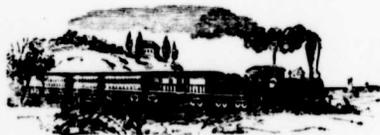


The Home Mission Journal.

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Railroading with Christ.

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CHAPTER XI.

MERIT REWARDED.

WHEN Joe Benton, after a week of careful nursing in the hospital at Orange Junction, recovered strength sufficiently to be able to listen to the details of the attempted robbery of the express, he was surprised to learn how, although he himself had suffered through their malignant hate, the plans of the evil doers had been effectually frustrated.

The bullet which so spitefully sped from the rifle of the guard had entered Joe's leg, causing a painful though not a dangerous wound. Joe had fallen at once and, partly stunned as he was by the fall, had been left for dead by the robbers. Quickly, however, Joe had regained his senses sufficiently to rise a little and to make an attempt to stagger off in the direction of the approaching express, yet only to fall again. This time, however, he sank down not between the rails of the main track, but upon a bit of disused switch which led off to a side cut from which gravel had formerly been dug.

Weakened by his wound and confused in his senses, Joe lay on the switch helpless and inactive, until presently he dashed into view upon the track the headlight of an oncoming locomotive. To Joe, scarce knowing where he was, the train seemed like a great monster rushing upon him to destroy him; and overcome by this new peril he fainted.

It was indeed a train that had rattled by Joe, as he lay on the switch—but not the express, as he had imagined, having in his half-unconscious condition mistaken the points of the compass. The fact was that the express had been detained by a blocking of the track west of Giant Mountain, and so under special orders the freight to which the leading ruffian had referred had been allowed to proceed on as far as Walnut Siding. Of this sudden change in the ordinary train schedule the robbers were of course totally unaware. Moreover, a strong westerly wind which was blowing that night carried all sounds of the approaching freight away from them; and a succession of bluffs through which the track curved tortuously in the direction of Orange Junction completely concealed from view the headlight of the locomotive, until suddenly, without the slightest warning, its brilliant rays shone full upon the wreckers as it shot out from around a sharp curve a few rods below the spot where the ties were heaped on the track.

The surprise of the freight engineer and of the robbers was mutual. But, as had been intimated by the leader of the gang, the engineer who ran

the freight, although a quiet man and never given to boasting, was one of the pluckiest engine drivers on the road. No sooner did the light from his locomotive reveal the obstruction on the track than he comprehended its purpose, and rapidly calculated the chances of successfully dashing into it. Of course he knew that the robbers would take a shot at him as he sped by, but he considered that the advantages to be gained by demolishing the obstruction on the track warranted the risk to be run in attempting to shoot by the spot. So Jim Perkins quickly yet coolly pulled the throttle wide open, and the powerful freight engine immediately gave a leap forward. There was a crash and the locomotive seemed to quiver in every part as it crunched its way through the splintered log ties, scattering them right and left—yet the train was not derailed, and once over the danger point, where the ties had been placed, it did not stop for all the curses of the infuriated ruffians. The timbers had been so placed on the track that while they afforded an almost insurmountable obstacle to the passage of a train from the West, they were readily brushed aside by the cow-catcher of an engine taking them on the reverse side.

By the sudden and unexpected appearance of the freight train most of the robbers had been utterly confused and disconcerted. But one member of the gang—the big man so familiar with the affairs of the railroad—retained his composure. With a fiendish deliberation and cruelty he raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired at the engineer as the train shot by. The bullet did not hit the engineer, but another man in the cab was struck and instantly killed. The victim was a young brakeman who had temporarily deserted his post, and was riding in the cab of the locomotive, when he should have been on the roof of a car. Unfaithfulness in what he had regarded as a small matter had cost the young man his life.

What the effect of his fire had been the big ruffian did not discover till some days afterwards, when, in a retreat where he was hiding, he read in a country sheet that out of the whole train crew only one man had been injured, and learned that it was that had lost his life. Bill Summers had killed his own son!

Joe Benton had not been long in the hospital when one day a visitor was announced. The caller proved to be the superintendent of the railroad, who, sitting down by Joe's bedside, took his hand and began an apology for what he had come to feel had been a harsh and hasty judgment of his subordinate.

"And now I have come to offer you," he continued, "in the name of the president of the company, in recognition of your attempt to save the express, an appointment as conductor of the through freight on which you once braked. The train crew is composed of the same men who formerly served with you, with the single exception of Jake Summers, who was shot as you know by one of the robbers on the night of the attempted train robbery."

Joe, of course, was delighted at these brightening prospects, and accepted the offer at once, accompanied as it was with such a handsome, if long delayed, vindication of his character. He felt now that his reputation had been firmly established.

In due course of time Joe Benton was discharged from the hospital. Hobbling about the bare and cheerless rooms in which his mother and himself had taken up lodgings after being forced to leave their old home, Joe sadly missed the little parlor so endeared to him by tender associations, but he bravely kept up heart and was not without hope that if he continued to have steady employment for some years he might finally win back the house under whose roof so many happy days had been spent. This bright

dream of future prosperity Joe confided to his mother. Meanwhile they agreed that they must hope in God, patiently and persistently apply themselves to the tasks of every day, and try to remain contented in spirit while yet seeking to be active and enterprising in labors.

After a few weeks at home Joe Benton was able to report to the superintendent of the railroad for duty, and was immediately given charge of the freight train, with the details of the running of which he was perfectly familiar. Jim Perkins, the engineer, was a steady, sober man who attended the same church as Joe; and sometimes during the tedious waits at sidings they had talked of other subjects than cylinders and grades and switches. Engineer and crew both felt that in Joe Benton they had a superior who would not stupidly misconstrue orders, nor take unwarranted risks; and so scrupulously observant of the rules of the road was he that at the end of two years he had to his credit a record of which the oldest conductor might have been proud.

The Overcoming Prejudice.

THE feeling aroused among Hebrew Christians at Jerusalem when they learned that Peter had consorted familiarly with Gentiles at Joppa and Caesarea, was not so much that a moral principle had been violated as that a social custom had been transgressed. They felt as some feel about a white man when he invites a negro to his table. But, since men are very apt to identify the code of a class with the moral law, indeed, often put the former above the latter, the feeling that greeted Peter on his return to Jerusalem may be imagined. These men did not object to Peter's preaching the Gospel to anyone whom he chose, any more than the Pharisees objected to Jesus' teaching publicans and sinners. What both they and the Pharisees objected to was sustaining social relations with people who did not belong to their class and had not enjoyed their privileges. They were willing to have the Gentiles become believers in Christ, though probably they entertained some latent suspicions as to whether they could or would do so, but they wanted broad and deep lines drawn between Jewish and Gentile Christians—between the circumcised and the uncircumcised.

This position, as Peter had come to see, was thoroughly untenable. The experience of Christian faith or the possibility of experiencing it are such vital and radical facts that the distinctions that prevail among men are not only dwarfed but eliminated by it. They are like the distinctions among the children of the same parents. No matter how great they are they do not abridge or affect the child's standing in the parents' affection or shut him out from his father's table. You cannot preach a type of religion that is even measurably true to the Christianity of Jesus without indirectly inculcating the doctrine of human equality—not actual, but potential. Thomas Jefferson did not discover that all men are created equal. Jesus discovered it. It was His great social discovery. If He had brought no other idea into the world He would deserve a place among the greatest philanthropists for His enunciation of that principle.

This passage also affords a beautiful illustration of the true Christian temper. These circumcised Hebrew Christians had all the pride of caste and of opinion that we associate with hereditary privilege, but when they heard that the Gentiles had entered into the experience of faith, they suffered their thoughts and convictions to be broadened to the compass of God's revelation. They caught the point. They did not say, "We see that a Christian Jew can con-