rangeley. One can't most generally tell whether a fellow's going to amount to anything or not by the way he takes hold at the start. If he's got it in him he's going to show it, however low down he begins—leastways that's been my experience."

The following Tuesday James Ellis threw down his pen on the desk, an expression of puzzled inquiry on his sunburnt face.

"I—I don't understand—discharged!"

And he again unfolded the officially stamped paper that he held in his hands. "No cause of complaint that I know of and another man appointed in his place—will be here on Friday. 'Inexperienced!' He's done everything required—never seen a more capable hand."

The station agent was visibly agitated when Tim appeared at the office door.

"I've got bad news for you; here, you may read it."

"Discharged! Why, what have I—"

"Done nothing, save attend strictly to your work," interrupted Ellis, looking up. "They say you're too young; it's a fault you'll get over in time, my boy."

"I wonder they didn't think of that when father—" There was something strangely like a lump in the boy's throat. "I'm older'n I was then."

"I know; it's an outrage!" And Ellis threw down the notice indignantly.

For the next two days Tim attended regularly to his work, just as prompt and careful, regarding every detail as though he were newly appointed and not a discharged hand.

After a couple of weeks Tim got a job in the village, but the pay was much smaller than he had been receiving in the railway's employ. Yet the family managed to live on it, and, during the early summer he received a raise in his wages.

While Tim felt the injustice of the action taken by the railway company, he never complained. It wasn't his nature to find fault.

"It may be providential, dear," and Mrs. Hammond thought painfully of the one trial she had been forced to experience. "You're safe, at least, where you are; there's no danger of accidents as there is around a railway."

Going back and forth from the village, Tim was accustomed to "cut across lots." By taking the railway track through the notch he was able to save three-quarters of a mile, and that seemed a good deal to one who was obliged to walk it twice a day.

The notch had been cut through a ledge and bank of loose rock. On one side there had been left an immense boulder, to keep from rolling down on the track smaller stones that might otherwise be dislodged by the heavy fall and spring rains. To serve as a protection against a possible dislodgement of the big boulder itself, a heavy chain had been placed around it, the ends of which were fastened

to staples, securely fixed by drilling to the solid ledge on either side.

"'Twould make a bad piece of business," often thought Tim, as he passed through the notch, "if that should happen to break away and come tearing down on the track. If it turned a little to the right, 'twould go crashing into the ravine, and I wouldn't give much for the sleepers and rails it went over. And a train that might come along!" Tim shuddered at the destruction of life and property that such an accident would cause.

It was the middle of November, and it had been raining for a week; not an occasional shower, but a steady downpour, accompanied by heavy winds.

"It doesn't seem safe, not to have some one stationed here." Tim was going through the notch during the rainy period to his work, and he stopped just in front of the massive boulder. "The rain must have loosened a good many of those smaller fellows up above on the side, and, if they should get started that chain would snap like a tow string—there'd be a regular avalanche. 'Twould be different if there wasn't the curve, so the engineer could see more'n a couple of rods ahead."

Tim was late starting home that evening. He had waited longer than usual in the village, hoping the rain would slacken somewhat, for, if anything, it had rained all the afternoon harder than at any other time during the week.

"Don't believe it's going to stop; might's well be moving. And Tim buttoned his coat more closely about his throat.

It was dark as he approached the notch. "I'd like to see how the boulder's standing it, but don't suppose I can distinguish much, dark and rainy as it is to-night."

Before he was opposite the big boulder and just as he was speaking, he tripped and fell—the rails had been bent.

"It's—it's the boulder!" scrambling to his feet. "It's gone!"

Ahead of him, the track had been torn up, roadbed, sleepers and rails having been carried into the ravine below! At his feet opened a great gully, to which Tim had carefully felt his way along.

"No knowing how deep it is. Wish I had a lantern. I wonder if it's anywhere's near time for a train?"

Feeling in his pocket he found a match—'twas the only one he had. Striking it, he looked at the watch that had been his father's.

The express was due in just ten minutes.

What could he do? He seemed powerless. And there were scores of lives aboard the "Sunset Special." There wasn't time to get a message sent to hold the train at Falmouth; it had already left that station, and was thundering on through the storm and darkness to its destruction.

"If I only had a light to signal the engineer, but I've—nothing!" Tim's voice was pathetic with helplessness.

He ran back beyond the curve. He listened—yes, that was the whistle. He could distinguish it through the driving storm above the roar of the wind.

At the sound of the whistle Tim was seized as though by a sudden inspiration.

"I—I—might be able. I'd be surer if it didn't blow so."

Just ahead beside the track was a pyramid of loose stones. Bounding across the rail he caught up one—it seemed to the determined boy about the right weight. Rushing along the track, he balanced it calculatingly in his right hand. He could see the headlight of the engine now!

"It's—the only—chance!" breathlessly.

Tim hurriedly took his position on a slight elevation at the left of the track