

FROM THE THROTTLE
TO THE
PRESIDENT'S
CHAIR

BY
E.S. ELLIS



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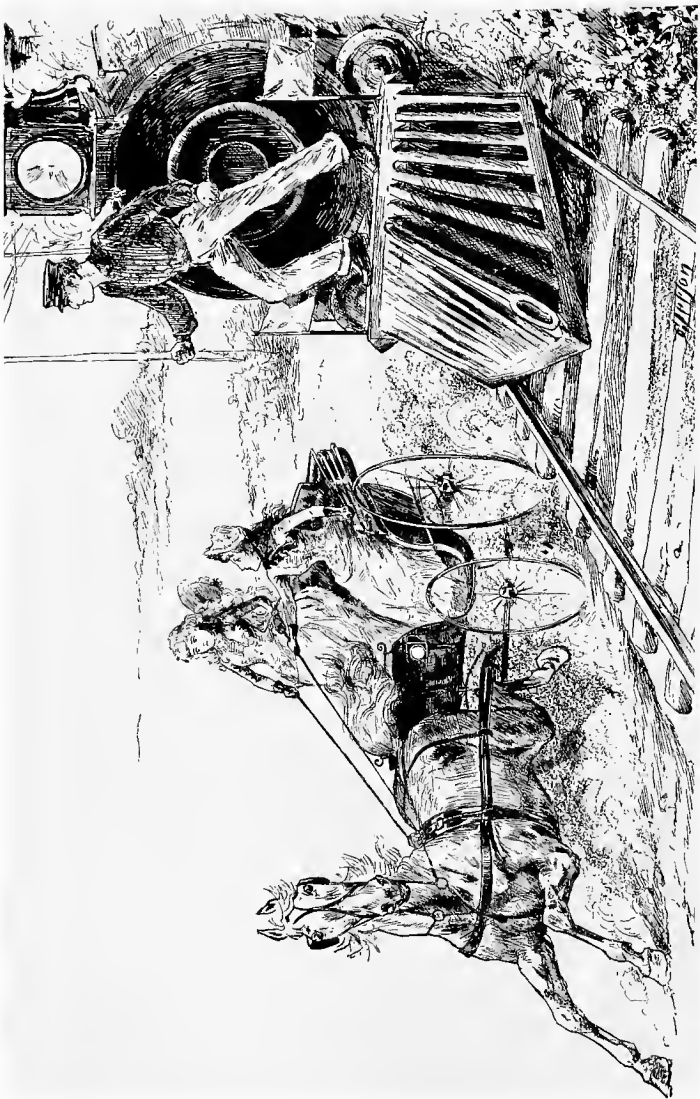
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FROM THE THROTTLE

TO THE

PRESIDENT'S CHAIR

A Story of American Railway Life

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS, A. M.

AUTHOR OF "LOST IN SAMOA," "TAD; OR, GETTING EVEN WITH HIM," "DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI," "LOST IN THE WILDS," "UP THE TAPAJOS," ETC.



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FROM THE THROTTLE

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CHAPTER I.

AT THE SIDING.

IT had been raining two days and nights, and there were no signs of clearing up. The Irondale and Ofalca Night Express lay on the siding, just west of Little Gypsy Creek, waiting for the down mail, which was over-due nearly half an hour.

From Irondale to the Junction was precisely forty miles. Before the Night Express headed up the road, a telegram was handed to Matt Fields, the engineer, and another to Calvin Twomey, the conductor, notifying them that the mail had just left the Junction, and the two trains were to meet at the switch near Little Gypsy Creek. This was about one-third of the distance from Irondale, and the Express, if no accident prevented, ought to reach it a quarter of an hour ahead of the mail. As a rule, the latter steamed into Irondale a few minutes before the Express left for its long run eastward, but, as I have said, it was late that night, and the Express was ordered to run to the switch, there leave the main track and wait for the mail to pass.

There was another switch about half-way between Iron-

dale and the Junction, which Matt Fields, with his peerless engine, the "Hercules," was sure he could have reached before the "Mercury," the locomotive drawing the mail, but that would have been sailing too close to the wind, and his orders were to remain at the turn-out until the road ahead was clear.

Accordingly the engineer ran with his usual speed to the siding, where, in obedience to orders, he was patiently waiting for the mail, which was such a long time in coming.

The Night Express on that run included three passenger cars, beside the mail and baggage car. The passengers numbered over a hundred, among them being Lloyd Montague Worthley, the nineteen-year old son of the superintendent of the road. Lloyd had entered Harvard a year before, his fond parents believing he was sure to graduate at the head of his class; but he came home a few months later wearing eyeglasses and bringing word that his eyesight had failed, and it would be impossible for him to continue his studies for some time to come. Naturally his parents were deeply disappointed, but, fortunately for their peace of mind, they forbore to make too close inquiries as to the precise reason why the young man had left the institution. Had they done so they would have been convinced of that which everyone else knew, namely, that Montague, although so young, was a scapegrace, who was allowed to leave college to escape expulsion.

At the time the "Hercules" ran upon the turn-out and the switches were adjusted to let the mail pass without abatement of speed, Montague was in the smoking-car, engaged in a game of euchre with several of his companions. They paid little attention to the movement of the cars or to the rain which rattled against the windows at their side in the impenetrable darkness without.

By and by, however, as Montague finished dealing a hand, one of the young gentlemen remarked on the long

time they had been waiting. Montague snatched out his handsome gold watch, and, glancing at it, exclaimed :

“By Jove ! that’s so ; I’ll have to attend to that. Wait a minute, boys, till I come back.”

Flinging his rubber coat, which was hanging at the side of the car, about his form so as to protect him from too much moisture, he strode down the aisle to the door, as though he combined in himself the presidency and superintendency of the Irondale and Ofalca Railroad. The baggage and mail car was in front, but stepping across the platform in the rain he gave the door such a kick that it was speedily opened a few inches from the inside. When the baggage-master recognized the young man by the light of his lantern, he drew the door further open and admitted him with a pleasant “Good-evening.”

Without heeding the salutation, Montague strode the length of the car and opened the door at the front, which joined the tender and engine. Looking over the pile of coal, with the long pokers, coal-pick and shovel faintly revealed by the reflection from the light in front, he could dimly see two figures in the cab of the engine.

Sometimes, during severe weather, a curtain of heavy canvas hung down behind the cab, so that the engineer and fireman were well protected. It was not there to-night, for the rain drove from the eastward, and, though it was the end of September, the weather was mild. In running, no matter what the direction of the storm, it never entered from the rear of the engine.

The “Hercules” had been blowing off for some minutes with a deafening uproar, but having relieved itself of the gaseous surplus in its treasury it ceased for a while, and all was comparatively still.

“Hello, there !” shouted Montague, placing one hand at the side of his budding mustache to help guide his voice to the engine.

By the dim light of the lantern over the head of the engineer the latter was seen to lean slightly forward, with his rugged face and grizzled beard turned inquiringly backward.

He said nothing, but his manner showed that, uncertain whether the hail was meant for him, he was waiting to receive some explanation.

"Hello, there!" repeated the son of the superintendent. "What the deuce is the matter?"

Such a question would have received no notice, had not Matt Fields recognized the voice. He knew and despised this sprig, who was so fond of assuming airs over the employees, but, since he was the only son of the superintendent, Matt was wise enough to show some deference to him.

Sliding off his seat at the side of the cab, the massive engineer stood erect in front of the boiler, with his face toward the rear of the tender. His hands were idly crossed behind him, as though he was seeking to warm his back. At any rate, that was the result, since the furnace door was open a few inches, and considerable heat found its way out.

"What do you want?" was the gruff demand of Matt.

"I want to know what this means!"

"What what means?"

"What are you waiting here so long for?"

"The down mail."

"Where is the mail?"

"I'll give you half a dollar if you'll tell me."

"Why don't you run on to the next turn-out?"

"Because I've been ordered to wait here."

"But you've got plenty of time. Pull out and put on all steam to the Gulch; and if the mail isn't there, drive through to the Junction."

"Those are your orders, are they?" asked Matt.

"You aint deaf; you heard me. Of course they are."

"Well," was the calm reply of the grim engineer, "if

you enjoy standing out there in the rain and making a fool of yourself, I don't know that I've any objection."

And without waiting to hear Montague's savage declaration that he would have the ill-mannered engineer discharged forthwith, Matt slowly climbed back to his seat, re-lit his brier-wood pipe, and resumed looking out at the gleaming wet rails in front, in the hope of catching the star-like glow of "Mercury's" headlight as she shot to view around the curve up the track.

The fireman chuckled to himself and said nothing. He, like everyone else, heartily disliked the young man, but he would not have dared to be so blunt with him. The little incident that had just taken place was another proof of the fact that the wealthiest and best-disciplined corporations always have some old and trusted employees in whose favor their iron rules must bend a little, and from whom a freedom of speech is tolerated that would not be permitted on the part of others.

Lloyd Montague Worthley, who prided himself on being considered the assistant superintendent of the Irondale and Ofalca Railroad, walked through the baggage-car in an ugly mood. He wondered why the "governor," as he called his father, allowed such insolence from the men, whose living depended on the wages they received from the company. He resolved that on the very hour when he secured authority he would discharge half the employees, and fill their places with men who knew how to treat their superiors.

As he entered the smoking-car, where his partners at cards were awaiting him, he saw Bob Lovell, the forward brakeman, sitting on a front seat. The youth, who was a year younger than himself, had been a school-mate of Montague several years before, and at one time they were intimate friends. But Montague, since his return from college, failed to recognize him as an acquaintance: there

was too great a difference between their social positions to permit anything of the kind.

"What are you doing here?" angrily demanded Montague, stopping short and looking down at the youth with a scowl.

Bob was startled by this rude address, but without moving he looked calmly up and answered:

"Just now I am sitting here."

"Why aint you out on the platform attending to your business?"

"Because I am inside waiting for some business to attend to."

"Well, get out of here; you have no right inside the car. We don't pay you for that."

"I never knew that *you* paid me for anything."

"Well, I order you to go outside on the platform."

By this time everyone in the smoker was looking at the couple, and showing much interest in the sharp interchange of words.

"You may give all the orders you please; I'll go outside when it's my duty, and not before."

Bob spoke in a low tone, as was his custom, but he was as angry as the youth who stood beside him fairly shouting his words.

"If you don't obey my orders I'll fling you out doors!"

"Nothing will suit me better than to have you try it," said Bob, deliberately rising to his feet, buttoning his coat, and taking his position directly in front of the sallow-faced youth.

"Let him alone, 'Tague," called one of his friends; "what are you bothering with the poor tramp for? He has to earn his bread and butter, and it isn't often he has a chance to sit in the presence of gentlemen."

"I certainly haven't it *now*," said Bob, with a flash of

his fine hazel eyes that was meant as a challenge for the speaker to interfere.

"You are right," replied young Worthley, glad of the excuse for withdrawing from a situation that was rapidly becoming embarrassing; "I will discharge him to-morrow! Let's finish the game."

CHAPTER II.

THE RUN TO THE JUNCTION.

MEANWHILE, time was passing, and Matt Fields began to feel anxious about the down mail. Had the train approached at the same speed with which the "Hercules" traveled, it ought to have been in sight long before; but the minutes were going, and the eyes of the fireman and engineer, as they peered out through the glass in front, saw nothing but the slanting columns of fine rain and the gleam of the wet rails, lit up by the glow of the headlight, until they vanished in the gloom, beyond which the keenest vision could not pierce the Egyptian darkness.

The "Hercules" began blowing off again, making conversation difficult. Matt had oiled every part of the ponderous machinery that possibly needed it, had found, by placing his hand on different parts of the gearing, that it was not growing hot, and in fact had done everything necessary for the spin to the Junction, where another halt would be made, and an opportunity given to learn whether the iron horse was prepared for the long run to Ofalca.

Matt glanced across at his fireman, Heff Putnam, who was perched on the box looking at him. As their eyes met, the engineer shook his head, the gesture saying as plainly as words:

"Something is wrong."

Just then the blow-off ceased, and all became silent again.

“I’m afraid the ‘Mercury’ has had an accident——”

“*There she comes!*”

At that instant the headlight of the other engine flashed into sight, like a meteor that suddenly bursts to view from the depths of space, and the increasing rumble of the approaching train struck the ear. Old “Mercury” was all right, even though belated.

She was coming fast. The switch was properly set, and the engineer, who had slackened a little, until he assured himself that such was the case, twitched the lever slightly, and the iron horse responded as does the thoroughbred to the touch of the spur. As the engine shot past, the engineer waved his hand to Matt, who had barely time to lean over and respond, when the other rattled over the switch and was far down the road.

Bob Lovell was already running along the turn-out in front of the “Hercules,” which slowly followed him to the switch. In a twinkling the lever was thrown over, and the train began moving out on the main track. Bob waited until the last car was past, when he flung back the switch lever, locked it in place, swung his lantern to the engineer, who was looking back from the side of his cab to make sure he didn’t leave the best brakeman he ever had behind, and, leaping on the rear platform, he walked hastily through to his place in the forward part of the car.

Bob’s post was on the platform when the train was in motion, though it was the universal practice for each of the two brakemen to stand inside, looking through the window of the front door, and ready to dash out the instant needed. The old rule requiring them never to leave the platform while the train was moving had been a dead letter ever since it was made. Bob, however, deemed it best to obey it strictly that evening. He was fully prepared for inclement weather, and he knew that Montague Worthley would never forgive the sharp

words he had said to him, but would seize the slightest pretext for reporting him at headquarters, and demanding his discharge.

Accordingly, he took his place on the platform, where he bravely faced the driving rain as the train sped onward in the tempestuous darkness, while young Worthley and his friends smoked their cigarettes and played euchre.

"I can't think what it was that made the mail so late," mused Matt Fields, as he drew back the cut-off (thereby shortening the distance for which the steam follows the cylinder), so as to increase the pace of "Hercules"; "but I'm afeared the track aint right, and like enough something is the matter with the bridges. Howsomever, if that's the case, Sam would have given me the signal as he went by."

It was only seven miles to the Little Gypsy, which was the first trestle to be crossed. There was another before reaching the Junction, and a third beyond that. These were generally called bridges, though all were wooden trestle-works, apparently quite strong, for they had withstood many a torrent and fierce overflow.

Matt Field slowed up as he rounded the curve, and approached the Little Gypsy with great caution. Ordinarily the rails were forty feet above the winding streamlet below, but when he came down the road that morning he observed the muddy torrent was running like a raceway, and was within twenty feet of the top; and it must have risen considerably since then.

The keen eyes which had peered over the road-bed so often in quest of danger, scrutinized the gleaming rails as they slowly came to view. Not content with looking through the glass in front, against which the myriad rain-drops were beating, Matt slid back the window at his side, and, regardless of the storm which pelted his shaggy head and face, he examined the rails and structure with the ut-

most care. So far as he could see, everything was right, and the next moment "Hercules" was slowly creeping out over the trestle-work, the engineer and fireman still minutely watching every foot that passed under their eyes, while the latter held himself ready to leap the instant the creak of timbers told him what was coming.

The glare of the headlight showed the turbid torrent, swelled to fifty times its usual size, sweeping and twisting swiftly through the framework, hardly a dozen feet below the rails, while the trees, stumps, and other *débris* that had caught against the upper side of the timbers threatened to carry away the structure bodily.

Matt drew a deep sigh when his engine cleared the bridge and struck the solid ground beyond. The "Hercules" was heavier than all the rest of the train, and if the bridge could bear its weight it would seem there was little to be feared. The lever was slightly jerked again, and the engine began snorting louder and faster, as it bounded off toward the Junction, twenty-odd miles distant.

Before half that distance could be passed, the structure spanning Wolf Gulch must be crossed. It was quite similar in size and strength to the one just left behind, and, though Matt was not without misgiving, he was hopeful that nothing would be found wrong there.

From what has been told, you have learned that the Irondale and Ofalca Railway was a single track, the usual provision for meeting trains being made by the system of turn-outs or sidings, which occurred at varying distances for the convenience not only of the passenger, but of freight and coal trains, a number of which passed over the road every day and night.

It seemed that Little Gypsy was no more than fairly left behind when the train approached Wolf Gulch. Here the same precautions were taken, and the dangerous spot was passed as safely as before. The road was now straight and

clear for nearly twenty miles to the Junction, and "Hercules" gave a taste of what she could do in the way of running.

Across level sweeps of country, through deep cuts and dismal stretches of forest, with the rain still falling, the iron horse thundered with a burst of speed so tremendous that the cars swayed from side to side, and even Montague Worthley glanced up with a startled expression from his game of cards and remarked more than once that they were traveling deuced fast. Bob Lovell, standing on the front platform of his car, placed his feet far apart and steadied himself without grasping anything for support, as he had learned to do from his experience on the road.

The "Hercules" left the siding more than half an hour behind time, but when the lights of the Junction twinkled through the misty darkness this had been reduced fully one-fourth—proof that part of the run had been made at the rate of nearly a mile a minute.

The Junction was so named because at that point the track was crossed at an obtuse angle by the I. & Q. road, as the Inverwick and Quitman line was termed. About twenty modest dwellings were grouped around the place, all of them occupied by the families of the employees of both roads.

The white light was swinging vigorously over the track as Matt caught sight of the familiar spot, and he steamed forward until he had crossed the other rails, when he came to a halt just beyond.

Here a supply of water was taken aboard and the engine oiled again, while the engineer and conductor compared their duplicate orders and consulted for a few minutes.

The purport of their instructions was that the track all the way to Ofalca was clear, and the run was to be made without unnecessary stops. A caution was added that great care should be used in crossing the trestle-work over

Dead Man's Hollow, since, although that was considered a model structure of its kind, the flood and freshet had subjected it to a great strain, and it was not impossible that some of the timbers were weakened.

It was well enough for the authorities at Ofalca to add their counsel to the conductor and engineer, but it was hardly necessary.

CHAPTER III.

"CLEAR THE TRACK."

FROM the Junction to Ofalca, the terminus of the railway, was a distance of sixty-five miles. The track deflected from the northeast to the southeast, the course, however, being mostly direct.

The country was wilder and more unsettled than to the westward, but in the main it was level, and not far from midway the road spanned Dead Man's Hollow by means of a trestle-work fifty feet high and fully double that in length. This was the last structure of the kind to be encountered, and, in the event of passing it safely, Matt Fields was confident of steaming into Ofalca less than half an hour behind time.

Had anyone been watching the engineer as the "Hercules" rapidly increased her pace after pulling out from the Junction, he would have noticed that he was not only scanning the rails which swept under the wheels of the engine, but was continually glancing ahead and to one side of the track as though in quest of something disconnected with it.

Heff Putnam paid little heed to his chief, for he had flung open the furnace door and was shoveling coal into the flaming maw, which devoured it with fierce rapidity. The crimson glow from the blazing interior struck the pile of tumbling coal in the tender, and gleamed again to the

door of the baggage-car just beyond with a power that showed the slanting columns of rain as they pattered against it. The illumination so filled the cab that the massive figure of the engineer was seen as plainly as if the sun was in the sky, but he did not look down at his assistant, who was only engaged in that which had occupied him many times since starting, and which he understood too well to need any suggestion.

Sitting thus, with his left hand resting on the polished lever, the elbow of the engineer was supported on the slide along which the window at his side passed back and forth, his small cap was drawn down until the front piece was just over his eyes, which darted back and forth with an alertness that could not have been surpassed.

The train was thundering through a sparsely-settled country, as was shown by the occasional glimpses of houses, whose lights were shining and could be seen from the engine.

All at once the grizzled face of Matt Fields was lit up with a smile, and a happy glow shone in his dark eyes. The light for which he was looking suddenly appeared on his right, and only a short distance from the railway.

That gleam came from his own home. There dwelt his loved wife and young Jack, a toddler only four years old, but the picture of his brave father and his pretty, demure mother. Every forenoon, when the "Hercules" thundered past, young Jack was standing on the porch or was held in the arms of his mother, and the two waved their loving salutes to the happy husband and father, who responded with a long blast from his steam whistle, which said plainly:

"I'm well, and am right glad to see you. Good-by!"

Young Jack was regularly on the watch at night, unless the Express was so late that the little fellow could not keep awake. Then the mother appeared alone and waved

her hand at her husband, whom she loved with an affection surpassing the power of words to describe.

It was past nine o'clock, and the engineer was doubtful whether he should see his boy, but he had no misgivings concerning the mother. *She* would be there.

The engine had not yet reached a point opposite the house when the door swung inward, and the small porch was flooded with light from the lamp within. Against this yellow background the comely figure of the woman was drawn as if in ink. Matt's hand left the lever, and reaching forward grasped the oblong ring which controlled the whistle. He did not remove his gaze while making this movement, but continued looking fixedly at that dear form in the door of his own house.

Jack was there !

The chubby fellow was in his mother's arms, and the right hand, which removed Lis cap, swung it vigorously in front of his own and his parent's face, while the mother was waving her delicate hand in less boisterous salutation.

Immediately the whistle of "Hercules" rang out in the night with a shrill, ear-splitting fierceness, which penetrated miles in every direction. The signal ended with an odd succession of blasts, without any meaning except to the ears for which they were intended. They constituted the special salutation for Master Jack Fields, who, as the father gazed back through the stormy night, was still seen in his mother's arms, waving his salute to his parent, whose occupation he meant to follow just as soon as he grew big enough to be of any use on the engine.

"God bless my little Jack!" murmured the engineer, dashing his hand across his eyes. "What would become of me if I should lose either of you? Mary is the best wife that any scamp like me ever had, and as for Jack! Well, they don't find any better stock outside of Paradise.

If anything should happen to Jack, Mary and I would never hold up our heads again.

“And suppose something should happen to me,” he added a minute later with an odd, strange feeling in his heart. “I wonder if either of them could feel as bad as I would at their loss. Yes; I’m sure they would, for they love me just as much as they can, and that’s the way I feel toward them. I wish,” and a heavy sigh escaped him, “that this run was over. I can’t help feeling there’s going to be trouble before we see Ofalca. Heaven help Mary and Jack if Matt Fields never comes back to them.”

It had been his intention to put “Hercules” through her paces and regain much of the time that had been lost, but the misgiving of which I have spoken caused him to change his mind. Since it was impossible to make up all the time, there was not much inducement to strive to regain any portion of it. There were circumstances under which the risk in running rapidly was no greater, if not actually less, than when steaming along at half speed, but the present, in the judgment of the engineer, was not one of those occasions. It was rather a time to feel his way.

It struck Matt that he was now dashing over a portion of the road where he had never encountered any accident, and he was striving to gather some consolation from the fact, when his keen vision suddenly apprised him that there was something on the rails in front that had no business there!

The instant he made the discovery, he closed the throttle and gave the little lever near it a twist, which turned it quarter of the way round. This acted with full force on the air brake, and instantly every wheel under the cars was gripped so powerfully that it ceased to revolve, and the train slid forward like a huge sleigh over the snow, to the music of the shrieking whistle.

The greatest resistance to the forward motion of a train

is not when the wheels are sliding without turning, but when, as may be said, they are on the verge of ceasing to revolve. Matt Fields lightened the pressure slightly, with the purpose of more strongly checking his forward progress, but the next instant he released the brakes. It was too late to stop the train, and instead of trying to do so, he opened the throttle again, "Hercules" making such a leap forward that every passenger felt the shock. Her puffs rang out on the night air, like the shuddering lower notes of an organ, and she seemed not only to recover her former pace, but to increase it with every revolution of the immense driving wheels.

It was a strange sight that had caught the eye of the engineer. A large bull, that ought to have been at home at that hour, had wandered off, and with that strange fatality which seems to govern dumb animals at such times, made his way to the railroad track. Climbing up the slight embankment, he seemed to conclude that no better place could be found for a promenade than the space between the rails.

He was a bumptious fellow, who was walking leisurely in the rain and darkness, wishing that some person or animal would appear in his path, that he might have the pleasure of tossing him to an indefinite distance, as he had done so many times, when the rumbling, puffing noise behind him caused him to turn his head to learn what it meant.

Ah, ha! There it was!

To the bull it must have seemed that some monster with one enormous eye was trying to sneak up behind him, and deliver a treacherous blow. Nothing could have suited the animal better, and at the moment the whistle sent out its resounding blast the beast whirled about, doing so with such eager promptness that it looked as if he leaped up and faced around while in the air.

He began dancing up and down, flirting his tail and nodding his lowered head as a challenge to his enemy to come on if he dared. It was at this juncture, when Matt Fields understood the meaning of the bull's actions, and knew that he could not fully check his engine, that he removed the brakes, and put on all steam.

It was his theory that, when such a meeting is inevitable, it is best to strike the object at a high rate of speed. The momentum of the engine being greater, the consequences are less dangerous to it, though more disastrous to the fool between the rails.

But Matt never saw a horse or cow with head turned toward or from the engine that he was not alarmed. Twice he had had his engine derailed by the animal doubling under the pilot, whereas when one of them stood broadside on, it was easy to knock it out of time without the least peril to the train.

The bull was still seesawing and impatient for the shock when it came.

No one in the cars was conscious of any obstruction or jar, but there must have been a single instant of amazement to the bull, when it flashed upon him that he had made an error of judgment. After that came oblivion.

CHAPTER IV.

"DOWN BRAKES."

HAVING disposed of the slight impediment in her way, "Hercules" now shook herself together and steamed off for Ofalca, being a good many miles to the southeast. Matt Fields adhered to his resolution of proceeding cautiously, for an hour or two's difference in his arrival was not to be weighed against the safety of the passengers in the cars behind him.

He noticed, as his engine puffed steadily forward, that the rain had ceased falling, and a strong wind was rising. But the floods which had deluged the country must have inflicted great damage, and nothing was more likely than that there had been one or more washouts or derangements of the rails, against which the closest vigilance was required.

It was nearing ten o'clock when he found himself approaching Dead Man's Hollow, spanned by the last trestle-work which he was obliged to cross during this run. For nearly a mile before reaching the dangerous spot the road wound through a dismal stretch of woods, in which was not a single dwelling. The engineer had often remarked that if ever the I. & O. road was troubled by train robbers, that was the spot where they would hold up the cars ; but the country was developing rapidly, and inasmuch as nothing of the kind had occurred, all thoughts of such danger had been dismissed long before.

That the vigilance of the engineer was necessary was proved while steaming at a moderate pace through this patch of forest. Bob Lovell was still bravely holding his place on the front platform, where, since the fall of rain had ceased, it was less unpleasant, when the peculiar shuddering movement and the rapidly lessening motion of the cars proved that the brakes were applied and the train coming to a halt.

Leaning over from the platform, he observed that a tree lay across the rails, evidently flung there by the strong gale blowing. Matt easily brought the train to a halt within a few yards of the object, and he and his fireman sprang down and ran ahead.

Bob was at their heels, for this was a case in which his services were likely to be needed. The second brakeman and the conductor joined them, while the little party stood consulting for a minute or two as to the best method of getting the obstruction out of the way.

It was an elm, nearly a foot in diameter at the base, and was growing within ten feet of the rails when overturned by the wind. It lay directly across the track, and would have played the mischief with an engine striking it at a high rate of speed.

"We must do one of two things," said Bob Lovell, surveying the tree, as plainly revealed by the glare from the locomotive's headlight; "swing the trunk around, or chop it in two and roll it off."

Just then another party approached in the person of Montague Worthley, who was rapidly losing his temper over the fact that the Night Express, instead of making up lost time, was steadily falling behind.

He uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Why didn't you put on all steam and butt it off?" he demanded of Matt Fields.

"The chances were that it would have been the engine that was butted off instead of the tree."

Montague gave an indignant sniff.

"Some folks never learn anything."

"And others don't know anything to begin on," remarked Bob Lovell, who had not gotten over the curt treatment from the young man. "You ought to take charge of some train, and have it run ten miles according to your ideas. It would be the last of that train and all the passengers."

"I would be sorry for the passengers," said Matt, "but it would be a good thing for the world if the lunkhead running it should be squelched forever."

"Don't quarrel, gentlemen," remarked Twomey, the conductor, who stood in considerable awe of the son of the superintendent; "we are losing time. Let's take hold and see whether we can't swing the thing off the rails."

It is no small job to lift the upper portion of a goodly-sized tree, as the party found when they grasped the limbs

close to where they put out from the trunk. Their united strength hardly stirred it.

"Now, all together! You aint half lifting," said young Worthley, standing a few feet away and giving his orders as if he expected to have them obeyed.

"No use," said Matt Fields, straightening up with a sigh; "we can't do anything unless *you* give us help."

The young man accepted this as an honest tribute and remarked, "I was the strongest man in my class at Harvard, and I can teach you something in the way of lifting."

Instead of taking hold of the limb near the trunk, Montague seized it a couple of yards away. The branch, however, was so large and stiff that this would have been effective enough, had he possessed any amount of strength.

Possibly there was something inspiring in the example of the dude buckling down to work, or, as was more likely, the others lifting together. Be that as it may, the trunk was raised several inches and swung fully a foot to the right, the bushy top sweeping the ground like some immense brush.

"I told you how to do it," remarked Worthley, believing that, but for his aid, the tree would have remained immovable. "Now, all ready again," he added, as if ashamed to have it thought he needed any rest while performing such a small task.

Once more the men bent to the work, and kept it up until the obstruction was swung round and almost parallel with and clear of the rails. Another hitch and it would be out of the way.

"Once more!" grunted Montague; "all together——"

The young man had been making a pretense of lifting up to that moment. Weaker than any of the others, he was too mean to do what he was capable of doing, until at the last moment he thought he could afford to make a "spurt."

Accordingly, he stooped low, and, placing his shoulder under the branch close to the trunk, put forth all the power of which he was capable, and lifted with might and main. But the limb was decayed and altogether unequal even to so slight a strain. It snapped off like a pipe stem, while Montague, wholly unprepared, sprawled headlong over the tree, striking the ground on the other side with a violence which caused his traveling cap to sink deep into the soft earth. His legs kicked the air for a minute, when he completed the somersault begun with so much vigor and flapped over on the broad of his back.

Everyone lifting at the tree let go and roared with laughter, for the sight was one of the most ridiculous that could be imagined. Montague was furiously angry, and, with a savage exclamation, he strode back to the train, leaving the others to remove the obstruction as best they could without his help.

This was soon done, and once more the train moved toward Dead Man's Hollow, barely a mile distant.

"Hercules" was puffing heavily, and the pace necessary before using the cut-off had not yet been reached, when Matt observed a man walking between the rails in front of him.

"I wonder whether this thing is going to keep up all the way," he muttered, as he pulled the whistle and held himself ready to shut off and apply the brakes.

But the individual belonged to that vast army of tramps who are the national pests of our country. He was walking toward the engine, and with wet, bedraggled garments, frowsy face, and half-starved body he preferred his lot to an honest, industrious life. Such nuisances as a rule are in no hurry to make away with themselves, and the one in front of "Hercules" stepped aside before the engineer applied the brakes, hardly glancing up at the train as it thundered past.

"I wonder whether that scamp has been up to any mischief," was the thought which had hardly time to form in the mind of the engineer, when, glancing along the two wet, gleaming rails, he caught sight of the trestle-work spanning Dead Man's Hollow.

Well aware that when the track was frosty or wet the brakes were less effective, the engineer shut off the steam and approached the structure at the most cautious pace possible.

The woods were on the right and left, sweeping downward as the hollow was approached, until the tops of many of the trees were below the rails. The light thrown out from the front of the engine showed that the small stream had become a raging torrent, and had spread so far beyond its natural boundaries that he caught the yellow gleam of the water as it twisted about the upper part of the swaying trunks.

"If we go down there it will be all day with us," thought Matt, who nevertheless did not bring his engine to a halt, though it seemed hardly moving as it crept out over the trestle-work.

He felt a distinct jar (for a locomotive is wonderfully susceptible to the least disturbance), at the moment of striking the structure, and for an instant he believed they were going down. He did not remove his hand from the throttle, however, but calmly awaited the final crash.

It did not come, and his heart beat high with hope as he found himself half-way across and everything right.

"We shall make it sure enough," he thought, his pulse still throbbing unusually fast, "and I shall consider this the luckiest trip I ever made—that is when it *is* made," he added, realizing that Ofalca was still a long distance away.

But already the iron pilot of "Hercules" overlaps the solid bank, and the small forward truck wheels are rolling

after it. The ponderous drivers sweep next, then rattles the tender, with the baggage car rumbling behind. The passenger cars are still out on the trestle, when Matt Fields gives the lever a slight jerk.

The loud puffs roll out from the smokestack faster and faster, the pace is rapidly rising, and the hearts of all are beating high with hope, when, without the least warning, the engine leaves the rails and plunges down the high embankment !

CHAPTER V.

THE FALL OF "HERCULES."

WHETHER the displacement of the rail was the work of the touselled tramp, or whether it was done by the great storm, can never be known ; but we will be charitable enough to lay it to the latter cause, since subsequent investigation pointed that way.

I have heard people express wonder that when a locomotive has fallen through a bridge, the engineer and fireman did not save themselves by leaping clear of the wreck and ruin ; but such persons do not know what an accident of that kind means. It comes with such awful suddenness that no man can help himself.

A veteran engineer, now sitting at my elbow, once went down forty feet into a tributary of the Delaware. It was on a dark, stormy night, just such as I am describing. He says everything was going smoothly, when there was a crash, and the same instant he found himself swimming in the rapidly flowing river.

Matt Fields' thoughts were on the bridge, as the one place where peril threatened. After crossing, he thrust his head out of the cab window and looked back to watch the train, as well as he could in the darkness, for the history of railway disasters proves that a heavy engine may pass

safely over a structure which is so weakened by the passage that it is liable to give way under a car that does not weigh a fourth as much.

The passenger cars were not yet over the trestle-work, when "Hercules" sheered to one side and plunged down the embankment among the trees. The engineer could not have helped himself, for he had not time. Besides, experience convinced him that in times of accident it is as safe to stay on the engine as to leap off, so Matt stayed.

Bob Lovell was the first to comprehend what had taken place. Looking out in the gloom, he saw the engine, followed by two of the cars, rolling over on its way down the bank. The sight, as partly revealed in the gloom, was frightful. Fortunately the furnace door of the engine remained shut until it came to rest on its side at the bottom of the slope. Then the door was torn open, and the live coals, pouring out, gave a fiery illumination that made everything plain to the terrified youth who, catching up the lantern at his side, leaped to the ground, shouting to the other brakeman and the conductor to follow him.

The slope was so steep that it required care to save himself from being precipitated to the bottom. He leaned so far backward that his shoulders almost touched the ground behind him. But in a twinkling he was at the bottom, where the "Hercules" lay wounded and helpless, blowing off steam, one piston rod dangling by her side, the forward truck torn entirely free and lying a dozen feet distant, one cylinder so shattered and twisted that the steam in the boiler was rapidly finding vent through it, while levers, oil cans, waste, coal, shovels, raking tools, steam chest, whistle, bell, connecting rods, ax, tools, smokestack, and all the varied parts which go to make that marvelous piece of mechanism called the locomotive, were scattered and mixed with each other in what seemed inextricable confusion.

But Bob Lovell cared nothing for all these ; the fearful question with him was the fate of Matt Fields and Heff Putnam, the engineer and fireman. Were they killed, badly hurt, or had they escaped ? And what of the passengers in the two fallen cars ?

As he reached the prostrate and wrecked monster, he saw nothing of his friends ; but by the light from the scattered and blazing coals, he finally caught sight of Matt near the front of the engine, where he was either too much hurt to help himself or was pinned fast under the wreck.

The steam was escaping through so many avenues that it quickly spent itself, and by the time Bob could reach the side of the engineer he was able to make himself heard without shouting. Holding his lantern to his face, he saw that it was pale ; but the eyes were open and something like a grim smile lit up the whiskered countenance. Before the frightened brakeman could give expression to his feelings, the engineer said in his usual firm voice :

“ Hello, Bob, is that you ? ”

“ Yes, Matt ! Thank Heaven you're alive ! what can I do for you ? ”

“ If you'll be kind enough to lift the front part of the engine off my leg, why, I'll feel sort of easier. If you can't do it alone get young Worthley to help you ! ”

No possibility of a man being badly hurt when he could jest in *that* style. Bob was relieved beyond expression, though by no means certain that his friend's life was not in danger. A hasty examination showed that his left leg was caught in such a position that it was probably broken, and it would be a difficult job to free it of the enormous load resting upon it.

“ But *Heff!* ” suddenly exclaimed the engineer ; “ what's become of *him?* Leave me alone ; I'll keep for a while. Hunt him up ; he must be in need of help. ”

The conductor and other brakeman were on the spot by

this time, having carefully felt their way through the plowed earth and the coal, which was still sliding down the slope after the engine.

"Here's poor Heff!" called the conductor, who like each of the brakemen carried his lantern. The other hastened thither and found him lying flat on his back, on the upper side of the embankment, as though he had composed himself to sleep on the ground, no portion of the locomotive being in contact with his body.

"I guess there's nothing much the matter with him," said the conductor, holding his light to his face.

"It couldn't be much worse," remarked Bob Lovell, stooping over and placing his hand on the clammy forehead. The touch seemed to revive the poor fellow, who, without stirring, opened his eyes and looked about with a faint wildness that showed he was slightly dazed. His eyes, naturally light gray in color, looked much darker.

"How do you feel, Heff?" asked Bob tenderly.

He was silent a moment and then swayed his head.

"I'm done for," he replied in a weak voice; "the engine rolled over me and I don't believe there's a whole bone in my body."

"It isn't as bad as that," said Bob with a cheeriness which it was hard to assume, for young as he was, something told him the man stretched on the ground in front of the three kneeling figures was mortally hurt.

By this time, the startled passengers were leaving the cars and carefully picking their way down the embankment. The "Hercules" had relieved itself entirely of the steam which caused such an uproar at first, and now lay still and motionless like some great beast that had succumbed to the harrying hunters at last. The two fallen cars, owing to their light weight, and the slow pace at which they had been moving, were but little damaged. Fortunately, too, they had been nearly empty, and the few

passengers they contained escaped with scratches and bruises.

Among the new arrivals were Montague Worthley and his friends, who had been in the third car, and one of them, Bertrand Harcourt, was a medical student. Each of these carried a flask of spirits, and one was applied to the mouth of the sufferer.

This quickly revived him, and his first inquiry was as to what had become of Matt. He was told he was somewhat hurt, and his friends were looking after him.

"I'm glad of that," said Heff; "bid him good-by for me."

"What's the use of talking that way?" demanded Twomey; "you are worth a dozen dead men yet."

Heff looked sideways at the medical student, who stood near, gazing down in his face with a fixed expression.

"I suppose you're a doctor," said Heff, "because I felt you examining my legs and arms and body; what do *you* say?"

"I do not think you can possibly survive."

The young gentleman instantly added in a lower voice to those immediately around: "I don't understand how he is alive at all; he is dreadfully crushed."

"This will be rough on mother and little Allie," said the fireman, his last allusion being to his pet sister; "I kissed them good-by this evening, and Allie made me promise to be very careful, for she said if anything went wrong with me she would die. I'm more sorry for her and mother than I am for myself."

There was not a dry eye among the bystanders. The conductor was so oppressed that he walked to where the brave-hearted engineer lay, his chief anxiety being to learn how his fireman was getting along.

"Can nothing be done for him?" asked Bob Lovell of the young man who had administered the spirits to the sufferer.

The medical gentleman shook his head.

"He can't last much longer. There's no way of removing him, and, if there was, he wouldn't live to be carried half a mile. He is growing weaker every minute."

Kneeling beside him, the young man gave him another swallow of the fiery stuff, while Bob Lovell, on the other side, took his hand in his own and asked :

"Tell me something, Heff, that you want me to do."

"Tell mother and Allie that my last thoughts were of them ; kiss Allie for me and tell her not to forget big brother Heff ; God bless her ! She couldn't forget me if she tried, and mother's prayers have followed me night and day. Bob, do you know how to pray ?"

"I pray every morning and evening."

"Pray for me—will you ?"

It was a strange sight as, at the bottom of the slope, with the night wind moaning among the trees, amid the *débris* of the wrecked locomotive, the silent figures standing round, dimly shown by the lanterns held in several hands, Bob Lovell kneeled on the wet earth and offered his prayer for the soul that was fluttering on the verge. Every heart was touched by the sorrowful, earnest petition, and they saw, when it was finished and the lantern was held over the white face, that the sufferer was dead.

The loving, widowed mother and the sweet Allie should feel the rugged arms of Heff clasped about their necks, and his warm kisses pressed against their cheeks, nevermore.

CHAPTER VI.

A GOOD SAMARITAN.

THE duty having been done to the dead, so far as it could be done for the time, the thoughts of all turned to the living.

Poor Matt Fields was still fast under the prostrate engine, and it was uncertain whether he was not injured more seriously than he himself believed. Not a passenger, except the few females, was left in the cars, but all gathered around the brave fellow, who bore his suffering with such fortitude as to compel the admiration of everyone.

He had made several efforts to work himself free, but the pain was so excruciating that he was obliged to cease, and the medical student, who examined the limb as well as he could, assured him it was badly broken beyond all question.

Montague Worthley was so awed by what he had seen and still saw that for once he was dumb, and left everything to those who were so much better qualified to do the best that could be done.

"It seems to me," remarked one of the passengers, "that with so many of us we ought to be able to lift the locomotive enough to allow his leg to be drawn from beneath."

"It might be possible," replied the conductor, "if we could apply our united strength to advantage, but not a quarter of us can get hold of the engine, and such a small number might as well try to tip over a mountain."

"Have you such a thing as a jackscrew?"

"There was an excellent one in the cab, but the lever was broken while the engine was turning somersaults down the bank, and it is useless."

"But we can place planking here, and by putting a num-

ber of strong saplings in the best position, we ought to be able to get enough leverage to do something."

"I have been thinking of that," said the official, who was in much distress over the inability to do anything, "but the prospect is poor—hello! what now, Bob?"

The question was addressed to Bob Lovell, who approached with a shovel that had been taken from the baggage car.

"He's very kind," observed Matt, who had borrowed a pipe from one of the crowd, and was calmly smoking it, "he's going to dig my grave for me."

"Better than that, I hope, Matt," was the cheery response of the sturdy youth, who had a defined plan of his own; "now, if you folks will hold the lanterns to give me all the light you can, I think something will be accomplished."

"It's about time," growled the passenger who had just been speaking, and who chafed at the sight of a strong man held a helpless prisoner when so many sturdy persons stood around him.

To the astonishment of the spectators Bob began digging directly beneath the imprisoned limb. The engine, resting on the whole length of its side, was dependent on no particular spot of earth for its support. His theory was that if an excavation was made of comparatively narrow width, at any point beneath the side lying on the ground, the mass of iron would retain its position.

You will see, therefore, that his plan was to make an opening under the imprisoned limb of Matt Fields, into which it would sink, while the locomotive remained motionless.

When the plan became clear to the rest, a general expression of surprise followed that it was not thought of before, for nothing could have been simpler.

Bob Lovell plied the shovel with vigor. The long rain

had so softened the ground that the digging was easy, and he made good progress.

"Can you feel any difference?" asked Twomey, who fancied he saw a peculiar expression on the face of the engineer.

"Yes—I begin to feel queer—I wonder——"

The pipe dropped from the mouth of the sufferer, and his head rolled back without sign of life.

"He's dead!" was the exclamation that escaped several lips.

"No," said Harcourt, the medical young man; "he has only fainted; that is because his limb has been relieved of the fearful pressure; the sudden restoration of his impeded circulation has overcome him. He will rally in a few minutes."

The gentleman was right. A little water sprinkled in Matt's face, and a swallow of spirits forced between his lips, brought him quickly to himself again.

Bob Lovell had stopped in affright when his friend fainted, not understanding what it meant, but on hearing the words of Harcourt, he renewed his digging more vigorously than before. He was still at it, when Matt recovered, and made a movement which shifted the position of the imprisoned leg.

"It's all right," he called out, "but I'm afraid to fool with it; handle me carefully."

No fear that that would not be done. He was drawn gently from beneath the mountainous weight that had held him captive so long, and the young physician examined the limb, which was found to be broken in two places.

The task of setting a compound fracture was more than the youth, who had not yet gained his diploma, dare undertake. He agreed to stay by the sufferer until removed to some point where he could receive proper surgical attention.

But another difficulty confronted them. How could he be carried to such a point?

They were in the wood, it was near midnight, and, so far as they knew, there was no house within miles.

"I'll start down the road toward Ofalca," said Bob Lovell, "and travel till I find help."

"But you may have to travel a week," suggested the alarmed passenger, who had shown such interest in the proceedings from the first.

"It can't be as bad as that," replied Bob; "I'll be sure to meet a train if I go far enough, and there's a station not more than a dozen miles distant."

"There's a turn-out only two or three miles away," said Matt Fields who, thanks to his many friends, had secured quite a comfortable posture on the ground; "I shouldn't be surprised if you found the up freight there."

"Well, you won't see me back again till I find *something*," replied Bob who, with lantern in hand, began climbing the embankment slanting to the southeast, so as to gain what he could.

The lantern was seen twinkling and swinging back and forth, as he ascended rapidly, though somewhat unsteadily, until at last he reached the track above. His figure could not be discerned in the gloom, except as his moving knees were shown in the reflection of his own light; and a few minutes later he vanished from sight.

As he did so, much praise was uttered concerning him, for it will be admitted that he had earned it by his quick wit and his promptness in helping the sufferers. Then, too, his act in kneeling at the side of the dying fireman, and sending up a prayer in his behalf, touched a chord in almost every heart.

There were scoffers in that crowd, as, alas, there seem to be in all such assemblages, but mankind respects the one who has the courage of his convictions; and there were

courage, manliness, and sincerity in the appeal to heaven at such a time and under such circumstances.

Matt Fields now inquired of the conductor whether he had sent back anyone to warn the train that might be following them. To his dismay, Twomey, in the excitement of the moment, had forgotten all about it. He ordered the other brakeman, who ought also to have remembered it, to attend to that duty without another moment's delay.

The frightened fellow lost no time in obeying. The cars still rested on the trestle-work, and he felt some misgiving as he hurried through them and leaped down from the rear platform. But the structure seemed to be firm, and, since the storm had ceased for some time, it promised to withstand the pressure against it.

Some rods distant the brakeman stooped and fastened one of the well-known railroad torpedoes to the right rail; then, running some distance further, he fastened a second to the left rail. Still further he set down his lantern between the tracks, with the red side turned toward the Junction. An examination of the wick showed that it was likely to burn for several hours, but if it should go out the torpedoes were left, and it was impossible to believe that any engineer would fail to hear their explosion as the wheels of his locomotive pressed them.

Feeling that he had done his duty, he now made haste to those at the bottom of Dead Man's Hollow, for, though there was no prospect of being able to raise a hand in the way of help, yet there is a fascination in such gatherings which many people find it hard to resist.

Meanwhile Bob Lovell was making good time up the track in the direction of Ofalca, which was more than thirty miles distant.

"If there is no train on the siding," he reflected, "I have got a good dozen miles to travel to reach the telegraph, and then it will take considerable time before help can be

brought to the spot. It's lucky there are no trestle-works or shaky bridges for me to creep over."

The thought had hardly been formed, when the sound of running water struck his ear. He was so familiar with the road that he knew it was not crossed by any stream at that point. He paused and held his lantern over his head, but the circle of light was too small to discern anything that explained the sound, which came from some point ahead.

A few paces further, however, and he saw it. The torrent of water was rushing under the ties, which retained their places and looked as strong as ever.

The embankment on which the rails rested at this point was only a few feet above the surrounding country which, like that in the neighborhood of Dead Man's Hollow, was quite thickly wooded. In some way the water accumulating on one side had eaten through the earth, forming a cut a half dozen feet in width, which was spanned by the ties on which the rails rested.

It looked, indeed, as if the order of things had been reversed, and that instead of the ties supporting the steel rails, the latter were holding the ties in place over the muddy torrent below. The ends of the rails resting on the solid earth, their own strength was sufficient to sustain them after the earth was washed from beneath the middle.

They looked, as I have said, as strong as ever; but suppose a locomotive should trust itself to them!

Bob Lovell shuddered at the thought.

He reflected that no train could approach from the west, while he would be able to signal any one from the other direction. So he carefully picked his way across the narrow break and hastened over the ties in the direction of the turn-out, where he hoped to find a freight train waiting for the passage of the express.

It seemed as if Bob was in luck that night, for he had gone only a short distance further when a small red light

broke upon his sight. He recognized it as the red light on the rear of the caboose of a freight train.

"That's lucky!" he exclaimed, breaking into a run which speedily brought him to the car, where the conductor and a couple of brakemen were impatiently awaiting the passing of the Night Express, which would give them the liberty to resume their sluggish progress toward Ofalca.

Bob's arrival and story, as may be supposed, created a sensation. It was decided that the freight engine should be detached and sent back to Dead Man's Hollow, to draw the passenger train to Ofalca. The accident had deranged everything on the road, but as soon as the first telegraph station was reached, communication would be opened with headquarters at Ofalca, and the business speedily adjusted.

The conductor walked with Bob to the engine at the head of the train, where the situation was explained to the engineer. Since it was necessary to make temporary repairs of the break a short distance back, one of the brakemen joined Bob on the engine, which began slowly backing in the direction of the Hollow.

The run was a short one, and an inspection of the wash-out convinced the engineer that it could be strengthened sufficiently to answer their purposes. It was noticed that the flow of water was diminishing, and was likely to cease before morning. With a number of heavy timbers and braces, a rude framework was soon put in form under the rails, and when the locomotive passed over there was no sign of yielding.

There was reason now to believe the way was clear for the few remaining miles, but an engine, when moving backward, is peculiarly liable to be derailed by any kind of obstruction, and, since the only light consisted of a couple of lanterns held by Bob and the other brakeman, the progress was cautious and deliberate.

The passengers and officials grouped around the wrecked "Hercules" had settled themselves for a tedious wait that was likely to last until daylight, when they were thrilled with pleasure by the long, resounding blast of a steam whistle from the direction of Ofalca.

"That's the freight!" said Matt Fields, who had been carried up the embankment and made as comfortable as possible on the cushions in the smoking car; "I can't make any mistake about *that* whistle."

Sure enough, the swinging lanterns on the rear of the tender were seen a minute later, and the engine backed down with as much care as is shown by an elephant when stepping upon a treacherous bridge.

The plunge of "Hercules" from the track had been caused by a broken rail. Conductor Twomey had so improved the absence of Bob Lovell that the rail was replaced, though the utmost care was necessary to prevent its giving way under the heavy weight of the advancing engine.

But the tender was linked to the third car of the passenger train, and several screeches of the whistle warned all passengers to get aboard. A few minutes later the engine began moving toward Ofalca, drawing after it the Night Express and all its regular passengers, including the wounded Matt Fields and the remains of poor Heff Putnam.

The braces and planking under the washout were re-examined and readjusted, and the train passed over safely. Torpedoes were then placed on the rails at each side, though there was little probability of their being needed, and the engine struck a sharper pace. Since it was built for strength rather than speed, it was much slower than the "Hercules," but it was fast enough for all demands that night.

A brief halt was made for a conference with the conductor of the freight on the siding, after which the rear passenger car was attached to the forward one of the freight,

and just as it was growing light the combination train steamed into Ofalca, the eastern terminus of the I. & O. Railway.

CHAPTER VII.

AN OMINOUS SUMMONS.

I TRUST that by this time you feel some interest in my hero Bob Lovell, of whom I hope to relate more that will prove entertaining and profitable.

Bob's father was a well-to-do merchant in Ofalca, with a promising future before him at the time his only son was born. Three years later Meta, the sister of Bob, came into the household, bringing sunshine and gladness to the brother and the parents. These were the only children with which they were ever blessed, and they were a couple for which any father and mother would have been thankful.

Bob was one of the brightest and most popular boys that ever attended the Ofalca academy. He was a natural athlete, who never met his equal in running, leaping, swimming, rowing, playing ball, or, indeed, in any of the sports that are such a delight to all American youngsters.

He led his classmates in their studies, and but for his assistance Lloyd Montague Worthley, although a year older, would have fallen far behind in his classes. Indeed, he was not the only pupil whom Bob helped to maintain his place by the stealthy aid given at critical times. This practice, although a violation of the rules, was one for which a teacher would have been exceedingly harsh had he condemned the generous youth.

The father of Bob intended him for the legal profession, though his good mother had set her heart on his adopting the ministry as his calling. The lad was naturally of a religious bent of mind and would have preferred the latter profession; but while the question was in abeyance, the

future was clouded, and both plans destroyed, by a calamity which swept away every dollar of Mr. Lovell's fortune. The shock was more than the gentleman could bear, and a few weeks later he died, leaving his family unprovided for.

Bob at that time was nearly seventeen years of age, and was prepared to enter the freshman class in Yale ; for, as you have been told, he was unusually forward in his studies, and the principal of the academy had taken the utmost pains with him.

A college education was among the impossibilities. Had he been alone in the world, he could have secured aid enough to see him through ; but he had a mother and sister to look after, and he must obtain work without delay.

Such a bright fellow needed not to search long in this country for a situation. He could have entered the Ofalca Bank and had his choice of half a dozen stores ; but he declined them all.

It was when Bob was a little fellow, and his brain was overrunning with desire for knowledge, that the first locomotive which entered his native town steamed into the new station, decked with flags and streamers, loaded down with directors and reporters, and drawing a special car containing the guests of the road, which was opened that day from Irondale, over a hundred miles distant.

The impression made on little Bob Lovell by the strange sight was never effaced. Despite the attractions of the learned professions, there was a charm for him in the railway business which surpassed them all. He felt that his highest happiness would be to stand in the cab of one of those beautiful engines and guide it as it thundered across the country, drawing a train of cars behind it.

He did not expect to become a railroad man until after the wrecking of his father's fortune, followed so soon by

the death of his beloved parent. He resolved then to carry out the desire that had been present with him for years.

His mother's scruples were soon overcome, though the accounts of several railway accidents caused the good woman no little distress and misgiving, and Bob walked straight to the office of Cavarly Worthley, who at that time was superintendent of the Ofalca Division, comprehending the sixty-five miles of line to the eastward of the Junction.

The stern railway official adjusted his glasses and looked over the lad from head to foot.

"You appear to be a bright young man," said he, plainly pleased with the handsome, intelligent face and sturdy frame; "what situation would you like?"

"I want to become an engineer."

"That is a responsible post; how old are you?"

"I will be seventeen next month."

"Too young! too young!" said the superintendent, with a shake of the head; "eighteen is the youngest age at which we take firemen."

"I was afraid I was not old enough," said the disappointed lad, "but maybe there is some other place I can fill for a year or more."

"How would you like to enter my office?"

"I am willing to do anything by which I can earn wages and help me on the road to an engineer's situation."

"There is no vacancy at present, and you may not know that we have a score of applications for every possible opening that can occur in the next five years. However, I will take your name and your references, and possibly you may hear from me. I like your appearance, though it doesn't do to rely altogether on appearances."

This was the best Bob could do, and he withdrew disappointed, for he had been quite hopeful of securing employment at once.

To his astonishment, on the second day, just as he had decided to accept a place in a wholesale store, he received a note from the superintendent requesting him to call at his office.

Needless to say Bob was on hand within the following half-hour.

"I have made inquiries concerning you," said the official, after greeting him, "and the result is so satisfactory that I have decided to break one of my own rules."

He paused with an odd smile and looked fixedly through his glasses at the lad, as if inviting him to guess his meaning. But Bob held his peace, wondering what was coming.

"There is need of a brakeman on the Night Express, since one of ours is about to enter the employ of the I. & Q. Strict justice would require that a freight brakeman should be advanced to the situation, but I have decided to offer it to you."

Bob's face flushed with pleasure, for he felt that this was beginning high up the ladder he hoped to climb. Before he could express his thanks, the superintendent, who seemed to be in a gracious mood that day, leaned back in his chair, and, twirling his glasses with one hand, continued :

"The duties of a brakeman on a passenger train are responsible, but less onerous than formerly. We call them brakemen, but there is little of that kind of work to do. You are aware that the old-fashioned hand brake has been superseded by the air brake, which is operated by the engineer. Still, we preserve the old machinery, since the air brake is subject to accident. You are to attend to the stoves and the ventilation, to call out the names of the stations, see that the proper signals are displayed, hold yourself in readiness to obey the orders of the conductor, and, in short, concentrate your full interest on the train. I have a card of printed instructions which I will hand you, and Conductor Twomey will give you any other information

you may need. The pay will be fifty dollars a month, but twenty-five will be deducted from the first month for the uniform with which you must be provided. Will you honor the I. & O. by accepting its proposition ? ”

“ I do so gladly,” replied the grateful Bob ; “ when shall I report ? ”

“ To-morrow ; Baumann, whose place you take, does not quit until the end of the week. I wish you to run over the road every day until then, in order, with his help, to familiarize yourself with your duties. It is not necessary that I should ask you whether you ever touch liquor, and I have been told that you never smoke or chew tobacco. Am I correctly informed ? ”

“ You are, sir.”

“ That is to your credit. You must bear in mind that the discipline on our road is strict, and that I have no patience with slovenly work, forgetfulness, or carelessness. The moment I find that you are afflicted with any of those curses I shall discharge you. That’s all ; good-day ! ”

Thus it was that Bob Lovell became a brakeman on the I. & O. road at an exceptionally early age. It doesn’t require a very high order of intellect to master the rudiments of a brakeman’s calling, and a few weeks were sufficient for Bob to feel at home in the forward portion of the Night Express. A few months later, those who were acquainted with the youth pronounced him the best brakeman on the road. He was alert, active, powerful, good-tempered, intelligent, and willing to help any one.

But, singular as it may seem, those very qualities brought the first trouble to him. One day, when the rear brakeman was derelict, Bob, to save him from the consequences, left his own place and performed his duties. The president of the road happened to be on board, his presence unknown to all except the conductor, and saw the act. He suspended the other brakeman for a month, and warned Bob

never to do anything of the kind again under penalty of discharge.

The investigation into the Dead Man's Hollow disaster had been finished, the repairs were completed, Matt Fields was removed to his home, where he was doing well, the wrecked "Hercules" and the fallen cars were in process of being dragged up the bank for removal to the repair shop, and the business of the road was running smoothly again, when Bob Lovell, to his amazement, received a peremptory summons to appear at the superintendent's office.

Such summonses were ominous. Bob had known of three, each of which was followed by the discharge of the employee thus called into the presence of Mr. Worthley, who had lately become superintendent of the entire road, and was said to be more strict in his discipline than ever.

"I am afraid for you," said Twomey, the conductor, to whom Bob showed the official note; "the old gentleman has been shaking things up since the affair at the Hollow. Have you had any words with young Worthley?"

"Do you remember the little flurry in the train, that I told you about? The fellow provoked me beyond endurance."

"I heard Montague boasting this morning that he had fixed you. He said if it had not been that Matt was hurt he would be discharged too. I'm afraid it's all up, Bob."

With a heavy heart the young man made his way into the office of the superintendent, his misgiving deepened by the sight of young Worthley, who looked at him with a triumphant leer as he entered and took his seat in one of the chairs, where several were waiting their turn to see the all-powerful official of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company.

CHAPTER VIII.

FARMER HIRSHKIND.

YOUNG BOB LOVELL, as he sat in the outer office of the superintendent of the Irondale & Ofalca Railway Company, found that he had two companions. One of them was a contractor, and the other was a farmer who owned the bull that had been knocked into nothingness by the "Hercules" some nights before.

At the moment Bob entered and took his seat to await his turn, the contractor was beckoned to pass within by young Worthley, so that only the farmer was left to precede the youth. The latter found his situation embarrassing for several minutes, from the fact that Montague exerted himself to make it so.

He sat on a high stool behind a desk, the top of which was surrounded by a railing through which he could survey all who were waiting outside the enclosure. As Bob entered, the young man glanced at him with such a palpable sneer that the young brakeman's face flushed. But one of the golden rules he had learned from his parents was to hold his naturally quick temper in subjection at all times. He affected not to see the snub, but took his seat near the farmer.

He was sorry he had not brought a paper with him, with which to occupy himself while waiting, so as to avoid the sight of young Worthley. The latter held a handsome gold pen in his hand, with which he seemed to be writing some important document, but he found time every minute or two to indulge in a significant glance at Bob, which made the latter long to cuff his ears.

True the latter had the simple recourse of not looking at the upstart, but he was conscious of what the fellow was doing, even when his own eyes were turned away; and the

effort to avoid glancing at Worthley was so manifest that it could only add to the enjoyment of the latter.

Glad enough, therefore, was Bob when the farmer at his side turned abruptly to him and said :

“My name is Jacob Hirshkind, and I had a bull killed the other night by the kyars, and I’m going to make this blamed old company sweat for it.”

Bob smiled at the farmer’s earnestness. He was chewing tobacco vigorously, and the volleys which he aimed at the cuspidor as a rule overshot or went wide of the mark, and were scattered over the surrounding territory.

“Yes, sir,” he added, with another shot at the vessel, so blindly aimed that if it had gone a little higher it must have landed on Montague’s spotless shirt-front ; “that ’ere bull was a ginooine Durham, worth a hundred dollars, and dirt cheap at that.”

“I was on the train that struck him.”

“You war !” exclaimed the other, with a delighted start ; “then you’ll be a witness for me. I’ll make it right ; I’ll send you a peck of the finest Fall Pippins, and if you’ll stop at our house my wife Betsey will cook you all the doughnuts you can eat.”

“I am afraid I can’t be of much help,” said Bob, with a smile ; “I was brakeman, and therefore did not see the accident.”

“But then you knowed about it, and I reckon that’ll stand.”

“But, Mr. Hirshkind,” ventured the youth modestly, “don’t you think you were to blame for allowing the bull on the track ?”

“How was I to blame ? I didn’t give him permission. I didn’t know nothin’ ’bout it till next day, when I went out to hunt for him and found the poor fellow strowed all along the path for about half a mile. I thought a good deal of that ’ere bull.”

And the old gentleman drew the back of his hand across his eyes and wiped away several real tears.

"If you do not look upon yourself as blamable for the bad luck of the bull, how can you find fault with the company, which had nothing to do with bringing him there?"

Farmer Hirshkind flung one leg over the other knee, shoved his straw hat on the back of his head, ejected another volley, which spattered up against the desk behind which Montague was swinging his gold pen, and shaking his long forefinger in the face of Bob, clinched matters thus :

"Young man, when you get as old as me, you'll be able to see things as they be, without havin' 'em warped by your lack of judgment. The difference is this : the company is rich and I'm poor."

"Then you would recommend all the poor folks to drive their cattle on the tracks of the company, so as to have them killed, and *make* it pay for them?"

"I don't know but that would be a good idee," replied Farmer Hirshkind, with a backward flirt of his head and a compression of his thin lips.

"Suppose," continued Bob, "that your bull had thrown the train off the track——"

"I wish to gracious he had," interjected the husbandman, with much emphasis.

"And had destroyed considerable property, and killed several passengers—who, then, should have paid the damages?"

"The company, of course," was the triumphant reply ; "you see, there's where your lack of judgment comes in——"

At this moment the contractor walked briskly through the door communicating with the inner office. At the same time Montague Worthley stepped into his father's room and said :

“There’s an old hayseed out there waiting to get pay for his bull that tried to butt “Hercules” off the track the other night; and what do you suppose that young Lovell has been doing?”

“I am sure I have no idea, my son.”

“Urging him to sue the company for more damages than he thought of. He talked low, but I overheard every word. He insisted that you would be glad to pay him a hundred dollars instead of the fifty he meant to ask in the first place.”

“That is strange; send in the old gentleman.”

Montague stepped briskly back to the outer office, and, opening the gate, beckoned with his pen for Farmer Hirshkind to enter. The latter leaped up so quickly that he upset the chair in which he had been sitting, jerked on his hat, and stumbled over himself as he went, through the gate, like a diver plunging off the dock.

Superintendent Worthley was a good judge of human nature, and he knew how to handle such visitors, of whom he had quite a number. Rising from his chair, he shook the hand of Mr. Hirshkind warmly, asked after his family, showed much interest in the season’s crops, and expressed his pleasure not only in finding the outlook so favorable, but that they agreed perfectly in their view of the political situation.

By this time the caller discovered that the superintendent of the Irondale and Ofalca road was as fine a gentleman as he ever met; and when he handed him a pass good for himself or any member of his family over the road for a year, he was sure that the meanest thing he could possibly do would be to ask pay for the bull, which had no business to be on the tracks of the company.

The farmer rose to his feet to leave, and was standing hat in hand, when Mr. Worthley, in the blandest manner imaginable, said :

"Now, Mr. Hirshkind, since we are such good friends, I am sure you will do me a favor."

"There ain't anything I can do for yo', Major—I mean Jedge—that I won't do, b'gosh!"

"We had quite a serious accident on the road the other night; one of our best employees lost his life, and I have learned that just before that the engine narrowly escaped derailing through a bull of yours, that—of course without your knowledge; accidents will happen—got on the track. I shudder to think of what the consequences might have been. I want to ask you, as a particular favor, that you will take pains to see that no other animal of yours strays upon our tracks."

"I'm mighty sorry 'bout that, Colonel—I mean Professor—but I didn't know nothin' 'bout it; it was all the fault of my son Hezekiah, and when I git home I will tan his hide for him."

"I beg you, don't do that. I understand that Hezekiah is one of the brightest boys in school" (alas, that was the first time the superintendent had ever heard his name mentioned), "and it would be cruel to punish him for a slip of that kind. Jacob, you and I were once boys, and we haven't forgot it."

And Mr. Worthley winked at the farmer, who smiled almost to his ears, while his shoulders bobbed up and down with suppressed laughter.

"Hezekiah is a bright boy, though I'm his father that says it, and since you ax it I'll let up on him, lettin' him know that it's on *your* account that I do it. You'll like Hezekiah when you see him, Doctor, and I'm going to send him down to spend a week with you."

"I'll let you know as soon as Mrs. Worthley can make room for you," said the dismayed superintendent; "just now I believe they are house-cleaning, and things are up-

side down. By the way, Jacob, you were talking with the young gentleman in the outer office."

"Yas. Who is he?"

"He is one of our brakemen."

"He's mighty peart. He was tellin' me that when bulls git run over and smashed into kindlin' wood it was the fault of the owners."

"Ah!" murmured the surprised superintendent.

"Yes, and he said, too, that if folks should cause any accidents by their cattle runnin' loose, it was *their* place to pay damages. Jis to draw him out I took t'other side of the question, but, I tell you, he aint any fool."

"Did he suggest anything about your suing our company?"

"Not him; he stood up for you folks like a lawyer."

A light broke upon the superintendent, but he said nothing of what was passing in his mind. He shook hands warmly with his caller, who was so much delighted that he secretly determined that instead of sending his son Hezekiah to visit the superintendent, he and his wife would come down and stay a month with him.

CHAPTER IX.

AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW.

LEFT alone during the interview between the superintendent and farmer Hirshkind, Bob Lovell found himself again in the unpleasant company of young Montague Worthley. He adopted a system which, in one sense, turned the tables on that youth.

Instead of trying to avoid his gaze, Bob looked fixedly at him. Montague tried to stare him out of countenance, but failed. There was something in the steady look of those bright eyes which few persons could withstand, and

after a while Montague acted as though he was trying to get rid of the vast amount of work that had accumulated on his desk.

His gold pen scratched rapidly, and he did not raise his eyes for several minutes. Then he cast a furtive glance at the detested face, only to find Bob's gaze still centered on him with such a penetrating expression that he looked down and worked harder than ever.

By and by Mr. Hirshkind came rapidly out of the office, walking so fast in fact that he bumped against the gate before he could open it, and narrowly escaped carrying the structure off its hinges. But he finally got through, and with a flourishing farewell to Bob, who pleasantly returned the salutation, he hurried out of the building.

Bob expected to be summoned to the presence of the superintendent without delay, but the minutes passed and there came no sign from within.

"He must have someone else with him," was the conclusion of the youth, "though I have seen no one pass inside."

A soft step was heard, and the white head and gold spectacles of Mr. Worthley appeared from the inner office. He looked surprised at the sight of Bob sitting outside, and, addressing his son, inquired :

"Montague, why didn't you send the young man to me? I have been waiting for him some time."

"I told him you were ready," was the unblushing reply; "but he didn't seem to be in any hurry to talk with you."

"I have been waiting to be notified," remarked Bob, as with hat in hand he rose to his feet and followed the superintendent to his office, "but if your son spoke to me I certainly did not hear him."

"It's a small matter," remarked the official, motioning him to a seat and closing the door behind him.

"I have sent for you," added the gentleman, with a

grave face, "to inquire about certain reports that have reached me."

He paused, but Bob said nothing, because there was nothing to say until he knew whereof he was charged.

"Mr. Walbridge, the president, informed me some time ago that he was on the train when the rear brakeman inexcusably neglected his duty, and you assumed it for him."

"That is true," said Bob; "I did not think there was anything wrong in helping another."

"The act itself may have been commendable; but to help him, you deserted your own post and committed the wrong of which *he* was guilty. If you two only were concerned, no fault could be found, but suppose that at that moment an instant demand had arisen for your services; what then?"

"I considered that probability before I ran back, and saw that it could not arise."

"Accidentally it did not. You must understand that you have been given employment with only one object in view, that is, the interests of our company; *that* must outweigh everything else, and no greater mistake can be made than to think the demand of any friend or person has precedence."

Bob felt that the superintendent was speaking the truth. He had done wrong.

"Mr. Worthley, you have presented the matter in a light that never occurred to me before. I see my mistake; I acknowledge it, and beg your indulgence, promising that it shall never occur again."

"That matter will be dropped, then; but there are still graver charges against you. On the first of next month a new regulation respecting our brakemen goes into effect. It is one which has been adopted by the leading roads, and we have decided to give it a trial. You will be allowed to stand inside the car while running, but must keep your

place at the front door ; you must never take a seat while the cars are in motion, but be ready to assist the passengers on and off at each station, which you will call out. We can only be certain that you are ready to do that by knowing you are standing at the front door. Your other duties will be the same as now, and I need not refer to them. But at present the brakemen are strictly forbidden entering the cars, except in some emergency, while the train is in motion. To take a seat among the passengers is unpardonable ; I understand you have violated this rule."

"It is a mistake ; I have never done so."

"You haven't?" repeated the superintendent in astonishment.

"No, sir ; I have never done so."

"Explain the cause of the reproof which my son administered on the night of the accident at Dead Man's Gulch."

Bob wanted Montague Worthley to hear the words he was about to speak, and he was on the point of raising his voice somewhat, when a slight noise at the door told him the youth was playing the eavesdropper.

"While we were waiting at the siding for the down mail, and after I had made sure that the switches and everything was right, and while it was raining very hard, I took my seat in the smoker near the front door. Your son was playing cards with a party near, when they all became impatient, and he passed through to the front of the baggage car and ordered Fields, the engineer, to run through to the next station, in violation of the orders he had received. Matt refused, and he was then so angry that on his return he ordered me out of the car. As it was raining, and there was no possible call for my services, I refused."

"Did you attempt to strike him?"

"No, sir ; he threatened to throw me out of the car, and I was annoyed to such an extent that I invited him to try it."

“And when the train started?”

“I took my place on the front platform, and never left it until the accident.”

“And at the accident?”

“Well, I did all I could, which wasn’t much.”

“You didn’t advise the conductor to disregard any suggestion which my son might give?”

“No; I am not aware that he gave any suggestion.”

Mr. Worthley sat silent a minute, twirling his spectacles about his thumb—a practice to which he was addicted when revolving some question in his mind.

“Well,” said he, “I have to say that your version of that night is widely different from what I received from other sources.”

“Young Bertrand Harcourt, the medical student, formed one of the party who were playing cards, and must have seen and heard everything; I beg to refer you to him.”

The superintendent still twirled his glasses. Evidently he was thinking hard about something.

Pausing but a moment to reflect, Bob said: “Asking your permission, there is something I would like to say.”

Mr. Worthley glanced in his face, and nodded his head as an invitation for him to speak.

“I am quite sure that the source from which this information reaches you is one that is strongly prejudiced against me. I ask that hereafter accusations from that quarter shall not be fully accepted unless confirmed by other testimony.”

These were bold words to utter about a man’s only son, and Bob Lovell was in doubt whether or not he had made a mistake. The superintendent looked closely at the spectacles, which, after making a couple of flirts forward over his forefinger, reversed and flew backward. He seemed to bend all his energies to the accomplishment of this simple feat, whereas he was totally unaware what he was doing.

“Mr. Lovell,” said he, after a painful pause, “when I sent for you it was with the intention of suspending you for a month or discharging you altogether. I will say that I was inclined to discharge you, since I was urged to do so by—that is, by other parties, but I have decided to defer such action until after a fuller investigation. You may return to your duties for the present ; if I find you have misrepresented anything, your relations with the company will end at once ; but if you hear nothing from me between now and the first of the month, that will be the end of it. That is all ; good-day, sir.”

“Good-day,” replied Bob, rising to his feet. He stepped hastily to the door, knowing that Montague was listening, hoping to catch him in the compromising situation. But the youth was too quick, though Bob saw him hurrying back to his place at the desk.

As Bob passed outside the railing, he could not forbear stopping just beyond, where only a few inches separated him from his enemy. There, in a low voice, he muttered, “Montague, my boy, you missed fire that time !”

CHAPTER X.

THE TELEGRAM.

BOB LOVELL felt that the wisest course for him was to face the situation unflinchingly. Montague Worthley was mean, envious, and treacherous, and would do him all the injury he could. To defer to him would only make the sprig believe that Bob held him in fear.

“No ; I will be fair toward him,” the young brakeman said, in discussing the matter with his mother that afternoon.

He was off duty for the day and he spent it with his sister Meta, a lovely, brilliant girl only three years his

junior, as has been told, and his beloved parent, from whom he had few secrets.

Bob was one of those enviable youths who was in love with his mother, and such a lad can never go far astray. He had given the particulars of what took place in the office of the superintendent, and asked her counsel. She told him he had done right, with the possible exception of his parting words to Montague Worthley.

“Do your duty, Bob, and leave the rest to Providence ; it may be that he will soon reach a situation which will enable him to drive you out of their employ ; but you will not be long without a place. Your experience would make you valuable to the Inverwick and Quitman road.”

Bob assured his mother that he would do his best to follow her counsel, and shortly after he walked down to the shops to take a look at the shattered “Hercules,” which had been brought thither, and was already undergoing reconstruction.

As he looked at the battered wreck, he could not but wonder how it was possible to make it serviceable again.

“It seems like building a new engine,” he said to himself, “but I would be sorry to see ‘Hercules’ leave the road ; the dearest wish of my heart is that sometime I shall hold its throttle as the engineer—that is, when Matt is ready to turn it over to me.”

It was two months later to a day that the “Hercules,” burnished and agleam, moved out of the shops upon the turn-table, where her nose was pointed in the right direction, and, under the guidance of the master mechanic himself, she took a little spin up the road. On the return, the gentleman pronounced the engine better than before. In repairing the locomotive, as is sometimes the case, certain slight changes had been made by way of experiment, which, so far as could be judged, were of decided advantage. The question would be fully settled when the engine went on duty.

And on that same day Matt Fields came up the road on the accommodation train, and, with the use of a crutch, made his way down to the shops to give "Hercules" a trial. The engineer was in high spirits, and declared that he could walk without help, but the surgeon forbade him doing so for some weeks, through fear of injuring his leg.

The next morning the "Hercules" was hitched to the down morning express for the run to Irondale, one hundred and five miles distant. It will be remembered that the return was made in the evening, when the train was known as the Night Express. It left Irondale ten minutes late, but steamed in at the Junction on time to a minute. Thence to Ofalca the run of sixty-five miles was made, with the greatest ease, by the schedule.

"I could have done it in fifteen minutes less without straining her," said the proud Matt as he was helped off his engine; "but of course I didn't dare let her out."

An engineer always refers to his engine as of the feminine gender, no matter what name it bears.

"'Hercules' is as good as ever," remarked Bob Lovell, pleased to see the delight of his old friend.

"As good as ever! She's ten times better; she makes steam easier, her machinery works smoother, and there aint another engine on the road that in the way of running can hold a candle to her."

Bob unconsciously sighed. Would it ever be his lot to occupy the cab of that splendid piece of mechanism?

Two months had passed since the memorable interview with the superintendent in his office, and Bob had long since made up his mind that he would never hear anything more of it. What inquiries had been made by the official were unknown to him, though he afterward learned they were thorough, and that the whole truth was developed.

Young Bertrand Harcourt, the medical student, was a visitor to the house of the superintendent; and he was on

the best of terms with Montague ; but he was a different person from him, and, when the old gentleman questioned him, he told the truth, including the readiness Bob showed in extricating the engineer from his imprisonment beneath his engine. This was news to the superintendent, as indeed was the whole narrative, and it is safe to say that it modified his opinion of the young man, whom a short time before he had intended to discharge from the service of the company.

To Bob's astonishment, Conductor Twomey told him a few days later that Mr. Worthley wanted to see him for a few minutes before the train left the following morning.

"I don't think you need worry *this* time," added the conductor with a smile, for Bob was a favorite with him, as he was with all the employees of the road who knew him.

"I wonder what it can mean," mused the youth, making his way thither on a crisp, bracing morning in November. "I hope Montague isn't there. He has been away for a few weeks, so I haven't seen much of him."

His wish was gratified so far as the young worthy was concerned, for a gentlemanly clerk was at the desk, and, having given his name to the superintendent, courteously opened the door and invited him to step inside.

"I am busy this morning," said the officer, after greeting him, "so we'll come to the point at once. I understand you would like to become an engineer."

"Why, I haven't told any one *that*," said the surprised Bob.

"You remarked something of the kind when you first applied to me, some months ago. Then Matt Fields tells me you want to go into service with him on the 'Hercules.'"

"I certainly never said that to *him*."

"Not in words, but Matt and Mr. Twomey also inform me that they have read the expression of your face many a

time when you were studying the points of that engine. Well, without beating about the bush, I will say to you that, although you are still under the required age, you may begin service next Munday as fireman on the 'Hercules.' The present fireman will be given a coal engine at that time, and I have already engaged a brakeman to take your place. That is all ; good-day."

"But," said Bob, rising to his feet, "you must allow me to thank you. I can only say that you shall never regret the confidence you have reposed in me."

Indeed, Bob felt so happy as he emerged from the superintendent's office that I am not sure he would not have gone up to Montague, had he been present, and offered his hand.

So Bob Lovell became fireman on the "Hercules." It added a slight pang to the misgiving of his mother, for she could not forget what had befallen poor Hefferd Putnam, his predecessor, and to her it seemed that the situation was the most dangerous on the road.

Bob was ready with any number of arguments to prove she was mistaken, and indeed almost convinced her that in the majority of accidents the safest place to be is on the engine.

Great as was Bob's pleasure at receiving the appointment, it was no greater than that of Matt Fields, his engineer. Indeed, it was through his solicitation that Superintendent Worthley gave him the handsome, vigorous, and intelligent brakeman for his fireman. He regarded Bob with fatherly affection, and was delighted to have him on his engine.

But behind all this, Matt Fields had a secret reason for wishing Bob to serve him. It was a powerful reason, and yet it was one of which Bob never dreamed, and which Matt did not impart, even to his wife, from whom he kept back nothing else.

He didn't dare tell her ; he was afraid to hint it to Bob; he even sought to keep it from himself (if the paradox can be admitted for the present), but it was there, all the same, and it caused him an odd, singular thrill when he looked across from his seat in the cab and saw Bob Lovell pulling the rope of the bell as they neared the Junction.

"I'll have to tell him some time," mused the engineer, "but at present I would not have him know it for the world."

"We are going to have an ugly run to-night," remarked Matt some weeks latter, as he was on the point of pulling out from the Irondale Station, "and as for 'Hercules,' she will have tougher work than ever before."

It was winter, the wind was blowing, and snow was flying in the air. Not enough had fallen to cover the ground, though it gleamed here and there in windows where the gale had blown it, and it was coming down in a fashion which left no doubt that it would continue all night. It was this to which Matt referred, for in the three-hour run before him the snow was likely to prove a serious obstacle.

A curious incident followed within the next minute.

Bob Lovell was sitting in the cab, with his head far out the window, and looking back along the station watching for the signal from the conductor, while Matt was on his feet, with his hand on the lever, awaiting the word from Bob to go ahead. It was already a few minutes after time, and, knowing what a hard run was before him, he was anxious to be off. The station being on the other side from his cab, he depended on Bob, in order to save a second or two of time.

While Bob was waiting, his whole attention fixed on the conductor, a sudden gale spun down the platform like a water spout, flirting off several hats, and sending their owners skurrying after them.

One of the papers thus sent broadcast skimmed so near

Bob's head that he snatched it while passing in front of his face. It was a small paper that had been folded, but was opened by the action of the wind.

The fireman expected the owner to claim it, but no one appeared. Just then Twomey raised his hand, and Bob called "Go ahead!"

The "Hercules" started on her eventful journey, while Bob, holding the bit of paper so as to read by the light of the open furnace door, saw these singular words:

"To-night—Dead Man's Hollow."

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT IT MEANT.

THE telegram was without date or signature, and Bob shoved it in the breast pocket of the roundabout of blue duck which he wore when on duty, wondering what it could mean, if indeed it meant anything in which he had a warrant to feel interested.

It was the name of "Dead Man's Hollow" that roused his curiosity. That was the scene of the accident some months before, and there was little likelihood of his ever forgetting it. He pushed the furnace door shut with his foot and looked up at Matt; but the engineer was still standing with his hand on the lever, his right elbow resting on the side support, while he was watching the track in front with an intensity that showed he had no time to think of anything else.

"I'll wait till we get to the Junction," concluded Bob, "and then show it to him."

The down mail arrived before they started, so that there was a clear run to the intersection of the railway lines. This distance, as you will recall, was forty miles. There

were several stations along the stretch of road, but they were attended to by the accommodation train.

“After all,” thought Bob, “it may mean nothing ; but if it does, it was Providence that wafted the message to me.”

There was little time for “loafing” on the “Hercules” when she was scurrying across the country with three or four loaded cars. She consumed steam fast, and though she devoured hard coal the intervals were not long between the times when Bob had to open the furnace door and shovel in the big lumps, that seemed instantly to burst into luminous heat, which swept through the long narrow tubes in the front part of the boiler, and kept the steam gauge above one hundred degrees.

Then, when not otherwise employed, he slipped up to his seat on the left of the cab, and pulled the bell-rope as they thundered over the crossings or shot by the way stations. Two ropes were attached to the bell, and when Bob was busy at something else, Matt’s left hand seized the one on his side and swung the musical appendage.

The ground was soon white in every direction with snow, the billion particles eddying with blinding vigor through the air. The weather was not very cold, though had the engineer been compelled to expose himself like his brethren on many of the European railways, he soon would have frozen to death.

When we look at the glaring headlight of a locomotive miles distant, at night, we are apt to think that the engineer is thus enabled to see a long way ahead ; but it is a mistake. He cannot see far, and he drives forward at tremendous speed, depending on the signals and trusting that the track is clear. Should you ever be seated on the engine of a night express, your first surprise will be to learn the slight distance your vision can penetrate with the aid of the headlight.

The steel rails of the I. & O. were laid with great accuracy and the road-bed was excellent, yet "Hercules" bounded and swayed at times as though the depressions and irregularities of the track were half a foot in extent. There is something extraordinary in the sensitiveness of a swiftly running locomotive to the most trifling unevenness of the rails.

Bob Lovell never slighted his duties when on the engine. He knew just when to shovel in coal, when to adjust the furnace door open for a few inches or to its full extent, and at what moment to rest. He watched the action of the engine as the physician watches the countenance and pulse of the patient fluttering between life and death.

It was this fact which rendered him a model fireman. The engineer never found his steam running low through any fault of Bob's, and not being compelled to offer any suggestion, he was able to give his undivided attention to his own duties.

But, though Bob Lovell was as vigilant as ever, he could not drive that strange telegram from his mind. The conviction became stronger than ever that the words "To-night—Dead Man's Hollow," meant *that* night, and in some way the Express was concerned.

"Hercules" behaved magnificently. The gale carried most of the snow off the rails, which glistened cold and smooth in the glare of the headlight, but enough lingered here and there to make the track slippery at times. Now and then Matt felt the wheels slip for one or two revolutions, but they quickly caught their grip again, and there was no perceptible diminution in the tremendous speed of the charger, which, as her proud master declared, was the swiftest engine on the road.

At last Matt shut off steam and began slowing up for the Junction. The lights of the station could not be seen through the blinding storm, but the veteran was sure of

every rod of the way, and required no such aid. The engine was almost at a standstill when the misty signal loomed to view, and "Hercules" came to a dead stop just beyond the crossing.

The engineer took out his watch and held its face toward Bob with a smile. The timepiece was furnished by the Company, and had no superior. The Night Express was due at the Junction at ten minutes past eight. It should have left Irondale at 7.05, but it was more than five minutes late. A blinding snow-storm was raging, and yet, when Bob looked closely at the face of Matt's watch, he saw the second-hand climbing toward the figure 12, which it must reach before it would be ten minutes past eight.

"You're doing splendidly," called the cheery voice of Twomey, the conductor, as he appeared at the cab with his arm thrust through the middle part of his lantern. "I gave you a half-hour extra to make the Junction."

"She's a beauty," said the delighted Matt, stepping down from his place, so that he, the conductor, and the fireman stood immediately in front of the closed furnace door, one or two of the feet resting on the floor of the tender.

"How about the run to Ofalca?" asked the conductor.

"You mustn't expect 'Hercules' to do what can't be done; the storm is heavier off there, the run is longer, and there will be plenty of snow on the track; she slipped considerable, and she's going to have a rough time of it before we strike Dead Man's Hollow."

"That reminds me," said Bob, who had been waiting for a chance to speak of the telegram, "of something very strange."

He then hurriedly told about the slip of yellow paper that had been blown in his face, and which he caught on the fly, as he expressed it. The engineer and conductor listened with interest, and the latter examined the few written words by the light of the lantern on his arm.

The schedule allowed five minutes wait at the Junction, and a good deal can be said in that time.

"What do you suppose it means?" asked Bob, as Twomey handed him back the paper.

The conductor had become pale, and, though his voice was calm, it was evident he was laboring under suppressed excitement.

"The safe in the baggage-car has fifty thousand dollars in gold, consigned to Wells & Fargo."

This announcement came like a burst of sunshine into a darkened room.

"I think you can guess its meaning *now*," added the conductor.

"It's what I've said many a time," remarked Matt; "that is, if the train-robbers held us up anywhere, it would be near the spot where 'Hercules' took a tumble down the bank."

"Who would have thought it?" muttered the conductor. "Down in New Mexico, or some of the Territories, train-robbery is one of the regular industries of the country; but here——"

"There is no use of stopping to wonder," remarked Bob, who appreciated the value of the flying minutes. "It looks as if a robbery is to be attempted at Dead Man's Hollow; what can be done to defeat the scamps?"

"Powell and Hamilton are both on duty to-night."

Erskine Hamilton and Kirtland Powell had charge of the express and baggage car. They were courageous men, and of course always went fully armed.

"Have you noticed any suspicious parties on board?" continued Bob.

"No more than are always on the train. I couldn't pick out any train robbers if I were offered a thousand dollars."

"I have no doubt some of them are there; they mean to

stop us at the Hollow and rob the express car. Why can't I go in and help Hamilton and Powell defend it?"

"Have you any weapon?"

"Nothing in the way of firearms."

"Then you have no business there; and how could Matt get along without you?"

"I wouldn't enter the express car till just before we reached the Hollow."

But Twomey shook his head.

"It might do if you were armed, but they would make short work of you with their weapons."

CHAPTER XII.

THREE BELLS.

FIVE minutes is a short time in which to make arrangements to meet the attack of a gang of train-robbers. It was enough, however, and had a longer period been necessary Conductor Twomey would not have hesitated to take it.

Several plans were hurriedly discussed. The most simple was that a party of half a dozen men should be secured at the Junction, and after being provided with arms be taken aboard as an escort for the treasure in the express car.

This seemed a simple and obvious precaution, but Bob Lovell showed that it was impracticable. It would take a long time to get six persons together, since no one was abroad during the storm. More than likely five out of every six would decline to run the risk, unless guaranteed a liberal price, which no one had the right to warrant. The most that could be said was that the express company would be likely to pay well for such services; and that would not secure the kind of crew that was wanted.

There were other objections which the three men saw.

The escort, not knowing the strength of the assailants, would be likely to show the white feather at the critical moment, and refuse to make an effective resistance. It might be that among them some confederate of the law-breakers would manage to insinuate himself. These and still other considerations caused the plan to be abandoned within two minutes after it was brought forward.

The conductor, with some doubts, asked whether it was not possible to procure enough armed men on the train who would combine to resist the assault. Before either of his friends could answer, he smiled and added :

“It wouldn't work : the moment the train stopped they would take to the woods.”

You need not be told that there was good ground for this assertion. It has happened more than once that a single man has held up a stage-coach containing six or eight persons possessing weapons ; and it was not long ago that three robbers went through a railway train, first disarming twice as many United States soldiers of the colored persuasion, who agreed not to fire off their guns through consideration for the nerves of the ladies on board.

“I have it !” said Matt Fields, at the end of five minutes ; “I will slow down before we reach Dead Man's Hollow, and be on the watch for anything on the track. They will put some obstruction on the rails, and then signal me to stop. I will do so at such a distance that I will have time to reverse before they can reach me. They will not be expecting anything of the kind, and I will be able to get a start which will take us out of their reach.”

“That is an odd arrangement,” observed Bob Lovell, with a smile ; “but suppose there are confederates on board ? There may be a dozen, for all we know.”

“Then the plan won't work,” replied Matt ; “for if that number get in the cars they will do as they please.”

“They will be able to rob the passengers, but they will

have a fight to capture the express car. Twomey, you must go through the cars like a detective, and spot every suspicious passenger aboard."

"I will do so," was the response. "It will take fifteen or twenty minutes, and when I am through I will let you know the number."

"How?"

"I will pull the bell-cord, striking the bell once for each person with whom I am not satisfied. You will not confound the signal with any other?"

"I know your touch too well," answered Matt, with a grin.

"Meanwhile," added Twomey, "I will post Hamilton and Powell against admitting any visitors. They are plucky fellows, and will be sure to make a sturdy fight. Go ahead!"

The conductor stepped upon the platform and Bob pulled the bell. "Hercules" sent out a labored puff, followed instantly by a score of rapid ones that ran together, the wheels slipping because of the snow. Matt instantly shut off, jerked back the rod connecting with the sand-box over the engine, and, as the white grains streamed down the curving pipe, whose mouth was just in front of the base of the forward drivers, he twitched the lever again. The immense weight of the engine ground the silvery sand into paste, but the huge wheels held and the pace rapidly increased, under the judicious nursing of the veteran engineer.

It may be said that Conductor Twomey was full of business as he moved briskly down the platform to board his own train, which was laboring forward to meet him. Just then he was on the lookout for suspicious characters, whom he believed he could discover by their watchfulness of his actions.

There was no person standing on the platform. It would

have been strange had anyone faced the driving storm, when abundance of time had already been given for all to enter the cars ; but while the conductor was walking he observed a figure ahead of him, going rapidly in the same direction. Twomey halted and swung himself upon the front platform of the forward car, at the same moment that the stranger stepped upon the rear car.

"It may not mean anything," reflected the conductor, "but I believe that fellow has been watching us, and I'll investigate."

Before doing so he entered the express car, where he gave Hamilton and Powell some interesting information. Their eyes flashed as they learned of the undoubted intention of a party to rob them of the treasure placed in their charge.

Hamilton, who was the larger, though not the more courageous of the couple, pointed to the massive safe at the corner of the car, and said to Twomey, with a quiet laugh :

"The money is there, every dollar of the fifty thousand. There's enough, Cal, to make a fellow think of keeping right on to Canada and having a good time. I didn't suppose anyone besides you knew we had it aboard, but, after all, it's easy enough for those fellows to find out what's going on."

"How are you fixed?" asked the conductor ; and it was Powell, the smaller of the two, who answered :

"Each of us has a couple of Smith & Wessons, and there are worse marksmen than Ersk and I. If we were in the Southwest we would have Winchesters as well, but as it is, I think we'll make things rather lively, Ersk, eh?"

Hamilton nodded his head as though the coming affray was likely to afford keen enjoyment to both, and, after some more unimportant conversation, the conductor with-

drew and entered the smoker on his hunt for suspicious characters.

Matt Fields was right in forecasting a severe snowstorm. It was coming harder than ever, and the howling gale seemed to carry it horizontally through the air. Its eddies were so fantastic that now and then a blast whirled into the cab, as if to drive the engineer and fireman from their snug quarters.

Had the circumstances been different, the heavy canvas would have been lowered between the engine and tender, and buckled in place, but Matt wanted elbow room that night.

"Hercules" began to fret because of the snow. She didn't care how much it dashed into her face or dived in among her joints, for she was tough and could stand it, but it annoyed her when it crept under the soles of her feet, and she began slipping, and falling behind her regular pace.

The continual nipping of a mosquito will exasperate a giant, and so when "Hercules" caught sight of a drift of snow that some freak of the gale had twisted across the rails, she seemed to lower her head like Farmer Hirshkind's bull, and, plunging into the drift, sent the snow flying over the smokestack, the headlight and her front, in such a blinding flurry that for a minute or so neither Bob nor Matt could see anything at all.

This was going it blind indeed. There might be a rock of a hundred tons on the track; a rail might be snapped in two or twisted out of shape; the trestle-work might have collapsed, or a dozen other forms of danger threaten, but it could not be learned in time for "Hercules" to recoil and escape.

But in a brief space she cleared herself of the "dust in her eyes," and the parabolic light was able to project its rays a hundred feet or more into the gloom, but not far

enough to give the air brakes opportunity to check the train in time to avert striking any obstruction on the track.

From the Junction to Dead Man's Hollow was about thirty miles, and one-third of the distance was barely passed when Matt Fields looked at his watch. He was a quarter of an hour late. At that pace he could not expect to reach Ofalca until fully an hour after schedule time.

He cared nothing for that, for it might be he never would reach the terminus at all. He was busy wondering whether there was any certain way of defeating the purposes of the miscreants that were crouching along the path, like so many tigers, to spring upon the intended victim as it came within reach.

But Bob, when not busy with his duties, kept looking up at the flat gong in the top of the cab for the signal that the conductor had promised to give them.

"It takes him a long time to make his round," thought the youth, on the point of descending from his seat to shovel more coal into the furnace, "or it may be that there are no suspicious parties aboard——"

At that moment, when his eyes were fixed on the instrument screwed to the underside of the roof of the cab, Bob saw the clapper jerked back by the thin cord, which instantly loosened so as to permit the spring to drive it against the metal with a clear ringing sound, plainly heard amid the rush and roar on the engine.

The movement was repeated twice, and then ceased. The three distinct sounds were the message from the conductor, and said as plainly as so many words could have done :

"Three suspicious characters are aboard!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FORM ON THE FRONT PLATFORM.

MATT FIELDS did not speak, but, looking across at his fireman, their eyes met with an expression which showed they understood each other.

It was a few minutes after this that the engineer was surprised to note an abatement in the storm. The wind continued to blow with great violence, but the fall of snow was perceptibly lessening. The air grew clearer, and the extent of his vision, as a consequence, increased.

If this continued, there was little to fear from anything in the nature of a snow blockade. The gale would whirl the feathery particles in windrows here and there across the track, but not to an extent that would seriously check the progress of "Hercules."

At each corner of the pilot was fastened a strong splint broom, which reached almost to the rail, directly below. The stiff, wire-like splinters were soon worn away and bent backward by the friction against the steel bars beneath, but they served a partial purpose when the snow rose a few inches above the rails. There was no call for the cumbersome snow-plow until the drifts became packed to the depth of several feet.

The engineer was glad to observe the abatement in the snow-fall. Intimately acquainted as he was with every part of the road, he could not be expected to locate himself so long as he was unable to see the landmarks spinning by.

In order to carry out the singular plan he had formed, he must have an unobstructed view of the road for some distance; and that could not be gained so long as the snow-storm raged with such fury.

The "hold up," if it should take place, would be at

Dead Man's Hollow, but the name, under the circumstances, was an expansive one, and the question whether it was to occur to the westward or eastward must remain unanswered until the event itself.

In either case, the stoppage was arranged at a most perilous point because of the unusually high bank. "Hercules" had taken one plunge down the slope into the woods, and another would be likely to wind up her career, for it does not often occur twice in succession that a shattered locomotive is improved by the process of reconstruction.

Both Matt Fields and Bob Lovell were in the unpleasant situation of not knowing whether or not the report from the conductor was correct. No doubt he had made a careful inspection, but as likely as not had blundered. The three men whom he had selected as suspicious might be innocent passengers, with no intent of wrong-doing, and it was not impossible that the real culprits, if present on the train, were still unsuspected. Such rogues always take pains to avoid the appearance of evil, and except to the eye of the professional detective are the last ones thought to be wrong-doers.

If Twomey, however, was right, there was no telling what complications would arise, but Hamilton and Powell were the most incapable of express guards if they could not withstand the assaults of only three persons, especially after the former received warning of what was coming and had abundant time in which to make preparation.

Bob gave "Hercules" another dose of fuel, closed the furnace door, and resumed his seat on the left of the cab, with his hand grasping the bell rope, when without any special purpose he looked back. The express car had no windows at the front or rear. There were two narrow ones on each side guarded by iron bars, but, to all intents and purposes, the car was a small fort on wheels.

The abatement of the snow-storm enabled Bob by the

faint light from the lanterns in the cab to catch the outlines of the front of the express car. The crevices of the door and the depressions of the framework were filled with snow, which, however, did not cling to the smooth, yellow painted surface.

Was he mistaken?

Directly in front of the door, on the platform next to the tender, he saw what seemed to be the figure of a person, standing motionless and silent, as if watching the men in the cab of the engine.

The fireman gazed intently, and a minute later concluded he was mistaken. He turned his head away, for just then the bell over the boiler sounded. They were approaching a crossing, and Matt gave his rope a yank to remind Bob of his duty. The latter pulled the cord regularly until they shot by, when he turned his head again and looked back.

"There's a man there, as sure as I'm alive," he said to himself.

You know that when you glance casually at the Pleiades you can see seven stars; but if you gaze intently, one of them seems to withdraw modestly from view and you can count only six. Something of the same nature took place with Bob, the figure gradually fading from sight under his scrutiny until he doubted his vision.

But the second glance settled it; the man was there, where he had no right to be.

A simple means of removing the last vestige of doubt was at his command. Slipping off his seat, he swung the furnace door open. Instantly the glare from the flaming coal struck the front of the express car with a power which brought to view every black line forming the ornamentation of the front.

Bob stood bolt upright and stared backward. There was no man in sight!

"That beats the mischief!" he muttered, "and I must have been mistaken, after all."

There was no call to keep the furnace door open, and Matt looked down at the fireman as if to learn why he did so. Bob said nothing, but kicked and latched the door, without shoveling in any coal, and glanced behind him.

There was the figure again!

"I understand it," said the youth to himself; "when I opened the door he dropped down behind the tender, and did not rise till the door was closed."

Stepping up beside Matt he shouted in his ear:

"Look back at the express car and tell me whether you see anything."

Without removing his hand from the lever, Matt leaned his head down and peered behind him.

"There's a man on the platform!"

"Who do you suppose he is?"

"How should I know!"

"He is either a tramp or one of *them*." Matt's waggery could not be repressed, and he added: "Perhaps he is one of Cal's suspicious characters, and he has sent him out there to see what we think of him."

"Watch him now," added Bob, who stooped down and once more drew back the furnace door.

The fellow ducked out of sight like a figure in a pantomime, but a moment after the furnace was shut he came up again.

Bob stood a moment in deep thought. Then he flung several shovelfuls into the furnace, though there was no call to do so, but he had decided on a course of action, and he was preparing for it.

Stepping up once more beside the engineer he said:

"Matt, I'm going back to that fellow."

"What for?"

"I want to learn something about him."

"Don't you do it ; he'll fling you off or shoot you."

"I think not ; I'll let him suppose I believe him a tramp, and want to show him some kindness."

"I advise you against it, but go ahead, if you want to."

Without any more delay, Bob Lovell began clambering over the coal in the tender toward the man, who must have viewed his approach with strange sensations.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WE'VE GOT HIM !"

THERE could be little question that the stranger on the front platform of the express car was a desperate individual, who would not hesitate to shoot a fellow-being to save himself.

But such persons are not lacking in a certain form of discretion, and, as a rule, do not fire unless the necessity seems to be upon them. Whatever the stranger imagined, he could not have felt much fear of the youth who was clambering over the tender toward him. He had no reason to suspect that the fireman knew his character, and, if he did, the rogue was prepared.

It took but a minute for Bob to reach the rear of the tender, where he grasped the sharp metal rim on the edge of the tank to steady himself, for to step to the express car required no little care.

Even in that critical moment, Bob became aware that Matt had shut off steam and gently applied the brakes, not with the intention of stopping the train, but with a view of easing his fall in the event of the stranger sending him flying from the platform. It is safe, too, to conclude that Matt gave less attention to the track in front just then than he did to the rear of his engine.

The man was now in plain sight. He was a large fellow,

with a long overcoat buttoned to the top, and with the heavy collar turned up about his ears. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets, and his cap was drawn down so that, even had there been plenty of light, little more than his eyes and the end of his nose would have been visible. His feet were spread apart, and with his back against the door, it is not likely that he felt much discomfort in his exposed situation.

"Hello!" shouted Bob, as he stepped down beside him; "it's rather rough riding out there."

The stranger muttered something which the youth did not catch.

"Wouldn't you like to come inside?" continued Bob, in the same loud voice.

"No," replied the other, "I don't want you to break the rules of the company for me."

"I'll risk it; but wait till I speak to the fellows in here."

Bob kicked the door violently, and a voice which he recognized as that of Hamilton shouted back:

"Hello! who is it?"

Hamilton did not suppose it possible that any dangerous person could have secured that position, but he and his companion were taking no chances.

"It is I, Bob Lovell; let me in before I'm snowed under!"

During the few seconds occupied in obeying the request, Bob said to the stranger:

"Keep where you are till I can have a few words with them; it is against all regulations to allow anyone inside, but I guess I can fix it."

The stranger made no reply, but grimly shifted his position a few inches and held his ground.

As Bob stepped within, the door was quickly closed and fastened. Then he motioned them to follow him to the other end of the car.

"Boys," said he, "there's one of them on the front plat-

form out there ; he doesn't know he's suspected, and I have had a few words with him. I told him I would coax you to let him step inside out of the gale."

"What did you do that for?" asked Hamilton.

"I want to get him in here so we can capture him."

"Has he anyone with him?"

"No, he's alone ; I'll bring him in, and then we'll down him ; you have plenty of rope and straps," added Bob, glancing at the hooks around the car, where, besides the checks for baggage, there was a quantity of extra rope to be used for the benefit of those travelers who are careless in tying their trunks.

"The idea is a good one," said Powell, pleased over the prospect of a lively scrimmage. "Bring him in, but don't forget he is armed and is sure to be quick on the shoot."

Bob stepped to the front door, and opened it far enough to admit a person.

Thrusting out his head, he called to the stranger, who was near enough to touch.

"It's all right ; step inside."

The scamp must have grinned to himself, and looked upon this invitation as a special miracle in his favor. Above all things, his gang wanted one of their number within the express car at the moment when the attack was made. They expected to get several in there, but did not believe the entrance could be secured except by a hard struggle.

But, behold ! here was one of the lambs letting down the bars to admit the wolf into the fold.

The stranger stepped forward without hesitation, stamping the snow from his feet as the door was closed and secured behind him.

The occasion was one in which he felt the necessity of unbending and making things clear. He was too well

dressed to pass for a member of the fraternity of tramps, and he offered a reasonable explanation.

"I'm obliged to you, friends," he said from behind his high collar and pulled down cap, "but though I'm acting like a tramp I aint one of 'em, even if I am trying to beat my way to Ofalca."

"Where did you get on?"

"At the Junction. The fact is, I've been down there on a big tear that lasted a week; when I began to straighten up, I hadn't a cent and didn't know anyone to borrow from. I was stooping on the other side of the baggage car when you began pulling out from the Junction, and slipped up and sat down on the steps. I found I was getting drowsy and likely to tumble off in going round the curves, so I took a standing position. I thought they couldn't see me on the engine, except when they opened that blamed furnace door, which was a good deal oftener than I expected. However, I dodged down and kept out of sight for a good while, till you caught me."

The last words were addressed to Bob, who replied with a laugh:

"I saw you by accident, and thought it was too bad that you should have to stay out there; so I slipped in here and asked the gentlemen to let you come in and sit down till we reach Ofalca."

"You're very kind, and I assure you——"

At that instant Hamilton's right hand flashed from his side like the sweep of a sword, and with lightning-like quickness it assumed a horizontal position, the muzzle of his revolver almost touching the chilled end of the stranger's nose.

"Up with your hands! We know you!"

The man, who had been standing during these brief moments with his hands in his overcoat pockets, snatched them out. Despite the exposure to which he had been sub-

jected neither of them was mittened or gloved. It is possible, however, that following the rule to be ready for all possible emergencies, he may have slipped off the coverings while waiting outside for admission, or even after stepping inside the car.

Thus it came about that while he seemed to yield prompt obedience to the summons, one of the hands which whisked from the pockets held a Smith & Wesson ; and despite the risk involved he would have used the weapon, even though the muzzle of another was almost against his face.

But Powell had also drawn his revolver, and believing there was no escaping the necessity he was only waiting long enough to make his aim sure, when Bob leaped like a cat from his position at one side of the desperado, and by a quick blow on the forearm sent his weapon spinning across the car.

With a frightful imprecation he drew back his closed hand.

“I know your game, and you’ll never get me alive !”

Had the blow which he aimed at Bob reached its mark, it must have injured him seriously ; but the youth’s alertness enabled him to dodge it, and before the scamp could repeat it he countered with such power that the man was sent reeling across the car, and only escaped falling by lunging against Hamilton.

The instant the express messengers saw he was disarmed, they shoved their weapons back in their pockets, and prepared to make him prisoner. On his part, he leaped to recover his weapon, which lay some distance off, directly in front of the iron safe containing the gold.

Bob read the meaning of the movement, and threw himself upon the man with such force that he drove him backward to the floor. The struggle which followed was brief, but fierce. The stranger kicked and struck and fought like a tiger, but Bob never let go.

Hamilton made an ardent attempt to capture one of his feet, and received a kick which banged him against a trunk with almost enough force to smash it, and a moment after Powell turned a back somersault over a box, his head striking the safe with such violence that he thought it must have made a dent in the massive door.

But both quickly rallied and returned to the help of Bob, who had his hands full. Despite all the powerful fellow could do, he was unable to free himself from the sinewy youth, who kept astride of his body and gripped his throat with a violence that threatened strangulation.

The next attempt on the part of Hamilton and Powell to capture the revolving feet was successful. They were forced down to the floor, where several rapid twists of the ropes secured the limbs at the knees and ankles.

Then, with more difficulty, the arms were strongly bound at the wrists, and the prisoner was helpless.

A few minutes later, as Bob Lovell clambered back over the tender, he greeted the inquiring look of Matt with the words—"We've got him!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE INTERESTING STRANGER.

AFTER the captured miscreant had been securely bound, Bob Lovell picked up the revolver that lay in the corner, and shoved it into his hip pocket, with the remark: "That may come handy before we reach Ofalca."

Matt Fields was thrilled by the brief story which his fireman shouted into his ear, and with a laugh and nod jerked the lever of his engine, which bounded forward with increased speed.

By this time the fall of snow had almost ceased. Bob was surprised when he took his seat again in the cab to

note that hardly a flake was eddying through the air. But for the thought of the robbers down the road, the engineer would have made an attempt to regain part of the time lost.

Meanwhile, as may be supposed, Calvin Twomey, the conductor, found an interesting state of affairs within the three cars behind the express. He was a wide-awake employee of the company, and was held in high regard by the officials above him. The spotters of both sexes, who occasionally took a ride over a section or the whole of the I. & O., never fixed anything on "Cal," as he was universally called. He could not be otherwise than honest, and therefore, if he was summoned to the office of the superintendent, or that of the president, he went without that awful misgiving which sometimes racks the employee nowadays when "sent for."

The railway conductor, from continuous practice, acquires great skill in memorizing faces. One of the most wonderful experiences I ever underwent was at the Lindell Hotel, in St. Louis, where I passed into the dining room some minutes after nearly six hundred guests had entered. The colored youth at the door, who took the hats, was absent for the moment, and I laid my hat on the rack among the multitude of others.

To my astonishment, when I came out, he immediately selected my headgear from the hundreds, and handed it to me with the remark :

"I knowed dat war yours, 'cause it am de only one dat wasn't handed to me by de pusson hisself."

And that same negro passed every hat to the proper owner as he emerged from the dining room. Among them must have been at least three hundred silk hats, between which there was no appreciable difference to ordinary folks, and yet the colored youth made not a single mistake.

I have never seen a white man who possessed this unac-

countable gift, but there are many railway conductors whose memory of faces is amazing. They will walk through one crowded car after another, and as they glance from side to side instantly detect a person who is trying to beat his way. Cal Twomey had something of this art, which is purely acquired, so that after parting from Matt and Bob at the Junction, and passing slowly through the smoker and the two following cars, with his penetrating look on each side, he picked out the three persons who had got on at the Junction for the ride to Ofalca.

Since the terminus of the I. & O. line was at the latter town, it took no sleepers or palace cars, and had no regular stopping place after leaving the Junction. This, it will be remembered, was a distance of sixty-five miles, which was a long run, comprehending eight or ten stoppages for the way-trains. Sometimes the express made a brief halt at Jigtown, ten miles west of Dead Man's Hollow, for coal or water, but it took no passengers.

By the time Twomey reached the end of the last car, he had located his three suspicious fellows, and oddly enough, or perhaps not oddly at all, there was one in each car. In the last, a tall man was muffled in an ulster, and doubled up in his seat as though he were asleep. Cal was convinced, however, that he was very wide awake, but there was nothing in the manner of the conductor to show that he felt any unusual interest in him.

In the second car a short, fleshy, middle-aged man was trying to read a paper by the rather weak light overhead. His face was covered with a stubby beard, and he was dressed in rather "loud" style, but there was nothing striking in his appearance. Nevertheless, Twomey fixed upon him as one of the party concerned in the scheme for robbing the express company.

The third person, of course, was in the smoker, where he was enjoying his *Reina Victoria* as if it had really been

grown in the garden spot of Cuba. He shared his seat with no one, but with his elbow on the window sill, his head resting on his hand, his legs crossed, he puffed in the leisurely fashion of the genuine smoker.

He appeared to be about fifty years old, with a gray beard all over his face, excepting his chin. His dress was modest, but good in quality. The noticeable feature about the individual was his eyes, which were startlingly bright. When turned upon a person, they seemed to look him through.

It was while standing in the aisle of the smoker, directly opposite this stranger, that Twomey reached up and gave the bell cord three sharp pulls. The man was looking straight at him, and said with a peculiar smile :

“That’s an odd signal, conductor ; I remember when it was an order for the engineer to run backward.”

Twomey was surprised at the remark, and wondered whether the man could have overheard the conversation on the engine at the Junction, and learned the meaning of the signal. It was not impossible, but the official was quick to reply.

“Five years ago that would have been the meaning on this road, but before giving it I would have pulled the cord twice, as a call for the engineer to stop.”

“What is its import now—that is, as you use it ?”

“It doesn’t belong to the regular code,” replied Twomey, without hesitation, “but is a means of understanding I have with the engineer, by which I let him know—well, a certain fact that may interest him. Of course you don’t expect me to translate the message for you ?”

“Not if there is anything of a private nature about it ; but since you have been through the train and taken a look at all the faces, why not sit down and smoke ?”

And the obliging stranger moved closer against the side

of the car to make room for the conductor, who accepted the invitation with thanks.

But to do so was a flagrant violation of orders. Of course, there could be no objection to him seating himself and talking with any one of his passengers, but to smoke a cigar while on duty was against regulations.

But Twomey did so without hesitation, for he was sure, if ever called to account, he could plead successfully that the end justified the means. He remarked that he was doing that which was forbidden, but the temptation was strong.

"No harm can come from it," was the cheery response of the other, as he held the lighted end of his cigar against the terminal point of the conductor's, who vigorously pulled at it. "I used to be a school teacher, and one of the cardinal truths I learned was that to be successful I mustn't see everything done by my pupils. Figuratively speaking, I had to close my eyes now and then, when by all rules they ought to have been wide open."

"That may do for the pedagogue," replied Twomey, with a laugh, "but I don't believe a railway company can ever be induced to adopt it."

"All sensible corporations do to a greater or less extent. How far are we from Dead Man's Hollow?"

It was a startling question, and despite Twomey's coolness he found it a relief to peer through the windows, as if striving to catch sight of some landmark, while he recovered his self-possession.

Taking out his watch, he said :

"We ought to have passed it long ago, but we are behind time and losing continually. I judge we are within ten miles of it, though I can't make sure of it. Are you interested in Dead Man's Hollow?"

"I can't say that I am, except to dread it. I passed over

the road the day following the disaster to the Night Express some months ago, and I shuddered to think what a dreadful place for an accident it is. If there was such a thing as train robbers in this part of the country, that is the spot where they would run an engine down the bank, for the wreck would be so complete that nearly every person would be injured or killed outright."

This certainly was an extraordinary remark under the circumstances, and the conductor was puzzled to understand why it should be made. He thought perhaps the fellow felt so secure in the success of the plan that he was amusing himself at his expense. Without hesitation, Twomey continued the discussion of the interesting subject.

"Do you feel any special interest in train robbers?" he asked.

"Well, yes ; I was in Arkansas at the time the James boys held us up near Walnut Ridge, and I was cleaned out of several thousand dollars. Since then I suppose I feel more nervous than most people over the danger."

All this time the conductor was tormented by the suspicion that he had heard that voice and seen that face before. There was a peculiar intonation in some of the sentences which had attracted his attention somewhere else and under widely different circumstances, and he was out of patience with himself that it was impossible to recall the occasion.

It seemed to him that the bright black eyes and the peculiar beard would have told the story on the instant, but unfortunately they did not.

All at once, while watching the suspected passenger sharply, the latter rubbed his chin, and as he did so the whole beard was disturbed, proving it was false.

Just then the whistle of "Hercules" gave a short blast, which meant to apprise the conductor that they were within a mile of Dead Man's Hollow. Excusing himself, he

sprang up and walked hastily to the rear car. He shortly returned, and on his way he locked the door of each car.

"I don't know as it will do much good," was his thought, as he returned to his friend without sitting down, "but when these folks want to get out doors to help the rest of the party, they will be bothered a little."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DANGER SIGNAL.

THE slowing of the train as it neared Dead Man's Hollow was so gradual as to be imperceptible to anyone except those watching for it. It was at this juncture that the first real surprise came to Twomey, the conductor.

He had returned to his place beside his bright-eyed friend, feeling nervous and apprehensive at the certainty that the crisis must come within the next minute or two, when the latter, in an indifferent manner, said :

"Cal, you have made a little mistake—an oversight, as it may be termed."

"What's that?" asked the astonished official.

"Each of your brakemen is furnished with a key to the car doors, is he not, the same as yourself?"

"Of course ; what of it ?"

"Well, when a passenger starts up with the avowed wish of entering the smoker, won't the brakeman unlock the door for him to pass through ?"

"I suppose—that is——"

"Have you warned the brakeman not to unlock the doors for anyone until after passing the Hollow ?"

"No ; who in the mischief are you, anyway ?"

The other indulged in a chuckling laugh, and answered :

"You and I had a little talk in the private office of the superintendent last Tuesday——"

“Well, by gracious!” was all the conductor could say. “I knew we had met somewhere, but I didn’t suspect that it was *you*. What is your business on the train, Cudworth?”

“Dead Man’s Hollow,” was the significant reply. “I saw some suspicious things at the station at Irondale to-day, and President Walbridge told me to go with the train to Ofalca.”

The man, whom the conductor had recognized at last, was Horsen Cudworth, a professional detective in the employ of the company. Perhaps there was nothing strange in the mistake Twomey made in setting him down as a suspicious character, for he was well disguised, and he had watched the movements of the conductor more closely than the latter imagined.

Without pausing for further words, Twomey hastened to repair his mistake. It took but a few moments to tell each brakeman that under no circumstances was he to allow any passenger to leave the car until each door was unlocked by the conductor himself. Promptly as this notification was made, it was none too soon.

The individual in the rear car remained seated a brief while after the whistle sounded, but holding his hand to the side of his face to shut out the glare of the light within, he scrutinized the snowy woods as if searching for some landmark. He did not fail to note the slackening of the train, but he supposed it was because of the high trestle-work.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet and walked briskly to the front of the car, where a brakeman was standing with his nose against the window of the door. Grasping the knob of the latter, he gave it a wrench and such a violent pull that his hand slipped over the smooth surface, and he came nigh falling.

With an impatient exclamation he demanded the meaning of the door being fastened.

"Passengers are not allowed to stand on the platform when the train is moving," was the reply.

"Who the mischief wants to stand on the platform?" demanded the other.

"It is against the rules to pass from one car to the other when in motion."

Another exclamation escaped the wrathful passenger, who uttered the truthful addenda:

"I have done it often, and no objection has ever been made to it; this is all fol-de-rol. I want to take a smoke; open the door."

"I would like to oblige you, but the conductor gave me positive orders to allow no one to leave the car——"

"Why did he do that?"

"I have no idea of his reason, but I daresn't disregard it; I would be discharged."

"I'll give you ten dollars; come, quick!"

But the brakeman shook his head.

"Ten dollars is a good price for a smoke, but it isn't worth my situation."

"I'll kick the blamed door in," muttered the thoroughly aroused individual, who could not have failed to know they were close to the place where the train was to be stopped. The brakeman protested, but the other kicked and wrenched with a vigor that looked as if he would make his threat good.

A scene almost similar took place in the second car, where the man selected by Twomey displayed a sudden eagerness to smoke a cigar. The I. & O. Company ran no little risk that evening of having their property injured, but the doors offered a more sturdy resistance than could have been expected.

Meanwhile matters were assuming an interesting shape on the engine of the Night Express.

Bob Lovell, while a couple of miles away from the Dead

Man's Hollow, piled in an extra amount of coal, and made matters ship-shape, as may be said, for the crisis then at hand. It was his wish to give his undivided attention to the important business before him.

By the light in the cab he had examined the Smith & Wesson which he picked up on the floor of the express car. It was a fine weapon, silver mounted, and with each of the chambers loaded.

In the hands of an expert it was capable of effective service.

"I don't know that I'll have any use for it to-night," thought Bob, shoving it back in his pocket, "but it may come handy."

The track of the I. & O. made a long bend just beyond the trestlework over Dead Man's Hollow. Bob's side of the cab was on the outer rim of this curve, so that, until the track straightened again, his view of the rails was slightly better than that of the engineer. He could catch sight of whatever might be ahead an instant before Matt, whose place was on the inner side of the sweeping curve; but, after all, the advantage was so slight that it amounted to little, and Matt did not step across to look out of the fireman's window, as he might have done had the deflection of the track been more abrupt.

Matt had shut off steam entirely, and the brakes occasionally nipped the wheels just enough to modify the speed without communicating a jar to the train. Bob was standing with the slide thrown back and his head thrust far out, while he intently peered ahead. The gleaming rails stretched away until they pierced the black gloom, which continually receded before the tardy advance of "Hercules."

A moment later, the network of the trestle loomed to view. Having no draw, it was without framework above, but the crosspieces, ties, and timbers seemed as if made of silver as the glare of the headlight struck them.

But Bob paid little heed to them; he was looking for something down the track which he did not wish to see.

Matt Fields was as alert as a panther. His left foot rested on the floor of the cab, and the right limb was crooked at the knee so that the boot was supported on the projection six inches higher. The body was bent forward and slightly to the right, the hand on that side grasping the support of the sliding window, which was drawn aside, like that of the fireman. The left hand was gently closed around the upper part of the lever, which had already shut out the steam from the cylinders.

Holding this attitude, the engineer could instantly shift his grasp to the little horizontal lever at the side which controlled the air-brake, or he could seize the reversing rod with both hands and fling it backward.

The attitude of Matt Fields was that of the most watchful vigilance, while Bob Lovell, still leaning far out of the cab window, suggested that he was about to spring into the air. He scarcely looked down, as the engine slowly rumbled over the trestlework toward the spot where it had left the rails a few months before.

All at once his heart gave a thump: *he saw it!*

There was the red light—the signal of danger—swaying like a great pendulum from side to side. There was no mistake about the presence of train robbers at that dangerous point.

Bob took one quick glance at it, and then looked across at Matt, who caught sight of it the same instant.

But the fireman was dumfounded. Instead of checking the engine, as was the original plan, Matt moved neither hand. "Hercules" kept creeping toward the danger signal, as if he held it in no fear.

What could it mean? Bob stared wonderingly at his friend, who continued peering forward, as if he would pierce the night itself.

The amazed fireman, fearing some fearful mistake had been made, was about to catch the arm of Matt, when the latter fairly took away Bob's breath by putting on steam, thus making for the danger signal with increasing speed.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DARING EXPLOIT.

BEFORE speaking to Matt Fields about his unaccountable action in pushing forward toward the danger signal, Bob Lovell glanced again out of the cab window.

The obstruction was in plain sight. It consisted of a log, lying directly across the rails, just as the tree had lain some months before, when the same engine was brought to a standstill.

Bob now read the purpose of the engineer. It was to go forward and attempt to shove the obstruction out of the way, instead of coming to a halt for the purpose of removing it. This was in violation of all law at such times, and, when it is recalled that the embankment was of unusual height, the course of the veteran can be considered nothing less than reckless to an unwarrantable degree.

But Matt Fields was led to do what he did from a cause which no person beside himself dreamed of, and which, incredible as it may seem, was unsuspected by himself until too late.

"He is satisfied he can push it off," was the conclusion of Bob Lovell, "and perhaps he can, but I never could have believed Matt would dare try such a thing."

The young fireman said nothing, but, taking his place just over the step by which he climbed upon the engine, held himself ready to jump the instant he felt it leave the rail.

All this time the man in front was swinging his red light

with great ardor. He was in plain sight, standing on the log, and not only swaying the lantern from side to side, but circling it over his head with such swiftness that it resembled a ring of fire.

As the flare from the headlight fell upon him, it was seen that his face was covered with a mask which reached to his mouth and contained peep holes for the eyes. What better proof could be needed of his character and unlawful business ?

Hercules moved steadily onward, puffing loudly, for the cut off was thrown clear over, so that the steam in the cylinders followed the head of the piston the entire length ; and the speed of the engine was about equal to that of a man running.

She seemed to shiver, as if with pain, when the projecting point of the pilot collided with the inert body, but there was no recoil or abatement of pace. On the contrary, Hercules puffed harder and went faster.

Now if the lower point of the converging rods had struck the log above the middle, it would have rolled under the pilot (or cow-catcher, as it is sometimes called), or the pilot would have gouged out a mass of wood without turning the log. In either case, the obstruction would have slipped beneath the engine, and either raised the forward truck or turned it aside, to such an extent that the Hercules would have been derailed.

But, fortunately indeed, the diameter of the log was so great that the shoe of the pilot passed below the center, and, instead of the engine climbing upon the obstruction, the latter was lifted bodily from the track and thrown several feet in the air.

Then it rolled back, and would have fallen upon the rails again with the danger of still getting beneath the framework of iron ; but at that instant Hercules responded to the spur, and leaped ahead with such a marked vigor that, like

a descending baseball, the log was caught on the fly, the second blow knocking it clear of the rails. It went rolling down the embankment, in the same path that Hercules would have taken had she been forced off her base.

The engine was now making for Ofalea at her best pace. Full steam was put on, and the speed, already quite brisk, was rapidly rising.

It was a daring exploit on the part of Matt Fields, and the risk he ran was fearful: but there is nothing which succeeds like success, and the brilliancy of his achievement received the praise of everyone who learned the facts.

Bob Lovell had resumed his seat in the cab an instant before striking the tree, convinced, as Matt had so often declared, that he could do nothing wiser than to stick to the locomotive, no matter what the character of the impending peril.

Just previous to this the keen eyes of the fireman, in the increasing glow of the headlight, descried other figures than the one swinging the lantern. This individual, seeing that the engine did not stop, made such a hurried leap from his perilous perch that he could not check himself, and went rolling and tumbling down the embankment, as if thrown off by the pilot itself.

There were three forms, all standing on the left of the track, which was Bob's side of the cab. They were in full view, but their faces, too, were shrouded in the black cloth, which effectually shut out all chance of recognition.

The moment they read the purpose of the engineer, they withdrew a step or two down the embankment, so as to be out of the way of the log, which lunged to the other side, and opened a fusillade with their revolvers.

The shots were aimed at the cab of the engine, and the first thing Bob knew the bullets were flying about his ears, one of them passing so close that he fancied he felt its touch.

"This is a good time to experiment a little in the same line," concluded the youth, who drew back his head so as not to offer too conspicuous a mark, and, thrusting out his pistol, let drive with all the barrels in rapid succession.

There was no chance to take aim, and he fired on general principles, as may be said, but a sharp cry left no doubt that one of the bullets at least had done some execution. Bob took a hasty peep backward as the engine rumbled by, but the darkness, out of the glare of the headlight, prevented him from seeing anything plainly. For the time it was impossible to tell the extent of the damage done by the single lead pellet.

Perhaps you can imagine the excitement in the cars, where, because of the gentle motion of the train, the crackling of the revolvers was plainly heard.

It may be said that every person who knew of the intended attack was certain of a halt when the signal showed near the trestle-work. Instead of that the engine made all haste forward.

The two individuals who were so eager to enter the smoker desisted from trying to tear down the obstructing doors, and stared out in unspeakable amazement, in quest of some explanation of the phenomenon.

The fellow who had been so cleverly captured in the express car was allowed to work himself into a sitting posture, with his back against one of the trunks. Here he scowled silently at Hamilton and Powell, who were too nervous to attend to any duties until the impending trouble was finally ended.

The captive's face showed his eager interest when he knew from the hollow rumbling that they were passing over the trestle-work. He struggled fiercely the instant the report of the first pistol shot was heard, and for a moment or two it looked as if he might liberate himself; but he was tied too securely, and could only gnash his

teeth and mutter savagely to himself, while he glared at his jailers as if eager to rend them to pieces.

It may be said that the astonishment of Powell and Hamilton was as great as that of their prisoner at the failure of Matt Fields to check the train, though they could not know all the circumstances, and had to wait until the end of the run before learning them.

Most of the passengers who heard the pistol shots did not read their full meaning. To them it would have been incredible that a party of masked men should attempt to stop and rob a railway train in one of the original thirteen States, and the furious effort of a man who was shut out from entering the smoking car was not likely to be attributed to the true cause.

The escape of the Night Express was a remarkable one, for, as you have noticed, the rule governing such episodes of railway traveling is that everything favors the law-breakers; but in this case it was the other way.

The "Hercules" steamed into Ofalca more than an hour late. To this point a telegram had been sent from a station between Dead Man's Hollow and a terminus, notifying the authorities and requesting a couple of officers to be in waiting. Detective Cudworth felt able to take care of the man in the express car, but since it was known he had confederates on board, there was fear of an attempted rescue.

Nothing of the kind, however, took place, and the prisoner was safely lodged in the lockup.

Detective Cudworth kept a sharp watch of the two persons who made such efforts to reach the smoker, but doubtless they were professionals too wise to betray themselves. They not only acted as if strangers to each other, but manifested no interest in the unfortunate fellow who was escorted from the railroad station to the town hall of Ofalca and committed for a hearing the next morning.

But the prisoner had no cause for fear. No overt act

was proved against him. No doubt he was engaged in a conspiracy to rob the express car, but he had done nothing.

Had one or more of the men that awaited the coming of the train at Dead Man's Hollow been brought to book, it would have gone hard with him or them; but no charge could lie against him who was so cleverly captured, and the magistrate had but one thing to do. That was to discharge him, intimating to the counsel of the I. & O. as he did so, that the company might consider itself fortunate if it escaped a suit for damages.

Mr. Hematite Oxx, as he called himself, may have overheard the hint of the magistrate, or, what is as likely, some lawyer on the alert for a case, urged him to bring suit against the corporation, and he proceeded to do so at once.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER AND SON.

ABOUT this time Mr. Lloyd Montague Worthley returned from the little vacation he had been taking with some boon friends in New York, and resumed his duties in the office of his father, the superintendent of the Irondale and Ofalca Railroad.

The appearance of this amiable youth did not indicate that he had received much benefit from his brief visit to the metropolis. He looked paler than when he went away, and an accidental fall, as he explained, had so injured his left arm that he did not expect to be able to use it for a week or two.

"This is a pretty mess that we are in," said he, with a disgusted expression, as he sat in his father's office, holding an earnest conference with him.

"To what do you allude?"

"We have just been served with papers in the suit of

Hematite Oxx against the company, for aggravated assault and false imprisonment, and the fellow is sure to get heavy damages."

"Yes, I saw the papers this afternoon, and I observe the suit is for ten thousand dollars."

"Yes, and he will get every dollar, too."

"I am not so sure of that, my son," replied his parent, who was plainly nervous, however, over the prospect.

"It's a pity," added the angry youth, "that the guilty parties could not be made to answer for their tomfoolery."

"To whom do you allude?"

"Powell and Hamilton; though, after all, I don't blame *them* so much as that fireman of Fields's. He is the freshest chump I ever knew. He made the brilliant discovery that because a gentleman who is broke undertakes to steal a ride, he must be a train robber, and so he inveigles him into the express car, where three men jump on him, tie him with ropes and straps, steal his revolver, and then to cap all, have him locked up in jail."

"And yet," said Mr. Worthley, twirling his spectacles over his finger, "Bob Lovell was right, and the man *was* a lawbreaker."

"There is no proof of it. It is possible the fellow was right, but I don't admit it. Supposing he was, how much better it would have been had he been left alone! The train wasn't stopped, and all Mr. Oxx could have done would have been to keep his place on the platform and harm nobody. *Now*, there's a pretty bill for damages to pay."

"Well," said the superintendent, "I cannot find it in me to condemn Lovell; he did a brave act, which few would have dared to attempt, and he would have been of great help had the train been brought to a standstill, and the express car attacked."

"It is strange that you have such a high opinion of him, father, when he has done nothing to merit it. He knows

how to tell a plausible story, but take my word for it, sir, he will prove a most expensive luxury for the I. & O."

"He was not afraid to exchange shots with them, and there is reason to believe he wounded one of them."

"What is the reason for believing *that*?"

"Matt Fields says he heard him cry out."

"I didn't know that because a person cries out it is proof that he has been pinked with a pistol ball. More than likely he uttered a taunt at the fireman, crouching in his cab, because he didn't fire better."

"It could hardly be that, since he fired as well as the scamps themselves."

"Well, since you are so stuck on him, I will admit he is a hero who ought to have his biography printed among those of the great men of the age. But the matter before us is what is best to be done about this suit."

"What's best to be done?" repeated the father in surprise; "we must contest it. I haven't seen Ganzell yet, but he will doubtless be in to-morrow, and we will talk the matter over."

"I've been thinking," said Montague thoughtfully, as he held an unlighted cigarette in his fingers and looked out of the window, "whether the best thing won't be to compromise."

"But how do we know that can be done? When there is a clear case against us I am always in favor of compromising the dispute. It is better in every respect; but I am not prepared to admit the company is in such a hole."

"I cannot understand how you fail to see it."

"Suppose you send for Ganzell and hear what he has to say."

"I will walk down to his office, as I feel the need of a little exercise, and have a talk with him."

"That will do as well, my son."

The father viewed the dapper youth with more pride

than he usually felt as he stepped briskly out of the room, and carefully donning his ulster, lighting his cigarette, and drawing on his gloves, started down the street to the office of the leading counsel of the Irondale and Ofalca Railroad Company.

"Montague is improving," reflected the superintendent, still twirling his glasses and gazing absently out of the window. "He shows increased interest in the business of the company. It pleases me to see such proof of his devotion to duty. At the next meeting of the board I must ask for a regular assistant. Other companies have such officers, and it will be cheerfully given me."

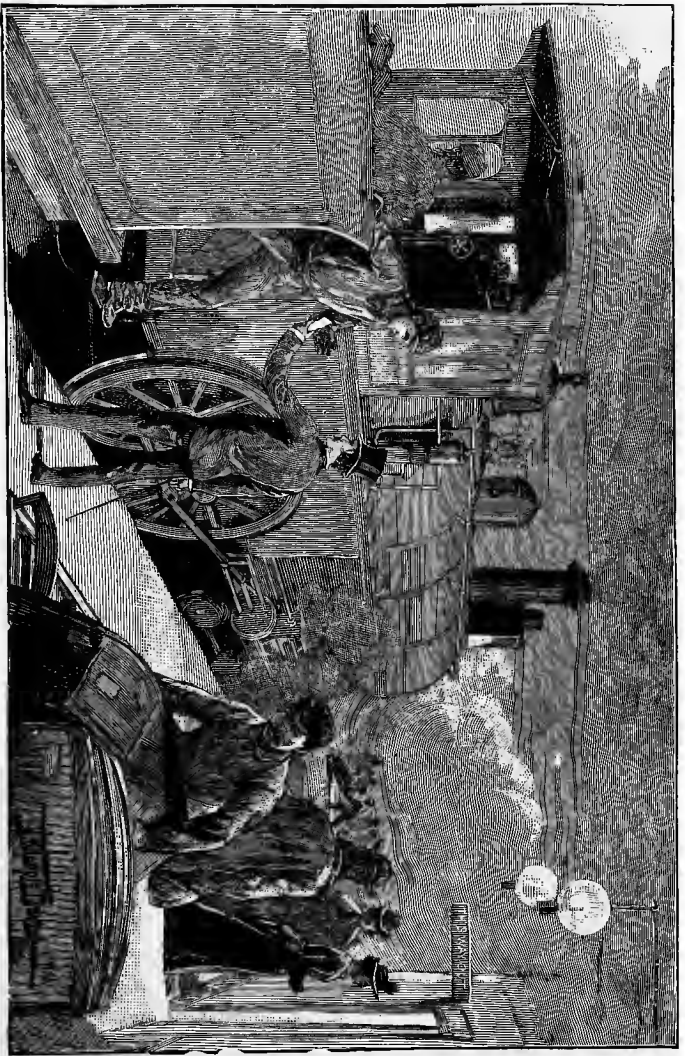
If Mr. Worthley had confessed the truth to himself, he would have said that the reason he failed to request such help long before was because the board was likely to select someone other than his only son and heir. The case wore a different face now.

"They could not refuse my demand for Montague's appointment, and it would stir my son's ambition to make himself invaluable to the company. I am growing old, and it will be a consolation to me to know the young man is my successor. Montague," continued the superintendent musingly, "is disposed to be severe with young Lovell. I think he was unjust some time ago, but in the present instance it looks as though the young fireman was precipitate; though it is hard to condemn him for such a brave act."

The superintendent twirled his spectacles a few minutes longer, his face showing that his reverie was not altogether of a pleasant nature, but he suddenly ceased, and attacked his work with vigor, as if to recover the lost time.

Meanwhile, the hopeful heir of the superintendent walked briskly to the office of Mr. Aurelian Ganzell, the senior counsel of the Irondale and Ofalca Railroad. That gentleman, as a matter of course, knew all about the suit set on

“THERE'S SOMETHING WHICH CONCERNS YOU, SIR,” HE REMARKED IN HIS SUPERSTITIOUS WAY.”



foot by Hematite Oxx for the rough handling he received while stealing a ride on the forward platform of the express car, and the brief imprisonment that followed, some nights before.

“There is no use in denying that the fellow has a strong case,” said the lawyer, after Montague had broached the matter. “Of course he violated one of the rules of the company in attempting to ride without paying, but the only remedy we have in such cases is to put him off the train.”

“Cannot he be sued for the value of his ticket?” asked Montague, with a significant grin.

“No doubt he could, providing the conductor demanded his fare and he refused to pay it. But the conductor did not see him; he did not refuse to pay his fare; in fact he was invited into the express car, with the promise of a free ride to Ofalca, sheltered against the storm, and then he was subjected to an outrageous assault. Yes, sir,” added Mr. Ganzell, “he has the best kind of a case against us. We may tire him out by adjournments, appealing the verdict, and dragging it through the courts until he gives up; but his lawyer, Simcoe, is a stayer, and if he has to fight for a year or two he’ll get there all the same in the end.”

“I have suggested to the governor that we offer to compromise the suit with the man.”

“Can it be done?”

“I think so; at any rate, I am willing to try it. What do you think of the scheme?”

“It is the best thing to do by all odds, but I fear that Simcoe will convince his client that his case is so strong that he won’t be willing to accept much less than his claim, and of course we can never consent to *that*—that is, not till the last resort has been reached.”

“What do you think would be a fair compromise, Mr. Ganzell?”

“ Let me see—he demands ten thousand. Offer him one tenth of that, and fight hard for it. If he holds out, or wants to consult his lawyer, advance five hundred. Troll him along, as you would troll a trout, and fight hard at every point.”

“ How high shall I go ? ”

“ Well, you may guarantee him twenty-five hundred ; but, if he still holds off, get him to make a proposition. If it is any way reasonable, tell him you will submit it to the company ; but remember, Montague, that you must fight inch by inch. After hearing your report I will have a talk with Simcoe, and see what I can do. Though he is a fighter, as I said, yet he is open to reason, and I shouldn't wonder if a way can be found of convincing him that it will be better for him, as well as better for his client, if a moderate compensation is agreed upon.”

The counselor winked, and Montague, who prided himself on the ability to “ catch on ” to any hint, laughed and nodded to signify the point was not lost by him. Then he lit another cigarette and left the office.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PLOT.

FOR several days succeeding the attempt to rob the Night Express, the authorities were busy trying to ferret out the criminals. Had the latter secured the treasure in the safe, it is not unlikely that sharp detectives would have succeeded in running them down ; but, since the crime was not consummated, the task was much more difficult. The strong gale which was blowing at the time obliterated every footprint in the snow, and the parties scattered with such skill that all trace of them was lost.

Before the officers could locate the two men whose ac-

tions in the train left no doubt they were confederates, they plunged into the seething streets of the metropolis, where they were so effectually lost that shadowing them was out of the question.

As a consequence Hematite Oxx was the only well left to pump, and he yielded no oil. He was too cunning to commit himself, but he played the rôle of the innocent victim of a brutal outrage so effectually that, as has been shown, the company was quite willing to come to terms without entering court.

Montague was fortunate in finding the individual in his room at the hotel when he inquired for him. He had laughed off the little fiction he first told about being on a spree at the Junction, and claimed to be a respectable person whose pocket was picked, and who did as many another gentleman has done in such a predicament—sought to obtain a ride to Ofalca without paying his fare.

Montague sent up his card to Mr. Oxx's room, and after a dignified delay the messenger boy brought down word that the gentleman would be pleased to see him in Room 19. Thither the son of the superintendent knocked a few minutes later.

The door was opened, and without speaking, the host carefully locked it behind his visitor. Then the two, standing in the middle of the room, looking in each other's faces, smiled, and shook hands.

"How goes it, Hem?"

"All is salubrious; how's things with you, Tague?"

"Ditto, and yours truly."

And each dropped into a chair and laughed heartily, but with so much circumspection that no one outside could have heard them. Mr. Oxx next lit a cigar and helped his caller to shed his ulster, since his injured arm required some care in the action. Then Montague lighted his inevitable cigarette, and the other rang for whisky.

"Thanks," said the younger; "I'm going back to the governor, and it won't do to have the smell about me; I'll bring up the average the next time I'm down to York."

"Sorry, but that will be a long time between drinks. However, I understand, and never try to persuade a man to indulge against his will; *that* sin can't be laid to the door of Hematite Oxx. Your arm seems to be troubling you yet?"

"A little, but it's coming round all right. Well, Hem, I've had a talk with the governor, and with our counsel."

"What did they have to say?"

"They're ready to compromise."

"What's the figure?"

"Mr. Ganzell instructed me to begin with a thousand, and, if forced, to work up to twenty-five hundred, but not to go above that."

"Can't they be squeezed a little harder? You know I'll have to divide with Tom and Sam."

"Of course, but I don't believe it will be safe to strike too high; I'll be real good with you, and, instead of beginning with the lowest figure, will start at the top. Then, if you feel like it, you can drop. So, what do you say to twenty-five hundred?"

"I was hopeful of making it five thousand."

"I sounded the lawyer, and I am convinced he will fight before paying that. He will keep it dragging through the courts, and you will have a mighty big fee to pay, with the prospect of having your claim reduced. Juries seldom give the whole amount asked, and railroad companies are all powerful in the courts."

"Well, what do you advise?"

"I've been thinking over it, and am anxious only for your good. Suppose I tell Mr. Ganzell that you are eager for a fight, but that I believe you would accept three thousand spot cash and drop the whole matter. I was told that

if you demanded more than twenty-five hundred to say that it would have to be submitted to the board, but the difference between that and three thousand is so slight that I am sure it will be accepted. Now, if you should hold out for thirty-five hundred, it would go before the board, and as likely as not the majority would insist on contesting it in the courts."

"But," said the shrewd rogue, "if they should do so, my offer of compromise would not militate against my original claim, for which the company would be sued."

"I believe you are right, and if you think best, go ahead. I have given you my judgment, and hope you will win."

Leaning back in his chair, Hematite Oxx blew several rings of tobacco smoke toward the ceiling, while he cogitated.

"I believe you are a good friend of mine, Tague, and I will therefore accept your offer. You can say so to the superintendent and to your lawyer."

"You have acted wisely, but, Hem, I am in a peculiar situation. You will have to see Simcoe, your lawyer, and tell him what you have agreed to, and he may persuade you to withdraw your offer."

"What if he does?"

"It will throw suspicion on me."

"I don't see how."

"It may be doubted that you made the offer."

"But doesn't my withdrawal of a proposition presuppose I have made it?"

"True, but my situation will not be altogether agreeable."

"Do you wish me to put it in writing?"

"I will take it as a personal favor if you will do so."

"It shall be done even as thou desirest," replied Mr. Oxx, with another laugh, as he turned to a stand at his

elbow, and began writing on one of the letter-heads of the hotel.

He was ready with his pen, and it took but a minute for him to write and sign a pledge to accept three thousand dollars in full for all claims against the Irondale and Ofalea Railroad Company. Before passing the paper to his caller, he looked sharply at him and said :

“Tague, I would give a liberal reward to find out how the men on the train tumbled to the racket.”

“It was all your fault.”

“What do you mean?”

“You lost a telegram on the platform at the Junction, and it fell into the hands of that fireman. I don’t know what fate took it there, but he got it, and after comparing notes with the engineer and conductor, they surmised what was coming, and you know the rest.”

Hematite Oxx indulged in a low whistle.

“Accidents will happen, but it was a piece of carelessness on my part. Luckily there was no address or signature to the telegram, and no further harm was done. How does *that* suit?”

As he spoke, he handed the paper which he had just signed to the caller, who read it carefully and said :

“That is to the point : I think that will go through with bells on ; but——”

“Well?”

“What do you think of that fireman who coaxed you into the express car and then jumped on you?”

“Do you know I admire the fellow? I understand he isn’t much more than a boy, but he’s the toughest customer I ever got hold of. If it hadn’t been for him, I believe I could have mastered the other two. I was mad enough to feel like shooting him, but, after all, when I saw him this morning I couldn’t help stopping him on the street and complimenting him on the style in which he wound up my

clock. I assured him that it was all right, and I would call quits with him."

Montague Worthley was aghast. *That* was not the kind of language he wanted to hear. He was indignant enough to regret the kindness shown this man, who was evidently an old acquaintance.

"Well, *that* was a bright piece of work," he said, sarcastically; "it will be in order now to give him a part of the three thousand as a memento of your loving regard."

"No; I've got to divide it with others, or I might feel like it; but don't you like the fellow, Tague?"

"Hem, I want you to do me a favor."

"It shall be done if in reason. What is it?"

"I want you to add a condition to the offer you have made the company."

"What is it?"

"It won't affect the amount of your claim, nor the promptness with which it is paid. Take your pen and I will dictate."

"You have a cool way of doing things," laughed Mr. Oxx, who, however, was in a pleasant mood and complied with his friend's request.

To the bottom of the note he had written a few minutes before, the following was added and signed:

"The above proposition is made on the distinct provision that the young man who invited me into the express car, under promise of shelter from the storm, shall be at once discharged from the employ of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company. Should the said company decline to punish the unjustifiable act of one of their employees in this manner, then the offer above specified is withdrawn."

CHAPTER XX.

DISCHARGED.

COUNSELOR GANZELL, Montague Worthley and his father, the superintendent of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company, were holding a conference in the private office of the last named gentleman.

The young man had given an account of his call upon Mr. Hematite Oxx at the City Hotel, and the written ultimatum of that much abused individual lay on the desk of the superintendent, where it could be easily read by all from their seats.

"It was the hardest job I undertook," said Montague, with an air of fatigue, as though he had not yet fully recovered from the task.

"You succeeded better than I anticipated," remarked the lawyer, reaching out his hand for the paper, as if to make sure he had read it correctly; "I did not think he would listen to anything less than half his first price."

"He insisted on that, but I assured him he could only get it, if he got it all, through a long fight in the courts, in which the expense would eat up half the sum. Still he held out, and it was not until I had put on my hat and left the room that he called me back and said he would accept three thousand."

"Did you assure him it would be paid?" asked the superintendent.

"My instructions from Mr. Ganzell were that if any sum above twenty-five hundred was demanded, I was not to pledge it until after my report to him. I followed orders."

Mr. Worthley took the paper from the counselor, adjusted his gold spectacles, and held the letter for a full minute before him. He had time in which to read it over more than once, but had anyone studied his manner closely he would

have discovered that it was the postscript which troubled him.

Slipping his glasses off their perch, he laid back the letter on the desk and began twirling the spectacles over his fingers. Then, looking inquiringly into the face of the lawyer, he said:

"Well, Aurelian, what do you advise?"

"Pay the bill and have done with it."

"Some of the directors may object. You know we have several cranky members."

"I will guarantee there will be no trouble from *that* source. It will be easy to convince them that it will be money saved to close the account; *that* is the only question which can concern such gentlemen."

"To be frank," said Mr. Worthley, "I hold the same opinion, but I don't like the condition tacked to this letter."

"You mean Oxx's demand that young Lovell shall be discharged?"

"Yes; it is hooked to the tail as though it was an afterthought; I can't understand why, if he received his price, he should demand anything more. What difference can it make to him whether Lovell loses his situation or not?"

"The very question I put to him," Montague hastened to say, "but it was no use. After all, if you heard Oxx's story, you could not help sympathizing with him. He says he was persuaded, only after much coaxing, to enter the express car, and he would not have cared had he been given a show, but the fireman struck him from behind, and, except for the presence of the two guards, would have killed him. When Mr. Oxx says it is a small thing to demand that Bob Lovell should leave the employ of the company for such a treacherous outrage, it is hard to object."

Mr. Ganzell smiled as if he pitied the squeamishness of the superintendent over the discharge of a single employee.

"If we had time to inquire into the merits of the case, I

have no doubt we should find considerable in young Lovell's favor, for all will admit he is a brave fellow. There can be no question that a robbery of the train had been planned, and that, had not the engineer butted the obstruction off the track, the whole fifty thousand dollars of Wells & Fargo would have been stolen."

"Exactly," Montague hastened to say; "no one can deny that the glory belongs to Fields; *he* showed not only pluck, but wonderful judgment. Not another engineer in a thousand would have dared attempt what he did, with a forty foot embankment on each side, down which he had taken one plunge only a few months before."

"That may be true," said the counselor doggedly, "but still, for genuine courage, it was not superior to the act of young Lovell, in climbing over the tender with the deliberate intention of attacking a powerful and fully armed man."

"Then," said the pleased superintendent, "you object to the last condition of the man's proposition?"

"By no means; although I would do so if I thought it would do any good. What I mean to say is this: while it is hard on the fireman, whose motive must be commended, yet, we, as representatives of a great corporation, have nothing to do with *that*. We are not here, if you will permit me, to think of Mr. Robert Lovell, but to protect the interests of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company."

The counselor had made himself plain, and perhaps his position cannot be gainsaid. It is said that corporations have no souls, and it may be added that it would be very strange if they had. Some of their members may be the kindest hearted of men, but collectively they are as hard and cruel as steel.

The question was simply whether the railway company should do a good thing for themselves by discharging from their employ one of the firemen working for them.

Why need it be any question at all? On what ground could Mr. Worthley dissent from the proposed arrangement, when he and his two friends had commended it? To allow any friendship for the proposed victim would be a sensitiveness, sure to subject the superintendent to ridicule.

No one could have seen this more clearly than that gentleman himself.

"Very well, Montague, make out the notification to Lovell, and I will sign it," he said, compressing his lips and nodding his head, to signify the question was settled.

The young man fairly leaped to the desk of his father, forgetful of the injured arm, and his pen flew over the paper. The form of these communications is brief, for, as a rule, a corporation is chary of words at such times. Robert Lovell was notified that his services for the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company would cease on and from the 10th inst., which date was the day following the evening on which the discharge was written.

Mr. Worthley once more set his glasses astride his nose, and carefully read the message. While he was doing so, Montague winked at Counselor Ganzell, who slyly wiped one eye with his finger, as if removing a tear of regret that one of the army of the employees of the company was about to fall out of the ranks.

It seemed to Mr. Worthley that the letter was very curt and unfeeling, and yet it was the same in form as had been sent to others without number, and the official had never before objected to the phrasing.

And so, wheeling about in his chair, he attached his autograph to the document, which notified Bob Lovell that he was no longer in the employ of the I. & O. Montague folded it in one of the official envelopes, wrote the name of Lovell upon it, and thrust it in his pocket, with the intention of personally handing it to the young gentleman that evening, when the night express arrived in Ofalca.

"You can notify Mr. Oxx," added the superintendent to his son, "that the company's check for three thousand dollars will be handed him within a week. He understands that certain formalities must be gone through which will prevent the matter being closed up sooner."

Montague bade his father an affectionate good evening, and left the office in company with Counselor Ganzell, the two indulging in no little fun over the tenderness displayed by the superintendent for the fireman of the Hercules.

The night express steamed into the Ofalca station that night on time to a minute. It was the custom of Matt Fields to leave the engine at that point, and turn it over to Bob, who, after the passengers had disembarked, ran the cars on a siding, while he took the engine to the round house, where it remained under cover for the morrow.

In these later days, the locomotives are generally placed in charge of the "hostlers," who draw their fires, clean and put them in shape for the next day's service, when the fireman presents himself, gives his engine its final touch, and brings it down to the station with the cars, ready for the run by the engineer who assumes charge.

Most of this preliminary work was done by Bob, who rose early, rubbed and oiled his machine, got steam up, and had everything prepared for Matt Fields in ample time.

The latter had barely brought the Hercules to a halt when Montague pushed his way through the crowd to the engine. Bob was nearer to him, and had only time to identify the young man when he handed him the all important letter.

"There's something which concerns you, sir," he remarked, in his supercilious way.

Bob took it without a word and thrust it into his pocket, while Matt, who had not observed the act, came from the other side of his engine and stepped upon the platform,

pleasantly greeting the young gentleman, who walked beside him as they left the station.

"There is but one opinion about what you did the other night," remarked Montague, who seemed anxious to propitiate the grim engineer.

"What do you mean?" asked Matt, quite certain, however, to what he referred.

"The way you knocked that log off the track down at Dead Man's Hollow."

"I didn't do it; it was the Hercules. She happened to hit it right; that's her style, you know."

"But it was a powerful piece of work; you must have made some very fine calculations."

"I don't know as I did," replied the engineer, to whom this kind of talk was anything but pleasant. Montague persisted in adding more extravagant compliments, and finally bade Matt an effusive good-by.

The latter walked a block in the darkness and then looked back as if in quest of the young man. He was not in sight, and the engineer shrugged his shoulders.

"If he knew—if *anyone* knew the real reason why Matt Fields didn't stop the Hercules that night, he wouldn't be so free with his compliments. The fact was I didn't intend to run into the log, but—but—but—I suppose it must all come out some day!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A BLUNDER.

LOYD MONTAGUE WORTHLEY was in a jubilant mood. Things were moving just to suit him. Bob Lovell was discharged, and he on his way to pay his respects to Miss Evelyn Walbridge, youngest daughter of the president of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company.

Her father was very wealthy, and Montague—well, he felt warranted in believing that he was the favored one among the many suitors for the hand of the beautiful heiress.

Why did Montague Worthley feel such hatred toward Bob Lovell? Because one was mean and the other noble. Young Lovell had proven his superiority over Montague in every respect from their earliest boyhood. There is something in this human nature of ours which resents the superiority of others. We are inclined to feel that they have no right to be our betters, and to dislike them for that very reason.

Montague Worthley looked a long way ahead. A shock of alarm passed through him when he learned that Bob Lovell had entered the service of the company, even though it was in the humble capacity of fireman. He remembered how easily that boy had distanced him at school and in all athletic sports, and he knew that in any kind of race between them, where fair play was shown, Bob Lovell would win.

Who would think that a fireman could outrun the only son of the superintendent of the road in the struggle for promotion? And yet such things have been done. For further particulars read the history of the presidents and officials of the leading railways of our country.

Montague dreaded a competition with Bob, even though the latter began at the bottom of the ladder and the former well toward the top. What he feared might not be probable, but it was possible; and you will understand, therefore, why he was so relieved when he reflected that Bob was ruled off the course altogether. In other words, he had been discharged, and competition was out of the question.

Montague was attired in the most fashionable clothes of the season, and it cannot be denied that he made a good appearance. His shapely feet were incased in patent

leathers, over which skeleton rubbers were drawn, for it was icy and slippery on the streets; his small hands were covered with amber-hued kids; his necktie was, irreproachable, his silk tile faultless, and the glimpse of his linen showed it to be like snow, well setting off the two carat diamonds which shone just below his neck.

He threw back the collar of his ulster as he entered the fashionable drinking place known as the Hole in the Wall, and, walking to the tables at the rear, where the latest files of sporting papers lay, sat down and ordered a fancy drink.

The young man did not forget that he was about to pay his respects to a fastidious young lady, and it was hardly the thing to go into her presence with the odor of ardent spirits about him. But Montague was plentifully supplied with cloves, sassafras root, and that sort of thing. Besides, he did not intend to do more than sip the fluid in the narrow necked vessel at his elbow.

His chief errand in this saloon was not that which led so many into the corrupting place. He wanted to brace himself for the momentous interview with Miss Walbridge, for, though he was not yet ready to propose the all important question, on account of her youth, yet, he meant to give some pretty plain hints in that direction—enough to “draw her out,” as he expressed it to himself. When an ardent lover is confident of standing within an hour or two before the eyes of his adored one, it would be very strange if he did not feel nervous.

Besides this, Montague had several letters in his pockets, to which he wished to give further thought. He had read them all, but several would bear a second or third reading.

Accordingly, after touching his lips to the flavored poison in the glass, he slid his left hand under his right shoulder, where he carried in an inner pocket his most precious missives. He drew out half a dozen, and, flinging

them on the table before him, began sorting them in the search for a particular one.

The next moment an imprecation escaped him. Before him lay the envelope directed to Robert Lovell—just as he had written it less than an hour before in his father's office. Snatching it up, he tore the seal, hoping the mistake he dreaded had not been made. But there was the curt notification to the young man that his services for the company terminated the next day.

"Well, I'm blessed!" muttered the young man (except that his expletive was much stronger than the one I have given), "if that isn't a little ahead of anything yet. However, I can send the right letter to-morrow—only it's infernally provoking to make such a blunder as that. If the governor finds it out, he will laugh, and say that fate had interfered——"

Montague Worthley almost fell to the floor. He had recalled that he handed a letter to Bob Lovell, which manifestly was the wrong one, but——

What letter was it?

Well might the astonished young man ask himself the question, for among his missives was one which he would not have fall into other hands for the entire worth of the I. & O. corporation.

"If it's *that* letter, I'm ruined!" he gasped, as the cold beads of perspiration formed on his forehead, and he hastily gulped the contents of the glass to prevent himself from fainting.

Then he began a desperate search through every receptacle in his clothing. As a person will do at such times, he examined them over and over again and looked into the places where it was impossible the article should be. He stooped and peered under the table, snatched up the newspapers on the stand and glanced beneath them, shook his hat as though it were hid in the lining, and then hastily

shuffled what letters he had, in the weak hope that the one he wanted was insinuated among them.

It was gone! Beyond all question, Montague had committed the unspeakably stupid blunder of handing it to Bob Lovell, instead of the one meant for him. What rendered it the more exasperating was that the missive bore no resemblance in appearance to the one intended for the fireman. It passed all comprehension how the mistake was committed.

But it was done, and, it was characteristic of Montague Worthley that, when no doubt was left, he resumed his seat, and, for several minutes, made everything blue around him. So intense indeed was his gnawing disgust that he drew the attention of others, who wondered without inquiring its cause.

The spasm of furious chagrin having passed, he was seized with a mortal dread of the consequences to himself, unless the missing letter was recovered without delay.

"What will Lovell do after reading it?" he asked, with an awful sinking at the chest. "He is such a high-toned, Sunday school sort of fellow, that, when he sees the letter isn't directed to him, he will refrain from reading the contents—Oh, pshaw!"

How idle to rely on any such hope as *that!* Montague bounded to his feet, and, without looking to the right or left, dashed out of the Hole in the Wall, and started up the street in the direction of Bob Lovell's house. It was not very late in the evening, and he was confident of finding the young man at home.

No thought now of Miss Evelyn Walbridge. The sweet question which so agitated the bosom of the young man but a short time before must remain unanswered until a more convenient season. Important as that subject was, it could bear no comparison with the one that was hurrying him along the street.

He had kicked off the skeleton rubbers when he entered the Hole in the Wall, intending to thrust his feet into them before coming out; but in his excitement he forgot them, and was hurrying over the icy pavements with no thought of the risk he was running.

“That telegram of Hem Oxx’s was blown right into Lovell’s hands, and, as if that wasn’t enough, I must turn over to him the very letter that will give me dead away. There is some deviltry about this, which—thunderation!”

Just then Montague’s two feet shot up in air, his hat flew off, and he came down with a bump, that he was sure must have caused a bulge on the other side of the earth. He heard snickering across the street, and picking himself up, moved along so gingerly that he escaped further mishap.

Yes; Bob Lovell was at home and answered the knock at the door. Without any salutation, the nervous Montague began.

“I’m afraid I made a mistake this evening and handed you the wrong letter; I’ll give you the right one to-morrow. Let me have the one you have; of course you saw it was not directed to you, and no gentleman under such circumstances would read the contents. I don’t know what *you* did, but hurry up and let me have it.”

“The hour is so late that I can’t give any time to business to-night. You will have to call round in the morning, and then I will see what I can do for you.”

And Bob Lovell shut the door in the face of the insolent youth.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN INTERESTING LETTER.

HAD Bob Lovell’s gentle mother overheard the conversation, brief as it was, between her son and Montague Worthley, it is more than likely she would have chided

him for his brusqueness; but Bob was following the course he had laid out for himself some time before.

He had shown favors and kindnesses without number to the young man, only to be repaid with snubs and meannesses which made his blood boil. Since Montague refused all overtures, Bob accepted the conditions: it should be war, and he would never bow to save himself from discharge. He knew several of the officials on the Inverwick and Quitman road, and he had been told that he could have a situation whenever he chose to ask for it. But to enter their employ would take him from his loved mother and sister most of the time, or compel them to move to some other place, and he dreaded the change.

Bob did not need the hint he received from Twomey that Montague was using the incident of Dead Man's Hollow as a pretext to secure his discharge. It was known that Hematite Oxx had instituted suit against the company, and Montague insisted that the luxury of young Mr. Lovell came altogether too high for them to enjoy.

When, therefore, he handed the envelope to Bob with the remark quoted, the fireman did not doubt that it was a notice of his discharge. He would not please Worthley by reading it in his presence, and thus it came about that the recipient remained as ignorant for a time as did the sender that the missive was not the one intended for him.

Bob was angry through and through. He felt that he had been made the victim of the dislike of the most despicable person in the whole State; but, with the grim heroism which was a part of his nature, he went through all his duties without glancing at the paper in his pocket. Making his way home, he still declined to look at it until it was time to go to his room. He had said nothing to his mother, and decided not to tell her until morning.

When at last she and Meta had kissed him good-night and withdrawn to their rooms, leaving Bob, as they sup-

posed, to read the newspaper, he withdrew the letter from his pocket.

It was then that his second surprise came.

"Helloa! the letter isn't sealed. Yes, it has been, but was opened; how's that?"

He did not notice the superscription, but drew out the sheet and read the following:

NEW YORK, December 7, 18—.

DEAR FLAMM :

It was a slip the last time, but we'll fetch her when we load up and fire again. We have our eye on the Wells & Fargo, but we shall have to lay low till it blows over. The next time we will chain the log down to the track, won't we, Flamm? Keep your eyes peeled and you can count on us every time. How's the arm? Help Hem all you can. He's true blue.

QUIZ.

Mystified and wondering, Bob read this note through several times. Then he looked at the envelope, and saw that it was mailed in New York, and directed to "L. Montague Worthley, Esq."

Then it was that light broke upon Bob Lovell.

"He has given me the wrong letter," and throwing back his head, he laughed so heartily that his mother called down to learn the cause of his merriment. Bob replied that he was reading something which amused him, and the good mother, glad that her boy was in such fine spirits, wooed slumber again.

After his mirthfulness Bob felt serious, for there was a grave side to the matter. Not only was the letter a confidential one, but it unmistakably connected Montague Worthley, son of the superintendent, with the men who attempted to rob the Night Express a short time before.

The direction on the latter showed that it was intended for this young man, while the contents referred to the failure some nights before at Dead Man's Hollow. This ref-

erence was too direct to be explained on any other hypothesis.

"Can it be that Montague has any connection with those criminals?" Bob asked himself, immediately adding:

"I hope it isn't as bad as *that*; there isn't a meaner fellow living than he, but it would break the hearts of his father, mother, and sister. Let me see," added the young fireman, who was now thinking fast, "Montague has been away for a couple of weeks; he comes back with an injured arm; I wonder whether it was done by that bullet, which I sent at a venture from the cab the other night!"

This was a daring presumption, and Bob hoped that he had made a mistake. Much as he despised young Worthley, he found it hard to believe he was an actual criminal, one strong ground for such disbelief being his well known cowardice.

Bob sat silently meditating over the matter, when the ring of the door knocker startled him.

"It is he, come for his letter," was the correct conclusion of the youth as he hurried to answer the call.

Had Montague Worthley possessed any tact, he could have extricated himself from the bad hole into which he had stumbled through his own carelessness. He ought to have made a courteous request for the letter, and then, out of gratitude, secured the recall of Bob's discharge. Had this been done, Bob would have met him half way, and, though his sense of right would have impelled him to warn the youth of the awful peril in which he was placed, yet he never would have betrayed him.

But you have learned of the insulting form in which Montague made his demand. Bob refused him, and going back to his room, decided that, inasmuch as Providence had placed such an effective weapon in his hand, he would hold it for emergencies.

The incident naturally filled the young man's mind to

the exclusion of anything else. All disposition to sleep was gone, and, although the hour had become quite late, he called to his mother that he was going out for a while. She replied, "Very well," for she was one of those happy parents who have no fear of trusting their boys anywhere and at all times.

Bob had no clear purpose in venturing forth into the crisp, wintry night, except that it would cool his brain and enable him to think with more clearness. Besides this, perhaps he felt some curiosity to know what had become of Montague Worthley. He was not likely to go directly home, and might come back to Bob's house.

The enterprising town of Ofalca contained about six thousand inhabitants, and was furnished with most of the conveniences and luxuries of modern cities. As a consequence, when Bob left his own doorstep, he walked over good flagging, from which, except here and there, the snow and ice had been removed.

The fact that he was on the lookout for young Worthley caused him to survey the almost deserted street more closely than at any other time.

"My gracious! I believe that is he!" he whispered, before he had taken a half dozen steps.

The hour was so late that hardly anyone was visible, but by the aid of the lamp, he saw the figure of a man, dimly outlined in front of the house on the other side of the street.

"If it's Montague, let him make the first advance," was the conclusion of Bob, as he sauntered in the direction of the main street.

Keeping a sharp watch over his shoulder, he was not surprised to discover the person following him, though he made no move to cross to the same pavement.

The young fireman allowed this to continue for several blocks, when, at the first crossing, he passed to the other

side and, facing about, walked directly toward his "shadow." The latter did not check his progress or try to avoid him.

Determined to give him a chance to speak, Bob loitered until they came face to face under the lamplight. Then, to his amazement, he discovered that it was not Montague Worthley, but Hematite Oxx, and that he meant to exchange some words with him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOWING GOOD SEED.

BOB LOVELL might have felt some misgiving about meeting Hematite Oxx face to face, at this late hour, in the deserted street, but for the pleasant words the man had spoken to him that morning. As it was, he made him a half-military salute as they met under the lamp, and said, "Good-evening, sir."

"How do you do?" replied Oxx, extending his hand; "I left the hotel on purpose to see you."

"I am at your service. Will you walk back to my home? We will be alone."

The individual hesitated a moment, and suggested that they go to the hotel, but that was a considerable distance away, and he accepted the invitation. Accordingly they wheeled, and a few minutes later were seated in the sitting room of Bob's house. The latter turned up the gas, and, stepping to the foot of the stairs, called his mother in a moderate tone. There was no answer, proving that she was asleep. As I have said, she was not troubled by any fears that her boy would go wrong when not under her eye.

Hematite Oxx threw off his ulster, and at Bob's invitation continued his cigar, which he was about to throw into the blazing grate. He offered one to the youth, who smilingly

declined, with the remark that he had not yet acquired the habit.

"Well," said his visitor, flinging one leg over the other and settling back in his rocking chair, "I wanted to see you on rather particular business. I don't claim to be a saint, but I'll be hanged if there aint some things I *won't* do."

Bob wondered what he was aiming at, and observed :

"I am sure there are a good many things you wouldn't do."

"I don't know about that," said his guest, gently drawing at his cigar and looking into the glowing coals. "It would be better if there were more. I forgot to say to you this morning that I received my revolver, which you sent round to my room."

"I ought to have sent it sooner, but it slipped my mind."

"It was all in good time. I suppose you have heard about my suit against the company."

"I have been told that you have brought suit for damages."

"So I did, but it is settled."

"I didn't know that."

"Yes, I made them a proposition this afternoon, which I learned a little while ago would be accepted. They give me a liberal sum, and have done what I demanded."

"You were quite fortunate," said Bob, who still failed to see what his visitor was hinting at.

"I suppose you know the condition on which I agreed to accept a sum considerably less than I first asked ?"

"I do not."

"It was that you should be discharged from the employ of the company."

Bob's heart gave a quick throb, for like a flash he saw and understood a great deal of recent events.

"Haven't you received notice?" asked Oxx in surprise.

"Montague Worthley walked down to the station this evening as we came in, and handed me a letter, which he said would interest me. I have no doubt he meant to give me a notice of my discharge, but he made a strange mistake, and passed over an envelope which contained another letter altogether. He called here a while ago to get it back, but I concluded to hold fast to it for the present. It makes mighty interesting reading, and, if he persists in persecuting me without a cause, I may be able to turn it to account as a means of defense."

Hematite Oxx did not try to hide his astonishment. He suddenly sat bolt upright in his chair, and holding his cigar between thumb and forefinger, stared at the youth, while a single muttered exclamation passed his lips. He was about to speak, but repressed the words, and, settling back, rocked vigorously, and puffed as though his cigar was on the point of expiring.

"Lovell," said he a minute later, "the meanest thing I ever did was to tack that condition to my proposal. It was suggested to me by another party, but it isn't necessary to mention his name."

"No, for you and I know there is only one person in the United States who would think of it."

Hematite Oxx laughed as though the remark pleased him, and hastened to say :

"I agree with you. I didn't think much of it at the time, and when a certain party asked, as a personal favor, that I would make the demand, I consented. After he was gone, I got to thinking it over, and the more I thought the meaner I felt. I finally made up my mind to send a second communication to the superintendent, withdrawing the demand, and I had begun writing it, when what should be brought to my room but a message from Superintendent Worthley, asking me to call at his house that evening !"

It was Bob's turn to be surprised. He suspected what was coming, but it was almost too good to be true.

"Have you called?"

"I have," replied Oxx, with a smile, "and I found the old gentleman at home. He was sitting alone in his library and expecting me. It was plain to see there was something on his mind, and it didn't take him long to make it known. He said he was so troubled over your discharge that he couldn't rest. He had sent for me to talk the matter over, and to learn whether I couldn't be induced to withdraw the condition. He offered me five hundred dollars from his own pocket if I would do so. You ought to have seen him open his eyes when I shut him off at that point and told him I had already made up my mind to do what he wanted. It was on my tongue to let him know that the whole thing was the work of his son, but I was afraid of hurting his feelings, and I said nothing on that point. He insisted that I should take the money he offered, but I replied that one infernally mean thing a day was all I could stand. Then he wheeled right round to his desk and wrote a note which he said would be delivered to you the first thing to-morrow morning. Seeing how pleased he was, I offered to place it in your hands this evening, and here it is."

Hematite Oxx, while speaking, had fished out an envelope from the pocket of his coat, and flung it toward Bob, who deftly caught it on the fly. The words were few, but to the point :

ROBERT LOVELL, Esq.

MY DEAR SIR : The communication from my office of to-day, notifying you of your discharge, is recalled. You will consider it un-sent, and continue your duties as heretofore.

Very respectfully,

CAVARLY WORTHLEY, Supt.

"It was very kind in you, Mr. Oxx, to do this," said Bob in a tremulous voice ; "I hardly expected it."

"Don't mention it," replied the caller, with an impatient wave of his hand. "I'm disgusted enough to kick myself to think I ever consented to such a thing."

"I am sure you will agree with me, Mr. Oxx, that it pays to be just and charitable to all."

"I admit that it does in *this* case."

"Yes, and in all others," Bob hastened to say, anxious to sow a few grains of good seed on the soil which cannot be said to have been very promising. "The career of some people seems to disprove the old saying about honesty being the best policy, but there is a reward higher than anything the world can give."

The visitor was silent. He was unaccustomed to such language, but he felt its truth, and his not unhandsome face became more thoughtful, as his eyes remained fixed on the glowing grate before him.

"Yes," he said with a faint sigh, "my father and mother taught me that, but, when I went out into the world, it seemed to me they were wrong. Rascality, dishonesty, meanness, appear to [be the qualities which succeed in this world. And yet, after all, you are right."

"It is hard to submit to many of the trials which meet us at every turn. Montague Worthley has no just grounds for disliking me, and yet the object of his life seems to be to injure me. It has been hard more than once to prevent myself from throwing all restraint to the winds and threshing him within an inch of his life——"

"It's a pity you don't do it."

"It will be a greater pity if I do. If he persists in his wrong-doing, he is sure to sup sorrow. I have been restrained more than once by my sympathy for his folks. You know what a good man his father is. If he learned what I could tell him about his son, it would break his heart. I hope he will never know it. I hope Montague

will not be led so far astray that he cannot retrace his steps before it is too late."

These were daring words, as Bob Lovell meant them to be. Convinced as he was that the man before him was one of those who were leading young Worthley along the downward path, he made this appeal to his better nature in the hope that he would listen to the voice of conscience, which was not yet dumb.

It is well that we know when we have said enough. The best intentioned persons often destroy the good they have done by overdoing it. When your shot strikes home, stop and let the wound rankle.

Hematite Oxx had finished his cigar, but he sat for several minutes silent and thoughtful. Then he turned and looked searchingly at the youth, who felt a certain embarrassment under the fixed stare.

"Well," said he, with a singular touch of sadness, "you are a remarkable young man. I shall not forget what you have said."

"I pray you may not," replied Bob, helping on his ulster; "everyone builds for himself, but make not the mistake of building for this world instead of for eternity."

The next morning Bob had finished his early meal, had kissed his sister and mother good-by, and had just left his own door on his way to the round house, where the Hercules was awaiting attention, when he found himself face to face with Montague Worthley, who was walking rapidly toward him.

The countenance of the young man was flushed, and it was evident he was in anything but an amiable mood.

"I'll take that letter now," he said brusquely, stopping short in front of Bob, who looked up in surprise.

"Hallo, Flamm, is that you?" he called out in return.

A hot glow mounted to the face of young Worthley, who

drew out the *right letter* from his pocket, and handed it to Bob with the remark :

“That is the one I meant to give you ; we will trade.”

“I don't know that I care about receiving yours,” replied the fireman, declining to take the missive.

“It is from the superintendent and is meant for you. You will find its contents interesting.”

“I might have found them so last night, but another has reached me that is still more interesting.”

“What do you mean ?” asked Montague, in angered amazement.

“Read for yourself.”

As he spoke, Bob handed the communication of the night before to him, and he read it with wrathful astonishment. There could be no mistaking the handwriting and the import of its contents. His countenance grew pale, and he uttered an imprecation.

“I'll see Oxx about this. What can be the matter with him ?”

“Nothing at all ; your father saw him last night, and it was arranged between them. I don't think you are smart enough, Flamm, to upset their agreement.”

“What do you mean by calling me ‘Flamm ?’”

“Have you never been addressed by that name ?”

“Never, until you had the impudence to apply it to me.”

“Who, then, is ‘Flamm ?’”

“I never heard of the person.”

“Ah, then the letter which you handed me was not intended for you. Probably you stole it from the owner, and since you have no claim upon it, I will keep it until ‘Flamm’ presents himself.”

It cost Montague Worthley a great effort to prevent his temper from breaking all bounds. He would have liked to assault Bob Lovell and take the missive from him, but he was too certain of the result of such an attempt.

He saw that despite his precaution the cool Bob was getting the best of him at every turn. But he must have the letter at all hazards. His manner changed, and with an insinuating smile, he said in tones that were meant to be persuasive :

“Come, Bob, what’s the use? It isn’t fair to treat me that way. You never were so rough on me before. I’ll be awfully obliged to you if you will let me have the letter.”

This abrupt change of front did not deceive the young fireman, but he choose to suppress some of the rasping words that clamored for utterance.

“Why didn’t you speak that way in the first place? Now, Tague, if I let you have the letter and say nothing about it, will you cry quits with me?”

“Of course I will ; it’s a bargain.”

“And you’ll stop bearing down on me so hard?”

“Of course ; we’ll shake hands over it and let by-gones be by-gones. There are some things in the letter which look odd to one that doesn’t understand them, but really, Bob, they don’t mean anything.”

The soft, effeminate hand of young Worthley was thrust impulsively into the hard palm of the fireman of the Hercules, and the pressure and saluting could not have been more hearty.

When it was over, Bob Lovell drew from his pocket the envelope that had caused all his mental misery and passed it to Montague. The latter glanced at the superscription, to make sure another mistake had not been made, and then hastily shoved it into the inner pocket of his coat, beneath his ulster.

Words cannot express his relief when he felt that the compromising letter was once more in his possession. Hastily bidding Bob a curt good-by, he wheeled about and almost ran down the street.

“If I ever make another such a blunder, I’ll blow out

my own brains, but if I do blunder like that again it will be proof that I haven't any brains to blow out. As for Lovell, I guess it will be wise to let up for a while; I've been pushing him a little harder than is wise, but I hate him more than ever before, and I'll even up matters before long. He wants to be an engineer on our road, but he never shall. There won't be any trouble in fixing things so that he will stumble into a hole where he will be buried, *and I'll do it!*"

The eyes of the young man flamed with passion as he muttered this threat. There could be no doubt of his earnestness.

He entered his own home a few minutes afterward and joined his parents at breakfast. A casual question or two brought out the truth of what he suspected: Hematite Oxx had called the evening before, while he was away, and spent considerable time with his father in the library. There was no trouble to read the meaning of *that* interview.

When alone in his room for a few minutes before going to the office, Montague drew out the envelope which had dispelled all sleep for the night previous.

"I'll wind up *this* part of the business," he muttered, withdrawing the folded sheet from within; "I'll burn this and caution the boys to be more careful in writing me—great Scott!"

The sheet which he produced and unfolded was blank. There was not the mark of a pen upon it. Bob Lovell had baffled him again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BOB LOVELL AT THE THROTTLE.

BOB LOVELL had cause to feel grateful over the outcome of the recent events. Despite his distrust of Montague Worthley, he knew his own situation as an employee of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company was more secure than ever.

Matt Fields mounted the engine at the round house and brought the cars into the station, where they waited ten minutes for the baggage and express matter to be taken aboard and for the passengers to assume their places for the journey westward.

"All aboard!" called Twomey, in response to the "Right here!" from the brakemen; and then, with a wave of his hand he added to the expectant engineer, "Go ahead!"

The Hercules, in response to the slight jerk on the lever, gave a resounding puff, and the ponderous drivers began slowly to revolve. There was no sand coursing through the curved pipes upon the rails, and no slipping. Matt (although he did not always do it) had that art of the accomplished engineer who knows how to start his train without the disagreeable jerks and jolts we all have felt. The engine moved so slowly that President Walbridge, who was on the train, looked out of the window and asked the superintendent at his side:

"Did you know we are moving!"

"No—is that so? So we are—but that is because we have a master at the lever."

The puffs grew faster, as the pace of the Hercules rose, until when they were almost running together, they suddenly ceased, and the next instant came out of the smoke-

stack faster than ever, though so faint that they were hardly perceptible. That was because Matt had applied the "cut off," by which, as I have already shown, the steam in the cylinder follows the piston head only a part of the way, darting in on the other side so quickly that the speed rapidly rises to a high point.

The run to Irondale, more than a hundred miles away, was fairly begun, and the Hercules seemed to snuff with pleasure like the racer, when he bounds across the plain. Only at rare intervals did the engineer look at his watch, for he was so accustomed to the movement of his engine, and so familiar with every point of the road, that he knew whether he was gaining time, falling behind, or holding his own. Dead Man's Hollow was due five minutes before ten, the distance being thirty-five miles from Ofalca, which point was left precisely at nine in the morning. Since the Hercules could not strike her regular gait until after winding her way over a series of switches, extending for an eighth of a mile from the station, and since there were one or two other points where it was necessary to hold up, it will be admitted that the Day Express was scheduled to make good time.

Matt took out his watch the moment he swept far enough around the long curve in the woods to catch sight of the trestle-work of Dead Man's Hollow. As he had done before, he smiled and held the timepiece so that Bob could see the face. The latter nodded pleasantly, for they were on time to a second.

Just then Matt shut off steam, and applied the air-brakes with such vehemence that every car took that peculiar, shuddering movement which is felt when the stoppage is so rapid that all the passengers bump against the seat in front, look anxiously in each others' faces, and ask what the trouble can be.

Bob glanced ahead, and saw a man standing in front

of the trestle-work holding a flag ; but it was white, not red, indicating there was no danger.

“ It’s all right ! ” he shouted to the engineer, who instantly released the brakes and quickly recovered the sweeping pace.

“ Confound him ! ” muttered Matt angrily, “ why did he show the red flag first ! ” and he shook his head at the man, as they thundered by him and upon the bridge.

He was the “ boss ” of a gang of laborers repairing the track, and had no business to delay unnecessarily the express or mail. He ran the risk of discharge by doing so.

The trip was about half finished, when Matt asked Bob to take a turn at the throttle. Brief as had been his service on the road, he had already guided the Hercules a goodly number of miles, so, without the least hesitation, he assumed the place vacated by Matt, and rested his hand on the lever.

“ Hold her about where she is, ” said the engineer ; “ she is doing well enough. ”

Matt took a look at the furnace, tested the steam gauges, and finding everything working right, seated himself on the left, where Bob was accustomed to sit, when not at work, and carefully noted how the youth handled the engine.

He could not but admire the performance. The lad carried a fine timekeeper, the gift of his father, and after running a few miles he glanced at it, instantly returning it to its place.

The next minute he shut off steam to an almost imperceptible degree, soon resuming it as before. Matt smiled. The Hercules was running slightly too fast, being about a half-mile further along the road than she ought to have been. The fireman had drawn on the rein until the right pace was struck.

When the Junction was descried in the distance, both

Bob and Matt were on the alert. Although accustomed to come to a stop before reaching the crossing, it was necessary to halt a quarter of a mile east of the regular station, unless the signal to keep on was displayed.

It was this signal which the engineer and fireman were looking for. As Bob approached, he shut off steam and gently applied the brakes, so as to hold the train in hand, in case he was obliged to stop.

While in the very act of throwing the brakes with their whole force against the wheels, Matt looked quickly across and called :

"There it is !"

Bob nodded, jerked open the throttle, and the Hercules galloped down to the station, where she was reined up with a skill that Matt Fields could not have surpassed.

It was at this point that Bob turned over the engine to its rightful master, and never was his heart sadder than when he did so.

A growing suspicion in his mind had become conviction, and he could have shed tears of genuine sorrow and grief.

CHAPTER XXV.

BOB AT HOME.

THE Day Express never made a more admirable run than on that wintry morning, when she drew up at Irondale, not a second behind time. It was the same at every station, though the halts were few. Both the president and superintendent walked forward to the engine and complimented Matt Fields on his performance.

"Not that there is any special call for commendation," explained the superintendent, "for the reports show that it is the rule with you."

"The Hercules is the best engine on the road," replied the

modest engineer, feeling as though he would like to pat the neck of the iron horse, if it had only possessed a neck to caress ; "but then Bob Lovell ran a part of the way."

"Under his eye," the blushing fireman hastened to add.

"He is rather young to be trusted with the running of a locomotive," said the president, "but you were really the director."

"He don't need much direction," said Matt ; "and I wouldn't be afraid to trust him with an engine."

"His time will come," was the pleasant remark of the leading officer of the road, as he bade the employees good-bye and walked away with the superintendent.

The result of the kind remarks that had been made to Bob Lovell was to make him magnanimous. He had resolved that morning to keep the compromising letter of Montague Worthley, not with any idea of using it wrongly, but to hold it as a sword of Damocles over the head of the unscrupulous youth.

But, although convinced of the treacherous disposition of his enemy, Bob reflected that he had as yet received no proof of it, and was not likely to receive it for an indefinite time to come. Besides, he believed the truth of what his mother had said so many times to him : he had but to do right and leave the rest to Heaven.

When, therefore, the Hercules drew up at the Ofalca station that evening and Montague Worthley was seen standing on the station with his face paler than ever, Bob concluded not to keep him in suspense.

"Do you know you made a bad mistake this morning?" asked the youth the moment the fireman stepped off the engine.

"What was that?"

"You gave me the right envelope, but no letter was inside."

"You don't tell me!" laughed Bob, taking his coat from

the box on his side of the cab, and hastily examining his pockets ; "it must be here. Ah, I think that's it."

Montague's hands trembled as he nervously opened the folded piece of paper handed him.

"Yes, that's right," he said, after a glance at the handwriting, and without another word he turned on his heel and hurried off.

"You are welcome to it," muttered Bob, stepping back and holding himself ready to run the engine to shelter, after passengers, baggage, and express parcels were on the platform.

No young man could have had a more delightful home than the young fireman of the Hercules. His mother was an educated lady of natural refinement, and the mutual love of herself and children could not have been more tender and perfect. Small as were her means, she was able, with the help of her noble son, to give Meta, her daughter, the best educational advantages Ofalca afforded.

Meta was as bright and popular as her brother, and though only three years younger than he, she held her place at the head of her classmates in the Ofalca Young Ladies' Seminary.

Among the attendants of that admirable institution were Effie Worthley, the sister of Montague, who was about the same age as Meta. She was a beautiful girl, and possessed something of her brother's disposition, and, but for the fact that she found herself so often in need of the assistance of Meta, which was always cheerfully given, she would have treated her with such patronizing airs that the proud Meta would have rebelled.

The next best pupil, and in some respects the equal of Meta, was Evelyn Walbridge, the youngest daughter of the president of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company. She was a few months older than Meta, and was a brunette of striking loveliness, not only in face, feature and

form, but in manners and disposition. She was inclined to be mischievous, but with it all was so kind-hearted, so brimming with good nature, and so affectionate, that the teachers, while compelled to scold her, loved her all the more.

One of the most charming characteristics of Evelyn Walbridge was her unconsciousness of her superior social position and her affection for Meta Lovell. The friendship between these two girls was trusting and unselfish. There never was a gathering at the stately mansion of Mr. Walbridge, where young folks were present, that Meta was not the first of the invited. It was out of Meta's power to give anything like the entertainments she attended, but that did not prevent Evelyn from being a frequent visitor at the humble home.

She frequently took tea with Meta, and sometimes spent the night with her. Mrs. Lovell was such a lovely woman that Evelyn often told her that she was as much an attraction to her as was the daughter, while Bob was the finest young fellow in town.

She was fond of teasing and making him blush, for she declared it made him look really handsome. He accepted her sweet persecution philosophically, but never allowed his feelings to tempt him to anything like presumption. He treated her with the utmost circumspection and respect, not believing she could entertain any other than sisterly feelings toward him.

When he found, however, that Montague Worthley had turned his eyes in that direction, a strange pang went through Bob's heart. He wondered whether Evelyn could ever bring herself to listen to young Worthley's suit. If she did, he could no longer feel that respect which was part of his being. But he resolved that he would not allow himself to think of so painful a subject.

It was on Saturday that the president and superintendent

took the ride I have described, and, as was Matt Field's practice, he exchanged with a friend, who ran the train from the Junction to Ofalca and back the following Monday morning. By this means Matt was able to spend Sunday at home, the Express slowing up to let him off and picking him up at the same place on the return trip.

Sunday was a delightful day with Bob Lovell. It was spent almost invariably in the same manner. Like his mother and sister, he was a member of the leading church, which they attended together in the morning, unless the weather was very stormy, in which case the brother and sister went alone, for there could be no weather tempestuous enough to keep them within doors.

Bob had been a teacher for several years in the Sunday School, while Meta was a member of a Bible class. Beside this, the young man took a prominent part in the temperance meetings held in the most wretched part of the town. Bob sang well, and could make an excellent address, and these gifts were often called into use. But for the fact that he was not at home until quite late during the week, most of his nights would have been employed in a similar manner.

Perhaps it may not interest you to learn about Bob Lovell's home life : you may find more entertainment in reading of the adventures which befell him in riding upon or in running the Hercules (and I have more stirring incidents to tell you than have yet been related), but after all, it is the home life which is the real test of a person's character.

If you want thoroughly to know a boy, visit him at home, and study his life there. If he is respectful, obedient, and loving to his parents ; if he is kind, affectionate, and unselfish to his brothers and sisters ; if he is thoughtful of the feelings of others ; if he prefers his home to any other place ; if he wishes the company of some members of the household when he goes out ; if the enjoyment of himself is secondary to that of others—why that young man is

safe, and, if he lives, fortune and happiness are as sure to come to him as is the darkness to flee before the rays of the rising sun.

Now, I don't pretend to say that Bob Lovell was a perfect youth. He made his mistakes, as do all persons of his years, and his hasty temper sometimes led him to say and do things which were better left unsaid and undone.

But he was building upon a firm foundation ; his character was founded on right principles, and the president and superintendent of the railroad were not the only ones who predicted good things of him.

He read and studied. Meta often wanted his opinion on subjects that were discussed at school, and he intended to be able to converse intelligently about them. He would have been proud could she have surpassed him in this respect, but he meant she should struggle hard to secure that place.

As for mother, neither could hope to get beyond *her*. She had had every advantage in her younger days, and the keen minds of her children were inherited from her. We would have enjoyed the sight, all of us, could we have seen those three in the cheerful sitting room, discussing some knotty question in moral philosophy, some problem in higher mathematics, some new discovery in physics, or the utterances of some ambitious philosopher or investigator in the realms of speculation, who had just found out that the whole system of Christian theology was a delusion, that the most learned and best men that had lived for eighteen centuries were fools, and that his own "system" was destined to reconstruct the universe in general and make everything lovely.

It would have been entertaining, I say, to listen to these discussions, but I shall have to leave them to your imagination, and proceed with a history of the career of the single male member of the little group.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ONE MORNING IN MAY.

THE birthday of Evelyn Walbridge came in the month of May, the season of fragrant flowers, of bright skies, and the most charming of all weather.

The parents of the girl were indulgent to their children, and, since Evelyn was the youngest, she was the special pet, or "baby," of the family, as her father insisted on viewing her. He declared that, like the rest of his children, they could never grow too old to sit upon his knee, to tell him all their troubles, and to meet him with a kiss when he stepped across his own threshold. The affection between the members of that household was of the most touching nature.

Evelyn knew that a plot was on foot to give her a handsome present, but with all her ingenious questioning and sly investigations, she was unable to learn what it was. None of the president's children was forgotten on such occasions, but they generally managed to obtain an inkling of what was coming, as is the rule at such times.

But, as I have said, Evelyn was entirely in the dark until the delightful spring morning dawned and she came downstairs to receive the mock chastisements which every member of the family insisted was due her on her birthday.

She saw nothing in the nature of a present as she moved about the house, though her bright eyes took in everything, but the significant looks and smiles on the faces around her left no doubt that something was on the carpet.

The surprise came when she was asked to the front door, where, just outside the gate, stood a beautiful black pony attached to a gem of a phaeton.

"They are yours!" said her father, who, like all the rest, was not less happy than the astonished girl.

Evelyn jumped up in the air, and clapped her hands with delight. Then her arms were around her father's neck and she was smothering him with kisses, and declaring him to be the best father, not only in the United States of America, but in the whole wide, wide world.

When the burst of excitement was over, she ran down the graveled walk, unfastened the pony, sprang into the carriage, and was off in a cloud of dust. She took a spin of half a mile, and returned as radiant as a sunbeam.

Of course each sister had to ride with her after breakfast, the father and mother declining until some more convenient season. Then the spirited pony was put in the stable to be given a rest until the afternoon. Meanwhile, a message was sent to Meta Lovell to be ready at two o'clock to take a ride with the joyous owner of the prize.

"Papa told me that Prince is a mettled animal, and that I must use great care in driving him. Just as though there was a possibility of an accident with *me* holding the reins!"

And the expression on the face of the president's daughter showed the scorn she felt that such an idea could have entered the head of her parent. Meta assumed a similar expression, and it was a full fourth of a minute before Evelyn could recover her voice.

"Well, I mean to find out how much go there is in Prince. There isn't any chance to let him out while in town, for I don't want to be arrested for fast driving on my birthday, so what do you say to trying the turnpike?"

"It will be grand," replied Meta, her eyes snapping with anticipation.

"I think it will be lovely; we will have a splendid road, with two or three miles as hard as a floor, broad enough to

give us elbow room and afford a chance for the other steppers to save themselves by getting out of our way—and, Meta, *we'll let Prince out.*”

“There's only one thing,” said Meta, after they had gone a short distance, “a part of the turnpike runs along the railroad track, and if we happen to meet a train——”

“We'll run a race with it,” broke in Evelyn, with a laugh.

“I would enjoy it, but——”

“It would be better than the chariot race at Barnum's. Oh, now, Meta, why are you trying to frighten me? You know you will enjoy it as much as I do.”

The turnpike to which Evelyn had made reference extended a little more than five miles westward from Ofalca. Beyond that point it became so broken and rugged that the majority of the company decided it wouldn't be right to charge toll, or rather they decided that the people wouldn't pay it if it was charged.

The turnpike was older than the railroad, and a grave complaint was made that for a full half-mile the two highways ran nearly parallel, and were of the same level, the turnpike crossing the track at an acute angle.

An inevitable consequence of this state of things was that there had been numerous runaways, and one or two serious accidents. There was much discussion over the remedy, but no action was likely to result for a long time to come. Those who held the reins over the most spirited pacers generally managed, so far as they could, to avoid the dangerous portion of the road when the regular trains were due.

It was early in the afternoon when Evelyn Walbridge reached the turnpike on the westerly side of the town and started Prince on a brisk trot. She had decided to let the pony step off at a lively gait for about three miles, when they would turn about and put him through his best paces on his return.

“What is the hour now?”

Her friend glanced at her chatelaine and replied that it lacked a quarter of three.

“There are no regular trains due for an hour,” remarked Meta, who had the time table of the road in her brain; “so we won’t run any risk from *them*. There may be a coal or freight train or some extra, but the chances are slight.”

“Bob isn’t due till evening?”

“No; it will be nine o’clock by the time he passes over this part of the road.”

“I wish he would come along *now*,” said Evelyn, turning her sparkling eyes on her friend.

“Why?”

“I would like to run him a race.”

“Why, Evelyn, what can the best horse do against a locomotive, and you know the Hercules is the swiftest engine on the road?”

“I have heard father say that. Of course Prince couldn’t equal it in speed, but then I think he could make that engine hurry,” added the girl, whose pride in her steed could not be kept down, as he struck a swift pace of his own accord.

“We may come out here some morning and give the Hercules a trial.”

“No; I shan’t do that, for Bob’s engineer would be mean enough to beat us, and both would wave their hands and laugh as they went sailing by.”

The road crossing was shortly reached, and as Prince was brought to a walk, the girls looked up and down the track for any trains. None was seen, and they drove on at a merry rate, happy as happy could be.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT THE TURNPIKE CROSSING.

IN the nature of things, a locomotive must run down and eventually wear out, like an ordinary horse. Every engine, therefore, has to take its turn in going temporarily out of service for repairs, which may occupy several days, weeks, or months, according to the state of health of the iron steed.

The Hercules had been limping for some time. Her valves were leaking, there was considerable lost motion in the valve connections, and, since the two wanted turning off pretty badly, it was decided to "shop" her.

In running to the shops, Matt Fields had orders to meet the west bound freight at the siding, a few miles out of Ofalca, and it was easy for him to keep ahead of the afternoon accommodation, which was not far behind the Hercules.

This, as you will observe, gave a free run to Ofalca, but the passenger train would be on the heels of Hercules, provided it was on time and the latter did not step lively. Matt decided it would be perfectly safe to run into Ofalca ahead of the accommodation, and, after a careful examination of his engine, he decided to do so.

"She would stand another week's run," he remarked to Bob, as he climbed into the cab, after inspecting every part of the machinery; "so we'll pull her wide open and let her whizz."

During the few months that had passed since Bob ran the Hercules part of the way to Irondale, with the president and superintendent among the passengers, the fireman had become fully acquainted with the make and running of the locomotive, and Matt Fields was not far from right when he said Bob Lovell was the equal in skill of any engineer on the road.

And during that period, too, Bob had learned the truth of a distressing suspicion which had entered his mind for the first time on that same run. He kept his own secret, and never hinted it to Matt Fields himself. The latter must have suspected that Bob had discovered it, but he, too, held his lips sealed, though the anxious expression on his honest countenance left no doubt of the anguish he suffered.

The result of this singular state of things was the determination on the part of Matt Fields that he never would hold the throttle of the Hercules unless Bob Lovell was in the cab with him.

The latter expected Matt to invite him to take charge of Hercules after leaving Jigtown, but he did not. It may have been that in the brisk run before him he wished to stand where he could observe every throb of the engine's heart, and hold himself ready to check its progress on the instant he detected any disordered pulsation.

With no train to draw, Hercules required comparatively little attention from the fireman. The coal which he shoveled into the furnace at Jigtown, while Matt was examining the engine, was sufficient to last to Ofalca, and no more oiling was necessary. So all Bob had to do was to sit in his place on the left of the cab, ring the bell as they approached the crossings, and watch for obstructions. A wild engine, as it is sometimes called, is peculiarly exposed to danger, since it runs out of schedule time, and, though its whereabouts may be known to the officials and employees of the road, its appearance is unexpected to others.

You may have observed, too, that a locomotive moves more smoothly when drawing two or three cars than when going alone. The load acts in the nature of a balance wheel, and prevents that violent jolting and swaying seen when the engine is plunging forward with nothing besides its tender.

In reply to Matt's inquiring whistle, the brakeman of the freight waved his hand to signify that all was right, and, with slightly diminished gait, the Hercules rattled over the switches to the smooth track beyond, where she quickly attained high speed.

Something like four miles of straight track stretched toward Ofalca, and Matt determined that his engine should come to a halt at the shops within the five succeeding minutes.

Bob Lovell was still sitting on the left, with the bell cord idly grasped in his motionless hand, which rested on his hip, while he gazed over the country, sweeping so rapidly behind him. His eyes were fixed on nothing in particular, for the scene was too familiar to awaken special interest.

He gave a gentle pull at the bell as they approached the turnpike crossing, but was looking to the left instead of ahead, when he heard Matt Fields exclaim :

“ Good Heavens ! they will be killed ! ”

Glancing at the engineer, he saw him instantly shut off steam and apply the brakes with such rigidity that the wheels were instantly locked and the Hercules slid forward like a sleigh over the snow.

The suddenness and awfulness of the danger must have upset Matt Fields, who was generally cool-headed. The violent application of the brakes produced scarcely a diminution of speed, whereas, if he had held the wheels, as has been explained, so as to make them revolve reluctantly, the restraint would have been at the greatest point.

And immediately after he did the worst thing possible, by emitting an ear-splitting screech from the whistle.

The instant he uttered his terrifying exclamation, Bob Lovell glanced to the front. He saw a phaeton, in which were seated two girls, one of whom was pulling desperately at the reins, while the panic-stricken horse was making for the crossing on a dead run.

Evelyn Walbridge and Meta Lovell were having their wish for a race with a locomotive.

The pony and phaeton were some distance ahead, going at a tremendous pace along the highway, and they and the engine were rapidly converging toward the point where road and railway crossed. The speed of the Hercules of course was greater than that of the flying horse, but she was beginning to feel the curb of the brake, and it looked as if the meeting between her and the doomed horse could not be averted.

Clearly there was but one way of avoiding a frightful accident: that was for Matt instantly to loosen the brakes, and put on all steam again. This would give the engine such an advantage of speed that it would shoot by the crossing before the pony, even though on a dead run, could reach it.

Bob Lovell saw what Matt failed to see, and shouted:
"Go ahead! We can beat them!"

But alas! it seemed to the veteran that there was but one thing to do, and he did it by holding the brakes in place, and emitting another terrifying blast from the whistle.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BRAVE DEED.

BOB LOVELL glanced ahead again. As he did so, one of the occupants of the phaeton looked around, and the youth, with a shock beyond the power of words to describe, recognized the white face of his sister Meta. Almost the same moment he knew the other was Evelyn Walbridge, who, half rising in her seat, tugged with might and main at the reins, while Meta partly rising also beside her added her strength. But Prince had taken the bit in his

teeth, and their efforts added to, rather than detracted from his terrible pace.

It was then that Bob Lovell lost his coolness for the moment. Instead of appealing again to Matt to drive the Hercules forward, he jerked open the door in front of his seat, and ran rapidly to the front of the engine.

When he started, there was no defined object in his mind: it was the result of instinct, rather than reason. Before reaching the front and pausing on the cross piece over the pilot, he had determined on an attempt that ninety-nine persons in a hundred would have declared simply added his own death to that of his sister and friend.

The phaeton was on his side, the convergence between it and the engine being so close that hardly six feet separated them. There was a perceptible slackening in the speed of the horse, who was beginning to feel the result of his terrific efforts; but alas! the same was the case with the Hercules, and, unless a change took place within a second or two, the animal was certain to get in front of the engine, where he must stumble, and fling himself and the occupants beneath the wheels of the plunging locomotive.

Oh, why did not Matt give the Hercules steam and, freeing the brakes, let her bound away from the carriage? To do so, would instantly carry her beyond the horse, who would strike the level road on the other side, where he could be brought under control.

Bob turned and made an agonized gesture to Matt, but his view was partly shut off by the engine, and it was useless. Then, without an instant's hesitation, he turned again, and gathered his muscles for the great feat on which he had determined.

Now, Bob Lovell, pray God to help you, and make the supreme effort of your life. A loved sister and one for whom you entertain an affection unsuspected in its fullness, even by yourself, are on the brink of death, and you are

to be the instrument of their salvation, if they are to be saved.

Aye, bend your muscles, set your teeth, hold your breath and make the leap, for everything must end in the passing of a breath !

Ah, how royally the brave fellow acquitted himself ! No trained gymnast could have surpassed that thrilling bound which carried him from the corner of the engine, through the intervening space, and landed him in front of the girls.

The speed of the horse and locomotive were so nearly equal at that moment, that scarcely a shock was caused by the leap, it being much the same as if engine and horse were standing still.

“Now,” muttered the fireman, as he seized the lines, “you will stop or I will pull your head off !”

His iron fingers were powerful, and, with one foot on the dashboard in front, he drew the reins back with a fury that must have sent the blood tingling through the veins of the mad charger. At the same time he threw most of his force in the left rein, drawing the head around until the foaming nostrils were pressed against the shaft.

Prince felt that a master had him in hand, and rearing, plunging, bounding, standing almost erect, struggling to loosen the fearful grip, but still going forward, he swerved to the left with such slackened speed that Hercules slid by, while the snorting horse, all a tremble, and with his sides heaving like a pair of bellows, came to a halt with such suddenness that the occupants barely saved themselves from being thrown violently to the ground. There was a second when the pretty phaeton stood on its two side wheels, but, concluding not to go over, it settled back in place again.

The Hercules went more than a hundred yards further, when she came to a standstill. Matt Fields, whose

frightened face was thrust far out the window, paused only long enough to throw the engine out of gear, when he leaped to the ground and ran back to learn whether any one was injured.

"Young ladies, it doesn't pay to run a race with a locomotive when it isn't pulling a train of cars."

It was Bob Lovell who, having checked Prince, turned about and addressed the odd remark to Evelyn and Meta.

The poor girls, realizing they were saved, were ready to swoon; but they were too young and strong and sensible to give way, even though they felt a momentary faintness from the reaction.

Prince was in such a state of excitement that he was liable to make off again. Before giving time to the girls to answer his jocosé remark, Bob passed the lines to Evelyn, leaped to the ground, and, running forward, took the animal by the bit. Then, by patting his neck and uttering soothing words, he soon calmed his terror to such an extent that he became manageable. By the time Matt Fields reached the spot, matters had quieted down, and both girls had sprung from the vehicle.

"You dear, good, noble fellow!" exclaimed Evelyn. Stepping hastily to the unsuspecting Bob, and throwing both arms about his neck, she impressed a warm kiss squarely on his mouth. Bob felt as though it was he that had been caught under the pilot and was undergoing a crushing process. He could only gape and wonder what the world was coming to.

At this juncture Meta, with eyes full of tears, put one arm about her brother's neck, and, as he drew her to him, she buried her face on his shoulder and sobbed as if her heart was breaking.

"Bob," said Matt Fields, as happy as the rest over their marvelous deliverance, "I'll take charge of the horse until you get through."

Matt was a good horseman, and, leaving the others to themselves, he led the animal a short way down the road and back again, until he saw he had so fully recovered from his panic that the girls would have no trouble in handling him.

The young fireman tenderly kissed his sister, who lifted her head, wiped the tears away, and looked at Evelyn. Miss Walbridge smiled, and asked :

“Aren't you proud of him ?”

“I always was,” was the triumphant answer. “Bob isn't any better this minute than he was yesterday or a year ago.”

“I beg you,” protested the scarlet-faced youth ; “that's enough. If I had taken time to think I wouldn't have made the jump, but as I asked you a minute ago, what's the use of trying to run a race with a locomotive ?”

“I think we held our own pretty well,” replied Evelyn, with the old saucy flash in her sparkling eyes. “You seemed to try to run away from us, but had hard work ; and if you hadn't turned Prince aside, he would have beaten you fairly.”

Bob threw back his head and laughed. Not only was he happy over the escape of the girls, but the memory of those lips pressed so ardently against his own raised his spirits to the effervescing point.

“But I wasn't aware that you were the owner of such a fine turnout,” said he. “I never saw this pony and phaeton before.”

“This is Evelyn's birthday,” said Meta ; “they are a present from her father, and Evelyn invited me to take a spin with her.”

“And we have *spun*,” interposed the gay-hearted girl ; “I don't think I shall forget this anniversary of my natal day if I live to be considerably older.”

“This is a bad place to drive,” said Bob, more seriously,

"and I hope you will take your outings somewhere else until Prince becomes better acquainted with the engines."

"He has had a pretty good introduction," laughed Evelyn, as she approached the phaeton and stepped within, before Bob could help her, Meta immediately following. Matt passed the reins to Evelyn, saying :

"Girls, you never can have a narrower escape than you've had this afternoon. It has been my luck to have the Hercules kill several persons while I held her throttle ; but among 'em all, there was not one that I looked on as so surely doomed as I thought you were when I saw your horse running away and heading for the crossing."

"I would suggest that since the lesson won't be lost on you," ventured Bob, "you say nothing about the occurrence. It will distress your people unnecessarily——"

"Robert Lovell," interrupted Evelyn, in a high voice and with a reproving look, "do you suppose I am going to keep this secret? Do you imagine I could if I wanted to? And I don't want to. No, indeed; I am going to hurry home on purpose to tell the folks. I am going to tell everybody I know. I am going to make sure that a full account is in the *Banner* next week. I intend to send a picture of you to one of the illustrated papers in New York. I will get Miss Bevins to let all the girls write a composition on it next week ; and maybe I can persuade Dr. Schureman to make it the text of his sermon on Sunday. I say nothing about the occurrence! I am ashamed of you! Get out of the way, Robert, or I'll run over you."

And waving him a gay good-by, Evelyn turned the head of Prince in the right direction, and with a twitch of the lines sent him off at a lively pace. As the wheels were bounding over the rails, the driver turned and nodded her head to the happy Bob, Meta doing the same, and they went down the turnpike at a rate which made it look as if they would reach Ofalca ahead of the Hercules.

Matt Fields glanced at his watch.

"By George," he exclaimed, "its time for the accommodation."

The two made a run for their machine, and mounted it at the moment they caught the faint whistle of the other engine down the road. The Hercules had sufficient start, however, and speedily striking her pace, she reached the shops at Ofalca all in good time.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PENALTIES AND REWARDS OF FAME.

EVELYN WALBRIDGE was a young lady who set great store on her word. She could not pardon the deliberate breaking of a promise. From this it will be understood that her pledge to proclaim the brave deed of Bob Lovell was fulfilled in spirit and letter.

The young fireman would not have been human had he not felt an occasional thrill of pleasure in hearing the sincere compliments which reached him from so many quarters, though he did think there was far more made of the act than was in good taste.

The *Ofalca Banner* sent its reporter to interview him. The reporter boasted of an experience on a metropolitan paper, and he was sure no one could give him points in the way of pumping information from any man, no matter how reluctant he might be to yield the truth.

The great point this young gentleman made on his victims was to keep them from suspecting they were talking to a newspaper man. He contended that, by doing so, they were induced to converse more freely, and his experience taught him that he was sure of obtaining valuable information.

Bob was at work in the shop, when a dapper youth in-

roduced himself as the representative of the Provident and Metropolitan Insurance Company of New York. Having heard of the creditable exploit in which Mr. Lovell had lately figured, it occurred to them that he might like to take out a policy in their company.

Before Bob could decline the proposition, his caller veered to the subject that was in his mind. He had heard so many conflicting accounts of it, that for his own satisfaction he determined to go to headquarters and learn the facts himself.

Thus appealed to, Bob could not refuse to state in a modest way the truth concerning the narrow escape of his sister and the daughter of the president of the road. A few general questions followed as to his age, his relatives, and his personal history. The fireman did not answer them when they trended too close, but he was courteous at all times, and said more than he wished out of a dislike of hurting the inquirer's feelings.

Bob never dreamed that the man was any other than he pretended, until the *Ofalca Banner* appeared a few days latter. Then, when he opened the sheet (the outside being "patent matter") he received a shock that almost took him off his feet. There, in big capitals at the top of a column, appeared the following headlines :

A HERO ON THE ENGINE ! BRAVE BOB LOVELL !

THE DARING EXPLOIT OF A FIREMAN !

From this heading you can form an idea of the column of description which followed. It was so extravagant and fulsome that Bob felt his cheeks tingle, and he instantly determined to go away from Ofalca until the matter should blow over.

He was completely mystified when the writer gave an account of his interview with Bob at the shops. There were

questions and answers of which he held not the slightest recollection, and the history of the exploits of his Revolutionary ancestors was news to him.

His perplexity was partly cleared up when the reporter naively stated, toward the end of the account, that, with the purpose of inducing the diffident fireman to talk, the writer had approached him in the guise of an insurance agent.

“I would like him to approach me again,” muttered the indignant Bob, with flashing eyes. “My gracious! *what’s that?*”

To his consternation he read the following at the close of the article :

“We understand that the *Illustrated Gazette* of the next week will contain a handsomely engraved portrait of Mr. Lovell, together with a faithful illustration of the thrilling scene, with the hero in the act of leaping from the engine Hercules, when it was running at the rate of a mile a minute. The picture will be accurate, the writer of the present article having furnished the data.”

I am afraid I can’t do justice to Bob’s emotions when he read the last lines. He boiled over.

“I’ll whip that fraud!” he muttered, hastily changing his working clothes for his street attire, “and then I’ll have my name in the paper again. I won’t be held up to ridicule in *that* style. How did they get my picture for the *Illustrated Gazette*? I’ll illustrate that young man.”

Bob had finished changing his attire, when he reversed the performance. Sober second thought came to his rescue, and he saw how ridiculous he was making himself.

“It would not only be foolish, but wrong,” he muttered, hanging his head, as he saw Matt and one or two others viewing him with curiosity; “but, all the same, I wish I could go to Canada for a few months. This is becoming unbearable.” Fortunately, however, for Bob’s peace of

mind the promised likeness of himself did not appear in the publication.

I have made no mention of the gratitude of President Walbridge's family to the young fireman, perhaps because that was the most interesting feature connected with the incident. The father called at Bob's house in person to thank him in the most fervent manner. There could be no doubt of *his* sincerity. The tremulous voice, the moistened eye, and the nervous pressure of the hand were eloquent of the thankfulness of the old gentleman that his "baby" had been spared to him through the daring of one of the employees of the I. & O.

Within the following fortnight a small box was left at Bob's home, he learning the fact upon his return from the shops in the evening. His mother and sister had not opened it, though Meta's curiosity was roused to a high pitch by recognizing the directions as being in the handwriting of Evelyn Walbridge.

Bob purposely tantalized her by insisting that the writing was not hers. Instead of opening the package to find out, he was disposed to let that part of the business go while he argued the question with her.

At last he consented to solve it, and display the contents to the expectant daughter and mother.

After removing any quantity of tissue paper and wrappings, they were brought to light. They consisted of a gold watch and chain of exquisite make and workmanship. Within the outer case was engraved the following :

To Robert Lovell, in grateful remembrance of his inestimable service in saving Evelyn, my beloved daughter, from death.

May 13, 18—

CUMMINS WALBRIDGE.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT.

HERCULES spent just a fortnight in the hospital. The period was in the nature of a vacation both to the engineer and fireman, who (although such is not the present custom) wrought in the shops until the engine was ready for duty again. Matt ran down home each evening, the train slacking up enough to allow him to step off just opposite his house, while he was picked up again the next morning. Where the speed of a train would cause an inexperienced person to turn a series of somersaults in the event of jumping off, a railroader will land lightly on his feet, and, after running a few paces, come to a halt without much of a jar, and with no inconvenience.

The lessening of speed on the part of the Down Mail was not perceptible to the passengers, when the veteran dropped to the ground, though he could not board it while going at anything like the same rate. Matt had taken a leap from a flying engine that was traveling forty miles an hour, and Bob, to whom he related the circumstance, surprised him by doing the same, neither suffering harm thereby. Of course, in these cases, the conditions were favorable, and few railroad men would have done as well.

While the Hercules was in the shops, Bob had his evenings to himself, and no youth could have appreciated the privilege more. He escorted his mother and sister to entertainments, to church meetings, and to the temperance gatherings. The latter were held twice a week, and Bob missed none. The work of such noble societies can by no means be confined to social assemblies. The weak and fallen are all around us, and the real labor is done by personal interview, at their miserable homes, in the saloons, and by their bedsides. In his unobtrusive way, Bob Lovell

sowed seed whose whole harvesting will never be known until the judgment day. Few, except the individuals themselves, were aware of the number whom he persuaded to sign the pledge, and none besides the lad knew of the sacrifices he made out of his moderate wages, to help some starving wretch, groping for light, and striving to break from the fearful enemy within him, which was dragging him down to wretchedness and ruin.

I must not forget to mention a trait in my hero which is as rare as it is admirable in one so young. I refer to his tact. Many a well-meaning youth defeats his good purposes by his manner of approach to his seniors. In his enthusiasm, he forgets the chasm of years between him and those whom he is seeking to help; but the latter do not forget it. Bob never failed to show a deference in addressing his elders, which disarmed resentment on their part.

But in no instance was his tact more strikingly displayed than in his deportment toward Evelyn Walbridge. How few would have had the manhood and self-command to avoid taking advantage of the footing he gained by his daring exploit? Had you been in Bob's shoes, would you have found excuses for declining the warm invitations to call at the Walbridges' home at any time? Would you have persistently avoided taking the rides in the phaeton, to which he was invited by the young lady? Would you, in going to and returning from your daily duties, have failed to pass the mansion where you knew the sweetest girl in creation was waiting to wave you a salutation as you went by?

Of course none of us would have turned back on such pleasures, but then we are not the fireman of the Hercules, and we never performed such an exploit as did Bob Lovell.

I think if Bob had put his thoughts into words they would have been something like this: "I adore Evelyn more than she suspects; the sight of her bright face, sparkling eyes,

and radiant smile, thrills me ; it would be happiness to go to her home and spend hours in her company ; I would be proud beyond compare to be seen beside her in her phaeton, but her father is president of the Irondale and Ofalca Railroad. He is rich and aristocratic ; but he is a gentleman, and his gratitude leads him to invite me to his house, when but for that motive I would not be asked to go there at all. I am only a fireman, working for small wages. Perhaps, one of these days, I may be something more ; possibly I may climb into some place where I shall stand on a social plane nearly level with hers. I will wait till then, and what may happen," he added with a strange thrill, "who shall say ?"

It is quite possible that with all his tact and penetration Bob Lovell never realized one truth : the course which he pursued was the one of all others calculated to deepen the regard and affection of Evelyn Walbridge. It would not have been hard for him to cool her esteem by pushing his attentions. But she knew why he blushed when they occasionally met, as they could not help doing ; she understood the cause of his absence from her splendid home ; she comprehended the reason of his modestly keeping in the background.

It caused her a certain pain because it was so ; but at the same time it drew him nearer to her. Her admiration for him was deepened, and, could she have had her wishes, she would have persuaded some magician, with the touch of his wand, to transform the humble home of the fireman into a palace of gold, and proclaim Bob king of the whole country.

And where, all this time, was Montague Worthley ? You must not suppose that he has been forgotten or that we can do without him. I wish I had something pleasant to tell about him, but it is not so.

The shock of the mistake he made in handing the wrong

letter to Bob Lovell subdned him for a time. He realized the frightful nature of the blunder, and could never understand how he forgot himself to such an extent.

When at last the letter was destroyed by his own hands, he breathed freely. He knew that Bob Lovell had read the missive, whose writing was a piece of strange recklessness, but he had not shown it to anyone, and he held no fear of what the fireman could do, so long as the letter had passed out of existence.

Montague's envious hatred of Bob had intensified, because of the repeated advantages the latter obtained over him ; but young Worthley had learned some wisdom during the few months, and the policy he fixed upon was that of waiting.

"By and by," he thought, "I shall have solid footing with the company, and then we shall see what we shall see."

Thus matters stood when the rescue of Meta Lovell and Evelyn Walbridge was effected by Bob. Montague Worthley was the only one in all Ofalca whose cheek did not tingle with pride that such a noble young fellow was born and still lived in that town. He ground his teeth with fury that the fates had given this fellow the opportunity to perform such a remarkable exploit.

"Where was Matt Fields," he snarled, "that he didn't save the girls? Why must it happen that this grimy fireman should be on hand to set everybody talking about him? I don't believe the thing was done in the way it was told. I could have done it myself had I been there ; but, confound it, I aint there when the chance presents. Why couldn't it have been someone else than Evelyn?" he demanded with another spasm of furious envy.

"But," he continued, following out his train of thought, "what will it all amount to? She is rich, aristocratic, and she knows I am the same, and I have told her how much I

admire her. No ; there can be nothing serious there ; so I will wait, wait, wait."

At the next meeting of the board of directors of the I. & O., Superintendent Worthley stated that his duties were increasing so rapidly that he felt the need of assistance. True, his son was already rendering valuable service in his office, but he was only a clerk without real authority. He would therefore ask that Montague should be officially declared the assistant superintendent of the I. & O., with authority to act as superintendent in the absence of Mr. Worthley.

There were nine directors present at this meeting, and three of them objected to conferring so much authority on one so young ; but the others reminded them that Montague had the benefit of a training under the eye of his father, who expected to hold his office for many years to come, and who had no intention of delegating his authority to any extent that could cause possible injury to the interests of the road.

The minority were not convinced, but one of them consented, out of regard for the father, to cast his vote as was desired by the majority ; and thus it was that Lloyd Montague Worthley became in fact the assistant superintendent of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company.

This promotion of his bitter enemy was a fact which boded ill for Bob Lovell.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"GOOD BY, HERCULES !"

IT was near the close of the month of May, when the physicians that had been so carefully doctoring the Hercules in the hospital pronounced her fully recovered and ready to resume her duty of pulling the Express over the Irondale and Ofalca Railroad.

It was the custom for Matt Fields, at such times, inasmuch as the repair shops were at Ofalca, the eastern terminus of the line, to back up to the station on the morning he resumed duty, and make fast to the Day Express ; but it was thought advisable to take the engine over the road in order to break her in, and, proceeding at a moderate pace to Irondale, begin his regular run with the train from that point eastward.

"The fact is," said Matt, with a troubled look, "I am worried about Jack."

"What is the matter with him?"

"I don't know ; he has been out of sorts for two or three days, but I am hopeful that it is nothing serious, though the doctor doesn't give me much satisfaction."

"Why don't you lie off for a while and stay with him?"

"I shall, if he doesn't improve ; I will get off, as we go down to-day, and let you run to Irondale alone. Get Tom Foster to fire for you when you start with the train to-night. You can be on the lookout for me, and, if everything is right, I will be at the place to join you. If I aint there, you will know Jack is worse, and will run through."

"Do you think the company will be satisfied to have me take charge?"

"The superintendent suggested that I should do just as I have proposed to you, and that, too, when he knew Dacres, the oldest engineer on the road, could be got."

"Very well ; give yourself no uneasiness about the Night Express. Even if Jack is improved, which I hope may be the case, you had better stay at home until to-morrow."

"I think I will do so," said the grateful Matt, climbing into the cab and starting the Hercules on the one-hundred-and-five-mile run to Irondale.

Something of the old thrill came over Bob, as it must have done with Matt as well, when he seated himself on the box

in the cab, and, looking down the familiar track, watched the rails sweep under the engine as it rapidly increased its speed.

The Hercules ran magnificently. She was like a racer which has been resting so long that she snuffs with delight and fills her lungs with the invigorating air as she bounds across the country. It seemed as if there was a joyous ring in the screech of the whistle, awaking the echoes among the woods, and notifying the world that "Richard was himself again."

When the turnpike crossing was reached, the pace was about thirty miles an hour. Matt looked across at Bob and both smiled; the thought of what had taken place there two weeks before was in the mind of each.

Just below, the Hercules was obliged to back upon the short siding to make way for a belated coal train that was creeping eastward. The directors of the I. & O. were already discussing the project of laying two tracks, and it was certain to be done before long, but for the present, there was but the single line, with all its inconveniences, even though the steel rails and roadbed were first-class.

Fortunately the coal train was nearly on time, and when it was out of the way the Hercules bounded out on the main line again with a clear run to Jigtown, beyond Dead Man's Hollow. The splendid piece of machinery sped along at an easy gait, Bob admiring her working as much as did the engineer.

The fireman was on his seat looking out, when a glance at the steam gauge over the boiler showed that the Hercules needed food. Bob, therefore, slipped down from his seat, drew open the furnace door, and threw in some coal. He had just finished his work when he observed that Matt had applied the airbrakes to the engine and tender just sufficiently to cause the wheels to revolve reluctantly, thus

offering, as I have already explained, the greatest resistance to its progress, much greater than would have been the fact had the drivers spun backward or stood motionless while the engine slid forward.

Bob looked quickly out of the window in front, wondering what it meant. They were close to the trestle-work over Dead Man's Hollow, the place which seemed destined to play forever an important part in the history of the Hercules. The pole of a red flag was thrust into the ground at the side of the track, more than a hundred yards to the eastward, and, though Matt applied the brakes, he had already passed it, and, despite all the Hercules could do, she was sure to run upon the trestle-work, the very place Matt was warned to shun. A number of men were working on the timbers, and were looking up in wonder at the approach of the engine at such speed.

It was impossible to stop the Hercules, as I have said, before running upon the trestle-work, and Bob's heart rose in his mouth ; but among the workmen was one of those rare persons who had the presence of mind to do the one thing that prevented the engine from plunging into the gulch, far below. A rail was out of place, but he quickly and coolly adjusted it, and drove the two spikes necessary to hold it long enough to save the locomotive. He was hammering the last spike at the moment the truck of the Hercules, with greatly decreased speed, ran upon it. Since there was a slight curve, the enormous weight of the engine would have knocked the rail loose had it been going faster. As it was, the steel rail remained firm, and Matt, seeing that everything was clear, did not stop or say a word to the mystified boss and workmen, but drew open the throttle and continued across the trestle at a higher pace.

As Bob resumed his seat, he glanced stealthily at the engineer. He, too, was on his box, his left hand resting on the lever, while he seemed to be scrutinizing the rails with

the closest attention. He did not look at Bob, and no word passed between them.

The run was to Jigtown, where the operator informed them the track was clear to the siding just beyond Matt's home, which, as will be recalled, was the place where the Night Express lay, waiting for the Evening Mail on the occasion described in the opening chapter of this story.

Bob kept his seat as much as he could during the rest of the run, and made sure he was on the lookout whenever possible. No signals were displayed, and Matt pushed on until his own little cottage appeared on his left. Then the Hercules went slower until the wheels ceased to revolve.

When she was motionless, the engineer stepped down from his place and made way for Bob.

"You understand the arrangement," he said; "you will run to Irondale and take Foster for your fireman."

"And shall I hold up for you when I come back?"

"No; you needn't do that."

"You will stay at home to-night? That's right, but I trust you will find Jack better. Ah! there's the little fellow now!"

A boyish shout came from the direction of the house, and turning their heads whom should they see but Master Jack Fields, on the front porch, swinging his hat and shouting as if he would split his throat.

"He doesn't look like a very sick boy," remarked Bob, with a laugh.

The father's eye kindled and he smiled.

"I don't think he is any *worse*, but all the same, Bob, you needn't hold up for me."

"Very well; you are entitled to stay at home. I will take you aboard as we go down to-morrow morning."

"No, you won't."

"When, then, will you resume charge of the Hercules?"

"Never!"

Bob stared at the engineer in astonishment. He thought he was jesting, but one look at that earnest face left no doubt of his sincerity.

“What do you mean, Matt?”

“What I say. I shall never again run a train over this road!”

Bob wanted to speak, but he knew not what to say. He pitied his friend from the bottom of his heart, but he could not comfort him. He looked away and remained silent.

“Shall I tell you the reason, Bob?”

“No; I know it, Matt.”

“You learned it to-day?”

“I learned it weeks ago.”

“Am I not doing right? Is it not my duty?”

“Yes, no one can deny that; I feel as sorry as you, but your position is too responsible to think only of yourself. You will speak to Mr. Worthley?”

“I will see him to-morrow; I will take the morning line up, and tell him the whole truth.”

“That is the true course; you are too valuable a man to let go.”

“Well, good-by, Bob, for the present,” and Matt added in a quavering voice, “Good-by, Hercules.” Then letting himself down from his engine he hastened to meet his young Jack, who had become so impatient that he was running and tumbling to get into the arms of his parent.

Bob started the engine down the road, and then glanced back. Matt had caught up his dimpled child, and, tossing him high in the air, held his arms outstretched to receive him as he descended, while the affectionate mother stood smiling and viewing the scene.

CHAPTER XXXII.

STARTLING NEWS.

BOB LOVELL pushed along at a rattling pace, after leaving the Junction, until he came in sight of the last telegraph station before reaching Irondale. The I. & O. at that time was not run on the excellent block system now prevailing on our leading roads, which reduces the danger of accidents to the minimum, yet such care was displayed in the management that the percentage of killed and injured was unusually low.

The telegraph station, of which I have made mention, was about seven miles from Irondale, the western terminus of the line, the location of these offices being at very irregular distances along the road.

Bob had rounded a curve, and was bearing down upon the little station, when he discovered that something extraordinary had taken place. There were no passengers there, but the operator was on the small, narrow platform, acting like a wild man. He was leaping up and down, running back and forth, and indulging in excited gestures. Apparently he was shouting, but of course Bob could not catch anything he said.

“What can be the matter?” muttered the mystified fireman, who decided that the quickest way to learn was to hasten to the station and halt.

The operator, a nervous young man, ran to the end of the platform to meet him, and before the engine could stop he leaped upon it, narrowly escaping falling under the wheels in the excess of his ardor.

“What’s up,” asked Bob, “to set you so wild?”

“What’s up?” gasped the other; “the mischief is to pay; Number 3 left Irondale a few minutes ago, and is coming up the road at the rate of a mile a minute.”

“What’s the cause of that?”

“A stranger got aboard and started her out of the shops. Nobody knows who he is ; he will be here in a minute or two ; just think if I hadn’t got word until after you had passed !”

“But you did, so what’s the use of thinking about it ? Where’s your dispatch ?”

The operator produced the crumpled piece of blue paper on which he had written this message, received just before from the office at Irondale :

Shifting engine Number 3 left at ten minutes past two, and is going up the road at her highest speed ; a stranger is on her ; turn the switch so as to ditch her.”

Bob Lovell looked at his watch.

“It’s only a quarter-past two ; Number 3 can’t run a mile a minute, and she won’t reach here for five minutes.”

“My gracious ! that’s short enough time ; run back out of her way, and I will turn the switch so as to ditch her.”

“But that will destroy the engine and kill the man on it.”

“It can’t be helped ; small pity for *him* ; he had no business to take the risk, but it’s too bad to lose the engine, for this is an ugly place to ditch her.”

Bob Lovell was thinking fast and hard.

“Where’s the down train ?”

“It left the Junction on time—that’s two o’clock.”

“She’s due at Wolf Gulch at half-past ; send a dispatch there for the conductor to wait until he receives word from you. Is there anything on the road between the train and us ?”

“I aint sure ; there may be a freight. But, Bob,” added the other, nervously whipping out his watch, “time is passing. Number 3 will soon be here ; what’s to be done ?”

“Do what I told you, but don’t ditch the engine ; let the switches alone.”

“What will *you* do? Have a butting match with her?”

“I am going to try to save Number 3, and the miserable fool that is on her.”

“How?”

“There’s no time to explain; step off, for your duties are here; one of these days I will sit down and give you the full history. Keep cool and send the telegram I told you, and send others to the Junction and to every point between, warning all trains to get out of the way.”

As the nervous operator made a break for his little cab of an office, it struck Bob Lovell that, more than likely, if he sent any messages at all, he would get them wrong, and add to the frightful peril by complicating it.

But the fireman could not afford to give him thought; he had his own hands full, as you will admit.

It doesn’t take much to upset the mental balance of some persons. This may be because they have not much of a mental load to upset, but if there ever was a lunatic, it was the telegraphist who had just left Bob and plunged into his diminutive office.

Hardly pausing to drop into his seat before the clicking instrument, he rapped out the following message:

Turn the switch so as to catch Number 3 on the rebound and all will be well.

Yours very respectfully,

SAM.

This dispatch went in to the main office at Irondale, where, as may be supposed, it created consternation.

The office at the Junction and each intermediate point received the following specimen:

Hercules sprung a leak on outward voyage—expects to blow up—look out for the pieces when they come down.

Thine own,

SAM.

Perhaps you can imagine the sensation caused by these wonderful dispatches.

"I hope I've got things in shape," muttered the distraught operator, feeling a misgiving that some of the recipients of his messages might not "catch on" to them. "At any rate, I've done my duty," he reflected, "and nobody can blame me—halloa! what's that?"

A sudden and rapidly increasing roar broke upon his ear, and he dashed out upon the platform to gain a better view than he could from his own window.

To the westward, and distant only a few hundred yards, was a mass of dust and smoke, like the thunderous mouth of a volcano. It streamed away in the distance, as if it were the tail of a comet which was bursting through space with inconceivable speed.

Hardly had the operator time to identify the approaching monster as Number 3, when it dashed by the platform, as it might have done if shot from the mouth of a giant columbiad. The terrified glance which the youth cast at it, while frantically holding on his hat with both hands and dreading that he would be swept off his feet by the terrific swirl which almost blinded him, led him to fancy he saw a man standing in the place of the engineer, with his hand on the throttle, while his glance was fixed on the track ahead of him.

By the time the clouds had cleared sufficiently to allow him to see the engine, it was far up the road, leaning to the right, as it whizzed around the long curve and quickly vanished from sight.

"I think there was another engine here a few minutes ago," muttered the bewildered agent, staring at the trail of dust and smoke in the air, which marked where Number 3 had vanished, "but—ah! I recall it was Bob Lovell with the Hercules just come out of the shops; what's become of

him? I can't see anything of him or his engine; it must be they were run over."

And the young man dashed to the upper end of the platform, and, standing on tip-toe, peered up the road in search of the fragments, which failed to materialize.

"That's odd," he muttered, taking off his hat and scratching his head, as some folks do when puzzled; "it must be that Bob slipped by and turned out of the way for Number 3. I'm blessed if I can get head or tail to it anyway!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RUNAWAY.

MEANWHILE what was Bob Lovell doing?

The situation was this: the shifting engine known as Number 3 was one of the fastest of its kind. That class of locomotives are built more for strength than speed, though the one in question could cover ground at a lively pace, but of course was no match for the regular passenger engines.

Number 3 bounded away from Irondale so unexpectedly that it was impossible to prevent it. The engineer had left it for a minute or two, and was returning, when he observed a stranger climbing into the cab. The engineer shouted to him to keep away. The man gave no heed, and disappeared from sight for the moment.

The indignant engineer broke into a run, muttering, "I'll give that chump a h'ist with my boot that will keep him away from Number 3 for the rest of his natural life—confound it!"

To his amazement the engine began moving away from him.

"The infernal fool has opened the throttle," exclaimed

the engineer, increasing his speed and calling again to the man.

A head was thrust out of the cab window, and looked tauntingly back at the pursuer, who was wrathful enough to shoot him, had he possessed a gun. He bent all his energies, however, to running, hoping to reach his engine, before it gained too much start ; but that class of locomotives speedily acquire a rapid pace, and, before half the distance was covered, Number 3 was drawing swiftly away from the panting engineer.

Others had witnessed the startling incident, and, as the engine rattled over the switches and upon the main track, the engineer made all haste to the telegraph office and notified the operator of what had taken place. On the instant, a message was sent along the road, which set the first telegraphist wild, though he retained enough sense to impart an intelligible account to Bob Lovell of the alarming crisis that had suddenly arisen.

It so happened that President Walbridge was in the office at the time, and it was at his dictation that the order was telegraphed to ditch the runaway engine, his dread being that it would meet some of the trains, if allowed to pass the first telegraph station.

Nobody knew just where the Hercules, with Bob Lovell at the throttle, was, for, as has been explained, he was running on the time he could catch from the other trains, it being his duty to give them all a safe berth.

Now, it is with Bob that our present interest lies, for it may be said he held the key of the situation. Let me remind you that forty miles stretched between Irondale and the Junction. If the runaway was permitted to keep on, a fearful disaster was certain, for if there were no freight or coal trains on the main track, the afternoon accommodation would have left the Junction before the runaway arrived at that point.

The message of the panic-stricken operator at the most could only confuse matters, but the people in the main office at Irondale did not go daft. Fortunately they had already sent warning all the way to Ofalca. They expected that the agent seven miles out would follow orders, and prevent the runaway from passing, by ditching it, but with the commendable object of taking every precaution, they notified each accessible point.

By and by, when the terrified youth regained in some degree his self-command, he telegraphed to Irondale that the runaway had passed like a whirlwind on its way eastward, but Bob Lovell was ahead of it with the Hercules, and probably would butt it off the track before Ofalca was reached.

This message, instead of giving the assurance the sender hoped, added to the dismay in the Irondale office, and President Walbridge received a painful shock. The telegram was incomprehensible, and for the succeeding half hour all the offices along the line were overrun with messages that made confusion worse confounded.

Bob Lovell, with that rare presence of mind which was natural to him, and of which you have already received proofs, formed his plan of action, and started to put it into execution within three minutes after the alarming tidings were communicated to him.

Looking down the road, he could see nothing of the runaway, and he began backing toward the Junction.

"All I ask now," he said to himself, "is that the road to the Junction is clear. There is going to be a fight between Hercules and Number 3, and I'll pin my colors to the Hercules every time."

It is a dangerous thing for a locomotive to run backward at a high rate of speed. There being no pilot at the rear, a slight obstruction is sufficient to derail it. A cow, or horse, or a tramp is quite sure to play serious mischief

with the ponderous machinery, and an engine, therefore, when retrograding must do so at a moderate speed and with a vigilant lookout.

Besides this, as you will see, it is impossible for the engineer to make use of his sand box, which can only deliver the grains in front of the spinning drivers. But unfortunately there was no time for the Hercules to swing around and head the other way. The runaway was almost upon her and the chances must be taken.

Reflect for a moment on Bob Lovell's situation. He was alone and obliged to watch the state of water in the boiler, see that there was enough coal in the furnace, keep guard of the rear of his engine for obstructions (which, after all, might appear in the form of a freight or coal train), and besides all this, the real, terrible danger itself was sweeping down upon him like a cyclone from the front.

After starting the engine backward, he stepped down from his place at the lever and threw in half a dozen shovel-fuls of coal. The speed rapidly increased and she was soon dancing along at the rate of thirty miles an hour. At every curve, or whenever a crossing appeared, Bob let out a resounding blast from his whistle and set the bell ringing, but did not slacken his pace.

He knew his gait was slower than that of Number 3, which, although a shifting engine, was capable of running much faster than others of its class.

Striking a stretch of straight track, he saw the white posts which supported the warning sign at a crossing, and the whistle screamed again, followed by the ringing of the bell. To his disgust, he observed a farmer's wagon bearing slowly down toward the track, at a rate which insured its simultaneous arrival with that of the Hercules. The horses were on a lazy walk, and the farmer, holding the lines, sat so low that only the top of his dilapidated straw hat was visible.

The Hercules awoke the echoes with her whistle, but the snail-like progress of the team continued, and the man gave no sign of hearing the warning cry. He was either deaf or asleep.

Bob glanced the other way. The runaway was not yet in sight and he applied the brakes. He could retard the speed considerably, but it was impossible to stop before reaching the crossing.

While the pace was slackening, the Hercules emitted a series of short, sharp toots, such as are used to scare cattle off the track, but it was not worth while to ring the bell, since there was no possibility of that being heard, if the whistle remained inaudible.

Did ever a team of horses move so slowly? It really looked as if when one of the lazy nags raised a foot he held it suspended a few seconds before depositing it on the ground again, while the wagon, whose fore-wheels were between the rails, appeared to have made up its mind to stay there.

"He deserves a shaking up," said Bob to himself, "and I would serve him right to take off a wheel or two, but it may not be any funnier for me than for him."

He saw he must strike the wagon. He was still traveling at a swift pace and it could never clear the track in time.

Toot-toot-toot-toot went the whistle, and, when within a hundred feet of the crossing, the old farmer, the top of whose whip could be discerned sloping over his shoulder, suddenly turned his head and looked down the road.

It is not necessary to say he was startled. He shot up to his feet, brought down the whiplash with full force on the haunches of one of the horses and shouted :

"Ge-up thar! Don't you see the old boy is comin'?"

The beast which received the stroke of the whip paid no more attention than if it were a straw. There was a slight flirt of the tail, and neither animal moved faster.

The husbandman was still berating, lashing and jerking the lines, when the corner of the tender struck the hind wheels and sent most of the spokes flying a dozen rods in air. The abrupt sinking of the rear of the wagon, and its violent wrenching, caused the owner of the team to lose his balance, and he was considerably jarred.

He was not hurt, however, and scrambling to his feet, he stared about him till he got his bearings, and muttered :

“Wal, I’ll be consarned if that aint the cheekiest thing I ever seed yet ; and here comes another of the critters, but he’s aiming head first and I’m out of his path, thank goodness.”

The old gentleman spoke the truth. Bob Lovell looked down the road and saw the runaway engine thundering after him, at great speed and less than two hundred yards distant.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HERCULES AND NUMBER 3.

BOB LOVELL paid little heed to the indignant farmer, for just beyond him he caught sight of the runaway approaching at a speed of which he never supposed a shifting engine capable. It looked as if she would be wrenched to pieces by the fierceness of her gait as she plunged like a meteor toward him.

The first thought that came to the fireman was that the man who was running the engine knew something of the business. Through the glass he caught a glimpse of his face, and he fancied he recognized him, but it was not the time to assure himself on that point.

A hasty sweep of the track in the other direction showed nothing in the way, though the range was not extensive. Without a second’s hesitation, Bob gave the Hercules more

steam. She responded instantly, as she always did, and backed away from her furious assailant, with a velocity that would have made it bad for any person or animal on the track and probably still worse for the Hercules herself.

What mad whim impelled the man at the throttle it would be hard to say, but at sight of the other engine recoiling from him, he seemed to be seized with a frenzy to shatter it to pieces, and he applied every ounce of steam at command. But Number 3 was already doing its best and her pace could not be increased.

Bob occasionally cast a furtive glance behind him, but his attention was fixed on the runaway, and he was graduating the pace of the two. Instead of running as fast as the other, he went slightly slower, so that his pursuer, as he may be called, slowly crept upon him.

Nearer and nearer he came, until the bumper struck the beam of Hercules, and the engines were in contact.

The instant Bob felt the slight jar and saw them touching, he devoted his energies to bringing the Hercules to a standstill.

"Now butt all you wish, and see which is the stronger," he muttered with grim humor.

But the task of the Hercules was harder than Bob suspected.

He could make no use of the sand box to increase the friction on the track. Every grain that he let down on the rails would help Number 3, and do the Hercules no good. To his dismay he observed, as he peered over his own engine, a yellow stream issuing from each of the long black curved pipes in front of the driving wheels of Number 3, and pouring out in such profusion that it was spilled on both sides of the rails.

This confirmed what Bob had suspected: the stranger knew something about running locomotives. The Hercules and Number 3 looked like a couple of vast animals that had

locked horns, and the former, while still struggling fiercely to prevent it, was being shoved backward with a power it could not resist.

Had the advantage been anywhere near equal, the Hercules would have accomplished what Bob wanted to do—that is, brought Number 3 to a standstill from its sheer inability to push harder than the finer engine, though constructed specifically for that purpose.

The youth was not long in perceiving that though he might make the task a hard one for Number 3, yet he could not check her. Had the man at the throttle been an ignominus, the engine would have begun to show signs of weakening by this time, but he was getting out all there was in the locomotive. Furthermore, could Bob have been insured twenty miles of clear track behind him, he would have persisted in blocking the progress of the other, and compelled it to succumb before passing the distance named. But besides the task in front of him, he was in an anguish of dread that in sweeping around some curve they would crash into a train bearing down from the other direction.

There was but one possible thing to do, and that was desperate enough to amount almost to suicide. It was to climb upon the other engine, and take forcible charge of the throttle himself.

I say it was a desperate recourse, but Bob Lovell did not hesitate to try it. He concluded that a man who was daring enough to run away with a locomotive, would not shrink from attacking him, with the fury of a tiger, if he interfered. He still held his place with his hand on the throttle, and was glaring out of the window, as if to dare the youth to show himself.

Naturally, as the two engines faced each other, the engineers were on opposite sides; but Bob, having set the lever at the proper point, opened the door and began making his way along the Hercules toward Number 3. He had picked

up a shovel at first, but concluded he could do as well without any other weapons than those with which nature had furnished him.

"If he comes out on the engine to attack me, I think I can get the best by throwing him off, for he doesn't know how to balance himself as well as I do, but he may wait."

Bob hoped to deceive the other as to his intention. If he could do so he might steal a march, and get into the engineer's cab without detection. Then the struggle would take place where the two stood on equal footing.

He was impelled to the fearful effort by observing the piston rods of Number 3 darting back and forth with such slightly diminished speed that, as matters stood, this queer flight and pursuit was likely to continue for a mile or two.

If any serious obstruction should appear up the road, Bob had the recourse of jumping off, which he would have done the moment it was necessary.

He endeavored, while moving along the right side of the Hercules, to act as though he had found it necessary to do something with the machinery. Stepping upon the ponderous piece of timber extending across the front of the engine, to which the pilot is fastened, he moved across to the bulky bumper of Number 3, and reached the narrow platform alongside the boiler, used by the fireman in passing round his engine.

He was now in front of the engineer's cab. The man holding the fireman's place on the other side, was peering out in front, and doubtless wondering what had become of the fellow, whom he had observed sink from sight between the two engines, but who was a long time in reappearing.

The footway on each side of the boiler had never been intended for any such purpose as that to which it was now put, and it stood so high that Bob feared it was impossible to keep out of sight, even if he lay flat and dragged himself forward. Nevertheless, he tried it. Time was im-

measurably precious and events were going with a rush. The smokestack and even the framework supporting the bell were utilized, and, with a hopeful heart, Bob found himself near the front of the engineer's window, while the man within had not discovered him.

But a new difficulty appeared. To enter the cab, he must either kick in the door in front, or swing along the outside and around from the rear. It was possible to do either, but he was absolutely sure to be discovered by the man before he could complete the attempt.

The youth had advanced too far to retreat, but his misgiving was never greater than when he crouched in front of the cab door, debating what to do. At this point the rise in the boiler, which was partly within and partly without the cab, afforded concealment.

It was delicate work to make his way along the outer side of the cab, though the distance was slight, and the ledge of the window slide gave the necessary support for his hands.

He decided to try the narrow door in front. This was held closed against the pressure of the wind by a thin brass hook, which a smart push would break. Bob steadied himself, and placing his right foot against the slide of the door, close to where he knew the fastening to be, he concentrated his strength for the decisive effort.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CAPTURE.

AT that moment, something like a shadow flitted along the other side of the boiler. Glancing thither, he saw the man was carefully advancing along the engine toward the front, by means of the footboard. With no thought of the trick played on him, he was gazing intently ahead,

wondering what could have become of the other engineer, and doubtless suspecting that some calamity had overtaken him.

This was the golden opportunity for Bob. A strong, quick pressure, and the door shot inward, the slight noise being unheard in the rush and roar of the locomotive. Bob went through as nimbly as a monkey, and in a twinkling steam was shut off, and the brakes applied.

Meanwhile, the individual who had caused all this mischief had succeeded in reaching the front of Number 3, where he craned his neck forward, holding fast with one hand, and looked around in quest of the missing youth.

He did not see him, and was wondering what it all meant, when the sudden reversal of number 3, which was like a yielding up of the task of conquering the other, gave such a shock to both engines that the man, still leaning far outward, lost his balance, and went over the front upon the pilot of the Hercules.

Bob had darted to the left side of the cab at this moment, and with a throb of the heart saw the man fall. In an instant he was through the open door after him, and ran at a reckless pace along the footboard, scarcely holding fast to the polished rod extending above and along it.

He knew the man had not yet gone under the wheels, for he would have felt the jar caused by the horrible crunching of his body. He had saved himself by catching fast to the rods of the pilot, but looked as if he could not sustain himself long. "Hold on a moment!" shouted Bob, carefully making his way to within reach of him.

The sight of that white, upturned face was one which the youth will not forget to his dying day. It would seem as if the individual could have climbed back had he tried, but the shock was too much for his nerves, and he was afraid to stir.

Grasping an iron support with his left hand, Bob reached far down with his right.

"Now, take hold; don't let go, and you'll be all right!"

The fellow hesitated a moment, but another encouraging word and he seized the friendly hand with a death-like grip. Bob was not rash, but steadied him carefully, and by and by got him upon the bumper above. But he was trembling violently, and too weak to stand. He was in a state of utter collapse.

"This will do," said Bob, cheerily; "the engine will soon come to a halt, and all danger be over."

Since the locomotives were striving with might and main to travel westward, and since there was left only their own momentum to overcome, the speed was rapidly reduced.

But it would never do for Bob Lovell to remain where he was. Number 3 would not be content with merely standing still. She was reversed, and, as soon as the wheels ceased to revolve forward, they would start backward with increasing swiftness.

The Hercules demanded no immediate care, since Number 3 was strong enough to hold her motionless for a time, but the fact remained, that a single fireman had two engines on his hands and both needed to be looked after.

Accordingly, when the wheels had almost stopped and the noise was slight, he asked:

"Are you afraid to try it now?"

"Not if you will help me."

"Keep fast to my hand and slip the other along the rod here and you will be safe."

The man, with much timidity and hesitation, did as directed, moving so slowly that by the time he stepped down in the cab again Number 3 was beginning to move backward. This was checked, though the Hercules still pushed hard.

Bob found himself in a quandary. The Hercules required

attention but he dared not leave Number 3, through fear that the man would seize the throttle and start her back at the same furious rate. Since that would place the Hercules behind Number 3, Bob would be almost powerless, if on the former, to prevent Number 3 dashing into Irondale at the same frightful speed that it had come thence.

I have said that the young fireman fancied he recognized the face, which he saw glaring at him from the engineer's cab. He was right, for, before he left the Hercules to climb upon the other, he had identified the individual as Hematite Oxx, whose looks and actions showed he was crazed from drink.

He had been on a spree for several days, and it was a drunken frenzy that led him to board Number 3 when he saw the engineer leave it for a few minutes. It was the same wild prompting of a disordered brain, that kept him in the engineer's place with the throttle pulled wide open, while Number 3 thundered up the road at the highest bent of which she was capable.

He had once served a few weeks on another road as fireman, which accounted for his knowledge of running the engine. But for this fact, he might have "burned" her frightfully by allowing the water to get too low, or have caused an explosion. But Bob Lovell himself could not have handled the runaway (though it is hardly proper to speak of Number 3 as such) with greater care.

No doubt had Hematite Oxx read Bob's purpose, when he saw him making his way out on his own engine, he would have met him savagely and probably beat him to the ground; but a sudden shock often sobers a drunken man, and when Mr. Oxx took a header over the front of Number 3, and by a desperate clutch saved himself from being crushed, his muddled senses cleared, the delirium left his brain, and he realized where he was and what he had been doing. It was this reaction which so weakened him that,

when he reached the cab, he was too faint to stand. He read aright Bob's puzzled look at him and said:

"Get off and go to the other engine if you want to; I've had enough; I won't bother you any more."

The fireman did not feel quite at ease, but he took the man's word, and, slipping to the ground, ran to his own engine, which he quickly threw out of gear. In an instant he was back again on Number 3.

Both were now motionless, and neither had been harmed; but it was too soon to feel safe. They were on the main track, and there was no telling, from the confusion that must have been created by the multitudinous telegrams, when some train would thunder down upon them.

For the first time during the flurry, Bob surveyed his surroundings in the effort to locate himself. No houses were near, but as soon as he saw where he was, he recalled that there was a siding but a short distance to the eastward.

He decided to proceed thither at a cautious gait, and, unlocking the switch, lost no time in running upon it. The Hercules being at the rear, was easily pushed by Number 3 in the direction of the switch.

"What a sigh of relief I drew," said Bob, in relating the incident, "when I caught sight of the switch and, looking back and in front, failed to see any train approaching. I jumped down, unlocked the switch, and was in such haste to run the Hercules and Number 3 on the siding, that I must have strained the shifting engine pretty badly. I got them out of the way, relocked the switch, and then felt secure; for in whichever direction the engines ran, they must leave the rails before striking the main track."

He next proceeded to bank the fires and put the locomotives in form for a long wait. He was resolved to stay where he was until some searching party appeared. Everything was so disarranged that it was dangerous to try to

reach even the nearest point from which to communicate by telegraph. The superintendent or some of the officials, would discover by and by the points between which one or both of the engines lay, and would send out a relief party.

Hours might pass before its arrival, since the utmost precaution would be taken, but friends were sure to appear and Bob felt he could afford to stay as long as any one. Accordingly, he completed his preparations for a halt that might last until sunset.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HEMATITE OXX.

DURING these latter minutes, Bob seemed to be unaware of the presence of Hematite Oxx, but he cast many a sly glance toward him. The man, after being helped into the cab, sat down on the fireman's box, with his back against the board behind him, his feet extended in front, and his head bowed forward on his breast, for all the world like a dead man, or one asleep.

Young as was Bob Lovell, his experience in the temperance work had given him an extended knowledge of the effects of liquor. When he first noticed how the man trembled, he feared he was on the verge of delirium tremens, but soon saw that such was not the fact. He had been drinking hard, until nearly delirious, but that had passed, and he was now as weak as a child.

When he observed that both engines were standing on the side track, he roused himself and looked toward Bob, who was standing below him in front of the open furnace door.

"Well," said Oxx, "it looks as though I've got myself into a pretty bad scrape."

"It might be better," replied Bob, who wished to feel his way before bearing down too hard on the man.

"How was it?" asked Oxx with a faint grin, and then, before the youth could answer, he asked, "Have you got any whiskey about you?"

"Not a particle."

"Well, I reckon it's about time to wind up this racket, which is a little harder than usual."

"What do you remember about it?"

Oxx, whose fine clothing was disarranged and soiled, and whose bloodshot eyes and inflamed face showed the terrific excesses in which he had been indulging, frowned for a few minutes, as if trying to collect his senses, and then said slowly:

"Things are awfully muddled; for the last three or four days, it seems to me, I've been drunk all the way from Ofalca to Irondale—not slighting a mile of the road."

"But how about this engine?—how came you to be on Number 3?"

"Let me see—I was in Irondale; I dreamed I saw an engine standing by itself, and thought I would take a ride on it; I——"

"It wasn't a dream, Mr. Oxx—it was a reality."

"Is that so?" he asked in astonishment; "yes, I suppose it is, but it seems like a dream, all of it."

"When did things become real to you?"

"The first awakening was when this engine gave a bump, and I pitched over the front. I tell you, Bob Lovell, there are times in a fellow's life, when he can think fast, and I did more thinking in the half a second I spent lunging over the front, and grabbing at anything that would hold me, than I ever did in a week before. I was a crazy fool up to that time, and wasn't much better then from the way I acted. If you hadn't come over to the engine and helped me up, it would have been all day with me."

"I don't know about that," said Bob lightly; "all you had to do was to hold on a little while longer."

"And that's just what I couldn't have done; I was so weak that I would have let go before the engines came to a halt."

"Well, Mr. Oxx, all this is the result of drink; it's a better temperance sermon than I can preach to you."

"I guess you are about right. I slipped into your meetings now and then, in Ofalca, to hear you talk; you didn't know I was there——"

"How often were you there?"

"Three times."

"I saw you on each occasion; you got behind the pillar on the left, and, since it was plain to me you didn't want to have me see you, I didn't show that I suspected you were there."

"Well, I loved to hear you talk and sing, but somehow or other, I couldn't make up my mind to sign the pledge."

"How do you feel *now*?"

"I shall do so on the first opportunity."

"That's this minute."

From his pocket Bob Lovell drew a small book, with a lead pencil running through the loops along the edge. Within this was a printed pledge, with which, of course, you are familiar.

"A pencil is as legal as ink," he remarked, passing both to the man, whose hand trembled as he steadied himself to write his signature. He hesitated a minute, but not from the cause his young friend suspected. Twice he started to write but checked himself. Then he suddenly looked up.

"See here," said he, "it's easy enough to write '*Hematite Oxx*,' there, but I don't know whether it will do."

"Why not?"

"It is no more my name than it is yours."

"Why not write the right one?" asked Bob, who had always suspected the authenticity of the individual's name.

"I belong to a good family, and I am ashamed to have any of my people learn what a wretch I am."

"But you are about to begin a new life, which will make them proud of you."

"See here," added the other with a graver face than he had yet worn, "I have just committed a serious crime for which I am likely to be punished; I won't put down my real name until I am out of this scrape; but I mean business and '*Hematite Oxx*,' will serve just as well as any other. So here goes!"

And controlling his nerves, he wrote "*Hematite Oxx*," beneath the printed temperance pledge, the letters being plainer and firmer than Bob expected to see.

"There!" said he, compressing his lips and shaking his head, "I shall keep that pledge, if it kills me."

"Little danger of its killing you; it doesn't work that way. It will be a hard struggle, Mr. Oxx, but with the help of heaven you will win; you cannot fail."

"I wonder what crime I have committed," he said a minute later; "I know the courts don't accept drunkenness as an excuse, but then did I run off with the locomotive, or did it run off with me? Did I steal the engine, or was it taken away from me before I could get off with it? However, what's the use of speculating in that style? The law won't have any trouble in finding a punishment for what I have done."

"Did any one recognize you when you got on the engine?"

"I cannot be sure of that, but I think not."

"I wonder that while I was on the other engine you didn't jump off and take to the woods before any one recognized you."

"But you knew me?"

"I suspected who you were, but I haven't told anybody."

Hematite Oxx looked sharply at Bob Lovell. He caught the meaning of his remark and, rising from his seat, was about to let himself down from the engine, with the purpose of seeking shelter near at hand; but, before his feet touched the ground, he stopped and climbed back to his seat again.

"No, sir," he said firmly; "I am going to stay and take what they have for me, even if it is ten years."

"It won't be anything like that, I am sure," remarked Bob, who had begun to feel some misgivings about the advice he was so prompt to offer him. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Oxx, I am hopeful that your punishment will be much less severe than you fear."

"What reason have you for such hope?"

"Well, in the first place no damage of account has been done; you knew enough to take good care of Number 3; there have been no collisions and no one injured."

"But I deserve no credit for that: what would have taken place but for you?"

"It is true it might have been bad, but the company will be so pleased to find out how well it has all ended that when they learn you have signed the pledge, are very penitent, and voluntarily stayed to take whatever punishment was to come, it is impossible that they should not be merciful."

"You encourage me," replied Oxx, plainly relieved by the cheering counsel of his young friend; "but no matter how severe they may be, I shall be happy."

"And why?"

"I am released from the slavery that has been my ruin. Never again shall I taste a drop of liquor, and to *you* belongs the credit; you may not know that the earnest words you said to me, after that affair some months ago, did a great deal of good."

"I really am glad to know it."

"Yes, sir; a certain party, the son of Superintendent Worthley, had gone so far in a particular line, that he never could have got back again if it hadn't been for me; and I never would have allowed him to do so if it hadn't been for what *you* said to me."

"I know what you mean," said Bob.

At that moment the sound of a whistle was heard. Looking to the westward they saw a locomotive coming cautiously around the curve.

It was pretty well loaded with passengers, and among them were President Walbridge and two constables. They had been looking a long time for Number 3 and the Hercules, and at last they were located.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PROMOTION.

IT was on the day succeeding Hematite Oxx's experience with engine Number 3, that an important meeting was held in the office of Superintendent Worthley, in the company's building at Ofalca.

While the superintendent and president were talking in low tones, young Montague, who was all suavity when the president was within sight, announced that Matt Fields, the famous engineer, was in the anteroom, and wished to see Mr. Worthley. "Bring him right in here," said the president; "he couldn't call at a better time."

"Yes, my son; show him in."

The next moment the bronzed and bearded engineer of the Night Express entered the handsomely furnished room. There was always an honest deference in his greeting which pleased better than the more elaborate salutations. Still Matt hardly expected the president and superin-

tendent of the I. & O. road to rise from their chairs and take his hand as he came in, and yet that is what they did.

After some pleasant chat about nothing in particular, the conversation drifted to the exciting incidents of the day before.

"I came up this morning," said Matt, "to see Bob; but he tells me the Hercules' exhaust is a little off, and she will have to wait a day or two before going out."

"Yes," replied the superintendent; "I ordered Mr. Lovell to make a thorough examination, and, if his engine was not right in every respect, to go back to the shop and stay till it was."

"How about Number 3?"

"She needs a little looking after, though injured only to a slight extent. Matt, what do you think of Lovell's performance yesterday?"

"It was nothing," replied the engineer.

"You don't consider it much of an exploit to save a valuable engine that I ordered destroyed, in order to protect other property and many lives?" was the inquiring remark of the president.

"No—that is, *not for Bob*; it would be a mighty big thing for me, or anyone else."

The dignitaries laughed at the veteran's way of putting it, and were inclined to agree with him.

"We have sent for him," continued Mr. Worthley, "and he will soon be here to give an account of himself. He is a bright young man."

"There aint a brighter or better person connected with the I. & O., and I don't except the president or superintendent," was the rather startling reply, which caused those officials to laugh again.

"Why, there aint anything that fellow don't think of," burst out Matt with a wave of his hand. "When old Hercules tipped over on me, there stood the whole crowd

gaping, feeling sorry, but they warn't able to lift a finger to help me. If it hadn't been for Bob Lovell I would have been layin' there still. He was the only one in the crowd—and your son, Mr. Worthley, was among 'em—that had the brains to see there was a simple way of getting me loose."

"That certainly was a clever performance," asserted the superintendent, at which the president bowed.

"Then, if he hadn't caught that bit of paper," continued Matt, "that gave away the plan of the gang at Dead Man's Hollow, our train would have been robbed; and was there ever a braver thing than his climbing over the tender and attacking that fellow standing on the platform of the express car? I wouldn't have done it myself, and I tried to keep him from doing it."

"It was a daring thing," said Mr. Worthley, "though it came near getting us into a bad hole. But his work yesterday was finer."

"Unquestionably it was," assented President Walbridge. "In my flurry I saw no way of saving Number 3, nor did any of those around me. As the only thing that could be done, I concluded to ditch her, letting the drunken fool that ran off with her be killed at the same time. Lovell had three minutes to learn things, and in that time he formed the scheme which saved both engines, a vast amount of property, many lives, and ended in the capture of the individual who calls himself Hematite Oxx, though I don't believe there is any person in the United States with such a name. While waiting for us," laughed the president, "Lovell got him to sign the temperance pledge, and the proud scamp that was certainly mixed up in the intended robbery of one of our trains is as crying and penitent as a child."

"Where is he?"

"He is lodged in jail: but Lovell has made such strong

intercession for him, and the man seems really to be so penitent, that we have concluded not to press the charge. He will be set free in a day or two, and I hope he will become the thoroughly reformed man he wishes to be."

"Lovell told me about him," said Matt, "and he is much interested in the chap that no one seems to know much about."

"But," said the president, with a glowing face, "what do all these achievements of Lovell amount to compared with his act a couple of months ago in saving my daughter and his own sister from being run over by the engine? I tell you *that* was a wonderful exploit. It has never been surpassed, and I know of no incident that is its equal."

The president could never repress his emotion when the incident was referred to, and, with a view of diverting his thoughts, Mr. Worthley asked their caller:

"Do you think, Matt, that Lovell is qualified to take charge of an engine?"

Matt's nose turned up in disgust.

"I'm surprised at such a question, Mr. Worthley. Why, there ain't his equal on the road; as I take it, the best engineer in the world is him that knows right away what's the best thing to do, and who does [it, and that's Bob Lovell."

"You know he is only eighteen years old—too young to become an engineer according to our regulations."

"But he's got a head onto him that's older than anyone of us," added the enthusiastic Matt, "and being as I've called to resign——"

"You called to resign!" repeated the superintendent, he and the president looking their astonishment; "what do you mean?"

"Exactly and precisely and circumstantially what I say. I resign as engineer of the Hercules, or any other engine that runs out on the road."

"Why is that?"

"I'm disabled; I aint fit to run an engine."

"What's the trouble? Your intellect isn't tottering, so far as I can judge."

"Mr. Superintendent, *I'm color blind!*"

The officials stared in amazement. The subject of color blindness was attracting considerable attention at that time, owing to a disaster in the West, which was said to be due to that cause alone.

"How long have you been sensible of this failing?" asked Mr. Worthley.

"Well, I've had my doubts for the better part of a year; sometimes I was sure that something was wrong with my sight, and then I was sure it was the fault of the men that showed the signals, and I talked pretty rough to them. But there hain't been any doubt in my mind since the night those fellows tried to hold up our train."

"What convinced you then?"

"Do you know that for all I was complimented so much for lifting that tree off the track with the Hercules' pilot, I never meant to do it? I was never more certain in my life than I was that the red light which was held up to stop me was a white one. When the first suspicion came to me it was too late to stop. Why," added Matt, as if resolved to make out the strongest case he could against himself, "I passed a red flag only yesterday, and by sheer good luck missed running the Hercules into Dead Man's Hollow."

The officials looked grave.

"Mr. Worthley," said the president, "we must have an oculist examine every engineer in our employ without delay. I have learned of a peril which I never suspected threatened us. I am surprised, Matt, that a serious accident has not resulted because of your failing."

"So am I; I ought to have resigned before, but, so long as Bob was on the engine, I felt safe. He suspected my

eyesight was not always reliable, for he kept a sharp lookout for the signals, and many is the time I learned whether to stop or go ahead by merely glancing at him without either of us speaking."

Such was the truth. Bob, as you will recall, had discovered Matt's sad secret, and it caused him as much distress as it did the veteran engineer. He knew the risk involved, and he felt it was wrong for Fields to remain at the throttle; but he could not tell him so. He determined that so long as he rode on the engine with him, he would make sure that no mistake occurred in the matter of signals; but, if the time came for them to separate, then he would speak frankly to his friend, and tell him his views, as he had done but a short time before.

It would have caused Bob Lovell much anguish, for it can be understood that it would have humiliated and almost broken the heart of the engineer. But Matt was conscientious, and was rapidly reaching the point where his own sense of honor impelled him to act. The narrow escape in running upon the trestle-work over Dead Man's Hollow, in the face of the danger signal, brought matters to a crisis, and no man was ever more in earnest than was he, when, before stepping off of the Hercules, he assured Bob he would never run it again.

But, as both the president and superintendent declared, Matt's resignation as the engineer of the Hercules did not carry with it his severance of connection with the road. The day could never come when remunerative work was not to be found for such a capable and faithful employee.

"Under the circumstances," said the superintendent, "we cannot refuse to act upon your withdrawal. It simplifies the situation."

"How's that?"

"Mr. Walbridge and I had concluded, before you came in, that a fireman who has given so many proofs of his ca-

capacity as Lovell, is just such an engineer as we want to keep in our service. We had determined to break our own rules for him as we did in first giving him employment, by placing him in charge of an engine."

"Then your talk about his being too young was a joke?" remarked Matt, with a grin.

"Of course; but the problem was how to make a good place for him, for it would have been a poor reward to give him charge of a coal or freight engine. Now that you have resigned we shall put him in charge of the Hercules; he will have the same run that you have been accustomed to make for several years past."

"You couldn't do anything that would please him and me better," exclaimed Matt.

"And as for you?"

"Why, I s'pose I'll go into the round-house as hostler."

"No you won't," the superintendent hastened to say; "you will assume duty to-morrow as round-house foreman."

"Whew!" whistled the delighted Matt; "I didn't think of anything like *that*; but I'll tackle it, and I guess I'll be able to hold up my end."

"There can be no doubt of it," remarked the president. "The duties of looking after the engines, the engineers, and firemen on this part of the road will not be hard; you will not have to run a train, and you can move your family into Ofalca, and be with them every night."

At this juncture, Montague Worthley announced that Bob Lovell was waiting outside. The assistant superintendent, whatever his feelings, was wise enough to hide them for the time. He merely glanced and nodded at Bob without speaking. The new engineer of the Hercules knew that the old envious hatred still rankled in the young man's breast, and the accounts between them were not yet closed, but for the present, the books were shut.

It need not to be said that Bob Lovell received a cordial greeting, and that the handsome fellow was made to blush again and again because of the compliments that came from all. Not only that, but there was good news for him—the best news that he could possibly have received.

The dream of his life—that of holding the throttle of the Hercules as its engineer—was a reality, and he had acquired the prerogative through his own merit and in such a way that it was as pleasing to the engineer who withdrew as it was to his successor.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE NEW MASTER OF THE HERCULES.

THE dream of young Bob Lovell's life was realized at last. He was appointed engineer of the matchless Hercules, on which he had served his apprenticeship as fireman. The grizzled veteran Matt Fields had been stricken with that extraordinary weakness, more common than is generally supposed, color blindness. Unable to distinguish the signals by which the engineer of a locomotive, who holds the lives of multitudes in his hands, is warned of danger, it would have been a crime to permit him longer to handle an engine. As Matt himself had stated, he would have resigned the hour he became aware of his affliction, but for the fact that so long as Bob Lovell was his fireman, he considered himself safe against disaster. The old engineer, however, was too conscientious to hold a situation in which, despite the companionship of his young friend, the lives of others might have been sacrificed. Accordingly, he gave up the throttle and became round-house foreman, a post more suited to him in every respect than that of engineer.

The face of Bob Lovell flushed when he climbed into the

cab of the Hercules, and, placing his hand on the throttle lever, realized that he was now the master of the superb piece of mechanism. His fireman, Dick Conklin, was a sturdy young man, who had served a couple of years on the freight and would have been promoted but for an occasional weakness he displayed for strong drink. He was several years older than Bob, quite powerful, tall and good-natured, except when indulging in intoxicants. At such times he was apt to be morose, reserved and sometimes ugly. He had been suspended once, but manifested such real regret for his offence, that he was allowed to retain his place, since Superintendent Worthley was aware that he had a widowed mother and invalid sister depending on his monthly wages. He was liked by all his associates, and the principal reason for placing him on the Hercules with Bob, was the conviction that the young engineer could do more than any one else to keep him in the straight and narrow path.

"Bob," said President Walbridge, "is the Hercules in good shape?"

"Perfect; I took a little spin down the track to test her and she never worked better."

"You consider her the fastest engine on the road?"

"I am sure of that."

"I am glad," added the president with a chuckle, "for we have had President Horton of the I. and Q., and his secretary, at a meeting, and we are going to take them home on a special. I want you to show him that we know something about running on our line. Worthley and I have got up a little plot that we think will surprise him."

Let me remind the reader just here, that the distance from Ofalca, where this conversation took place, to the Junction was sixty-five miles. The Junction was the point where the line of the Inverwick and Quitman railway crossed that of the Irondale and Ofalca. Mr. Horton was

president of the latter road, and by invitation of President Walbridge had come to Ofalca in his special car, to hold a conference on an important business in which both corporations were interested. While the roads were rivals, and there had been considerable friction between them regarding freight and passenger rates, yet the respective heads met like warm friends, and treated each other with the utmost courtesy.

After the business of the meeting was over and the cigars were produced, President Horton began a little badinage about the speed attained on the respective roads. His company had just put on an express, which by actual test had made a considerable distance at the rate of a mile a minute. He had ridden on the train and timed it himself, so there could be no mistake.

"That is a tremendous pace" he said with a shake of his head. "You hear it spoken of lightly, but there are mighty few trains in the country that attain it."

"On the contrary," said President Walbridge, "I think it quite common. Hardly a day passes, in which it is not made by some of *our* trains."

"I would rather see that than hear of it."

"I will endeavor to show it to you."

President Walbridge felt the taunt of Mr. Horton, as did Superintendent Worthley, and the former resolved that he would give his guest an exhibition that he would remember for a long time.

It was the intention of the superintendent to attach the private car of Mr. Horton to the down train, dropping it at the Junction where he would strike his own line. Bob Lovell expected to make the run to Irondale, the other end of the road; but leaving that work to the engine which had been doing it while the Hercules was undergoing repairs, Mr. Walbridge decided that Bob should take President Horton and his special car to the Junction. Presi-

dent Walbridge and superintendent Worthley would bear him company, so that including the secretary of the first-named gentleman and the conductor, there would be just five beside the brakeman.

Mr. Walbridge exchanged significant looks with his superintendent, as he excused himself for a few minutes, while he went out with the purpose of arranging for the special run. That duty properly belonged to the superintendent, but the latter caught the idea and remained with his guest, smoking and discussing the increasing rates of speed as shown by the revised time tables of all the roads.

The above will explain the meaning of the conversation between President Walbridge and Bob Lovell, who had just returned from a run of a mile or two down the road to test his engine.

"Bob," continued Mr. Walbridge, his handsome blue eyes twinkling, as he placed his hand on the shoulder of his favorite young engineer; "you understand what I mean. The first consideration of a railway company is *safety*; speed should always be secondary, and, no matter how strong the temptation, I never want you to take an unnecessary risk. Always follow your own judgment, but if *you think it safe*, I would be pleased to have you show what the Hercules can do. Mr. Horton has an idea that they make better time on his road than we, though we have steel rails and as excellent a road-bed as they. Now, we are through with our business, and he is ready to return to the Junction. It is two hours before the regular down train and, according to the time-table, the road will be clear to the Junction for an hour and a half. The necessary orders will be telegraphed ahead to keep it clear for that time. We wish to start fifteen minutes from now. Mr. Worthley and I will accompany Mr. Horton to the Junction."

"The distance is sixty-five miles and you would like me to make it in an hour and a quarter?"

"If you think it safe."

President and engineer were gazing straight into each others' eyes as they spoke. They tried to look serious, but at the same instant both broke into broad smiles. *They understood each other.* "I will never knowingly incur a dangerous risk," said Bob, as his smile departed, "for I agree with you that the motto of an engineer should be safety for his passengers before anything and everything else. The road between here and the Junction is the best run on the line, and the finest portion is the track beyond Jigtown."

"Why so?"

"For ten miles it is perfectly straight, and the grade is slightly down. I presume, Mr. Walbridge, you would like to know where Mr. Horton is to receive his lesson?"

"I would."

"Well, I will spin along at a lively pace until after crossing Dead Man's Hollow, when I will spur the Hercules and get her up to her best pace at Jigtown. The first mile-post is just beyond Jigtown, and perhaps it will be well for you to ask Mr. Horton to take out his watch and note how long it takes us to strike the ten succeeding mile-posts in succession."

"You understand, Bob, that you must not make the attempt *unless you deem it safe?*"

"I give you my word that I never will do otherwise."

"All right then; I leave everything to you, but," added the president with another odd twinkle of his eyes; "I *hope* your judgment will pronounce it safe."

Bob was about to reply, but he was obliged to turn his head to hide the smile that would come in spite of his effort to restrain it. He grasped the situation and sympathized with the feelings of the two highest officers of the road. Unless some unexpected obstacle prevented, he was resolved to put the Hercules to the very highest pace of

which the superb steed was capable. At the same time he was equally resolved not to violate his motto of sacrificing everything to safety. He had never been guilty of recklessness, and he considered it a crime for an engineer to risk the lives of those in his care by any effort to show what he or his engine was capable of doing.

"Give her plenty of coal, Dick," he said to his fireman, following the invariable rule of all engineers, who refer to their engines as of the feminine gender; "we'll keep her at one hundred and thirty pounds; give her a thorough oiling, for we have no more time than we need to get ready."

"The old man is anxious to show what you can do, Bob," said the fireman, sharing the hopeful pride which prompted the words of the president; "I'll do my duty, and it all depends on *you*."

"I shall try to do mine," replied Bob, catching up one of the long-necked oil cans and dropping himself to the ground, to help in putting the iron steed in order.

He examined every part of the Hercules, assisting Dick, who really needed no help, and making sure that the slightest point was not overlooked. Just before the quarter of an hour was up, he backed gently against President Horton's private car, the single brakeman coupled them together, and the Hercules was ready for the race of her life.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A LIVELY SPIN.

THE air hose was connected, the brakes tested, and a minute later the two railway presidents, Superintendent Worthley and the secretary of the guest, came out on the platform, laughing and jesting with each other as they stepped on board the handsome private car. Mr. Worthley

was at the rear of the procession, and he could not resist the temptation to run a few paces to the engine and say, in a hurried voice, to the handsome engineer:

"You understand, do you?"

"I think so," replied Bob with a smile and nod of his head; "don't time me till we strike Jigtown."

Mr. Worthley ran back and stepped upon the car, so close behind the three chatting gentlemen that his absence was not noticed. The brakeman was standing on the front platform with his upraised hand grasping the bell cord, while both engineer and fireman were watching him. The instant the car door closed behind the magnates, the conductor nodded, the brakeman jerked his hand downward, and simultaneous with the clink of the bell in the engineer's cab, Bob Lovell twitched the lever. It was done so gently that those in the car felt no jar and were not aware they were moving until they glanced out of the windows at the side.

The Hercules was blowing off steam, but as her pace increased this ceased and Bob closed the cylinder cocks, which emitted little jets of vapor during the first dozen revolutions. A few moments later, when the engine had passed beyond the winding switches, "he linked her up," and the pace rapidly increased.

Everything joined to make an unprecedented run, though possibly the powerful engine might have travelled a little more smoothly had there been two cars instead of one behind it; but the private coach was heavier than an ordinary passenger one and constituted just the right "balance" for the engine.

Bob Lovell's wish was to make the sixty-five miles in one hour and a quarter. This had never been done on the I & O., and was a tremendous run, for it was necessary to wait a couple of miles beyond Ofalca before striking a high place, as the trestle-work over Dead Man's Hollow

was never crossed at a greater speed than twenty miles an hour, and prudence demanded there should be a slacking up for fully a mile before reaching the Junction. In addition, there were places where the line curved sharply and in two localities the up grade was considerable. Even the Hercules could not ignore these handicaps, and it was impossible for her to make the pace that could be attained on other portions of the road.

But it may be said that two-thirds of the road was excellent, and Bob Lovell believed he could make every bit of it at the rate of a mile a minute. And yet, even that fearful speed would barely be sufficient to cover the distance in an hour and a quarter, which, it will be observed, was almost an average of that velocity for the entire distance.

It was five o'clock to the minute, when the Hercules steamed away from Ofalca, and orders had been telegraphed to the Junction to keep the track clear for an hour and three-quarters, the hope of the president and superintendent being that it might be accomplished in an hour and a half, though they had their misgivings.

The engineer had scheduled the entire distance in his mind, not even his fireman knowing it. Three miles from Ofalca things began to hum, and when ten miles were passed Bob, with one hand on the lever, snatched out his watch and glanced at its face. He was a half minute ahead of his own schedule.

Without speaking, he glanced across the cab at Dick, and then, looking down, nodded his head. The fireman slid off his box, hastily opened the furnace door, threw in half a dozen shovelfuls of coal and pointed at the steam gauge. It stood at one hundred and forty, and began blowing off again. Bob nodded to signify he was suited, and, while Dick grasped the bell cord to ring for the crossings, over which they were continually thundering, the engineer gave his whole attention to the reins of the Hercules.

Five miles further, he took a second hasty glance at his watch. He was nearly two minutes ahead of time.

"If the road remains clear," he thought, "Mr. Horton will be astonished, and so will the president, superintendent, and the rest of them."

It was barely five miles further to Dead Man's Hollow, and, despite Bob Lovell's matchless coolness, he began to feel the thrill which comes to the warrior when he sees victory within his grasp. Much as he expected from the Hercules, she was doing more.

Sweeping round the long curve that approached the trestle-work, he leaned out of the cab to catch sight of the framework. He would have felt little risk in going over at double the ordinary rate, but, in accordance with his resolution, he shut off steam, waiting until quite close to the bridge to apply the brakes, so as to save every second possible.

At this moment, to his consternation, he caught sight of a red flag fluttering between the rails, just in front of the structure.

"What can that mean?" he asked impatiently, as he put on the brakes; "that makes a delay of I don't know how long."

No one was in sight, and, bringing his engine to a dead halt, within a rod of the signal, he called to Dick to jump down and see whether he could find the explanation of the signal. Bob scrutinized the rails but could detect nothing wrong. The bridge looked as usual and the whole thing was a mystery. The fireman, however, at his order walked across ahead of the engine, Bob following so slowly that he could have checked the locomotive within its own length, at a signal from the fireman.

But solid ground was struck again, without any discovery why the danger signal had been displayed. Dick climbed upon the engine, and Bob glanced at his watch. He had

lost the two minutes gained, and nearly a minute more, and, so far as he could judge, there had not been the least cause for the exasperating delay.

Bob now prepared to put the Hercules through her paces. He was approaching Jigtown, and twenty miles of favorable track were ahead, half of it being the best of the line. There was plenty of daylight, and no trains were in the way. The Hercules was blowing off steam again (for Dick kept shoveling in coal), and the president and superintendent of the road wanted better speed shown than had been exhibited since leaving Ofalca.

The Hercules acted as if she understood the situation as well as the young man who held the throttle, and before the fireman expected it, she was going at a prodigious rate. The connecting rods at the side darted back and forth with a swiftness that made the ponderous iron seem to be quivering, instead of going and returning twenty odd inches at a time. The immense drivers spun around with bewildering velocity, the long lines of parallel rails darting under the pilot with dizzying swiftness, while, as is always the case, under such a high rate of speed, the enormous engine bounded and leaped from side to side, wherever the slightest depression or irregularity occurred. Had the small door in front of the engineer been open, the terrific gale would have swept him from his place, though the leaves on the trees as they shot backward were unruffled by a breath of air.

Bob Lovell did not sit on the box at his side, as was sometimes his custom, but stood near the boiler below, his right hand resting on the edge of the slide, along which the window had been shoved. The gale that rushed against his fingers was like a hurricane; the puffing from the smoke-stack resembled the shuddering lower notes of an organ; his left hand grasped the lever, while his keen eyes peered from beneath his cap, which was pulled low on his fore-

head, and he scrutinized every rod of the track as it darted under his engine.

He knew the Hercules was running faster than ever before. He had struck the ten miles, where President Horton was to be asked to note the speed, and Bob was giving him the lesson that President Walbridge was anxious he should receive.

The engineer could now see a long way ahead, and, believing that the utmost speed attainable was reached, he snatched out his watch just before reaching one of the white mile-posts, and noted the instant they whizzed by. Still holding it in his hand, he observed the second hand as it climbed around the small circle. It was half way when Bob glanced ahead. Yes, there was another mile-post, coming toward him as if fired from an immense piece of ordnance. Keeping his eye on it, he looked at his watch the instant the post was passed.

The mile was made in exactly fifty seconds. The Hercules was going at the rate of seventy-two miles an hour! Bob was delighted and amazed, but he kept his timepiece in his hand for the next mile. The engine was gaining, for she sped by the next post in forty-eight seconds, or at a rate of seventy-five miles an hour.

"The next mile will beat them all," was his conclusion, carefully noting his time and feeling a thrill from head to foot.

Sure enough the third mile which he timed was made in precisely forty-five seconds, or at the astonishing rate of eighty miles an hour!

This was the utmost possible limit, the "high water mark," and it not only could not be exceeded, but could not be maintained. Bob slipped his watch back in place, and thought with a glow of pride:

"If President Horton timed the Hercules he has become convinced that we can do as good traveling on the I. & O. as on the I. & Q. What's up now?"

This was caused by the sudden clinking of the bell overhead, calling for him to slacken his pace. Bob turned and looked at the front of the car, where he should have seen the brakeman just within the door, but instead of him, he observed a man with a face as white as death, making frantic gestures at him.

CHAPTER XL.

AN ASTOUNDING FEAT.

‘**A**S I was remarking,” said President Horton of the I. & Q. road, “there is a great deal of exaggeration about the speed of railway trains. Men speak of a mile a minute as a very ordinary achievement when I do not believe it is attained by one road in a dozen.”

The gentleman was sitting in his cushioned chair, the others similarly placed around him, smoking, and fully prepared to enjoy the sixty-five mile run to the Junction.

“I cannot agree with you,” insisted Superintendent Worthley, “for with the improvement in road-beds, steel rails, engines, and the advancement in science, that gait is by no means wonderful.”

“Now,” added President Walbridge, “how great a speed do you think, Mr. Horton, we will make with this car on the run to the Junction?”

The gentleman looked around and out of the window, as though he expected to read the answer in what he saw.

“Well, say forty, possibly fifty miles an hour,—that is if everything proves favorable.”

“I don’t know how well we shall do, but since we have but one car, we ought to do as well as that.”

Mr. Horton smiled, as if to signify he would rather spare their feelings, though if they invited their own discomfort, he would not oppose.

The remarks given followed a general conversation and were made after crossing the trestle-work over Dead Man's Hollow. It was easy for all four to tell from the action of the car and a glance through the windows that the train was rapidly reaching a high rate. Both Mr. Walbridge and Worthley, as well as the conductor, knew just where Bob Lovell would let the Hercules out. They were as familiar as he with the road and the hints he had received were certain to bear their fruit.

"We have just passed a mile post," remarked Mr. Walbridge; "please use your watches, gentlemen; I will call out the instant we strike the next post, and the next, and the next and so on for four or five. Possibly we may be ashamed after the test, but I hope not."

The other three drew out their timepieces. Mr. Horton and Worthley carried stop watches, so that it was easy to register the exact time to a second. They held the instruments ready and looked toward the president, who placed himself so as not to miss the post.

"*Now!*" he shouted, and, at the same instant, all three who were looking at him, saw something white flash by the window and the record was begun. It was not necessary to keep their gaze on their watches, and Mr. Horton, half suspecting a little trick on the part of his brother president, looked toward him.

All saw they were going fast, but when the next shout was made and again a white bird seemed to flit by the windows, they consulted their timepieces. Just fifty seconds had passed!

Every one was startled and glanced at each other, as if some mistake had been made, but they were timing the next mile, and, before any one could do more than gasp his amazement, President Walbridge, whose face was flushing with the excitement of the occasion, shouted:

"*Now!*"

Forty-eight seconds! What could it mean? The engine must be running away; the world was topsy-turvy; they were all going to destruction; President Horton was terrified.

The other president and his superintendent began to feel some qualms, but they were not going to let their guest see it. They were bound to give him the lesson, no matter what the cost to themselves. Besides, they possessed unbounded faith in Bob Lovell, though no one could guarantee that he would not lose his head like many an older man in such a trying situation.

But all were timing the third mile, which was made in forty-five seconds. No one in the car had ever traveled as fast before. A cold chill ran over President Walbridge, who, while watching the mile-posts, also held his watch before him. He looked inquiringly at Superintendent Worthley who shook his head. This would never do. Iron and steam and wood could not stand such a terrific strain, but neither of the officers made any motion to interfere.

Mr. Horton's secretary, a pale youth who wore eye-glasses and parted his hair in the middle, looked as if he were about to faint; and as for President Horton!

He was so flustered by the amazing pace attained a minute before that he lost his reckoning, so to speak. In his excitement, he partly rose from his seat and glaring at his watch was sure the third mile was made in twenty-eight seconds!

He was completely upset and certain that the engine was running away, and, that in a few minutes, all would plunge headlong to destruction. Bounding from his seat, he snatched the bell-rope, jerked it frantically, and dashing to the front of the car, began wildly gesticlating to the engineer.

"Great heavens!" he shouted, "we're going four hundred and fifty miles an hour! we are doomed! we won't be

able to stop under ten miles! what's the matter with the engineer? Has any one a pistol to shoot him?"

The terror of the gentleman brought something of confidence to the others. They smiled, and President Walbridge springing up, hurried after him to the front of the car. While the guest motioned so fiercely for the engineer to slacken his pace, the host waved him to go on, and that there might be no misunderstanding, pulled the bell-cord. Bob, who was looking around, grasped the situation in an instant and let out the Hercules again, giving her full steam and crowding her to the last degree.

By this time, the smooth, even track began to change. There was a slight curving, the grade became level and the irregularities, though hardly perceptible to the eye, were greater than before. As a consequence, the Hercules began bounding and lunging in the most terrifying fashion. A person unacquainted with fast railway traveling would have been certain that both engine and car would leave the track the next instant.

"I beg you not to be frightened," said Mr. Walbridge, soothingly, as he laid his hand on the arm of his friend; "would you like me to signal to the engineer to go a little faster?"

"*To go a little faster?*" gasped the white-faced man, grasping the back of one of the chairs for support; "did you ever know a person speeding to the demnition bow-wows, who wanted to *go faster?*"

And then sagging down into the seat, he looked appealingly up at his friend and wailed:

"Walbridge, if there is any way of stopping that engine, for heaven's sake do so without a second's delay."

President Walbridge laughed so heartily that he roused the other, who began to understand the exhibition he was making of himself. At the same time, Hercules was compelled, in spite of the best she could do, to moderate her

pace, though the roughness of the track caused it to seem as if they were going faster than ever.

Mr. Worthley, who was still timing the train, saw the rate was between fifty-five and sixty seconds to the mile. This was fast enough and indeed faster than that portion of the road had ever been traversed, but he did not mean to interfere with Bob Lovell, who, it was evident, knew what he was about.

Before any one in the car supposed they were within a dozen miles of their destination, the engineer was heard blowing for the Junction switches, while the train began breaking up so perceptibly, that assurance came back to all. The keen eyes of the young engineer caught the right signal, and, steaming forward again he drew up at the station at exactly five minutes past six.

The entire run from Ofalca to the Junction, sixty-five miles, had made been at the rate of a mile a minute for the entire distance. Nothing like it had ever been known before on the I. & O. road, and the record to this day has not been reached by any engineer, though attained on other lines, both English and American.

CHAPTER XLI.

A THUMP.

“AS I remarked, the speed of a mile a minute is not an unusual one.”

The observation was off-hand and made by President Walbridge to President Horton, who having recovered from his fright, was able to bear a little badinage when the laugh was fairly on him.

“I have no doubt we could do as well on our road, if we placed an engine in charge of a crazy engineer,” he replied.

“Mr. Horton,” said the other, laying his hand on his

shoulder, "the young man who holds the throttle of the Hercules is the brightest and best engineer on the road. He is Bob Lovell, who saved my daughter's life and captured that runaway engine the other day. There is no man living, though he is not yet twenty-one years of age, with whom I would trust myself as soon as with him."

"But, say, Walbridge, that was a mistake about his making that mile in less than half a minute."

"Yes, though he did it in three-quarters of a minute, as the rest of us agree by our watches."

"Well, all I have to say is that if you don't treat Mr Lovell well, I shall steal him from you."

The hosts and guests parted company, while Bob ran down to the turn-table and brought the Hercules back with her pilot turned toward Ofalca. President Walbridge and Superintendent Worthley stepped upon the engine as it came up beside the station. Bob was smiling, for he saw both were delighted.

"You did yourself proud," said the president, extending his hand to the blushing, handsome fellow.

"It *was* a pretty good run," he modestly replied, removing his glove to take the hand of the gentleman. As he did so, he felt something in his palm, which a glance showed to be a twenty-dollar bill. Murmuring, "Thanks!" he slipped it into his pocket; "Hercules is a splendid engine."

"I wouldn't have missed it for a hundred dollars," added the superintendent, who, having observed the sly act of his superior, extended his hand to the fireman with a similar greenback, followed by another to the conductor and brakeman; "it would have been impossible, Dick, without *your* intelligent help."

"That is true," Bob hastened to add, "I want no better fireman than Dick."

"No engineer need ask a better one; Dick has but one

failing," said the superintendent, looking at him kindly; "he knows what it is and he has only to prove he has mastered it, when we will give him a good berth."

No words could have been more fitly spoken. Dick Conklin's manhood responded and he felt that moment as though he would gladly risk his life for any one of the three, and, as for ever tasting another drop of liquor, he would first cut off his right hand; but alas! many a poor fellow has talked and felt that way, when on the very verge of hopelessly falling.

"Now, Bob," continued the president, who could not help chuckling over the manner in which the tables had been turned on President Horton; "there is nothing due from the east, I believe." He turned toward the superintendent for the information he desired.

The latter thought a moment and replied:

"The freight leaves Ofalca at six, but goes on the siding at Jigtown to wait for the up-train, which leaves here in fifteen minutes."

"Then there is nothing to hinder us from running to Ofalca ahead of the express?"

"Nothing."

To make sure, the necessary orders were telegraphed along the Ofalca division, and, in a few minutes, the assurance came that there would be a clear track ahead for two hours, or at any rate until the run of the Hercules was completed. There is considerable difference between riding over a railway line, as the "boss," and going as a passenger on a limited ticket, as most of us have to do.

Ordinarily the officers would have waited for the regular express and returned to their homes on that, but they decided to ride back on the engine with Bob Lovell. The accommodations were scant, but the two "high toned" passengers and the conductor and brakeman speedily accommodated themselves to the situation. Superintendent Worth-

ley placed himself on the fireman's box, and, with his gloved hand grasped the bell-rope, to signify that he would relieve Dick of that part of his duty. The president at Bob's invitation seated himself on his box, though Mr. Walbridge protested, since manifestly he was in the way of the engineer, but the latter stood just behind him, and looked over his shoulder, out through the glass in front.

"I want you to do a little running for me," said Bob, "when we get fairly out on the road."

"I never served an apprenticeship at *that*," replied the president, "though I have some idea of how the thing ought to be done. However, if you will keep an eye over me and superintend the business, I'll show Worthley over there that some things are as easy as others."

"When he takes charge," said the superintendent, "make room for me to jump off."

Everything being ready, Bob signified to the president to go ahead, and he gave the lever such a big pull that the driving-wheels spun around like lightning.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed, "what's the matter?"

"Let him alone," called the superintendent, "and we'll get home some time next week, if the Hercules can stand it."

But Bob slyly jerked the lever the right distance, and the engine began puffing and traveling in her usual manner. When the puffs became fast enough, he indicated to the president the right depression into which to slip the catch on the reversing lever. The gentleman strained hard, but the heavy lever wobbled back and forth and he could not link it at the right spot, until Bob, in the same tricky manner as before, gave him help.

"There seems to be a good deal of unnecessary fuss about one of these things," growled the gentleman, pretending not to see the laughter of the superintendent on the other side of the cab. "I hope no cows or horses or runaway teams will stray upon the track."

Mr. Walbridge was quick to learn that the situation of an engineer is mighty different from that of a passenger. His seat was much harder than the cushions in the cars, and the Hercules had a way of jolting and plunging about for which it seemed to him there was no justification, while as he cast his eyes ahead at the long, thin steel ribbons, over which he was treading, he could not repress a discomforting distrust of them. It appeared to him that they must be weak in some places, that the ties were rotten or that one of the wheels of the engine must give out and send everything to eternal smash.

But as mile after mile swept under the locomotive, he grew accustomed to the novel sensation and something like self-confidence came to him. Looking across the cab at the smiling superintendent, he shook his head, as if to ask him whether he did not wish he knew how to run an engine as well as he.

Having set things going, it struck President Walbridge that his duty for the time was finished. He, therefore, folded his arms and making himself as comfortable as he could in his seat, devoted himself to looking ahead. The country bore such a novel appearance, viewed from his position, that he found the sensation delightful because of its newness.

Bob was glad he relinquished his hold on the lever, for it gave him a better opportunity to manipulate it. When the curve they were nearing became sharper, or the road rougher, he partly shut off steam, so as to moderate the speed, while, it need not be said, he kept a sharp lookout for anything in the nature of an obstruction on the track.

It seemed to Superintendent Worthley that there was never a line constructed with so many road crossings, and he was pulling the bell cord almost continuously. Now and then, the engineer sent out a sharp shriek from the whistle,

though the practice on all roads is to dispense as much as possible with this ear-splitting but necessary nuisance.

As the party neared the excellent piece of track to the westward of Jigtown, Bob had no intention of attempting the pace he had reached, when going in the other direction, but the president turned and shouted in his ear that he would like to see what the Hercules could do while *he* was the acting engineer. He had sat so long on the box that he gained still more self-confidence. In response to his wish, Bob linked the engine up to the notch closest to the perpendicular, and gently twitched the lever. The Hercules was sure to do her best, though, since the grade was not quite so favorable, it was hardly possible to attain the amazing swiftness which frightened President Horton out of his wits.

With no car to draw, the engine very quickly struck a gait that was strong enough to frighten a veteran engineer. The connecting rods darted back and forth with a quickness that the eye could hardly follow, and the five-foot drivers went around with a swiftness which seemed to threaten to send their spinning peripheries into a thousand fragments.

President Walbridge changed his easy sitting position. Instead of leaning idly against the window slide, he suddenly unfolded his arms and grasped the seat with both hands to prevent falling. He thought he had made a mistake in asking Bob to let out the Hercules, but he was not going to ask him to check the engine, when he knew the superintendent was anxious he should do so. He was sure Bob Lovell would moderate the pace when prudence demanded it, and he was content to leave everything to him.

Once again the speed of the Hercules became frightful. She quickly sprang into the race of a mile a minute and was steadily increasing it. The jolting, plunging and racket were terrific. A person could not shout loud enough to be

heard across the cab. Both the superintendent and president were holding on with both hands and hoping that the engineer would think it his duty to bring the steed down to a more civilized pace, but the speed continued to rise, while Bob slyly enjoyed the shaking up of the officials. Dick Conkling kept rushing in the coal, the conductor and brakeman spread their feet apart to maintain their balance, and the Hercules was blowing off half the time. When not busy, the fireman stepped back on the tender, folded his arms, and, with his cap drawn down on his forehead, grimly smiled at the important men, who were fast becoming too uncomfortable to pay attention to anyone besides themselves, or indeed to anything except to cling fast and wish the confounded business was over.

Bob Lovell reached out his hand to shut off steam, when his heart almost stood still. A single thumping noise directly under his box on which President Walbridge was seated struck his ear. Quick as a flash, he seized the arm of the gentleman, and, with one powerful wrench jerked him from his seat and threw him sideways on the bottom of the cab, with a violence that almost drove the senses from the astounded president of the I. & O.

Bob Lovell knew what that thump meant!

CHAPTER XLII.

A CLOSE CALL.

AT the instant President Walbridge was thrown forward on his face by the furious wrench of Bob Lovell, the whole side of the cab was hewn off as if by the sweep of a vast broadaxe. The air was filled with dirt, gravel and dust, so obscuring the small space that the five occupants could see each other only dimly through the frightful swirl and tumult.

But the moment the president was hurled from his seat, where had he remained a second longer he would have been ground into nothingness, Bob Lovell shut off steam, set the brakes and jerked open the sand-box. It was all done in a twinkling, but he could do nothing more and he left the rest to heaven.

The parallel rod on the right side had broken and was threshing about like a huge serpent, but with resistless force. It was that which had hewn off the side of the cab, and, plunging into and out of the ground with lightning-like rapidity, was sending showers of dirt and débris in all directions and threatening to derail the Hercules and bring death to all on board.

I know of three accidents precisely like the one I am describing. In two instances the engineer delayed his leap from his seat a couple of seconds, and was killed as if by a thunderbolt. In the other, the engineer bounded aside the instant he heard the first thump and escaped with a few slight bruises.

Superintendent Worthley was so terrified that he could only sit still and stare, without making an effort to save himself. Neither Dick Conklin nor the conductor or brakeman had ever seen anything of the kind before, and they sprang back on the coal of the tender, crouching in abject fear. Mr. Walbridge climbed in a dazed way to his feet and was on the point of making a leap from the engine when, amid the appalling confusion, he became aware that the Hercules was still on the rails and perceptibly slackening her speed. He moved further back on the tender and tremblingly awaited the end which must come within a very short time.

Had the engine left the track, fearful consequences would have been inevitable; but it remained on the rails, the huge wheels revolving slower and slower, until finally the crippled Hercules stood still.

By this time every one realized the narrowness of the escape, and hastily descended to the ground to learn how much the engine had suffered. The enormous piece sliced from the cab lay beside the track several hundred yards to the rear, and the heavy bar of iron, twisted and wrenched by its fierce usage, hung like a broken limb from the side of the monster.

The conductor ran forward in one direction and the brakeman in the other to signal any approaching train, while the engineer and fireman began tugging to release the broken parallel. With the help of hammer, wrenches and cold chisels this was finally done, after which the parallel on the other side was taken off, a precaution which no competent engineer could forget, since, from some cause difficult to explain, another accident would have been almost certain had the second parallel been left in place.

Everything being in readiness, Bob called in the conductor and brakeman by means of the whistle, and once more all climbed into their places on the engine.

"You must excuse me, Mr. Walbridge," said Bob, "for handling you so roughly."

"It is quite easy to excuse a man for saving your life," was the response of the president in a tremulous voice.

"Well," said the engineer, flushing, "I heard that thump the instant the rod broke, and knew what it meant. The Hercules has been subject to too great a strain to-day."

"It's all *his* fault," remarked the superintendent, jerking his thumb toward the president and disposed to be facetious, now that the danger was over; "he insisted on trying to run a mile in half a minute and he ought to have foreseen the result."

"I'm done playing the engineer," said the president, whose heart was filled with gratitude for his good fortune; "every man to his calling, and it isn't a safe thing to interfere with a pilot at the wheel."

About half the distance between the Junction and Ofalca had been passed, and the question to be considered was whether they should attempt the run ahead of the express or go upon a siding and signal it to stop and take the officials on board.

Bob Lovell's examination of his engine had convinced him that it was safe to run the remaining distance within an hour, which would land them in the town considerably ahead of the express. It was decided, therefore that this should be done, his passengers continuing with him.

He started at a moderate pace, carefully noting the action of the Hercules, and ready to check her the instant he detected anything amiss, but the machinery worked smoothly and he gradually increased the speed.

The president and superintendent were nervous over their experience, and, at their request, Bob slackened his speed, arriving in Ofalca only a few minutes ahead of the express. Mr. Walbridge warmly pressed the hand of the young engineer, as he stepped off the engine at the station and went to his home, where he gave a glowing account to his wife and daughter of what had taken place. It need not be said that the story suffered nothing in the telling, and pretty Evelyn was more confirmed than ever in her belief that Bob Lovell was the best and noblest and bravest young gentleman she or anyone else ever knew. How she wished that he was rich, and not quite so proud as to decline all her invitations to spend an occasional evening at her house. Perhaps had he been more ready to avail himself of the privilege, for which many a man socially more favored sighed, she would not have held quite so exalted an opinion of him. Human nature is a queer compound and as queer in a bright-witted miss as in anyone else.

"It seems to me that that fellow is horn for all sorts of mishaps and accidents," remarked Lloyd Montague Worthley, the son of the superintendent, some evenings later, when

he called at the house of President Walbridge, and was obliged to listen to Evelyn's enthusiastic story which he had heard from others; "I should hate to ride with him."

"And why?" she asked half indignantly.

"Because I would be sure of an accident."

"What accident has he ever had?"

"Well, it would be hard to name them all; there was the tree on the track, when he was fireman, the running away of your pony——"

"What had he to do with that?"

"Didn't his engine frighten your horse?"

"No; it belonged to another engineer; he was only a fireman, but he saved our lives."

"I suppose so, and then there was that runaway engine some days ago, which he had a great race with."

"And father says it would have been destroyed and killed the man on it but for Bob."

"Then there was the one in which your father and mine came nearer death than ever before."

"But," persisted the high-spirited miss, "*father* was running the engine and Bob pulled him off his seat just in time to save him."

"Well, I suppose I shall have to admit that he is the best engineer that ever lived or ever will live."

"And, if you do, you will come nearer the truth than I have ever known you to come."

This was a little too pointed for Montague. His face had been growing crimson for several minutes, and with the last reproof, he sprang up and began donning his overcoat.

"I wonder that you don't bring him here to spend the evening instead of *me*; greasy engineers seem to be your style."

Evelyn rose, her eyes flashing.

"I have invited him to come more than once, and, Mr.

Lloyd Montague Worthley, I consider Bob Lovell as much superior to you in every respect as day is superior to night or sunshine to darkness."

"Good-evening, Miss Walbridge."

"Good-evening, sir."

And he departed.

CHAPTER XLIII.

NEWS FROM OVER THE SEA.

DEATH is always watching to effect an entrance into the citadel of life, and the avenues through which he finds his way are beyond counting. Especially in middle and old age, the most trifling slips are often sufficient for the grim foe, and that which a person can do with impunity in his early manhood, is little less than suicide when his years are advanced.

Had anyone been asked to name the person who was likely to suffer the most serious consequences from the last accident to the *Hercules*, undoubtedly it would have been President Walbridge. The vigor and strength of the fireman and engineer were sufficient to avert all possible harm, but the years and sedentary life of the president were against him, beside which he was the one who really came the nearest to death.

And yet he was never aware of the slightest ill effects, while Mr. Worthley, several years younger and seemingly a more rugged man, began to show serious consequences from the mishap. His nervous system had received a shock from which it not only failed to rally, but to which it soon began to succumb. He was troubled with insomnia, lost his appetite, and finally showed such extreme debility that his physician assured him his only hope was in abandoning his duties altogether for a time and engaging in travel.

He reluctantly assented, for it was apparent to all that it was his only hope. His son, being assistant superintendent, assumed the duties of his father, who, with his mother, left Ofalca with the expectation of being absent several months, and possibly a year. At any rate, he promised President Walbridge and the directors that he would not attempt to resume his duties until his doctor pronounced him fully restored to health.

The lessons of the past two or three years were not lost on Montague Worthley. He could not forget by what a narrow margin he had secured the situation of assistant superintendent. There were few of the directors who really liked him, and, if he attempted to carry out any of his petty persecutions, he himself was likely to suffer.

Besides, if his father should die, he was eager to step into his shoes. Had that calamity taken place on the day of his departure, the son would not have received more than two or three votes for the office. It now depended on himself whether, if the choice were deferred six months or a year, he should be able to secure enough support to elect him.

The course for Montague to follow was so plain that he would have been the veriest zany had he not seen it. Only by the strictest devotion to business, and by an intelligent and unremitting supervision of the interests of the road, could he obtain the good will of those whose opinion must decide the question.

President Walbridge was such an intimate friend of the superintendent that he could not but feel a certain regard for his son, unworthy though he had often proved himself. He made it his duty to give more attention to the affairs of the road than he had been accustomed to, and lent Montague all the aid possible. The young man expressed his gratitude for this help, and seemed to think and care for nothing but the welfare of the I. & O.

He rode up and down the road, whenever he could gain

the opportunity, was in his office early and late, looked sharply after the multitudinous duties, and in short, conducted himself just like a model railway superintendent.

He even ventured into the temperance meetings of the employees, and made a fair address to the men assembled there, though he was somewhat disconcerted by noticing among his auditors two persons who possessed several unpleasant secrets of his life. One of them was Hematite Oxx, whose black eyes were fixed so searchingly upon him that Worthley stammered for a few minutes and came near breaking down. The other individual was a young blood of the town, with whom Montague had been on a wild spree within the preceding week, though it was managed so discreetly that few suspected the dereliction. Nevertheless, the young orator exhorted the employees to soberness, and a total abstention from drink as the indispensable requisites for success in the present life and happiness in the life to come.

In answer to the continual inquiries, Montague reported that his father, who was traveling in Europe, was doing well, and there was little doubt that he would fully recover his health; but, acting on the advice of the best physicians he had decided not to return home until the end of the year.

Those who had disliked the son so thoroughly began to revise their opinions. It looked as if they were mistaken. He had a kind word for many, and even went so far as to overlook some of their slips after they had given promises of greater care in the future. Enough has been said to show how prudently young Worthley was laying his plans for the future.

Bob Lovell confessed to his mother and sister that he was puzzled. His own disposition, so fragrant with sweet charity for his fellow men, urged him to give the best con-

struction to the changed course of Montague, but his knowledge of the young man's nature forbade him doing so.

It sounded strange to hear the mother, whose heart seemed to have no room for any feelings but kindness, say:

"He is treacherous and wicked; nothing but the grace of God can change his nature, and until that is done he is your enemy."

"I agree with you, mother," replied the son, as he sat chatting with her, after Meta had retired for the night; "I have no doubt that he is playing a part, with the single purpose of securing the situation of superintendent, for I don't believe his father will ever hold it again."

"How does he act toward you?"

"Unexceptionably; he is even pleasant at times and has not made the first attempt to interfere with me in any way."

"Well," said the parent, cheerfully, "he is jealous of you because you are better and smarter, and, my dear boy, I may as well tell you, because you are handsomer than he, and Evelyn Walbridge thinks more of your little finger than of his body."

"Why, mother!"

Bob blushed to the roots of his hair, for he had never heard his parent speak thus before. It almost took away his breath, and he knew not what to say for the moment.

"It is true, my darling boy," she continued, reaching out her dainty hand and smoothing the auburn ringlets from his brow, as she had done ever since there had been any on his head to smooth; "you are too big and sensible to be spoiled by anything like flattery."

"But—but—what makes you speak about Miss—that is, Evelyn, in that way?"

"Because she told me so herself, and I have no doubt that *some time* she will say the same to you."

It seemed to Bob in that moment, which he can never

forget, that his heart stopped beating. He looked yearningly at his adored mother, wondering whether she suspected his secret. Those blue eyes of hers were looking right down into the depths of his soul, but she chose to give him no sign just then. She *did* read his thoughts, but with the tact natural to her sex and years, she added:

"But, Bob, you and I will give ourselves no concern about Montague. If he should ever drive you from the employ of this road, you know that an equally good situation awaits you on the Inverwick & Quitman, for President Horton has told you so."

"I am not worrying over my future, for that is in the hands of Heaven, and, so long as I do my duty, all will be well; but any man with spirit cannot help feeling uncomfortable when he knows he is treated unjustly. As some people would say, it galls me."

"But time will bring all things right. You know that though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding fine."

At this moment, there was a ring of the bell and Bob answered it. The hour was late and he was surprised, on opening the door, to find his old acquaintance, Hematite Oxx, standing before him. Bob knew nothing more about this mysterious individual than before. While he did not live in Ofalca, he spent a great deal of his time there, and was a regular attendant at the temperance meetings of the railway employees.

Since his affair with the runaway locomotive, he seemed to have turned over a new leaf. He had improved in appearance and dress, and evidently possessed considerable means. There could be no mistake about his genuine friendship for Bob Lovell, who had done so much for him. The young engineer warmly greeted him, and insisted on his entering the house. The mother hearing their voices, prudently withdrew to her own room.

“Mr. Lovell,” said the visitor, after they were seated and he had observed they were alone, “there is something which I feel I ought to tell you.”

“I am always glad to hear anything you have to say, Mr. Oxx.”

“Well, then, I have only to request you in the first place not to ask me *how* I secured the news.”

“I don’t think I would have done that even had you not made the request,” said Bob with a smile.

“In the next place, what I tell you is the cold, hard truth.”

“I am equally sure that statement is superfluous.”

“You have a happy way of placing a fellow at his ease, Mr. Lovell,” replied the pleased caller, who never addressed the young engineer by his given name as did most others; “Cavarly Worthley has resigned the superintendency of the I. & O.”

“You amaze me, Mr. Oxx; he is in Europe.”

“I know it, but he will never see his native land again. He is in Switzerland, hopelessly ill. Conscious that he is suffering his last sickness, he has forwarded to President Walbridge his resignation as superintendent.”

“How do you know—I beg pardon, I forgot, but you are sure there is no mistake about this?”

“Mr. Walbridge received the letter this afternoon, but has not told a living person.”

Bob looked at his visitor in amazement. It was on his tongue to ask that if such were the fact, by what possible means had Hematite Oxx gained the information, but, remembering his promise, he simply stared and held his peace.

“I know what question is in your mind,” said his caller with a smile, “but it is unnecessary. I pledge you my honor that I have told you the simple facts, for I know whereof I speak. Furthermore, the letter which Mr. Wal-

bridge received this afternoon, and which consisted of four pages of foolscap written by his wife, his resignation being in her hand, but signed by him, contains also an earnest appeal to Mr. Walbridge to exert his influence to secure the superintendency for his son Montague."

"I cannot doubt it."

"Furthermore, Montague has been laying his plans for a year to secure it."

"I am aware of that."

"Furthermore, he will get it."

"I am convinced you are right."

"And furthermore, and finally, my dear Mr. Lovell, *when he does, look out!*"

CHAPTER XLIV.

AT THE GATE.

HEMATITE OXX had one trait as rare as it was commendable: he never overstayed his welcome; but if he erred at all, did so in the other direction. Bob Lovell would have been glad to have him remain longer and urged him to do so, but, having told what he had to tell, he bade his young friend good-evening, and left.

As may be supposed, the young engineer was interested in what he had learned. He could not help speculating as to the means by which his caller received the news so early and so fully; but it was beyond his power to answer the question. In good time everything would be made plain, and he must content himself with waiting.

Calling to his mother that he would not be absent long, he passed out the front door and sauntered down the street. He could think better while walking in the clear autumn air. The stars were shining, the night was still and there were few people abroad at that hour.

"I have no doubt Hematite Oxx has told me the truth," he reflected, "and it is quite certain that Montague will become the superintendent of the Ofalca division, or more likely the entire line to Irondale. He will now appear in his true character. Possibly he may think I am too small game to hunt, but then he is a small man himself. I shall walk straight in the path of duty, satisfied that whatever he attempts, he can do me little real injury. The world is broad enough for him and me, and if I am crowded out of the service of the I. & O. there are other situations open for me."

Bob observed two persons on the other side of the street, a little way ahead, walking slowly in the same direction. There was nothing remarkable in this, but a minute later they passed under the light of a street lamp and he recognized them. One was Montague Worthley and the other the last person in the world he expected to see in his company.

Bob would have discredited his vision, had not the taller and heavier turned his head at that moment, so that the light showed his profile with daylight distinctness.

"Well, that amazes me," muttered the young engineer, stopping short in the shadow to prevent himself being seen, and closely watching them; "if Montague has received word of his father's death he does not seem to be grieving deeply over it, but what can he want of *him*?"

Aye, that was a question which he would have given much to have answered, but which, like the others, must await the future. The sight caused him to feel uncomfortable, for it lowered his estimate of human nature. The companion of young Worthley was one whose friendship he had never doubted until that moment. Now it looked as if the two were plotting together.

Keeping far enough to the rear in the gloom to avoid detection, Bob moved slowly along the street, so as to

maintain pace with them. At the second crossing they stopped and talked together a few minutes. In the stillness of the night the murmur of their voices reached him, standing under the shadow of a luxuriant elm, but he did not distinguish the words uttered. Then they separated, the taller of the two crossing to the side on which Bob stood, and walking rapidly toward him. Not wishing to be recognized, he took advantage of his shelter by stepping behind the large trunk of the elm, from which he peeped forth at the approaching individual.

A short distance off he passed beneath another lamp, where the full light struck his face. The man had lit a cigar and his features were seen again so clearly that all doubt would have been removed, had there been any left.

Had the man been Hematite Oxx, Bob would have stopped him and called for an explanation, but it was not he and, acting on the theory that it was better that he should not know that his unaccountable conduct had been observed, Bob kept the body of the tree between them until the other disappeared in the gloom.

There was nothing to be gained by following or watching him, and he moved on again, feeling some curiosity to learn what young Worthley was doing. This curiosity was partly due to the fact that he had stopped on the corner near the residence of President Walbridge while talking with his companion, and it looked as if he meant to enter. He had lit a cigarette, and was walking at a leisurely rate in the direction of that gentleman's house. Sure enough, when he came opposite, he turned into the gate and walked rapidly over the graveled walk.

"He is going to make a late call," was the natural conclusion of Bob, "and the light in Mr. Walbridge's office looks as if he expects him. I can't doubt what Oxx told me."

By this time Bob began to feel half ashamed of the part

he was playing. He had a feeling of meanness in thus watching the actions of others, in whose business he ought to have no concern, but he was considerably disturbed, not only by what he had been told, but by what he had seen.

He passed a short distance beyond the house of the president and turned to walk back. As he did so, he observed a man approaching. He was a stranger, and in the gloom could not be seen very plainly and there was no reason why Bob should feel interest in him; but, while considerable space separated them, the gate of a residence opened, and the figure of a lady hurried forth, her movement showing that she intended to cross the street.

She came upon the pavement so close to the stranger that she involuntarily shrank back and waited for him to pass, ere she ventured to trip across.

"Good-evening, miss," said the man; "I am delighted to see you come out to greet me."

She seemed dazed by the unparalleled impudence of the stranger, whose chuckling laugh was plainly heard by the angered Bob Lovell.

"Don't be scared now, my pretty miss; it aint often a gentleman like myself has a chance to press the lips of such a beauty as President Walbridge's daughter——"

Evelyn, for it was she, uttered a faint scream and started to retreat through the gate behind her, when Bob Lovell arrived.

"Why, Miss Evelyn, I did not expect to see you abroad at so late an hour," he said in astonishment.

"O, Bob, I believe you are my guardian angel," exclaimed the excited girl; "you are always near when I want help; but, O, Bob, haven't you killed him?"

"I guess not," coolly replied the young engineer, looking at the prostrate figure, which was beginning to climb slowly to its feet, from the middle of the road whither it had been driven by one powerful, lightning-like blow of the young

engineer; "he may not be as pretty in the face as he was, but I'm sure he'll know a good deal more than before. But how is it, Miss Evelyn, that you run the risk of such insults?"

"You see I am opposite my own home; Mrs. Putman has been very ill for several days and has never been the same since the death of her son, so I go in and read for her in the evenings when I can. She seemed so glad to have me to do so that I stayed longer than I intended; but I have only to run across the street and never dreamed of anything like *this?*"

"I don't think you have any cause, to fear *that* person; but I will attend you to the gate."

She slipped her hand behind the arm of Bob and clung to him as though she was dreadfully afraid some monster might pounce down on her, while you may be sure that even such a cool-headed young gentleman as the engineer of the Hercules ardently wished that the house of President Walbridge was several miles distant.

"I guess it will be safe to leave you here," said Bob, drawing open the gate and lifting his hat.

"Are you not coming in?"

"It is too late—it wouldn't do, besides——"

He hesitated and she looked saucily at him.

"Besides *what?*"

"I think Mr. Worthley is within; if I am not mistaken, he entered a few minutes ago."

"Then I'll go back and stay with Mrs. Putman," said Evelyn, pretending to start in that direction.

Bob could not help probing a little further, though his conscience reproved him for doing so. "Of course *I* am out of the question, when *he* is near."

He was audacious enough to retain the dainty hand, which, I am bound to say did not struggle very hard to release itself, and he looked straight down in the bright eyes that stared as resolutely into his own.

"Bob," said she, unconsciously lowering her voice; "I think more of your little finger than I do of a hundred Montague Worthleys and *he knows it*, and now *you* know it, if you did not know it before. Good night."

She gave his hand just the faintest possible squeeze, whirled about like a fairy, and flashed out of sight before the abashed, happy and bewildered Bob Lovell fairly realized what was going on.

CHAPTER XLV.

AN APPARITION.

THE news brought to Bob Lovell by Hematite Oxx was true. It was known on the morrow that President Walbridge had received the resignation of Superintendent Cavarly Worthley and that a few hours later a cablegram had reached both the president and Montague, announcing the death of the invalid in Switzerland.

Fitting resolutions were passed by the representative bodies, and the church to which he was attached, and by the other organizations of which he had long been an honored member. All the engines on the I. & O. were draped and every employee wore a piece of crape on his arm for thirty days. There was no lack in the appropriate honors to the memory of a man who had long held such a prominent position, and who had acquitted himself well wherever duty called him.

After the lapse of a suitable period, a meeting of the directors was called for the selection of the superintendent's successor.

Everything joined to help Montague Worthley. It could not be denied that he had done his duty well during the year in which he held the responsible office. His revered father had made an earnest appeal that his son should suc-

ceed him, and the refusal to select him would not only have been a humiliating snub to Montague, but a slight upon the memory of his father.

Among the eleven directors were five or six who would have preferred some one else, but, for the reasons named, they repressed their wishes, and Lloyd Montague Worthley received the high honor of being elected superintendent of the I. & O. railway by the unanimous vote of the board of directors.

Meanwhile, Bob Lovell stuck to his resolution of doing his duty to the best of his ability, minding his own business and leaving the rest to Providence. His run had been fixed so as to be as pleasant as he could wish. He left Ofalca at nine in the morning, reaching Irondale, one hundred and five miles away at half-past eleven. Returning at five in the afternoon he required about the same period to complete the journey eastward. This enabled him to spend each evening and his Sundays with his mother and sister. Although his arrival at night was rather late, yet by a little hurry he could finish his supper, change his dress and reach the meetings of the temperance society, the church gatherings and other commendable organizations very nearly on time.

Everything relating to his situation was so congenial that he could not help earnestly wishing it might continue. His run was really the best on the road, though the reverse one of the veteran Sam Hubbles with 99 was almost the same.

Dick Conklin attended to his duties faithfully, but the watchful Bob saw evidences that proved his fireman was indulging to some extent in drink. He was morose and on several occasions the engineer detected the smell of liquor upon him.

He spoke kindly to Dick, who accepted the reproof with

ill grace intimating very clearly that he preferred to be left to attend to his own business.

Montague Worthley signalized his official assumption of the superintendency by a vigor and enterprise which was not only commendable, but startled some of the more conservative of the directors, though when necessary they endorsed his course. The country through which the I. & O. extended was developing rapidly, there being a great increase in travel and freight. It was decided to lay another track throughout the whole extent, and work was begun without delay. Several new engines were purchased, the admirable block system was introduced, various other improvements made and indeed everything was done to render the line first class in all its appointments.

It will be remembered that when Bob Lovell made his wonderful run with the special car of President Horton of the I. & Q., he was stopped at the trestle-work over Dead Man's Hollow by the display of a red flag, though no person was in sight. Bob was naturally curious to learn the cause of the signal, for which he saw no reason. At his request inquiries were made, but no information was obtained and the matter, not very important of itself, remained a mystery.

He might have forgotten it, had it not been repeated one evening when he was running eastward. It was so late in autumn that by the time he reached the Hollow night had descended and his own headlight was burning. He was approaching the trestle-work at a moderate speed, when he caught the glow of a red light at the end nearest him. The Hercules was so well in hand that he readily brought her to a standstill, before leaving the solid ground, and Dick Conklin with some growling, descended from the engine to learn the cause of the signal.

The lamp sat on one of the ties, burning brightly, but in

answer to his hallooing no response came, and he called to Bob that all was right. The engineer followed the fireman at the same slow pace as before to the other side, without discovering anything wrong; and as Dick climbed again on his engine, he gave the latter steam and started on with renewed speed.

"That's the second time that trick has been played on me," said Bob, who like any engineer in his situation, was impatient that such liberty should be taken with him.

"It's a *ghost*" muttered Dick, who had kicked the lantern down the bank; "I believe the place is haunted."

"Haunted!" laughed Bob, "no sensible man believes in such stuff."

"You'll believe it before you are much older," replied his fireman, with a significance that Bob afterward recalled.

Three nights later the eastern express was delayed a half hour at Irondale, so that the lamp of the Hercules was lighted at the junction. It was late in autumn, the air was crisp and keen and, the sky being cloudy, the darkness was profound; but the track was clear, and Bob hoped to make up considerable time before arriving at Ofalca. The road to Jigtown and beyond, as will be remembered, was favorable for fast running and he spurred the Hercules so sharply that she gained a number of minutes before sweeping round the curve by which Dead Man's Hollow was approached.

No engineer dare run by a red light, and though Bob Lovell might be morally certain that some trick was played on him, he could not disregard the signal of danger. As was his custom, he slowed up and carefully scrutinized the rails in front. He noticed that Dick Conklin was uneasy and had his head thrust out of the side of the cab, as if he, too, expected to see something which he did not wish to discover.

"*There it is!*" he suddenly exclaimed.

"I see it," called Bob, "but it is not a signal of danger."

"No; but it's a good deal worse! *It's a ghost!* Stop, or every one on the train will be killed!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

RUNNING DOWN A GHOST.

THE sight which met Bob Lovell's gaze as he approached the trestle-work of Dead Man's Hollow was enough to startle anyone.

At the beginning of the structure, stood a tall figure, perfectly white from head to foot. No features were visible, and there was only a general resemblance to the human form; but that it possessed limbs was proven by the fact that it held a light in one hand and slowly circled it about its head. The light seemed to be a torch, which gave out a yellowish illumination, as though it were a pine knot. Consequently, as Bob had declared, it was not a signal of danger, and he was not required by the rules to stop.

The form was a perfect representation of an apparition or ghost, as those unsubstantial creations are generally pictured in the minds of the superstitious. Encountered anywhere on a dark night, it was enough to make one's flesh creep.

But there was no superstition in Bob Lovell. He believed the individual in front of him was the same one that had displayed the two warnings of peril, carefully hiding himself against discovery when the fireman attempted to investigate.

"Aint you going to stop?" asked frightened Dick Conklin, sliding off his seat, stepping across to the engineer and grasping his arm.

"Why should I stop?" asked Bob, who permitted the Hercules to advance at a slow rate.

"Why, it's a ghost! It's the ghost of Heff Putman that was killed when Matt Fields ran off the track."

"If that's so, we can't hurt it and it can't hurt us; I'm going so slow that I wish you would slip down, Dick, and catch it, just to learn what a ghost is made of; you will never have a better chance."

The fireman looked horrified.

"I wouldn't touch it for the world. If you run over it you will suffer."

"I am not as likely to do so as is the ghost; I will give it notice, and if it doesn't choose to step aside, it has nobody to blame but itself."

As he spoke he drew down the rod connecting with the whistle and a blast rang out that awoke the echoes for miles. But he kept the Hercules steadily approaching the apparition. The latter held its place until it seemed as if the pilot of the engine was touching the ghostly garments. It was still circling the smoking light about its head when, seeing that the Hercules did not intend to stop, it stepped off the track.

"Dick," said Bob, motioning to him, "take the throttle and run slowly to the other side and there wait for me; this business is getting tiresome."

"For heaven's sake don't think of *that*," protested his white-faced fireman, stepping forward and grasping the lever.

"I'll take care of myself," was Bob's reply; "keep the engine moving, and wait a minute or two for me on the other side; I won't be long."

The apparition was hardly prepared for what followed. It had moved to one side and instead of waving the torch about its head was holding it down. Standing in this position, and only a few paces distant from the engine, it suddenly saw the athletic figure of the engineer as he dropped lightly to the ground and made straight for it.

This isn't the way reputable ghosts expect to be treated. A man generally runs from instead of toward their species. The moment the apparition comprehended that a real flesh and blood person was bent on making a closer acquaintance with it, it wheeled about and started across the trestle-work to the other side.

The structure was not intended for foot travel, and it was dangerous for anyone to attempt to cross it in that manner, especially in the darkness, but Bob Lovell was not afraid to go where any ghost went, and he followed it out on the frame-work. The fugitive was wise enough to retain the torch, which being held over its head gave enough light to prevent any false step that must have proved fatal; but the same illumination helped the pursuer against making a similar blunder, so that it may be said the advantage was equal.

It was a strange race. The ghost instead of speeding beside the track, dashed between the rails, while Bob Lovell satisfied that Dick would not run over either, did the same, leaping from tie to tie with a swiftness that kept him almost upon the heels of the flying phantom. Several times the young man narrowly missed his footing, but he believed that, even if he did so, he could catch himself before dropping through into the stream fifty feet below.

One thing was self-evident: the ghost was long-limbed and knew how to travel fast. Bob caught a glimpse of a huge pair of boots, as the white sheet was swept aside, and once or twice, despite the imminent peril, the fugitive glanced backward through the eye-holes of the head-covering at its persistent pursuer.

It was a clean hundred feet across the trestle-work, but both made it in safety, reaching ground on the other side only a couple of paces apart.

"Stop before I shoot!" called Bob, who had no firearms with him.

The ghost had turned to the right, and started at headlong speed down the sloping bank; but it was thoughtless enough to cast another terrified glance behind, thereby losing its foot-hold and rolling over and over to the bottom.

It retained its torch, which was partly extinguished, but before it could rise to its feet, Bob had it by the arm.

"Heavens o'nath! don't shoot! I aint a ghost!"

It was the voice of a man who uttered this prayer, and it would be hard to imagine a more frightened person. Had he known enough to fling away his torch and hold his tongue, he might have hidden his identity, but his words and the glimpse of his face, as shown by the smoking brand, revealed him to Bob as old Jacob Hirshkind, the farmer whose bull had been killed by Matt Fields long before, and who was persuaded out of claiming any damages therefor by the bland arguments of Superintendent Worthley.

The farmer flung aside his white sheet, which had lost most of its color in the headlong tumble down the bank, that had pretty well covered him with dirt. He formed an exceedingly picturesque sight, as dimly revealed by the smoking light of the torch in his right hand.

"Why, Mr. Hirshkind, what do you mean by such performances as this?" asked the astonished and amused Bob.

"I'm mad," was the singular reply.

"What are you mad about?"

"Why, I've been thinkin' 'bout that bull of mine that was run over on this road and that Mr. Worthley didn't pay for."

"But you expressed yourself satisfied at that time."

"So I was, and that's the meanest thing 'bout it; I've been talkin' to my wife and she says I was a fool, and I've come to believe I am."

"You are certainly acting like one. Was it you who showed a red flag here something over a year ago and a red light last week?"

"I 'spose I may as well own up."

"Why did you do that?"

"I want to git even with this blamed old company."

"That's a very poor way of doing it. Do you know you have made yourself liable to punishment?"

"What fur? I haint committed murder or bigamy."

"But you are interfering with public travel, and that is an offence against the law."

"That aint *all* I've done," chuckled Mr. Hirshkind, who seemed to think he had performed a very cute act; "I'll tell you if you'll keep it to yourself."

"Let me hear it!"

"I've soaped the track for about a mile, a little way up the road. I tell you I'm a bad man to wake up."

"Well, take my advice and do nothing of the kind again or you will land in State prison,—my gracious! what does that mean?"

CHAPTER XLVII.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

BOB LOVELL talked fast, for there was not a second to spare. He had left his engine, when strict regulations forbade such a proceeding, and he could not afford the time to discuss the extraordinary situation with farmer Hirshkind, who had taken such an original method of squaring accounts with the railway company for the loss of his property.

But brief as was his conversation, it was long enough to involve him in an exasperating dilemma. Looking up the bank, he saw that Dick Conklin, instead of coming to a stop, as he had ordered him to do, had put on steam and was going up the road with rapidly increasing speed.

Bob Lovell was dumfounded and then indignant. He hastily climbed up the bank, finding himself a hundred

yards behind the train, which was already running faster than he could travel at his best, and, though there was no earthly hope of overtaking the cars, he started after them, just as any passenger is inclined to do under similar circumstances.

The trick of the fireman was enough to render the best tempered man savage. Bob felt that if he could step upon the engine at that moment he would grasp the morose Dick by the neck and kick him clean and clear of the cab. He had done everything for the man, had borne his sullenness without resentment, and striven to the utmost to keep him from drink. As a result, he was ungrateful and revengeful. He had left the engineer behind out of pure ugliness, and he deserved dismissal for his act.

"I'll apply for another fireman," said Bob, compressing his lips as he hurried up the track; "and, if he shows any feeling about it, I will have him dismissed for drunkenness."

These words were the expression of his thoughts when stirred deeply by anger, but those who know Bob Lovell's charitable disposition need not be reminded that they were very liable to "revision" when the time for action arrived.

But, while the young engineer was stumbling over the ties, he awoke to several unpleasant facts. It was himself who was most liable to be discharged for what he had done. He had abandoned his engine, without sufficient cause, while, from a certain view, the fireman was to be commended for taking such prompt charge of the train.

Bob was in the mood to believe that Dick had some sinister motive in the course he had followed, and now that Montague Worthley was supreme in directing the affairs of the road, it was to be expected that he would make use of the incident to get rid of one whom, despite the truce that had existed so long, he hated intensely.



A NARROW ESCAPE.

It will be understood that the meditations of the young engineer were of anything but a pleasant nature as he hurried along the track, speculating as to where he would spend the night and what the result of it all would be.

But hark! Assuredly, in the stillness, he caught the puffing of an engine from some point ahead. It must be approaching, and, if so, possibly he could make himself known to the engineer, who would gladly take him aboard. He stopped his rapid walk and listened more closely.

The sounds puzzled him. They seemed to be made by an engine attempting a task beyond its power. The puffs were slow for a moment and then all ran together, as is the case when the wheels slip and revolve with great rapidity, stopping the instant steam is shut off and renewed the moment it is let again into the cylinders.

A light broke upon Bob Lovell.

"Bless old farmer Hirshkind!" he exclaimed; "it wasn't right for him to soap the tracks, but, all the same, I'm mighty glad he did it."

The engineer broke into a lively run, fearful that after all the train would escape him; but he had not gone far when he caught the glimmer of the many lights from the car windows, showing where in rounding a long curve on a slightly up grade the engine had become stalled.

The Hercules was fleet and powerful, but when some enemy was mean enough to take away her "grip" on the roadway, how could she be expected to acquit herself creditably?

She gained ground but with provoking tardiness. Sometimes she was able to drag the train a few paces, and then everything stood still, while the wheels spun around with a swiftness that sent the sparks of fire flying from beneath. All in the train were interested, the platforms being crowded, while the brakemen, expressmen and others were alongside the engine, gathering up handfuls of dirt and

flinging it on the rails. The sand box was drawn open, but its yellow contents had been exhausted long before, and the Hercules was in a crippled condition from an insignificant cause indeed. There was laughing, mingled with fault-finding, for with it all the situation was not without a certain grim humor.

Bob Lovell breathed a prayer of thankfulness when he was able to reach up and grasp the guard rail of the rear platform. Drawing himself on board, he hurried through the intervening cars until he reached the tender, when he leaped down again and ran to the engine, upon which he climbed and grasped the lever.

In the confusion he was not noticed. Dick at that moment was helping to gather dirt to spread on the rails in front of the drivers. One passenger, who was in a hilarious mood, was shouting for the engineer to oil the tracks with a view of "neutralizing" the soap. Others were giving orders to which no one paid attention, and altogether the scene was unique in its way.

A locomotive, like a horse, seems to know when a master takes the reins. Fortunately the Hercules had slipped and hitched her way over most of the soapy track, and was at the end of the curve and the up grade. Releasing the steam which kept the wheels slipping, Bob admitted it carefully into the cylinders, but, better than all for his own sake, he discovered that the fireman in his flurry having applied the brakes at the beginning of the trouble, had not released them, a fact of which no one seemed to be aware. They were not rigidly applied, for in that case such a powerful engine as the Hercules would not have been able to budge the train an inch; but she acted as if she knew when the drag was removed, and began gaining ground so fast that every one ran to board the cars before they passed beyond reach.

The astonished Dick had not noticed who was con-

trolling the throttle, but hastily climbing into the cab, called out:

"Get out of there ! I'll take charge."

"I guess not!" replied Bob, looking coolly around.

Dick was astounded. The presence of the ghost would not have startled him more than that of the engineer, who, he supposed, was having it out with the apparition at Dead Man's Hollow.

It was no time to bring the fellow to account, and Bob did not utter another word, giving his attention to running the engine, while the fireman, after recovering from his shock, sullenly resumed his own duties, not deeming it best to attempt any explanation.

The gait of the Hercules steadily improved. The speed increased, and, barring a slip now and then, she soon struck her pace and sped toward Ofalca as though she had never been plagued in the peculiar manner described. Bob kept his place at the throttle, while there was no cause for further complaint about the fireman. The latter appeared to be trying to make amends for his unpardonable meanness, knowing he would have received far different treatment at the hands of any other engineer. Dick was large and strong, but Bob Lovell was his master. He was now twenty-one years old, unusually active and powerful, and having no bad habits, there was not a man in the employ of the I. & O. whom he was not able to handle with ease. Had he chosen, he could have administered severe chastisement to the surly fireman that he would remember all his life, and no one knew it better than Dick Conklin himself.

When the run was completed and Bob was about to step from the engine at Ofalca to turn it over to Dick, the latter, with some embarrassment, said:

"I 'spose you think it queer, Bob, that I acted——"

"I want to hear nothing," interrupted the engineer with

a wave of his hand; "you can make no explanation, and I will settle with you hereafter."

Dick muttered something and was about to persist in speaking, but Bob did not pause to listen. He had shed his engineer's working suit, his citizen garments being beneath, and walked up the street to his home, where he did not deem it best to tell his mother and sister what had taken place down the road.

Bob was not disappointed the next morning when he received a summons to call at the superintendent's office at eight o'clock. The conductor, as in duty bound, had given an account of the interference with the rails which increased the delay of the train, but he said nothing about the ghost adventure at Dead Man's Hollow. The conductor was our old friend Calvin Twomey, under whom Bob Lovell began his career on the railway as brakeman, and he could be depended on not to do or say anything that could militate against the young engineer whom he held in such high regard.

Superintendent Worthley still used his eye-glasses and dressed with the nattiness which always marked him. He was doing his best to nurse a downy mustache into vigorous growth, though his success was not encouraging.

It caused Bob a pang to see him seated in the same chair and in the same office which his father had so worthily filled for years, but there was no evidence in the successor's bearing of any special grief over the loss of his parent.

Montague had acquired a certain dignity with his experience, and discarded those overbearing ways that rendered him so disliked a few years before; but the mean, envious nature was there still, and sure to manifest itself on suitable opportunity.

Bob Lovell bowed politely and took one of the chairs that were placed at the side of the room for visitors. Without replying to his salutation, the young superintend-

ent picked up a sheet of paper from his desk and, as he wheeled his chair about so as to face his visitor, he spent a minute or two in reading it before addressing the employee.

His position was such that the light fell on the paper and showed the letters through it. Though this caused them to be reversed, yet they were so clearly seen that Bob was able to recognize the hand that had penned the communication. His feelings may be imagined when he identified the writing as that of Dick Conklin, his fireman.

This man had taken care that his employer should be promptly and fully notified of the singular affair at Dead Man's Hollow. Little doubt that he had been encouraged to do so by the superintendent himself.

"I suppose you are aware, Mr. Lovell," began Montague, with his gaze still on the paper "that one of the gravest faults an engineer can commit is the abandonment of his engine without the most urgent cause."

"There can be no question of *that* fact," replied Bob, knowing very well what was coming.

"You were stopped at Dead Man's Hollow last night, or more properly you stopped without being signaled to do so, and left your engine in charge of Fireman Conklin, who was obliged to run it until checked by the condition of the track, except for which the fireman would have been obliged to bring the train all the way to Ofalca."

"That is hardly a fair statement, as made by the paper which you hold in your hand, and which was written by my fireman."

Worthley glanced angrily over the sheet and demanded:

"What cause have you to say it was written by Conklin?"

"Do you deny it?"

"You are not the one to question me, sir; it is for *me* to question *you*. I repeat my statement and wish to know whether you dare deny it or any portion of it."

I have no intention of denying anything that is true," said Bob, determined to keep control of his temper; "as you know, there have been danger signals displayed at the trestle-work at Dead Man's Hollow on two occasions, the cause for which we never understood. Last night the party who did this essayed another rôle, that of ghost or apparition. Since there was no saying what form his ill will would next take, I decided to call him to account. My fireman refused to jump off the engine to seize him, and I did so. I——"

Montague Worthley raised his hand:

"You admit the charge then?"

"I do, but——"

"That is sufficient; you may go."

And the young superintendent wheeled his chair around so as to turn his back upon the astonished engineer, and began fumbling at the papers on his desk. The hint could not be mistaken, and Bob rose to his feet, with a "Good-day sir," to which no response was made, and left the office.

The interview was so different from what he anticipated that he was mystified, but the fact that it was highly unsatisfactory to himself, and stirred rankling memories and resentment in his heart gave some clue to the reason why it was thus. Worthley wished to make it as annoying as possible and had succeeded.

"He means to discharge me," was the natural conclusion of Bob, as he made his way to the station to take charge of his engine. Just before reaching it, he was surprised to meet Dick Conklin face to face, walking toward the superintendent's office. Before the fireman could avoid him or speak, Bob stepped in front of him and said:

"The superintendent received your letter, complaining of me, so there is no need of going there to inquire about it. I have tried to be a friend of yours, Dick, but you

have repulsed me, and I hope you will now follow your own promptings. You have managed to roll up quite an account between us, but it shall be settled sooner than you think. I shall not forget a single thing, and all *shall be paid with interest!* *Mark that!*"

"It don't make any difference to me," said Dick swaggeringly; "I aint going to serve under you any longer."

"*That* does a good deal toward evening matters," said Bob turning away.

"I've got one of the new freight engines, and begin running to-day."

Bob would have been glad, under any other circumstances to congratulate his fireman on his promotion, but he held his peace, feeling that it was he who was the most fortunate in being rid of such an ingrate.

Reaching the station, he found the road-foreman of the Ofalca division, in the act of backing the express into the station. On the engine with him was a sturdy, broad-faced, good-natured young man, evidently surveying things with wondering curiosity.

"He's new to the business," explained the foreman, "but the superintendent gives orders that he is to serve on the Hercules. He is strong and willing, but you will have to look after him pretty close for a while."

Bob reached out his hand to the new fireman, who blushed like a schoolboy and muttered his name, which was Kit Hawkins. "I'm glad to have you with me, Kit, and will help you every way I can. You seem to have the Hercules in good shape."

"That's cause he done it," replied the young fellow, with a grin; "I didn't do nothin' but look on."

"That's about all he did do," laughed the foreman, stepping off the engine, "but he was eager to take hold, and I've explained all I could to him in the little time I had."

Bob saw in the assignment of this verdant fireman to service under him, one of the petty persecutions which any superintendent except young Worthley would have scorned. It necessitated double duty for a time, besides increasing his responsibility tenfold. No fireman ought to have been permitted on the Hercules until after serving an apprenticeship on some freight or coal engine, while Kit Hawkins had never stepped upon a locomotive until that morning.

But his company was far preferable to that of the sullen Conklin, and Bob was resolved to do everything to make him master of his duties at the earliest possible hour. During the few minutes the train was waiting at the station the engineer gave his fireman his first lesson. Moving along the platform, which was within a few inches of the Hercules, he showed Kit where to thrust the nose of the long-necked oil can, so as to lubricate all the joints. He watched the fireman closely and was pleased to notice the natural dexterity with which he did his work.

Kit listened so attentively to everything said and displayed such deftness when he did take hold, that Bob began to feel as though he had secured a prize, but judging by what he knew of the superintendent, that official would be likely to remove him as soon as his services became valuable.

"That is, provided he leaves *me* in charge of the Hercules," added Bob to himself, "which I can hardly believe likely. It seems strange that he didn't make any inquiries about that ghost, when he had every reason to believe I had discovered the man, who is the same one that expended so much soap on the rails. I think I frightened farmer Hirshkind so that he will try nothing like that again, but, if he doesn't stop we'll have to stop him."

Just then Conductor Twomey called out his cheery "All aboard!" the flat gong in the roof of the cab clinked sharply, and Bob twitched the lever. Glancing at his watch,

he saw that it was precisely nine o'clock, so that if nothing unusual took place he would steam into Irondale on time.

While the pace required was brisk, yet it was not remarkable. It is good running to make one hundred and five miles in two hours and a half, when several slow ups and stops are counted in, and, for a number of miles, only a moderate rate can be maintained. But President Walbridge was right when he asserted that a mile a minute is made every day and nothing thought of it. There are a dozen local trains on our leading roads which run between stations at that speed at almost every hour of the twenty-four.

It seemed to Bob Lovell as if all the exciting incidents of his railway career were to be crowded together. He had hardly resumed his place at the throttle, with the Hercules spinning along at the rate of over fifty miles an hour, when in rounding the first curve out of Ofalca, he espied a man a short distance ahead, with his back toward him, walking between the rails.

There was something in the appearance of the individual which struck him as familiar, and he saw he was walking unsteadily, like one under the influence of liquor. He glanced over his shoulder once or twice at the approaching engine, but he made no move to step aside.

Like a flash the thought came to Bob:

"He intends to commit suicide!"

Off went the steam at the instant, the brakes were rigidly applied, and the wheels revolved reluctantly, that, as I have explained, producing the most effective resistance possible to the progress of a train.

But, in spite of the utmost he could do, Bob Lovell saw that it was beyond his power to stop before reaching the man, who resolutely kept his place between the rails, paying no heed to the shrieking of the whistle.

It was a fact that he was determined on self-destruction, and that the Hercules was sure to run beyond him, before she could be brought to a standstill.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE DEED OF A HERO.

BOB had done all that was possible to stop, but his trained eye saw that the Hercules would run fully a hundred feet beyond where the man was unsteadily walking before the wheels would cease to revolve. His decision was taken on the instant. Opening the door in his front, he passed through, hurried along the side of the engine and, reaching the pilot, made his way down to the lower round, where he balanced himself, keeping in poise by grasping one of the upper pieces with his left hand.

He had suspected the identity of the reckless individual before he turned his face to glance over his shoulder. It was Hematite Oxx, who, under the influence of liquor, had deliberately decided to end his life by allowing the Hercules to crush him beneath her ponderous wheels.

When barely fifty feet away, his action left no doubt of his intention. Coming to a stop, he placed his feet wide apart to steady himself, thrust his hands in the outside pockets of his coat, and without looking back, calmly awaited the awful shock that would end at once his earthly career.

He was standing a little to the right, while Bob, having decided on his course, carefully worked his way to the left of the pilot.

At this moment the Hercules was running probably twenty miles an hour. Only two or three paces separated the man from the engine, when Bob leaped like a cat from his perch, straight toward the other. As he did so, he

spread out his arms, which were thrown around the shoulders of the individual, who, at that instant, must have believed it was the engine that hit him.

But the young engineer, in addition to the impetus of the locomotive, sprang with all the power at his command, striking against the other with such force that he was thrown headlong from the track, while Bob, retaining his vise-like grasp around his neck, rolled down the bank, with him clasped in his arms.

The amazed fireman saw the two men revolving like a couple of interlocked logs, hats flying, feet kicking, and the dirt and gravel scattering in all directions.

The Hercules rolled by and, as her master had calculated, came to a standstill about a hundred feet beyond.

The sudden braking up of the train caused excitement among the passengers, many of whom were crowding the platforms, while the others raised the windows and were staring out at the strange sight beside them, the full meaning of which no one understood.

The shock sobered Hematite Oxx, who, with the help of his reseuer, struggled to his feet, and, without speaking, stared fiercely at him.

"What does this mean?" demanded Bob; "why do you choose to make a fool of yourself?"

"What business had you to prevent me?" muttered the wretched fellow; "I can't master my taste for liquor, and I'm better dead."

"I have no time to talk with you here; come with me on the engine and we'll have it out at Irondale."

Bob would have compelled him to get in the cars, but for his fear that Oxx would leap off after the train gained full headway. Besides, it would be embarrassing for him to meet the inquiries of the passengers.

"No; I shan't go with you," replied Hematite Oxx, trying to pull away; "I don't thank you for your interference."

"It makes no difference whether you thank me or not, and it makes no difference whether you want to go or not; if you refuse I shall compel you."

The bright eye of the young engineer flashed, and the fingers that grasped the arm of the man pressed the flesh so hard that he winced. He held back, but Bob started up the bank, pulling him along as though he were a child. The fellow saw the attention they were attracting from the passengers, and he felt that he was helpless before the sturdy young engineer, who had a will of his own when it was aroused. So, instead of continuing his resistance, he changed his tactics and climbed awkwardly up the bank to the side of the engine. There he stood motionless.

"I don't want to get on, Mr. Lovell; let me go, please and——"

"Get up, or I will pitch you up on it! Kit, reach down and give him a lift!"

The willing fireman did so, and, dragged in front and lifted from the rear, Hematite Oxx once more stood in the cab of the Hercules.

"Take your seat over there on the fireman's box. Will you give me your promise that you will stay there till we reach Irondale?"

"I s'pose so," replied the man sullenly.

"All right; I have your pledge, and you will keep it."

Nevertheless, Bob Lovell took occasion to whisper in the ear of his fireman:

"Keep your eye on him, for he may attempt to jump off."

The brakes were released, steam admitted into the cylinder, and the fretted Hercules began puffing forward, the curious passengers being obliged to await a more favorable opportunity to learn the meaning of the strange scene that had taken place under their eyes.

As Bob stood at the throttle, Hematite Oxx was in his

field of vision, and he was sure to anticipate any movement on his part. This was the more to be feared, since the man had some acquaintance with running an engine. Whenever the attention of the fireman was removed for a moment, Bob kept a closer watch, standing so as to be able to leap at him the instant he should start to leave the engine.

The fireman was like a hawk. Once, when Hematite Oxx shifted his feet, so as to make his position more comfortable, Kit made a bound at him and seized both shoulders.

"What's the matter?" asked Oxx, staring round.

"I thought you was goin' to jump off."

"Nonsense; I have given my promise: that's enough."

Bob could not hear what was said from his station, but the action of the two told him the story, and he smiled in spite of himself.

When the train drew up at the Junction, the engineer stepped across the cab and, laying his hand familiarly on the shoulder of the poor fellow, said:

"Was I wrong in understanding your promise not to attempt to leave the engine until we reach Irondale?"

"You were right; I will not——"

Bob saw the tears in his eyes, as he turned his head away, unable to finish the sentence. The reaction had come and he was grievously sorry for the crime he had attempted.

"You needn't pay any more attention to him," remarked Bob to his fireman, just before stepping off the engine to oil and examine the machinery.

By this time about twenty passengers had crowded around the cab, anxious to learn what had taken place. Oxx kept his head turned away so that they could not see his face. Bob explained that the man was so placed that he feared he would be struck, and, as the best means of getting him out of the way, he sprang at him. He could not tell a falsehood, and to avoid more questioning he moved around the

engine and pretended not to hear the queries sent after him. He did not wish the passengers to know that it was a case of contemplated suicide, and therefore delayed climbing back into his cab until the last moment. Then he did so on the fireman's side, which was the furthest from the platform, where the gaping passengers were awaiting his return.

But this was Kit Hawkin's opportunity and he improved it appallingly.

"I tell you," he said, with his round, grinning face thrust so far through the side of the engineer's cab, that it almost touched that of a dapper young gentleman in eye-glasses, who was busily taking notes; "it beat anything you ever seen."

Kit talked so low that the subject of his remarks on the other side of the cab could not hear him.

"Why so? Tell us how it was?" said the young gentleman with lead pencil and glasses.

"Why the fellow was walkin' right atween the rails and wouldn't get out of the way, though we whistled for him, and the engineer put on brakes, and let about fourteen hogsheads of sand on the rails. Oh, he meant to kill himself—no mistake about it! Mr. Lovell seen it, and what did he do but run out on the engine, stoop down on the cow-catcher and——"

"Hold on—not quite so fast," interrupted the young man, writing rapidly in his note book, "'run out on the engine, stooped down on the cow-saver,' what next?"

"Then Mr. Lovell just gathered himself, as though he was goin' to jump over a meetin' house, and *biff* he landed alongside the man, and down they went heels over head, with the engine grazing their heels as it went by."

"So you think he intended to commit suicide?"

"No doubt about it; he looked over his shoulder, two, three times as we was whistlin' and bearin' down on to him,

but he wouldn't budge, and just afore we reached him he braced himself——"

"Braced himself? what with? Had he any timber to use for that purpose?" asked the scribe, holding his pencil suspended.

"What are you talkin' 'bout?" demanded the fireman in return; "he just spread his feet apart and waited for the engine."

"Great Heavens! maybe he meant to knock the locomotive off the track. What a narrow escape from an awful disaster!"

And he hastily appended the startling statement to the account which was to appear in the *Weekly Illuminator*.

"Do you know the misguided man's name?"

"I aint sure, but I heard Mr. Lovell call him Oxx—funny name, isn't it!"

"He's Hematite Oxx," remarked one of the bystanders, peering around the head of the fireman, at the silent figure on the other side of the cab, with his features carefully concealed; "I have met him several times in Ofalca."

At this juncture Bob Lovell climbed hurriedly upon the engine. His face was so frowning as he hastily set the oil can in the receptacle at the end of the boiler, and resumed his place at the throttle, that the staring group moved back to resume their places in the cars.

"Kit," said he sternly to his fireman, "I hope you were too careful to let any of those people pump you."

"What do you mean, Mr. Lovell?"

"It is one of the rules of the road, that in case of accident, none of the employees is to give any information to outside parties. They must learn all that is to be told from the officials. I could not avoid answering those people in a general way, and I trust you were wise enough to refuse anything further."

"You needn't worry about me!" was the unblushing re-

sponse of the new fireman; "we was talkin' about the weather, and how soon we was likely to have skatin' and that sort of thing. They tried to get me on to the subject, but I was too smart for them."

As Bob pulled the lever and the train started, he looked curiously at the young man, whose face was the picture of innocence and candor. He wanted to believe him, but he had his misgivings.

These misgivings were dissipated, however, when the next number of the *Weekly Illuminator* appeared with its flaming head-lines and sensational narrative.

"Kit," said the engineer, after perusing the amazing story, "you have mistaken your calling."

"Why?"

"You ought to have been a newspaper man."

CHAPTER XLIX.

CONQUERED AT LAST.

"YOU are making a great mistake, Mr. Oxx," said Bob Lovell, when the two gained an opportunity to converse privately, after the run to Irondale was completed, "in being discouraged at your failure to keep the pledge. Many of the best men at work now in the temperance cause have failed once or twice before reaching firm ground, where they may be considered safe. This is the first time, I believe, you broke your pledge, is it not?"

"Yes," replied the sorrowing victim, "but the struggle has been terrible, and more than once I was on the point of yielding."

"How came you to give up?"

"It was because I reached a point at last where I grew tired of the struggle."

"That is strange, when you have kept the pledge for

more than a year; but the great John B. Gough, twice at least, did the same. Suppose he had yielded, how much would the world have lost, to say nothing of his own eternal ruin! But you haven't told me how you came to drift off this time."

"When you persuaded me to sign the pledge, after the end of that spree, during which I ran away with the engine, I was so full of courage that I was sure I never could become a slave to drink again. I did my best to persuade others to swear off, and for several weeks, though I felt the appetite now and then struggling like a tiger at me, I never had a thought of yielding."

"I believe you were one of these who did not drink regularly, but now and then indulged to an excessive extent."

"That was it. Several times during the years past I would awake to the fact that I was going to ruin and would brace up. I generally did so at the beginning of each year, like many others, but at the end of a few weeks I would go off on a wilder spree than ever. I am an only son, without father and mother, but with a considerable fortune left to me, so that unfortunately I have not the incentive to work that you have."

"Most people would consider that a fortunate condition," said Bob with a smile, "for it gives you the greater opportunity of doing good to others."

"Such ought to be the case, but it is rarely so. You know from what has already taken place, that despite my competence, there have been times when I was without a cent of money, and occasions, too, when I have engaged in schemes which it would not be safe, even at this day, for the authorities to know. Well," continued Hematite Oxx, "some months ago I had to begin to wrestle with my appetite. It seemed to me that it was as much a veritable physical struggle as two prize fighters ever can have, but I won every time. Then I thought the victory was so complete,

that the danger had departed altogether and I would be troubled on more. Now and then it did return, but never so strongly as at first."

Bob looked astonished.

"Why, then, did you give way to-day?"

"That's the strangest part of it. I was coming down Main Street this morning, with no thought of drink, when just opposite the Hole in the Wall, as they call that saloon, I walked in, went to the bar and ordered a cocktail, without thinking of what I was doing. I was in a brown study, and did not realize the step until I had the glass raised to my lips. It was a piece of pure absent-mindedness which I cannot understand, for I never experienced anything of the kind before."

"But you say you awoke to the danger before the stuff touched your lips; why, then, did not you not dash it down?"

"Ah, I would have done so had the consciousness come a moment sooner, but I had caught the *smell of the liquor*. It was then that Satan conquered. In an instant, all my resolutions vanished as though they had never existed. I drank the stuff, and then another and another glass, until I had swallowed at least half a dozen. It seemed to me that nothing in the world ever tasted half so delicious, and I was ready to barter my soul for the indulgence."

"Your case is remarkable, for, though I have known of men yielding, when, according to their belief, the temptation was not one-tenth as great as the many they had successfully resisted, I never saw a person go as far as you did, without a realization of what the consequences would be. What a warning of the need of always being on our guard!"

"True, and I am wondering now, whether that strange absent-mindedness was not one of the consequences of my former indulgences—that my appetite having been foiled

in trying fairly to overcome me, resorted to the cunning underhand method."

"I cannot answer that question, but possibly there may be something in the theory."

"The next thing I was aware of was that I was walking along the railway track. I was still under the influence of liquor, but it was another curious phase of my condition, that, while my body was so affected that I could not walk steadily, my mind seemed as clear as it was before I tasted the stuff.

"My sensations were horrible. I believed then, as I do now, that I had yielded so readily because of the stealthy attack of my insidious enemy. I recalled the fearful struggles, of which no human being knows, with my appetite, and I recoiled at the prospect of going through them again, as I shall have to do, if I am to conquer. I did not believe I had the strength to do so and I am still of that belief."

"May I ask you, Mr. Oxx, whether you have made the error in this business of relying entirely upon your own strength?"

"No; I was quick to realize that that could never save me. I have spent many hours, pouring out my soul to God in agony. Six months ago, when Satan was drawing me irresistibly toward a saloon, in this very place, I faltered along until at the very door, when I dropped on my knees and implored Heaven to save me."

"And it was done, of course."

"Yes; I prayed right on in the face of the wondering looks and laughter, and jibes and sneers, and I conquered. Rising to my feet, I felt like a giant. I delivered an exhortation to that crowd that sent several sneaking home to their wretched families and that kept my temper at bay for months. But, as I just told you, the feeling which came over me when on the railway track was that I was vanquished, doomed, helpless and hopeless. I had just reached

that point, when I heard the shriek of a steam whistle behind me. I looked about and saw your engine coming, though I had no thought that it was the Hercules and you were at the lever.

“The sound of the whistle struck my ears like the exulting cry of a demon. It seemed to warn me that I was already so low in the depths of despair that I could never again be extricated. You cannot realize my blank, hopeless horror. It was woeful beyond the power of mind to conceive. Suddenly all my thoughts crystalized into the resolution to throw up my hands and end the struggle then and there. I glanced over my shoulder once or twice. I knew, from what I heard, that the engineer was doing his best to stop, but I knew enough, too, of the engine’s running to understand that it was impossible to check it in time to save me. When the grinding roar was so near that I was sure of being struck the next minute, I stopped short, braced myself, and shut my eyes.”

“I noticed your action, and you must have thought, when I seized you, that you had been hit by the engine.”

“So I did, and to show the abnormal state of my emotions, the first distinct feeling that succeeded the shock was of anger, because I had not been instantly killed. You can appreciate my bewilderment and the difficulty I had in comprehending what had really taken place.

“Well,” added Oxx with a sigh, “here I am, and I suppose I must take a scoring at your hands.”

“No, sir,” said Bob in his sympathetic manner; “I have no feeling but of the tenderest pity for you. I recognized you while some distance off and, of course, I wondered what could be the real cause, though I noticed your unsteady gait. But, my good friend, you have made a brave struggle, and have held out when many in your situation would have succumbed. You have won time and again, old boy, and *you are going to win* once more and finally.”

This was said with a glowing face, a ringing heartiness of manner, and a resounding slap on the shoulder of the depressed man, who felt in response a thrill of courage like a magnetic shock go through his entire being.

"I have seen too much of the woe and sorrow caused by drunkenness," continued Bob, "to have anything but profound pity for the victims, even though they rise to their feet and fall repeatedly. With many it is a disease, to be treated as such, and there are thousands who have gone so far that they are unable to control their own longings and weakness. I don't wonder that you recoil at the prospect of another prolonged battle, though the sure victory that awaits you is worth ten times the cost. But I am glad, beyond measure, that I can give you tangible help."

Hematite Oxx stared at his young friend, not knowing what he meant.

"I think it is an error, on the part of many, in trying to master their appetites, that they do not use the aids within their reach. Here," he added, taking out his pocket-book, and withdrawing a neatly folded bit of paper therefrom, "is a prescription known as D'Unger's Remedy. The author is an educated physician, who has tested it in hundreds of cases, and he declares it has never failed in a single instance."

"Never failed to do *what*?" asked Hematite Oxx.

"I believe it is a decoction, made mainly from the thin bark of the twigs of the cinchona or quinine plant. A wine glass of the preparation, taken morning and evening, supplies a tonic to the system which is in danger of collapse from the total withdrawal of the stimulants to which it has been accustomed. It not only does that, whose blessing you can fully appreciate, but it removes the yearning, torturing thirst for whisky itself."

"That seems incredible," said Hematite Oxx, whose eager, earnest expression showed how he longed to

believe the statement, even though it was almost beyond belief.

“Dr. D’Unger tells of an old soaker, in Maryland, I believe, to whom he gave the preparation to cure an attack of the chills. The patient was one of those miserable wretches that you always find hanging around country taverns, and who seem to live year after year upon liquor, until their whole being is saturated and they are drunk all day and all night. I remember a hostler in my boyhood who was pointed out to me as a man that had not drawn a sober breath for forty years. Dr. D’Unger was surprised by a visit from his patient, who admitted that he had been cured of his chills, but was indignant that his appetite for liquor had vanished. To him the whole pleasure of life was gone, and doubtless he would have preferred the chills with his insatiate thirst, than to be rid of them with the loss of that.

“This interesting fact led the doctor to investigate and experiment further, with the result that through the aid of his prescription, scores of lawyers, physicians, and even clergymen, who had been overcome by a weakness for liquor, found a help which fully restored them to their right minds. I give you the prescription, which any good druggist will put up for you, though he will probably require a day in which properly to prepare the ingredients.”

“I will try it more gladly than I can tell you,” said the grateful sufferer, “and if it will do only a fractional part of what you promise, it will save me.”

Let me, for a single moment, anticipate the trend of events. It was eight months after this memorable interview that Hematite Oxx (soon after known under his true name), took the hand of Bob Lovell and said in a voice tremulous with feeling: “I am a saved man. While I give my Heavenly Father the credit, the chief means employed was that remedy you handed me on the day I attempted to throw

away my life in front of your train. I have at times felt something of the old longing for stimulants, but it was always so weak that it was easily overcome, and now, for fully three months, I have had no more desire to indulge in intoxicants than I have at this moment to swallow a pint of nauseous medicine. I believe the thirst is entirely eradicated, and never, never can I be grateful enough."

Perhaps some unfortunate brother whose eyes may read these lines may be struggling with the same temptation. In the hope of being of some benefit to him, I here give the prescription, which, of my own knowledge, has been the means of saving more than one from disgrace, ruin, and death. At the same time, I cannot claim it to be the equal of the famous bichloride of gold treatment.

Pulv. Cinchonæ Calisaya. $\text{Opr. } \frac{3}{4}$ viii.

Spts. Vini Rect. } aa. Percolate q. s. to make $\frac{3}{4}$ xvi.
Aqua

S.—Two desertspoonsful three or four times a day.

CHAPTER L.

TROUBLE AHEAD.

AT the conclusion of Bob Lovell's earnest talk with Hematite Oxx, he related his own experience of the evening before with Farmer Hirshkind, and the interview with Superintendent Worthley.

"I have no doubt that, when I get back to Ofalca, I will find my discharge awaiting me."

"No, you won't," was the response, uttered with such emphasis that the young engineer was astonished.

"I will qualify that," added his friend, "by saying that possibly your discharge may be sent you, but if so, it will be recalled more promptly than it was when sent by his father."

"You speak strongly, Mr. Oxx."

"I think you will admit that all my former assertions to you have been verified. So they will be in this case. If the discharge should reach you, let me know at once, for I am going back on this train, and shall stay at Montague's house. He will hardly dare to send the order without consulting me, and in that case, he will never send it."

Bob was silent a minute and then he added thoughtfully, as his eyes sought the floor:

"I am fortunate in having such a friend at court. I made up my mind that if Worthley dismissed me, I would go to President Horton of the I. & Q., for I know he would give me an engine at once."

"You would prefer to remain with the I. & O., wouldn't you?"

"I would indeed, but I am tired of continually fighting for my place, and of being forever the object of the superintendent's persecution."

"Well, you will stay with the I. & O. as long as you choose, and you may safely laugh at all of Montague's annoyances. Only be careful not to give him just grounds for discharging you. You may be surprised at my words, but I am sober now, and I have full warrant for every assurance I have given. Not only that," said Oxx with impressive earnestness, "but if you live to see a few years more of life, you and certain other people connected with the I. & O. will be the most astonished people in the United States of America!"

"You are speaking in riddles, Mr. Oxx," said Bob smiling, and naturally pleased at what he had heard.

"I have no wish to affect any mystery or to assume a part, but I am weighing every word I utter. Bide your time and follow the same path you have followed so manfully all your life. But," said the speaker, after the manner of one who is about to change the theme to a more im-

portant one; "there is trouble at hand, not for you but for all the employees of the road."

"Be kind enough to explain."

"You know of the enormous outlay required for the building of another track, the purchase of new locomotives and rolling stock, and the many improvements the road is making?"

"It is inevitable as a matter of course."

"Well, Montague has had several consultations with the president and directors, and some of them are frightened at the expense, which has proved much greater than was anticipated. Mr. Walbridge is too wise a business man to feel any alarm and he opposes the step that has been decided on."

"What is that?"

"On the 1st of November—that is next month—the wages of every engineer on the road is to be cut down fifteen per cent., and that of the firemen, brakemen, and others ten per cent. It is Montague's pet idea and he has succeeded in winning the majority of the directors to his views. How will the employees accept it?"

"They will strike to a man," was Bob Lovell's reply.

"Of course, but Montague has persuaded the directors that all the help the road wants can be secured elsewhere without trouble."

"Is the reduction to be for a specified time only, and are the men to receive a promise of the restoration of wages when the condition of the road warrants it?"

"As near as I can learn, the reduction is unconditional. Mr. Walbridge and two or three of the directors favored making it for three or six months only, with the promise of restoration to the old figures as soon as the business would justify it, but Montague has convinced them that the heavy expenditures render it unsafe to make any such pledge, and that, if it should be made, and the company finds itself

unable to keep it, the condition of affairs would be ten times worse than before."

"We are so far along in October that it would seem the notice ought to have reached us by this time."

"It is to be sent out to-day to all the employees, probably by posting it at points where everyone will be sure to see it."

"The Division holds its regular meeting at Ofalca to-night," said Bob thoughtfully; "and the question will be fully considered, but there can be little doubt of the result."

The young man referred to the Worthley Division No. —01 of Locomotive Engineers, which was organized just after the death of Superintendent Worthley and named for him. The officers of the division were: Matt Fields, C. E.; Sam Waycroft, F. E.; W. Bronson, S. E.; R. H. Miller, F. A. E.; J. T. Vail, S. A. E.; T. T. Torbert, T. A. E.; H. Sayre, Guide; Bob Lovell, Chaplain.

At the time the Division was organized, Bob Lovell was the choice for C. E., but he refused to accept any office except that of chaplain. Most of the officers were old enough to be his father, and, though there can be no question that his education, clear-headedness, and natural ability were superior to those of any other, it was appropriate that he should insist on remaining in the background, when the officers of the Lodge were selected. His deportment at the meetings was always modest, but no one commanded more attention than he, and, without the Division being aware of it, it came to lean upon his counsel as the safest to follow at all times.

Sure enough, when Bob reached Ofalca that evening, he found notices had been posted of the intended reduction of wages on the first of the following month. The circular was carefully worded, stating that the extraordinary expenditures rendered the step necessary. There was no

intimation, however, of any restoration to the old figures in the future, but the announcement stated that the scaling down would include the president, superintendent, and all salaried officers, who set the commendable example of voluntarily submitting to a reduction of twenty per cent. of their compensation. This looked magnanimous, but what employee would not have been glad to suffer a still greater scaling down of salary if he could exchange situations with one of them?

Since there was no hour of the day or night when some of the trainmen were not on duty, it was impossible that all the members of the Division should be present at any particular meeting. But there was not one, who was able to be in Ofalca that evening, that was not on hand. The excitement was deep, though not boisterous, and, where any two met before the meeting, the one subject only was discussed.

At such times there are sure to be a goodly number of hot-headed individuals, who are impatient of delay and eager to proceed to extremes. Among these were most of the officers, there being only two exceptions, Matt Fields and Bob Lovell.

Those who insisted on accepting the challenge, as they called it, were not lacking in strong arguments to support their views. They pointed out the obvious fact that business had never been so good on the I. & O., the last statement showing that it had increased nearly fifty per cent. during the preceding year. The country through which the line ran was developing fast, and business throughout the Union was booming. The I. & O.'s earnings were far in excess of those of the I. & Q., where there was no intention of cutting down the pay of the employees.

It could not be denied that the laying of another track, the purchase of rolling stock, and the various improvements under way had compelled an unusual outlay; but what was

it, after all, but an investment of the huge earnings of the corporation? It was far different from a loss, since instead of being in the form of actual money, it was in that of property that was certain to bring the road much larger returns than if it were put out at the most favorable interest. The new bonds which the company had issued were selling at par, and in equity there was no justification of the big cut in the wages.

Several members had expressed these views until Matt Fields in the chair began to feel his ideas becoming mixed. He had intended at the proper time to take the floor and combat them, but he now doubted his ability to do so. Catching the eye of Bob Lovell, he nodded to him to step into the breach. The latter, after waiting until all had made known their views, rose to his feet. The instant hush that reigned in the chamber showed that he had the attention of everyone.

"It is a safe rule," said he in his quiet but impressive manner, "in important matters to *go slowly*. We must consider every step and be satisfied in our own minds that it is wise. It is a fortnight to the 1st of November, when the reduction goes into effect, and before we decide to quit work or proceed to extremes, let us be certain that every possibility of a satisfactory arrangement is made. The law of our Brotherhood will not allow us to strike off-hand. We are required to exhaust every means at our command to avert such a calamity, and when there is nothing more left us to do, it must be ordered by Chief Arthur.

"I admit that, as I view it, this cut is unjustifiable. The views of the brothers who have spoken are sound. The I. & O. was never in a more prosperous condition, and a reduction one year ago would have been more equitable than at this time. Besides, the cut is serious. Five per cent. ought to have been all that was considered, and I never knew of any cut that was greater than ten per cent.

If we submitted without a protest, I much doubt whether our old wages would be restored, and it is not improbable that another reduction might take place when we least expect it.

“From what I have already said, you will understand that I share your feelings, but I insist that our course shall be so careful and thoughtful that it will never be necessary to take a backward step. Manifestly, our duty is to appoint a committee to wait upon the president and superintendent, and secure a full exchange of views. I hope some brother will make such a motion.”

Bob Lovell's object was to keep off of the committee, and he therefore refrained from offering the motion since, in accordance with the general custom, he would have been made chairman. He was not the one to shirk any duty, but the reader will understand his reluctance to appear before young Superintendent Worthley as the representative of the employees.

His little trick, however, availed him nothing. The motion he suggested was promptly submitted by a member, who insisted that Bob should be appointed chairman.

Before he could protest it was done, and Matt Fields, C. E., named as his associates Dick Conklin (who had taken no part in the debate) and Sam Waycroft, F. E.

Bob said nothing, but more unsatisfactory appointments could not have been made. Waycroft was an honest fellow, but so diffident that he blushed and stammered and mixed matters woefully when attending to his simple duties in the Division. He would not be able to open his mouth in the presence of the officials of the company, or, if he did, was likely to “put his foot in it,” and agree with everything said by them instead of backing up his associates.

Although Dick Conklin was a member of the Division, it can be readily understood why Bob Lovell distrusted him.

In truth the young engineer believed he was nothing less than a spy in camp, and that he carried many of the secrets of the meetings of this branch of the brotherhood to the superintendent. Of course there was no certainty that such was the fact, but the sagacious engineer had seen and heard enough to justify his belief in the fellow's treachery. However, if such were the fact, the traitor was sure to be unmasked sooner or later, and Bob held his peace.

It was a tribute to the confidence which the members had in the young engineer that his views were accepted without opposition, and, after the adjournment, the feeling was expressed that the best course had been taken in appointing him to head a committee to wait upon the leading officials of the road.

CHAPTER LI.

A SNUB.

BOB LOVELL believed in promptness. He notified his associates that he would send a communication to the president and superintendent, asking them to appoint an hour at their earliest convenience, when they would meet the committee, whom he named, in order that the arrangements could be made so that each of the three might be present.

By this time, Bob could no longer doubt the truth of every statement made to him by Hematite Oxx, for all had been verified. The expected discharge from Superintendent Montague Worthley had not reached him, and he was satisfied in his own mind that it never would, "thanks to the unaccountable influence possessed by Oxx at headquarters.

An unexpected answer came from Superintendent Worthley that the president and himself would meet the committee, in the office of the latter, at nine o'clock on the evening following the naming of the committee by the division. This readiness was unexpected, and many of

those who learned of it, augured favorably, but to Bob Lovell it bore too much the appearance of eagerness on the part of the superintendent to confront the representatives of the employees. He was convinced that the outcome would disappoint the latter, but he had plenty of time during the day to prepare himself for the ordeal.

One cause of Bob Lovell's uneasiness should be made clear. He was always certain of the most considerate treatment at the hands of President Walbridge, and, had the momentous question been in the hands of that gentleman to settle, there could be no trouble. In fact, the question never would have come up at all. But young Worthley had played his part for a year or two with consummate skill, and seemed to be so entrenched in his position, that he was immovable. He had gained the confidence of the directors, who were disposed to give him free rein to do as he chose.

Furthermore, President Walbridge had applied himself so assiduously since the death of his old friend, Cavalry Worthley, that he gave alarming evidence of breaking down. He had been confined to his house off and on for several weeks, causing his family much solicitude. The result to be feared was that he would shift his responsibility in the important matter to the shoulders of the young superintendent.

That there was the best ground for this apprehension was shown that evening, when the members of the committee entered the office of Worthley and found only that gentleman present. He greeted his callers with cold courtesy, and when they were seated, wheeled his chair around so as to face them, and said :

"I am sorry to tell you that I have just received a note from Mr. Walbridge, saying that it will be impossible for him to be present, and he wishes me to speak for him. He is not at all well."

"I am very sorry to hear that," said the disappointed Bob Lovell."

"Yes, I'm sorry too," added Waycroft, coughing hard and turning crimson in the face, while Dick Conklin sat grum and silent, not having uttered a half dozen words on the way.

"So am I," added young Worthley, "but the truth is Mr. Walbridge is in a bad form. I think the death of my father affected him more than most people suppose, and he has been working very hard like the rest of us for the past year. But, gentlemen, you have asked for this interview, and I have granted it. My time is valuable and I hope you will talk to the point."

Thus invited, Bob Lovell, knowing that he would have to act as spokesman, said :

"We were appointed a committee last evening to wait upon you and the president, respecting this order of a reduction of wages. In the first place, while we admit the heavy expenditures made by the road, we see, as you yourself must see, that these expenditures would not be ordered unless with the belief that they would bring the road ample returns."

"But there is no surety of *that*," said Superintendent Worthley.

"Nothing is sure in this world, but no one will deny the wisdom of the course in making these improvements. The confidence of the business community is proven by the fact that the new bonds of the road sell at par. Your last report shows that the I. & O. has been and is in a more prosperous condition than ever before. In our humble judgment, therefore, the necessity for the reduction in our pay is not apparent."

"It is a pity that you were not at the head of the road," remarked the superintendent with a sneer. Then, turning to Engineer Waycroft, he asked :

“Do you share in these remarkable views?”

The man appealed to became crimson in the face again, and after clearing his throat, replied :

“Well, I dunno ; I can't say I understand things as well as you do ; I think you know best.”

Bob Lovell bit his lips with impatience, though his associate proved to be about the size he suspected when he was appointed.

“And Mr. Conklin what is *your* opinion?” added Worthley.

“I don't pretend to know nothin' 'bout these things ; I didn't want to be on the committee and I'm willin' to leave things to you.”

“Proceed, Mr. Lovell,” said Worthley, with a meaning smile.

“I may add that my associates also were not of my own selection, and, since they have spoken, I regret they did not make their views known before consenting to serve ; but, waiving that matter, I wish to ask whether you will not agree that the reduction shall be less, and also for a stated time, instead of being indefinite as it now is.”

“I beg to say that the matter has been fully considered and that no change or modification will be made.”

“Can you not afford to make the reduction five or ten per cent., instead of fifteen !”

“No, sir ; it ought to be twenty, and, if I could have my way, it would be, but the president and directors are considerate and have agreed upon the lowest cut possible.”

“But is it to be for three or six months or for a year or more ?”

“If the business of the road warrants it, I have no doubt the restoration to the old figures will be made, but understand me, no promise at all is given.”

“This phase of the question has been fully considered I presume ?”

"It has ; the step has been under consideration for months and was taken only after the fullest investigation, and when all the directors saw the absolute necessity for it."

"Then your reply to our request is that the cut of fifteen per cent. will be enforced and you can hold out no encouragement that it will not be permanent?"

"That is my answer, sir, and it was an exceedingly foolish thing for you or any one else to think otherwise. Am I not right, Mr. Waycroft?"

Thus appealed to, this gentleman showed greater confusion than before. Only after clearing his throat several times and fidgeting about in his chair, did he find words to say :

"Well, I've always found you fair and right, Mr. Worthley, and I hain't got no objection to what you say. I think the boys had better knock under and help out the road."

"And *you* Mr. Conklin?"

"Them's the views I've had all along."

"I am glad to learn that a majority of the committee are sensible men, who are blessed with enough intelligence to understand the situation. I see no necessity of the Brotherhood seeking any more conferences with me ; but, in case they do, please say to them that no committee will be received, headed by the chairman of this one. I am willing to talk with their representatives at any time, but I must insist that their spokesman shall be a *gentleman*."

Bob Lovell's heart beat fast, and he could hardly restrain his desire to wring the nose of the young fellow who had insulted him ; but he did master his temper, and rising to his feet, said :

"Good-evening, sir."

"Good-evening," replied the superintendent, pointedly

addressing his words to Waycroft and Conklin, as they followed the chairman out of the office.

"I hope," said Bob, when they were on the outside and wending their way to the room of the Brotherhood, which was holding a special session to hear their report, "that you won't oppose a motion that I mean to make this evening."

"What's that?" asked Waycroft.

"I want the division to vote you a medal apiece, for being the champion fools of the Brotherhood."

"What do you mean by that?" growled Conklin.

"If you don't know what I mean you're a bigger numskull than I suspected."

"You'd better not be so free in what you say, young man; I've knowed persons to git hurt for sayin' less."

"I repeat my words, and more than that shall repeat them at the rooms. Neither of you had any business to serve on the committee unless you were willing to stand by what I said, so long as I represented the views of the brethren. I didn't expect anything different from *you*, for your course was in keeping with your character, but I was disappointed in Waycroft."

"The fact was," said the latter, really ashamed of himself, "I got mixed, and, when the superintendent looked at me so sharp through his eyeglasses, I didn't know what I said."

Dick Conklin walked sullenly behind the others, without speaking, for he appreciated the self-evident fact that it was out of his power to bluff Bob Lovell, who despised him.

CHAPTER LII.

ORDERED OUT.

THE chairman of the committee kept his word. Entering the room where the members of the Division were anxiously awaiting his return, he reported fully and truthfully all that had been said, supplementing his words, with the motion that his associates be each presented with a medal for the support they had given him.

The C. E. with a grim smile, ruled the motion out of order, but Conklin was so angered, that he sprang to his feet, and insisted that his resignation be accepted then and there.

It was done with such promptness that it was over before he really understood what was going on. Comprehending it a minute later, he strode out of the room slamming the door with unnecessary force after him.

The breeze caused by this little episode was quickly over, for everyone appreciated the gravity of the situation.

"It is useless for us to attempt anything further," said Bob Lovell; "the next step is to report to Chief Arthur and place the matter in his hands. We have done our duty."

The step was resolved on and a full statement sent to the Chief of the Brotherhood at Cleveland, with the request that he would follow his judgment in the matter. It was hoped that that gentleman, whose wise conservative course has won him the respect of railway corporations as well as employees, would be able to convince the directors of the I. & O. of the injustice of the step they had determined on, and secure some concession that would prevent the disastrous strike which impended.

Chief Arthur immediately responded by coming to Ofalca, where, by consulting with the officers of the division, he learned all the facts. He commended his friends for the temperate course taken and assured them he would do his

utmost to bring about a satisfactory adjustment of the trouble. With his usual acumen he saw that President Walbridge was the proper party to consult, since Superintendent Worthley was certain to adhere to the position already taken, and was less amenable to reason and argument.

But circumstances proved unfavorable. The note sent to President Walbridge's home brought the answer that, while that gentleman would be extremely pleased to meet Mr. Arthur, for whom he entertained great esteem, his physicians forbade him to see anyone on business, or to give the least attention to it. He deeply regretted that such was the case, but no choice was given him.

Shut off in that direction, the Chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers presented himself at the office of the superintendent, where he was received courteously and all his statements and arguments given careful attention. It is not too much to say that almost any person beside Lloyd Montague Worthley would have been impressed by the forcible arguments of Mr. Arthur, who showed admirable temper and covered the whole ground. He made no threats but gave the superintendent to understand that the claims of his faithful employees were founded on justice, and if a conflict came, the sentiment of the community would support them, and the loss to the company would be far greater than if the reduction of wages was deferred for a full year, or not made at all.

With a delicacy that could not have been surpassed, he intimated that when the stockholders of the railway company found their dividends passed, with the prospect of their indefinite postponement in order to meet the inevitable losses, they would be sure to place the blame where it belonged, and the gentleman who was now so strenuous in insisting upon the reduction, would be likely to find that he had made a serious mistake.

Although this significant statement was uttered with all possible consideration, Superintendent Worthley flushed and insisted that it was nothing less than a threat. Springing to his feet he ordered the chief to depart at once, and never to approach him again. Still courteous and considerate, the visitor begged the young man to keep cool, to give the subject a week's thought, and then to promulgate his decision. Nothing more remaining to be done, Chief Arthur, smiling and self-possessed, bade his angry host good-day.

He informed Matt Fields that the outlook was bad, but he had not given up all hope, and he would wait a week before sending his final reply. Returning to Cleveland, he addressed a respectful letter to Superintendent Worthley, in which he once more went over the ground, elaborately and with great care, begged to be pardoned if he had given offense during their interview, and asked the official to send his final decision at the end of a week.

He got it by return mail. It was curt and informed Chief Arthur that the officials of the I. & O. considered themselves competent to run their business without the interference of outside parties, adding that they had taken their position after due consideration, and that nothing could induce them to compromise or concede a single point.

This official communication brought matters to a focus. The chief sent word to Worthley Division, Number —01, that all the members were at liberty to quit work on such a date as they saw fit, and that they would have the support of the Brotherhood throughout the country. The chief begged them to conduct themselves like gentlemen, to avoid injuring any of the property of the company, to do all they could to protect it and prevent others from injuring it, not to abandon their engines until after the completion of the run on which they might be engaged at the

hour ordered for the strike, and urged them to abstain from interfering with those who might be selected to take their places.

This communication from the Chief of the Brotherhood was read at the special meeting of the Worthley Division, where, as may be supposed, it caused a profound sensation, though its import was generally known to the members beforehand. There were flashing eyes and muttered threats when the reading was finished, for everyone felt the outrageous wrong done them. They felt, too, that one man was responsible for it, and, had Lloyd Montague Worthley encountered certain members on their way home that evening, it might have resulted seriously for him.

No one had deeper cause than Bob Lovell for resentment, for he had been repeatedly insulted by Superintendent Worthley, and yet no member of the lodge made as earnest and impressive appeal to his friends to follow the advice of Chief Arthur in spirit and letter. He assured them that they would find many causes for anger and would be tempted to violence, but no gentleman must forget himself in such a trial as was before them. He especially appealed to them to keep away from all drinking places, and so to conduct themselves that they would never forfeit the respect of the community in which they had lived so long.

The conclusion of the proceedings of the Division was an order for all the members to quit work at six o'clock P. M., on November 1st., or as soon after that hour as the run on which they might be engaged, should be completed.

The firemen were also in session the same evening, and the report of what had been done was immediately sent to them. They promptly issued the same order to their members. The brakemen were without any such organization, but it was known that, possibly with a very few excep-

tions, they would join their brethren. As a consequence the strike was certain to be complete.

CHAPTER LIII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

MATT FIELDS, as the C. E. of Worthley Division, Number —01, of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, appreciated his delicate position, for, being no longer an engineer, his interests, in a certain sense, were more closely interwoven with those of the I. & O. Company than before. Many employees, when promoted to responsible posts, withdraw from the Brotherhood, not on account of unfriendliness to the order, but because of the possibility that their new line of duty may force them to oppose certain measures in the Brotherhood, as required by their higher allegiance to their employers.

It was this feeling which led Matt Fields to call upon Superintendent Worthley and frankly state his views. While his loyalty to the I. & O. was as strong as ever, yet his sympathy with the cause of the employees impelled him to make it his own, and he unhesitatingly declared that he intended to stand by them to the end.

The Division notified the superintendent of the course decided upon, couching the notification in respectful language, for the members were resolved that no charge of unfair action should lie against them; but young Worthley was one of those small men who welcomed the coming conflict. He fancied he was posing as a hero before the community, reveling in the belief that the leading journals of the country would soon be filled with accounts of the new difficulty between capital and labor, and would not fail to speak of the splendid character of the youthful superintendent, who had defied the combined employees and had

snubbed Chief Arthur himself when he ventured to interfere. The young man had the directors behind him, and, if the discharged employees caused trouble, he could appeal to the authorities of the State, who, if necessary, would order out the military. Altogether the prospect of being talked and written about, and becoming the central figure of an immense sensation was gratifying beyond measure to him.

It so happened that Bob Lovell was the last engineer to quit work on November 1st. Six o'clock, the hour named, found him near the Junction, on his way to Ofalca with the express. At the crossing of the I. & Q., several engineers and firemen were waiting for a few words with him. They commended the course taken, declaring that they were with their brothers on the I. & O.; that when the facts became known, they would have the support of every person whose support was worth having.

It was while Bob was making his brief stop here, and talking with his friends that the telegraph operator ran out of his office and handed him a dispatch, which he carefully refrained from opening until he had resumed his trip up the road. Then, seeing that everything was going right, he opened the damp, coarse envelope and read the message, which was dated at Inverwick, the northwestern terminus of the I. & Q. :

ROBERT LOVELL :

I have a satisfactory situation awaiting you, whenever you feel at liberty to take it.

J. H. HORTON,
President I. & Q. R. R.

The reply which Bob sent to this on reaching Ofalca was :

"I appreciate your kind offer, but I feel it my duty to stand by our men until this difficulty is over."

Kit Hawkins, the fireman, had picked up knowledge fast,

and grimly remarked he was getting a vacation sooner than he expected ; but he was such a warm admirer of his engineer that he was ready to follow him through fire and water, and no one could persuade him from going out with the veterans of the road.

Bob Lovell was far from contemplating the struggle with exultation. He believed the men would win, since their cause was just, and, sooner or later, the directors of the road would awaken to the fact and compel the superintendent to make some concession that could be accepted by the men.

But he feared for the latter. Their families would not suffer, for their brethren throughout the country would see to that, but the idleness and excitement were sure to lead some of them to the saloons. There were thoughtless, impulsive members who would delight in mischief, and when the new men should appear on the ground, trouble was almost certain to take place.

The Hercules reached Ofalca on time, and, after discharging the passengers, Bob ran the engine into the shop, and saw that the fires were drawn and everything in order. Then he changed his dress and walking outside, stopped a while to chat with Matt Fields and fully twenty of the men gathered there.

“ We are bound to win,” said young Lovell, in answer to a remark ; “ I haven’t a particle of doubt about that, but it all depends upon us.”

“ In what way,” asked Waycroft, who after all had got round to the right side of the question.

“ The superintendent has convinced the directors that he can master this business and make the victory a great advantage to them. Events will prove his mistake, and then they will compel him to come to terms.”

“ But he has already sent out advertisements for new men, promising them steady employment, and declaring

that under no circumstances will he allow a single employee who has gone out to resume his place on the road."

"Of course, he couldn't do less than that, but among these new men will be a great many incompetents. They will have accidents; they will burn the engines, make an end to all regular running and mix up things so badly that the directors will awaken to the great mistake their superintendent has made. All we have to do, boys, is to wait for the good time coming. But I fear the consequences to our own men. Here are twenty of us. Now that we shall have plenty of leisure, let us devote it to looking after our members."

"What for?" queried one of the engineers.

"See that they don't drink any liquor; for, if they don't abstain, there will be more than one tragedy. Then watch, too, that none of them injures any of the company's property."

"The company be ——," exclaimed another of the group. "Do you suppose we're going to give our time to them after such treatment? I'll see them hanged first."

"I can understand how galling it is," said Bob earnestly, "but I am appealing now to your self-interest. No matter what disaster takes place, we shall be charged with it, unless the proof of our innocence is too apparent to be questioned. We cannot succeed except by retaining the sympathy of the community, and we can only keep that by scrupulously refraining from all disorder and unlawful proceedings."

"Bob, there's no use in disputing the truth of what you say," remarked Matt Fields, "but all the same, my boy, you are asking an impossibility. The majority of us will do as you wish, but there are several hundreds on this strike, and among them are some who will welcome the chance to do mischief."

"That is just what I've been saying, Matt, for it proves the necessity of eternal vigilance on our part. I intend to give all my time to our men."

"You'll have your hands more than full."

"Of course I will, unless all of you assist me," said Bob, starting up the street at a slow walk and renewing his appeals to his companions to help keep the employees from doing wrong.

Bidding them good-by for a short time, he went home, ate his evening meal, and then, feeling that duty called him elsewhere, he went out, telling his mother and sister that he might be absent until a late hour, and they should not attempt to sit up until he returned.

Bob went straight to the first drinking saloon on the main street of Ofalca. He had been in the place before, and had helped more than one miserable victim out and home to his sorrowing family. He knew that here he was looked upon with anything but friendly feelings, but he cared nothing for that. He walked directly through the bar room to the smaller apartments at the rear, and glanced at everyone in sight. His heart gave a quick throb of relief at the failure to find a member of his division or a single employee of the company.

"God grant that they all may keep away from these houses," was his prayer as he came forth, and, turning down a by-street, made his way to the worst place of all, the more fashionable saloon, known by the name of the Hole in the Wall, which had come so near proving fatal to Hematite Oxx.

There were a dozen loungers in the large, gilded bar-room, most of whom were drinking or had been drinking, but among them all was none of those whom he sought. There remained the two rooms at the rear, provided with tables, flash newspapers, and furnished with fine furniture and expensive paintings. Before he could enter the prin-

cipal one, a broad, heavy form appeared at the entrance and beckoned him to approach.

It was Matt Fields, the roundhouse foreman. There was no fear of his touching liquor, and Bob rightly concluded he was engaged on an errand similar to his own, for he was one of the most efficient workers in the temperance society of the town.

"What is it, Matt?" asked Bob, stepping forward and speaking in a low voice, as he took his hand.

"Some of them have arrived."

"Whom do you mean?"

"The new men. I have the leader here, and he's an old acquaintance; come in and see him."

Bob followed his friend into one of the rear rooms, where, at a small table in the corner, sat a shaggy individual, about the age of Matt himself. He was plainly but neatly dressed, with a full grizzly beard, a defective eye, somewhat round shouldered, of massive build, and evidently the possessor of herculean strength.

"Tom, this is the young gentleman I was speaking about," said Matt, introducing him; "he is Bob Lovell, the best engineer on the I. & O.; Bob, my friend, Tom Meredith."

"I'm glad to meet you," said the latter in a gruff voice, without rising from his seat, as he offered his hand; "what'll you take?"

"I'm obliged to you," replied Bob, drawing up a chair by the table, "but I do not drink; Matt and I quit a good while ago."

"So he was telling me; I take only a glass of beer now and then; but I was saying to Matt that it's a great change for him since I knowed him in the army."

"Yes," said Matt with a laugh and a sigh, "when I was with the boys on the Potomac I was one of the heaviest drinkers among 'em. I wonder that it didn't kill me long ago."

"We fellows in the army felt as though we had—what do you call it?—a dispensation to do as we chose, but there's no use in talking; we are better off without it."

"Tom and me was in the same company," said Matt, pleased, like every veteran, to recall the stirring days of the civil war, "and, Tom, I believe we drank from the same canteen."

"Well, we did," responded the other, shoving back the glass of beer and producing a brier-wood pipe, which he proceeded to fill and light; "I'll never forget them days."

Bob was glad the conversation had taken this turn, and he felt a secret admiration of the shrewdness of Matt, who, instead of plunging into the burning question of the railway strike, kept upon these reminiscences which awoke such warm memories in the hearts of both. The former course might have stirred the resentment and stubbornness of the old veteran.

"Do you remember that scout we went on," said Matt, his eye kindling at the recollection, "down by Dinwiddie Court House?"

"I don't think I'll forget that, being that it was there I lost an eye."

"That was a hot time. There was only twenty of us, and before we knowed it, we ran right into a party of Mosby's men. Whew! didn't they make the fur fly. They would have gobbled us sure, if night hadn't been so near. My horse was shot under me, I got a bullet through my arm, just as I pitched head first into the bush, where I crawled beside a log and laid there till midnight when the moon came up. Those chaps come near stepping over me a half dozen times, but luck was with me. They say a fellow that's born to be hanged is safe till his time comes."

"But why don't you tell about *me*, Matt?" asked Meredith with a huge grin, while he kept his pipe stem between his yellow teeth.

"I'm coming to that ; when I thought it was safe, I crept out of the bush and had got pretty near to the high-way, when I heard a groan. Gracious ! I jumped six feet in the air thinking it was one of Mosby's men."

"But it wasn't," interrupted the grinning Meredith, too interested to hold his peace ; "it was *me*."

"So it was ; when you spoke, I knew your voice ; I went over by you and there you was, shot in the eye and through the shoulder."

"Yes, that was *me*," added Tom, "and I had made up my mind that my last sickness had come."

"Maybe it was the same thing that saved you as saved me," said Matt, with a laugh at his own joke, "but you wasn't of much account just then—that's certain. Howsumever, I give you a drink from my canteen, got you on your feet and we started for camp. But I'm afraid we never would have got there, if the General hadn't sent out a party after us. You was laid up a good while, and my arm bothered me for a few weeks, but, we stuck to it and were in at the death at Appomattox."

"You just bet we were," added Tom, "and that wasn't the only time we drank out of the same canteen ; but after that brush down at Dinwiddie, I swore if there ever was a favor I could do Matt Fields, I'd walk barefoot to do it, and so I will, old fellow, and here's my hand on it."

Bob Lovell felt a moistening of the eyes as these two veterans of the war, warmly clasped their hands, and, holding them thus for a moment, looked straight into each other's faces, with an honest earnestness that could not be doubted.

"It seemed to me," continued Tom, "that all the good turns in the army was from you to me instead of wicy wersa."

"Well, I knowed you could be depended on when wanted," replied Matt Fields, gratefully, "so it wasn't your

fault that you didn't do a good deal more for me. But, Tom, if you're anxious to do me a turn, I'll give you the chance."

"You will, eh?" asked the other, eagerly: "jest show it to me."

"In the first place, what have you been doing the last five or six years?"

"I've been running a stationary engine at Coal Haven."

"Did you ever handle a locomotive?"

"I once fired for six months on a freight, on the Cumberland, but I was discharged for drinking, and have been with the stationary engine ever since."

"Then of course, you don't belong to our Brotherhood; how did you come to know of the strike so soon?"

"There was an advertisement in the *Illuminator*, three days ago, asking for men who knowed anything about engines; we was promised good wages and steady employment if we would apply at once. So me and three others came up on the train this morning, went straight to the superintendent's office and told him what we was after. He asked us a few questions, and then said he would give us each an engine to-morrow."

"I suppose the three who came up with you are engineers?" was the inquiring remark of Bob Lovell.

"They all told the superintendent they had been running on the Pennsylvania, but it isn't so; two of them have fired a less time than me, and one of them don't know any more about an engine than he does astronomy. That don't seem to make no difference, howsumever."

"Do you know of any other men who are coming to Ofalca?"

"No, but the superintendent said there would be plenty of them."

"I observed none on my train," said Bob, "which was the last up to-night."

"But, Matt," said Tom Meredith, "you haven't told me what favor I can do you."

"It's this : I want you to refuse to take a situation on this road."

Their new friend looked amazed.

"Why, is it going to harm you two ?" he asked, looking from one to the other.

"You couldn't do anything worse. Haven't you heard how matters stand !"

"The superintendent said that only a few of the men had struck. They were them that wanted their wages raised, and being so poor he concluded to let 'em go. I didn't suppose that foremen and the engineers like your young friend were to be left out."

"Whew ! but that's rich !" exclaimed Matt Fields, with astonishment ; "Bob, explain matters to Tom ; you can talk better than me."

As succinctly as possible, Bob Lovell made clear the true situation to the astounded Tom Meredith. He had hardly finished, when the man brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

"That settles it ! I wouldn't undertake to run an engine on their blamed old road, for ten thousand dollars a month ! No, sir ; I aint that kind of a chap. Good-night, gentlemen : I'll go out and hunt up the other fellers and explain matters to 'em."

And without pausing to say anything more, Tom Meredith strode out of the "Hole in the Wall," on his errand.

CHAPTER LIV.

RAILROADING UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

MATT FIELDS looked at Bob Lovell, and the two smiled. "There would be no trouble if they were all like *him*," remarked the young engineer ; "it was for-

tunate that he is an old friend of yours, but there will be others, if they are not already here, who won't be so easily persuaded. Let's make a search through the town for them."

As the two passed through the bar room, they came face to face with three of their friends—an engineer, fireman, and brakeman—who had just entered, and whose flushed faces and confused manner showed too plainly the errand that led them thither.

"Come, boys," said Bob cheerily, "this isn't the place for you."

"How is it *you* are in here?" asked the engineer significantly.

"We have been talking with one of the new men who arrived to-day, and he has given us his promise that he won't go to work to-morrow, but will do all he can to dissuade those who came with him. That's the best thing to do."

"Maybe some of them are in here," continued the engineer, who would have been glad had he been able to deceive the watchful Bob as to the cause of their coming thither.

"No, we have looked around."

He moved off as he spoke, and the three kept him company, expressing a wish that they might be able to find some of the new arrivals.

"Don't let anyone induce you to drink anything," said Matt Fields, in his fatherly way. "I don't believe we shall meet any more to-night, but we will take a walk through town."

An hour was spent in the search, but, if there were any other new men in Ofalca, they took good care to keep out of sight. Probably some of the railway officials looked after them. Bob made sure that his three friends were safe at home before he went to his own house, retiring to bed after midnight.

Matters assumed a more stirring aspect on the morrow. The day was crisp and sunshiny, and all the strikers were on hand at an early hour. Superintendent Worthley rose earlier than for years, and, after a hasty breakfast, repaired to his office, ready to receive the new applicants, of whom he expected a large number. He had sent letters to different points, beside advertising extensively, and had received a telegram at midnight from Irondale, saying that over fifty men had arrived at that point too late to catch the evening express to Ofalca. The operator was directed to man an engine and a car, and send them eastward without delay.

Among the applicants were a number of men who understood the running of an engine well enough to perform the duty required, and Superintendent Worthley received word that the new arrivals might be expected in Ofalca about nine o'clock, the hour for the express to start on its trip westward.

Montague Worthley was in high spirits, and, in answer to the numerous inquiries, informed his friends that the service of the road would be in perfect shape in a day or two. He had secured all the help he wanted, and would soon be compelled to turn away applicants. If the strikers undertook to interfere with the new men, they would be taught a lesson which they would remember for the rest of their natural lives.

"It's lucky you came yesterday, for if you had delayed you would have been too late, but your promptness will be rewarded."

These remarks were made to Tom Meredith and his three companions, as they entered the superintendent's office, a half hour after he had received the encouraging telegram from Irondale.

"You are going to give us each an engine, are you?" asked Tom, forgetting to remove his slouch hat.

“Certainly ; I intend to place you on one of the passenger trains ; it is one of the best runs we have.”

“And what are you going to do with *us* ?” asked one of the three.

“I want one of you to take the westward freight, and I’ll place the other two before noon. I have so many matters on hand that you’ll have to excuse me for a while.”

“Wal,” growled Tom Meredith, “we hain’t come to take charge of any engines.”

“You haven’t ! What did you come here for, then ?”

“To tell you that you and your blamed old road may go to thunder for all we care,” promptly replied Tom (only he employed language too forcible to be given here), whereupon he and his three companions tipped their hats over their foreheads and swaggered out of the superintendent’s office.

Now, it must not be supposed that Bob Lovell, Matt Fields, and the leaders in the strike, had neglected a precautionary step, so obvious that it occurred to them at once. When Bob left Ofalca, the preceding morning, he took five members of the division with him. Two dropped off at the junction, while the others continued to Irondale. Their special business was to look out for those that were expected to take their places, and it need not be said that they were sure to do their duty thoroughly.

A half hour after the superintendent received the telegram from Irondale to the effect that fifty men were about to start, another message arrived, saying there was a hitch in the business, and more than half refused to go. Finally, twenty odd started.

Of course the special would run carefully, but at the end of an hour and a half a despatch came from the Junction notifying the Superintendent that the train had reached that point with the twenty passengers intact.

"They are in good spirits, splendid looking fellows, all veteran engineers and *they will stick!*"

This was the assuring message from the operator, supplemented fifteen minutes later by this :

"Matters don't look as well as at first. Twelve of the men refuse to go further ; the strikers have their emissaries at work, the mischief is to pay ; it now looks——"

At this point the telegraph instrument ceased clicking and the operator in the Superintendent's office looked up with a blanched face and gasped :

"The wire is cut ! You can't get anything to or from the Junction."

Worthley was taken aback for the moment. He had not counted on this. The situation was becoming interesting and serious. But he recalled that it was his duty to keep up the rôle of the hero. He must not be dismayed by any obstacle, no matter how insurmountable it might seem to ordinary individuals.

"I'll go down on the express !" he exclaimed, springing to his feet ; "it's about time for it to start ; look after the office till I return," he said to the several attaches ; "if this gets any worse, I'll appeal to the governor for the militia."

The Ofalca station was crowded. Most of the strikers were on hand, awaiting developments, while hundreds of others were attracted by that natural curiosity which is so potent in drawing American crowds together. There were groaning and uncomplimentary remarks, when the dudish young Superintendent was seen approaching rapidly, but he pretended to hear them not. He was filled with the importance of the business on his hands. He looked indeed as if the responsibility of the commonwealth was entrusted to him, but he felt fully equal to all demands.

Meanwhile the Hercules had been fired up, and being attached to the cars was backing into the station. Dick

Conklin was at the throttle, with a young man acting as fireman, who stepped upon an engine for the first time in his life. Conklin's flushed face showed that he had been indulging in something to give him the courage necessary to face the scowls of the employees, some of whom muttered threats against him and his fireman. These threats, too, would have resulted in action before he could pull out from the station, but for the watchfulness of Bob Lovell and Matt Fields, who moved hither and thither among the strikers, urging them to remain passive spectators of events.

"This train goes through to Irondale!" shouted Superintendent Worthley, taking out his watch; "all aboard."

"Where's the conductor?" asked an old gentleman, who showed some hesitation about entrusting himself to the cars.

"I'll take charge of this train; don't be afraid."

"But who's going to take charge of *you*?" asked a striking engineer; "you'll need your mother or someone else."

The laugh which greeted this sally caused Worthley to stop short and glare at the speaker, as though he meditated leaping at his throat; but, if so, he changed his mind and hustled among the crowd, speedily waving his hand as a signal for the engineer to go ahead.

During the brief spell the train was waiting for its passengers, several of the striking engineers hurried forward to where the Hercules was blowing off steam, and made a few not very good-tempered remarks to Conklin. He persistently remained on the other side of the engine and acted as though he did not hear what was said. It was a great relief to him when he caught the signal of the superintendent and was able to pull away from the crowd that was rapidly growing threatening.

Aside from Dick Conklin's course in withdrawing so summarily from the Brotherhood, without paying any attention to the method required, he had become very

unpopular with his associates. His action in taking Bob Lovell's place at the throttle of the Hercules intensified this dislike, and with the inflamed sentiment among the strikers, he displayed more courage than he had ever shown before in taking out the express for Irondale.

Some fifty passengers entered the cars before starting, much less than the usual number on the morning trip westward. Only a portion of these were provided with tickets, and among them were fully a dozen of the disaffected men.

The telegram received by Superintendent Worthley gave reason to believe that the engine and car with a number of new men had already left the Junction, and was on its way eastward at that moment. Consequently it would not do for the express to steam recklessly ahead, with every probability of a disastrous collision. There was every reason to believe it could reach Jigtown, beyond Dead Man's Hollow, where there was another telegraph office through which communication might be had, provided the wires had not been tampered with westward of that point. Conklin was therefore directed to make all speed to Jigtown, keeping on the alert for the other engine.

Young Worthley had contemplated an excursion through the cars to gather up the tickets, but he was so impressed with the lack of dignity of such a proceeding that he left the passengers alone, concluding that the company could stand the loss better than he could afford to sacrifice his self-respect. It was a prudent proceeding on his part, for the small and select body of strikers were waiting to give him a "reception" that would have been anything but pleasant.

Dick Conklin ran with a recklessness which more than once caused a feeling of consternation among the passengers and startled Worthley, who, taking his place in the forward part of the express car, anxiously watched the progress of the engine. In rounding the curves he pulled

the bell-cord more than once as an order for the engineer to slacken speed.

Fortunately, however, Jigtown was safely reached, and, as the train came to a halt, Worthley jumped from the platform and ran into the telegraph office. It was rather shrewd on his part that, while there had been such a wholesale cutting of wages of the employees, the telegraphists were not disturbed. He knew how indispensable were the services of these people, and their pay remained untouched. Although he said nothing of the matter to them, he intended on the settlement of the main strike to scale them down also, making full preparations for any resistance on their part.

A surprise awaited him on entering the telegraph office at Jigtown. The wires were not only in working order to Irondale but also to Ofalca. The cause of the operator's declaration in the latter office was a disarrangement of the wires in the room where he was sitting. He was too flustered at the time to notice the fact which became known at the moment the Hercules left the station on its trip westward.

CHAPTER LV.

A FAVORABLE OUTLOOK FOR THE COMPANY.

THE telegraphist at the Junction had been astonished by the sudden failure of his connections with the main office at Ofalca, but, before the special with the new men left, communication was restored and word was received that the express had started westward nearly on time. The special was directed to wait at the Junction until its arrival or other orders were received from the superintendent.

This news was welcome indeed to Worthley and lifted a great load from his mind. With the telegraph wires un-

molested, and the special definitely located, it was easy to get matters into some kind of shape. He at once ordered the special to remain at the Junction, and, taking his place on the engine with Conklin, directed him to run at fair speed for that point. He could not free himself of a distrust of the engineer, and it need not be said the superintendent breathed freely, when at last he caught sight of the Junction in the distance. In fact, Conklin had done much better than was anticipated. He ran nearly on time and had not met with the slightest accident since leaving Ofalca.

After stepping from the cars at the Junction, the superintendent speedily acquainted himself with the situation. He recognized a number of his discharged employees, who had done effective work with the new men, waiting with the special from Irondale. They had persuaded fourteen to abandon their purpose of taking the places of the strikers, but there were nine that were determined to go to work at all hazards. All of them had had more or less experience in running locomotives, and two or three were fully qualified to take any engine on the road. Most of them had been discharged for cause, from other lines, but there were a few who voluntarily quit in order to obtain better paying situations. They were men with families, to whom every dollar counted, and they met all arguments with the reply that it was simply a question of bread and butter with them. They were willing to work for the wages that had been refused by the employees of the I. & O., and that was all there was about it. The strikers promised these wages to them, if they would refuse to go to work, so long as the strike lasted. The new men grimly replied that if they would make the engagement for a year or two, they would accept it—otherwise it was useless to talk.

In reply to Superintendent Worthley's inquiries, he was

told that there were fully a hundred new arrivals at Irondale, including men who were qualified as engineers, firemen, conductors and brakemen, and that they were awaiting assignment to duty. The superintendent's face glowed when he read this information, which was so good that he imparted it to the passengers and strikers standing around. He directed the officials at that point of the line to set them at work as rapidly as possible, while he would return to Ofalca and direct operations at that point.

Accordingly, Conklin resumed his trip westward with the express, while Worthley, forgetting his dignity for a time, took his place among the new men within the car, and discussed the situation and explained matters to them, while a fully competent engineer felt his way eastward over the line that he now traversed for the first time.

There was some natural anxiety as to how the new engineer would handle his engine, but the man serving him as fireman had some acquaintance with the road and gave valuable aid. Besides, the person who held the throttle was not only careful but fully competent, and he performed the creditable task of taking the special the whole one hundred and five miles from Irondale to Ofalca without the least mishap or injury to the car or engine.

On the whole, Superintendent Montague had reason to congratulate himself on the outlook. Ofalca being the eastern terminus of the I. & O., every arrival at that point must come over the line from the westward or the northwest. There were two points where the new men would appear: one was at Irondale, the western terminus, but which connected with other roads centering at that place, while the other was at the Junction, to which passengers could come from the northwest over the I. & Q. road.

Every train to those points brought more or less applicants, until Worthley telegraphed notices to where he had advertised, that he had all the men he wanted and no more

applications need be made. He experienced a peculiar thrill when dictating these messages, for what stronger proof could be given of the wisdom of his course and his overmastering triumph that had come sooner than he expected ?

Who could say that he would not be dubbed, the Young Napoleon of Railways ?

The superintendent had barely got these orders off when word was received that Conklin had reached Irondale, only fifteen minutes late and would start on time in the afternoon.

"Things are working beautifully," he said, swinging round in his office chair and lighting another cigarette ; "by two days at the furthest we shall have everything going smoothly, and, about that time, I reckon, these strikers will be the sickest body of men in the country. They will find that when they butt against Superintendent Lloyd Montague Worthley, they make the mistake of the taurus that undertook to push the locomotive of the track."

The boast was not addressed to any one in particular, but was intended for the *attachés* of the office, all of whom broke into laughter over the witticism. If they failed to appreciate the brilliancy of their chief, they might be discharged for impudence.

During the afternoon, the reporters of the newspapers began to arrive. These were the gentlemen Worthley longed in his heart to see, and he directed all applicants to be admitted to his office while other business had to wait. He had provided himself with a box of good cigars and an unlimited supply of cigarettes, for he was anxious to be properly presented to the public and he flattered himself he knew how to secure that boon.

It is not worth while to dwell upon the story which Worthley glibly rolled off to his listeners. He told of the enormous expenditures the road were making and of the

necessity for a temporary reduction in the wages of the employees ; the I. & O. had always paid the highest rates and treated their employees with consideration, only to be repaid by the basest ingratitude. But the superintendent was as firm as a rock and would never, never yield a point, conscious as he was, that right and justice were on his side. Chief Arthur who ventured on some impertinent advice to the superintendent, thinking, because of his youth, that he would be awed by the mighty leader of the Brotherhood, received a taste of his mettle, when he was promptly put out of his office and forbidden ever to intrude again. The admirable means the superintendent had taken to procure new men had resulted most happily. They were already on the spot, and, at the most, only a slight disarrangement of schedule time would prevail for a few days. Altogether, the triumph of Superintendent Worthley was one of the most striking that had been known for years, and marked him as one of the rising railway men of the country.

That was about the way young Worthley put it to the newspaper men, and he was gratified to see how meekly they accepted his utterances, and how careful they were to write down his exact words. It was these facts which probably prevented him from being as diffident as he might have been under other circumstances.

But the journalists who called upon Superintendent Worthley understood their business better than he suspected. After helping themselves, as in duty bound, to his cigars, and thanking him for his courtesy, they circulated among the strikers themselves, and obtained their side of the story. From these versions they made up an account as impartial as any right-minded person could have asked.

Worthley was chagrined when he found his remarks cut down to a paragraph or two, while the very best things he had said were left out altogether. Among all the journals

there was not one that made any reference to his Napoleonic character and the admirable foresight he had shown in preparing at such short notice for the gigantic strike.

But a compensation promised itself, when a pleasant young gentleman called the next day, and securing a private interview, stated that he represented *The Illustrated Radiator* which would be highly gratified to receive a photograph of Superintendent Worthley, together with the salient facts of his career.

Worthley blushed and protested that he did not deserve such recognition, but all the same, the applicant secured elaborate replies to his questions and a great deal of volunteered information. The young man was taken home to dinner by the superintendent, and presented with a handsome cabinet picture of Worthley, with his hair parted in the middle, eye-glasses and all.

"Some of my too ardent friends have persisted in calling me the Young Napoleon of Railways," laughed Montague, "but of course you won't publish anything about that."

"I don't know," said the correspondent, whipping out his note-book and jotting down the fact; "I am very glad you told me. You see all those points are interesting."

Worthley laughed again, pressed another cigar upon the caller, forced a yearly pass upon the I. & O. into his hands, and begged him to call and see him whenever he could make it convenient. At the same time he ordered one hundred copies of *The Illustrated Radiator*, for which he paid a handsome price in advance.

Since the publication was a weekly one, it was necessary to wait some days for its appearance with the portrait and biographical sketch, but the correspondent promised that they should be published at that time with a number of illustrations accompanying the account of the great strike.

With this pledge the *attaché* of *The Illustrated Radiator* took an effusive departure ; but before going home he interviewed a number of the leading strikers, including Bob Lovell and Matt Fields. Then he stopped at the Junction, where it is to be presumed he gathered some interesting information, for he made copious notes and smiled to himself in a significant way when at last he headed for the metropolis.

CHAPTER LVI.

NOT QUITE SO FAVORABLE.

THE great strike which promised so auspiciously for the I. & O. Railway did not progress as favorably in that direction as anticipated.

Among the new men engaged, as has already been stated, were a number of experience and ability, but they labored under the disadvantage of being ignorant of the working of the road, while it was hard to secure the information that was indispensable.

But the force included, as was inevitable, a great many incompetents. They misrepresented their qualifications and played sad havoc with the interests of the company employing them. There is reason to suspect, too, that several were given charge of engines who were in sympathy with the strikers and took every means to benefit them and injure the road. Their position was known to some, but not to all of the disaffected, and there were several secret conferences between them. Bob Lovell and Matt Fields heard hints of this curious state of affairs, but their sentiments were so well known that their best friends prevented reliable information reaching them.

As a consequence, deplorable results soon followed. A number of the engines were "burnt" so badly as to be unfit for service ; trains were derailed in the most unaccount-

able manner ; double and triple the quantity of oil and coal was used or rather wasted ; trains broke down when no just cause was evident ; it was impossible to make schedule time ; the engineers and conductors developed an amazing genius for misunderstanding orders and mixing business in the most inextricable tangle, while it not unfrequently happened that some of the employees abandoned the trains in a body, leaving them on the main track, where more than one disastrous collision followed. There had been a number of persons injured, but, fortunately, no lives were sacrificed—a piece of good fortune that it was unwise to believe could long continue.

It was inevitable that the business of the road should suffer. Travel fell off at least one-half, for people were naturally timid about trusting themselves on the cars while such a chaotic condition of things lasted. The carriage of freight was greatly affected also, and the company saw a number of law suits impending for their failure to fulfill their contracts with the shippers. Altogether matters were in a bad way.

But Superintendent Worthley seemed to rise higher in the face of the mountainous difficulties confronting him. He paid off the dissatisfied men, discharged the glaringly incompetent, and exercised more caution in filling their places. But he insisted that he would keep up the fight until the “crack of doom,” to quote his favorite expression. He was actuated by principle, and would see the I. & O. go to the dogs before yielding a single point. If the directors were dissatisfied, they held their peace and left the superintendent to fight it out on his own lines.

There is no saying what the outcome would have been, had President Walbridge retained good health. It is fair to believe, however, that he would have exercised a restraining influence upon Worthley, and brought matters to

a satisfactory settlement long before the culminating point was reached.

But Cummins Walbridge was a very sick man. The decline, of which he showed evidence early in the summer, grew steadily upon him. It was no wish on his part to shirk his duty that caused him to fail to be present at the first interview between the superintendent and the committee from the strikers, and afterward to decline to see Chief Arthur, when he asked for an audience with him. He was physically and mentally unable to do so, and, by the time the strike was fairly under way, his health became so critical that his physician would not allow him to hear anything concerning it. During the stirring days, when his counsel was so badly needed, his lips were mute, and the whole contest on the part of the company was practically in the hands of the young superintendent.

Those were anxious days for Bob Lovell, who slept only when worn out, and unable to keep his feet longer. Despite everything he could do, he saw the very dangers coming that had caused him so much uneasiness from the first. A number of the men drifted into the saloons, where, under the excitement of the poison they swallowed, they said and did things which would never have occurred to them in their sober moments. They were angered that the road held out in the face of the great losses it suffered daily. They were incensed against the superintendent, and, had not that individual exercised commendable control, he would have been violently treated. There were whispered threats, too, of destroying the property of the company, and bringing it to its senses by some daring act that would strike terror to the hearts of the officials.

Chief Arthur kept himself fully informed of everything that was going on. He expressed himself ready to come to Ofalca at any moment there was the least promise that he could do any good, and he urged the officers of Division



"I'M WINDED, AND CAN'T GO ANY FASTER," PANTED MATT.

No. —01, to see that their men abstained from all unlawful acts. They already commanded the sympathy of their brothers and of the public, and could continue to do so only by patience, self-restraint and an unvarying perseverance in the course followed thus far.

It was a noteworthy fact that the morning express from Ofalca, formerly in charge of Bob Lovell, proved to be the one exception to the frightful disarrangement that prevailed elsewhere. Dick Conklin and his fireman seemed to "take" to the run with remarkable readiness and skill. That the engineer steadily indulged in drink was apparent to all, yet never to the extent of being incapacitated for duty. He left Ofalca and Irondale nearly always on time, and reached each terminus at the moment scheduled. Now and then the express was interfered with by the breakdowns and obstructions on the road, but when this was not the case, the trip was effected with such admirable regularity that it came to be about the only train that received substantial patronage, and was considered safe by passengers.

Superintendent Worthley was delighted with the fact, and commended it as a model for the others, informing the patrons of the road that very soon everything would be conducted in the same unexceptional manner as that line.

As the days passed, Conklin seemed to gather courage, or rather audacity from his immunity and success. He no longer avoided the knots of excited strikers, but gave them taunt for taunt, and declared that the run belonged to him, and that no one of them would ever again be given a show on the road.

Unpopular at first, the dislike of this man deepened. He was openly threatened, and more than once would have been assaulted but for the counsels of cooler heads. Matt Fields warned him that he was inviting trouble and it would surely come, unless he learned to be more careful of his words.

"I have had hard work to hold back some of the boys," said he, "but it is only on the condition that you keep your mouth shut and stop provoking them."

"Bah!" retorted the red-faced engineer; "I aint afraid of the whole gang; you can try bluff, but it won't work with me; I wasn't born in the woods to be scared out by an owl."

"I hope they won't bother you, but if they do, you'll have yourself to blame."

"When I want your help, old man, I'll ask for it."

About half past six o'clock, that same evening, just as Bob Lovell had sat down to tea with his mother and sister, there came a sharp knock at the door. Bob sprang up and answered it himself. Matt Fields stood before him, and, dimly seen in the gathering darkness, was more excited than he had ever known him to be before.

"What's up, Matt?" asked the young engineer in a guarded voice, as he carefully closed the door behind him.

"Get on your overcoat and come with me at once; the——is to pay."

"What do you mean?"

"There's some mischief afoot; I've been trying all the afternoon to find out what it is and only got a hint a few minutes ago. I stopped in at the Hole in the Wall and overheard Saggors and Bilkins in the back room. They didn't see me, but I caught enough to know that an ugly scheme is fixed, and we'll have hard work to stop it."

"I will be with you in a minute," replied Bob, whose keen appetite for his supper had vanished; "will you come in?"

"No; I will wait here; don't let your folks know anything about it."

No need of that warning. When Bob came back into the dining room, his mother and Meta saw no appearance

of any unusual emotion on his part ; and, though his heart was thumping fast, he smiled as he said :

“ I won't be able to stay to tea ; there are some things that must be looked after at once ; I'll be back as soon as I can, but I can't say how soon.”

He leaned over and kissed each in turn.

“ You know, Bob,” said his sister, “ that I expect to stay all night with Evelyn ; her father is very low, and they are in great distress.”

“ I am sorry I can't escort you there, but my business is urgent ; give Evelyn and her folks my sympathy, and say that I remember them all in my prayers, and am anxious to serve them any way I can.”

He kissed them a second time, lingering a moment with his arms about the neck of each, for, somehow or other, the conviction was upon him that he was going into personal danger from which he might not return alive. Matt Fields had not given him any particulars, but there must be some fearful cause for the veteran's agitation, and he would not have made such an earnest appeal to Bob unless a terrible crisis was impending.

His overcoat was quickly donned and buttoned round his athletic frame, and he drew on his gloves while walking through the hall to the front door. Meta ran after him, and called a cheery good-night as he stepped outside and walked off with his burly, broad-shouldered friend. Bob responded affectionately, flinging her a kiss, and laughing as though he were starting out upon some picnic instead of the gravest peril he had ever been called upon to confront.

Running his arm through that of his companion, he said :

“ Now, Matt, tell me what it is.”

“ They're going to lynch Dick Conklin to-night ! ”

“ Great heavens ! ” exclaimed Bob Lovell, stopping short and staring at his companion ; “ are you sure ? ”

"No ; I aint sure they'll *do* it, but I'm sure they're going to try it."

They resumed their walk at a slower pace than before, and, with their arms still interlocked, talked in low, earnest tones.

"I got a hint last night that something was in the wind, but the boys know how you and me feel, and they take mighty good care to keep everything of that sort from us. There are two engineers, among the new men, that are in with 'em and are helping 'em in every way they can. I don't mind *that* much," added Matt, "for I can't feel much pity for the company if so many of their engines are crippled, but, as I was sayin', I seen that something more than usual was in the wind, but try as much as I might I couldn't get any idea of what it was, until I overheard Saggers and Bilkins in the back room of the Hole in the Wall. It happened that they was talkin' right to the p'int, so their words amounted to something. There's a dozen of 'em in it, and they mean to string up Dick Conklin. The blamed fool ! I warned him of the trouble he was sure to bring on himself."

"He is censurable, but this must never be permitted, Matt. Did you pick up anything more?"

"Only a little, but they're going to take him from his engine and string him up to the nearest tree."

"It seems impossible, but you must be right. Saggers and Bilkins are desperate men, especially since they have been drinking, and there are too many others ready to join them in any crime. Now, let us see," said Bob thoughtfully ; "where is Sheriff McMasters?"

"He's down at the Junction."

"If we knew the plans of the conspirators, we could place them under arrest ; but we don't know who are in it besides Saggers and Bilkins, and while we were looking after them, the others might complete the crime."

Bob Lovell was thinking fast.

"They wouldn't dare harm Conklin after his arrival at Ofalca, so they intend to do so at some point down the road. That point can't be far off, for they will have to walk there, so it must be in that stretch of woods three miles out, a little way beyond where Meta and Evelyn came so near being run over."

"I'm blessed if you aint right," exclaimed Matt; "that's the spot, but how are we going to get there?"

"We can travel by the same means that they do. The express is due there twenty-five minutes past seven."

The young man took out his watch and looked at its face by the light of the gas-lamp under which they were walking.

"It's a quarter of seven now; our time is fearfully short and we haven't a minute to spare."

CHAPTER LVII.

TOO LATE!

HAD there been an hour or two at command, Matt Fields and Bob Lovell would have conducted matters differently. They would have appealed to the authorities and had the suspicious men watched or taken into custody, or more likely, would have summoned the clear-headed members of the Division to their help and nipped the tragical scheme in the bud. Fully nine-tenths of the strikers could be counted on to check any such dreadful purpose on the part of their comrades, before the few desperate men could take more than the first step.

But all these obvious plans were unavailable, because there was not a minute to spare to appeal to them. Within three-quarters of an hour, unless prevented, the crime would be consummated.

As they passed the Hole in the Wall, Matt ran across the street, entered hastily and walked to the back room, as if looking for someone.

"Aint Sagers and Bilkins here?" he asked of one of the bartenders, as he wheeled about.

"They went out right after you," was the reply.

"Do you know where they went?"

"Can't say."

Matt darted out the door and across the street to where Bob Lovell was impatiently awaiting him.

"They aint there, and nobody knows where they went," was his remark, as, stepping beside the young man, they resumed their hurried walk.

"Of course not; they're a mile out in the country by this time."

"Bob, 'spose we don't hit the right spot!" suggested the elder.

"Maybe we won't, but we've got to take the chances."

A brief distance, and they reached the westerly limits of Ofalca, through which ran the line of the railway. They would have struck better walking by passing beyond the rails to the turnpike, which has been previously referred to, but the distance was greater and the seconds could not be spared.

It was a keen, cold night, with no snow on the ground. The sky was without a moon, but was clear, and the millions of stars flooded the earth with mild radiance.

Just as they stepped upon the ties, they heard the town clock booming the hour.

"Gracious!" exclaimed the startled Bob, "that's seven o'clock; we've got twenty-five minutes to travel three miles in; can you do it, Matt?"

"It's easy enough for *you*, but purty tough on *me*; I aint used to legging it like that. I say, Bob!"

"What?"

"Have you got a pistol with you?"

"I never carry a weapon."

"Nor me either, but we oughter had 'em with us this time; the only way to handle Saggers and Bilkins and his like is with guns."

"No; I'm glad we haven't anything of the kind; we shall be stronger without them."

"That may be so, but it's blamed hard for me to see how you make it out. But, Bob, it's hard work to talk when we are grabbing ground in this style."

It was soon evident that the old engineer had essayed an impossible task. Twenty-five minutes for three miles may not be very hard work for some folks, but it was too much for him. He was walking so fast that a single point's increase would lift him into a trot, and he was already breathing fast and hard. Bob saw he could not do any better, and he accommodated his pace to his, though he himself might have gone much faster without inconvenience.

As the young engineer hurried along, he used his eyes and ears to the utmost. It seemed to him that he could not be so much to the rear of the party, for Saggers and Bilkins were no more than a quarter of an hour in advance, though fifteen minutes at such a time was likely to decide the question of life or death.

Peering into the gloom ahead, the bright eyes of Bob Lovell failed to detect the most shadowy outlines of any man, nor could the listening ear catch any othersound than that made by their feet on the ties and gravel.

More than once the thought came to him that possibly a mistake had been made in locating the scene of the crime at the small patch of woods three miles out from Ofalca, but the doubt was quickly followed by the conviction that he was right after all, since it was difficult, for reasons already named, that it should be otherwise.

Scant as was the information on which he was proceeding, he believed that the lynching party numbered no more than a dozen, and probably less. He could call most of them by name, and among them were some daring and reckless persons, that were not to be deterred by the presence of any danger, no matter how great.

But it was not to be supposed that they would throw aside all prudence and safeguards in arranging the tragedy. The fact that they had selected this lonely spot, outside of Ofalca, was proof of that. Undoubtedly they contemplated derailing or bringing the express to a halt, for in no other way could they secure possession of the obnoxious Conklin. There was certain to be a large number of passengers in the cars, and the strikers would make sure that none of them was recognized by those people, most of whom had their homes in Ofalca.

Bob Lovell had little opportunity to form his plans, since it was impossible to possess anything more than a general knowledge of those of the lynchers, but he hoped to come upon them before a blow was struck, confident that, though they were in a state of fury, he and Matt could dissuade them from taking the final step.

His reliance was on the express being late. He recalled that it ran with greater regularity than any other train on the road, but it was reasonable to believe that at the end of more than a hundred miles it would be a little behind. If it were tardy ten minutes only, that would be enough, but if it was on time, Matt Fields at least would be unable to reach the spot in time to be of avail in the crisis.

Strange how a perverse fate sometimes intervenes at such crises. Now, it is a law on railways that, while a train is never allowed to leave a station a second ahead of the scheduled time, it is permitted to arrive a few minutes in advance. And thus it came about that the eastern bound express, instead of being late or on time, was

actually five minutes ahead. Perhaps Dick Conklin was fired by the compliments received from Superintendent Worthley into extra efforts to outdo himself.

Bob Lovell and Matt Fields were doing their best in the way of pedestrianism when, to their dismay, they caught the distant sound of the Hercules' whistle, and at the same moment the headlight burst to view like the sudden appearance of Venus in the horizon.

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed the startled Bob, "*we're too late!*"

"I'm winded and can't go any faster," panted Matt.

"Come on as best you can," said the younger. "I must be there."

As he spoke he broke into a run down the track, speedily vanishing in the gloom, while the exhausted Matt labored along like a foundered ship.

The steady glow of the engine's headlight caused Bob to come to a sudden halt after running some distance. Listening intently, he failed to hear the familiar roar that would have reached him had the express been under way.

It had come to a stop! The lynchers were on hand, and Dick Conklin was in their power.

Desperate and almost beside himself, Bob Lovell burst into a dead run over the ties at the risk of falling headlong. The train could not be far off, but as he sped along it seemed as if it were miles distant. Would he ever reach the spot?

Hark! He stopped for an instant and caught the distinct puffing of the Hercules, the sounds showing that she was getting under way again and rapidly increasing her speed.

"They have thought better of their purpose," exclaimed Bob Lovell; "they have allowed him to go."

But he was not entirely rid of the terror that had brought him at such a terrific pace to the spot.

The Hercules was now close at hand, and the young engineer stepped aside from the rails to allow it to pass. It was running quite fast, and, as it came opposite, he looked searchingly at the cab to learn whether the imperiled Conklin was at his post.

He was not ! His fireman was at the throttle, and he was the only man in the cab ! Dick Conklin was missing !

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE ACCOUNT SETTLED.

ON that eventful night Dick Conklin spun from the eastward with a speed which, as we have shown, brought him to the small stretch of woods just outside of Ofalca, five minutes ahead of time. He was contemplating, with no little exultation, his arrival at the terminus earlier than it had ever been accomplished, when just ahead he caught the red glimmer of a danger signal.

He was always on the watch for warnings of that nature, and he instantly shut off steam, applied the brakes, and gave a single blast from the whistle, to notify whoever displayed the signal that he saw it and desired to know the cause.

He was barely able to bring the Hercules to a halt just before reaching the light, but failed to catch sight of any person near the spot.

"That's queer !" he muttered to his fireman ; "take hold of her, while I find out what it means."

As his assistant stepped into his place, the engineer slipped down from the engine and ran toward the lantern. He was hopeful that it meant nothing serious, and was anxious to accomplish his famous run to Ofalca with the least possible delay.

At the moment he reached the pilot, and was in the act

of stepping over the rails to approach the signal, less than a dozen paces away, several men seemed to leap up from the ground and, without a word, seized him. He resisted fiercely, but was quickly overpowered, while a rough hand, placed over his mouth, prevented any outcry. The astounded fireman was staring at the shadowy figures, when one of them hastily withdrew from the group, and, leaping upon the engine, said in a husky voice :

“Run this train into the station, and, if you say a word about what you have seen, you will be a dead man within an hour ! Tell them your engineer was drunk and fell off his engine.”

The fireman was too terrified to make any reply. The face of the man who addressed this startling command to him was blackened so that his features could not be recognized. The other had learned enough about the Hercules during his short apprenticeship to be able to obey the order, and, without a word, he opened the throttle and started forward, the stop having been so brief that not another person on the train suspected the real cause.

There were eight men concerned in the tragedy, all powerful, determined, and merciless. Everyone had drunk enough to quench his natural moral nature, and, to use a common expression, they meant business from the beginning.

Dick Conklin understood the meaning of the demonstration the moment he caught sight of the blackened faces and felt himself seized. He knew it was a conflict for his life, and he struck and kicked and fought like a tiger, knocking two of the men down before he was fully mastered.

But there was no escaping his captors. His arms and legs were held so that he could not use them, and, lifting him bodily from the ground, they hurried down the slight embankment to a large tree, from which a strong limb projected less than a dozen feet above their heads.

"Now, say your prayers," said one of the lynchers ; " and cut them short ! "

"I haint got any prayers to say," growled Conklin ; " but what are you goin' to do with me ? "

"String you up ! "

"What for ? "

"'Cause you aint fit to live ; if you hadn't been so free with your taunts and slurs we might have spared you, but you deserve hanging, on general principles."

Instead of begging for his life, as the disguised vigilantes evidently expected, their victim became sullen. He stood on his feet like some fierce wild beast, from whom all hope has departed.

"Zach," said one of the men, using a fictitious name, "climb up and slip the rope over the limb ; I'll fix it about his neck. Have you got anything to say before we swing you off ? "

"Nothin', only that you're a set of cowards," replied Conklin, adding several ugly imprecations. He was as much under the influence of liquor as any of his captors, else he would have fallen on his knees and begged to be spared.

"We don't care for your opinion either way," said the other, "and would rather have your curses than your blessings."

But, if Dick Conklin was unwilling to ask for mercy, he was not prepared to yield without a final struggle. He was standing erect, with his arms and legs free, but with seven men grouped around him, while the eighth was climbing the tree. At the moment the speaker advanced to place the noose about his neck, he made a sudden bound and started for the railway track, shouting "Murder !" at the top of his voice. Could he have gained a few paces' start, he might have got away, but his captors were prepared for such an attempt, and, before he was fairly started, he was

tripped and fell flat on his face. Several sprang upon him, and were still struggling, all in a heap, when Bob Lovell reached the spot, bursting upon them like a cyclone.

"Madmen! fools! drunken brutes!" he roared in the height of passion, "what are you trying to do?"

As he thundered out the furious words, he gripped one of the men by the throat and flung him headlong fully ten feet. A second was kicked after him, as though he were a football, and flirting back his unbuttoned overcoat, he placed himself astride of the prostrate wretch, and throwing up his fists like a professional pugilist, said:

"You cowards! Before you can harm a hair of his head you must kill me!"

The explosion of a bombshell could not have caused more dismay among the lynchers than did the arrival and action of Bob Lovell. Everyone recognized him in the gloom by the sound of his voice, and they stood for a moment stupefied and irresolute.

The young engineer was quick enough to take advantage of their indecision, which was liable at any moment to culminate in an attack on him.

"I know you," he added, "and if you doubt it I will call your names! If you lay hand again on this man, I will see that everyone of you is hanged as you deserve to be. I am not the only man here; Matt Fields is right behind me. We'll fight the whole pack of curs; but you needn't wait for him! I'm ready, and dare you to attack me! Do you hear? I dare you to come on, and I don't want Conklin to raise his hand. Stay where you are!" he ordered, feeling the fellow striving to rise to his feet; "I'm not afraid of a hundred such drunken scoundrels!"

The fellow who had climbed to the limb softly braced himself in that position and prayed that he would not be noticed. Softly drawing up the rope, he flung it as far as

he could in the opposite direction, and then wished he was somewhere else.

"We don't want to hurt you," finally spoke the leader of the party; "but you're the last one that ought to defend the like of him."

"I would defend a mad dog against such miscreants as you," was the scornful reply. "You have flagged a train; played a trick to get him off the engine, and then the whole lot of you pounced upon him. Suppose I hadn't arrived and you had hanged him, the crime would have been proven on all of you; the strikers would have stood disgraced before the country, and a lot of innocent men compelled to suffer because of the doings of eight sneaking poltroons!"

At this moment the tramp of Matt Fields was heard, as, guided by the sound of voices, he waddled toward the spot. He had forced himself beyond what he believed was his ability, and reached the scene so exhausted that he could hardly stand.

"How—how—are things?" he gasped, leaning against the tree for support; "jus' hold things still—till—till I git breath, and I'll jine in on the chorus!"

Singular that this grotesque outburst should produce the effect it did, but even Bob Lovell was conscious of a momentary revulsion of feeling, which needed to have been but slightly stronger to cause him to laugh outright. As it was, several of the lynchers did give way to mirth, which never seemed more out of place than at that dreadful moment.

Dick Conklin, realizing that he was rescued, made another effort to climb to his feet, and, stepping aside, Bob Lovell allowed him to do so. The others, too, were almost sobered by the exciting turn that had been given to the business. True, like criminals, when driven to a corner, they might have precipitated themselves upon the young engineer and the weak, panting foreman and sent them to keep company

with the man whom they wished to lynch, but savage and fierce as was their resentment, there was not one among them who could have been persuaded to harm a hair on the head of either Bob Lovell or Matt Fields.

Besides, there is a possibility that they felt a well defined suspicion that if they undertook such a contract, they might find themselves unable to "deliver the goods."

"I don't suppose," said the man that had done the speaking for the lynchers, and who was recognized by Fields and Bob as Bilkins, "that it *is* the square thing to jump on a chap in this style, but he's a mighty mean cuss, and we only wanted to give him a good scare for the way he's been acting."

"Didn't you really mean to hang him?" asked Bob Lovell, lowering his hands.

"Bless your heart, no! Do you suppose we're such fools as *that*?"

Bob knew this was downright lying, but it isn't always prudent to let a man know you doubt his word. It was best for all parties concerned that the disavowal should be accepted.

By this time Matt Fields had partly recovered his wind.

"Haven't you ever heard that it's carrying a joke too far to hang a man?"

"It *is* pretty rough, we'll admit, but suppose we let it go at that; I'm satisfied," growled Dick Conklin, who certainly had every reason to feel thus over the conclusion of the matter; "it did shake me up pretty well, but I'll agree to say nothing about it to anyone, if you folks wish it."

"That'll suit us; I don't suppose there's any need of our staying any longer?" he remarked inquiringly to Bob Lovell.

"No; go back to Ofalca; wash that black stuff off your faces; keep away from the drinking saloons, and get to bed as soon as you can."

During this striking interview, the only member of the lynching party that opened his mouth was Bilkins. Inasmuch as he had started in as spokesman, his companions were quite willing to leave that business to him, thus helping to screen them from detection. Mighty glad of the permission given them to depart, they eagerly followed their leader to the railway track, and were soon lost in the gloom in the direction of Ofalca.

The member who was perched in the tree, believing he had not been observed, attempted to slide down the opposite side without detection, but the task was too difficult, and, missing connections, he dropped flat on his back with a thump that forced a loud grunt from him.

"That identifies *you*," said Bob Lovell, recognizing the fellow as Saggars, "though I won't call you by name just now, but it depends on how you conduct yourself whether I do so hereafter. Trot along after the rest and try to be a good boy."

"My blessing go with you, sonny," added Matt Fields, extending his hand in a fatherly way, and speaking freely now that his breath had fully come back to him.

The man cheerfully obeyed orders, disappearing like the rest in the direction of Ofalea.

The three that were left behind did not speak again until the last of the party were beyond sight and hearing. Then it was Dick Conklin who broke the silence :

"They may say all they choose, but if their minds wasn't set on hanging me, then my name isn't Dick Conklin."

"Of course," said Matt ; "five minutes later and you would have been strung up."

"In less time than that. That fellow that climbed the tree took a rope with him to put around the limb, and the one who done the talking started to place it about my neck. I made a rush, but they tripped me, and I was trying to get away when Mr. Lovell arrived."

"Yes, and he saved your life."

"There's no doubt of it."

"I warned you," continued Matt, "that you would bring trouble on yourself by taunting the boys, but you thought you knowed best."

"It all come from my drinking," added Conklin, who, like his enemies, had been completely sobered by his experience; "and I have took my last drop."

"Did you recognize any of them?" asked Bob Lovell.

"No; their faces were blackened, so I wouldn't know them in the daytime, let alone at night. The voice of the one who done the talking sounded familiar, I thought, but I can't place him."

"It is just as well," said Bob, who, stepping in front of the man he had rescued, added impressively: "Dick, you have been the meanest man I ever knew. Shortly after you began serving under me as fireman, I saw you walking along the street late at night with Superintendent Worthley. He is my enemy, and I knew at once you were playing the spy on me. I said nothing, but on the night I got off of my engine at Dead Man's Hollow, you tried to leave me behind, and would have done so but for the soaped tracks, by which I was enabled to overtake you. You sent a report of the occurrence to the superintendent, who would have discharged me therefor, but for a friend that prevented it. I notified you, when I had become fully convinced of your treachery and ingratitude, that I would settle the account with you, and I have kept my word?"

To the surprise of Bob Lovell he found he was standing in the presence of two weeping men. Matt Fields was not ashamed to place both of his horny hands to his face, and, after sobbing a minute or two, he said, in a tremulous voice:

"This beats anything I ever seen or heard tell of. Bob, if you only had wings, you would be an angel!"

It took Dick Conklin longer to master his emotions. When he attempted to speak, he broke down once or twice.

"I feel," said he, "as though I wished they had hanged me, and done with it; I aint fit to live."

"Then, certainly, you are not fit to die," said Bob Lovell sternly, though it cost him a hard effort, too, to retain command of himself.

"I have done all you say, and I don't think a meaner man ever lived; Superintendent Worthley offered to pay me for all the bad reports I could bring him about you; he *did* pay me for my trick of running away from you, when you got off to lick that ghost; he urged me to stay in the Division, and bring the secrets to him; he done all he could to make me hate you. But, Bob Lovell, you have conquered; I love you, and ask you whether you will give me your hand?"

"With all my heart," said the young engineer; "on the condition that you give me your pledge never again to take a drop of liquor, for I cannot help believing you would have treated me better but for that."

"I swear that, with the help of Heaven, I will never touch the accursed stuff again," said Dick Conklin, still clasping Bob's hand, and looking reverently upward as he uttered the words.

"And further, I will never set foot on the Hercules until you hold the throttle, nor will I do another day's work for the road until the strike is ended."

"And being now that my wind has come back to me," remarked Matt Fields, "let's go home; I'm as hungry as a bear."

"I begin to feel that way myself," laughed Bob, falling into line, "for you called me away before I could finish my tea."

CHAPTER LIX.

BUDD STEEN.

“ I TELL you it was the strangest experience I ever had, and it has given me all the running I want on this road till things get into the right kind of shape.”

It was the fireman of the Hercules, who was talking to a group of the strikers that had gathered at the round house to persuade him to quit work.

“ How was it ? ” asked one of the interested party.

“ Why, Dick was anxious to run in ahead of time, and things was humming. I had just finished shoveling in a lot of coal, and looked up, when he wasn't there ! I was alone in the cab.”

“ What had become of him ? ”

“ That's what I'd like to know. You see, Dick has been drinking purty hard since this trouble begun, and had a good jag on after leaving the Junction—carried it with him. I think he was leaning out the cab and lost his balance.”

“ Why didn't you stop and look for him ? ”

“ Well, you see, I've been serving only a short time, and hain't got the hang of an engine yet, and I wasn't sure I knowed how to manage the business. I was afeared of an awful accident, so I let them go ahead, and contrived to fetch the Hercules into the station all right. Then the place where I missed Dick is so near by that we can go out and search for him.”

“ No need of that. *Here he is !* ”

It was Dick Conklin himself, who strode into the round house, sober, and laughing. The others surveyed him wonderingly, while the fireman, who was trying so hard to keep his secret, stared as if he could not believe the evidence of his own eyes.

"I don't want to go through a scrape like that again," said the engineer, as he joined the company. "It aint often a fellow is as lucky as me, and saves his neck by such a narrer chance."

This was truer than his hearers suspected, and though they had little liking for the man, they felt relieved that he had not met his death in the shocking, and, it may be said, unprofessional manner of falling out of his cab window.

"Boys," added Dick, "from this time forward I'm with you! That was a warning to-night. I don't run another engine on this road till the strike is over."

"And I'm with you, too," added the fireman, with a significant look at his engineer; "no more for me."

This outspoken course restored the two men at once to the good graces of the strikers, who shook them by the hand, and assured them that their action would help materially in forcing matters to a conclusion.

Dick Conklin completed his programme by going to the office of the superintendent and informing him of his decision. Bob Lovell and Matt Fields advised this as being manly and proper.

Young Worthley was surprised, but, reading in the demeanor of the engineer his earnestness, he remarked that he was relieved to hear his decision, since there was a good deal of complaint of the way in which the express was run, and he was on the point of placing it in charge of Budd Steen, one of the new men, who had served several years on a western road, and whose skill could not be doubted.

The new arrangement went into effect the following morning. Budd Steen was a black-eyed, smooth-faced man, under forty years of age, with an alert, wide-awake manner. He was very tall, active and muscular, and since his arrival in Ofalca had been running the principal freight line. True, he had met with a number of accidents in-

volving considerable loss to the company, but so far as the matter could be investigated, he was in no way blamable.

His fireman was a heavy, thick-set young fellow, of some experience, and was an old acquaintance, having accompanied the engineer from some point in the west. They were on the best of terms, and it looked as if Superintendent Worthely had taken a wise step in placing them in charge of the Hercules and the day express.

The express left Ofalca on time, carrying more than a hundred passengers, for, as has been stated, it had become quite a favorite with the people whose business called them westward. Everything went along smoothly, Budd Steen having become so well acquainted with the road during his brief service that he required little piloting. Just before reaching Jigtown, however, the key worked out of the right piston rod, and the cylinder head, as a consequence was knocked out.

While this crippled the engine to some extent, it did not prevent it making pretty fair time to the Junction, where the arrival was a half hour late. Trending then more to the west, the bridges over Wolf Gulch and Little Gypsy were safely passed, when an eccentric on the other side broke, and the Hercules was totally disabled, with Irondale ten miles away and no telegraph office nearer than that town. If the passengers would wait where they were, the express would soon be missed and relief despatched, but in the disorganized condition of things, several hours were likely to pass before an engine arrived to take them to Irondale.

A train full of passengers are not among the most patient people in the world, and the complaints and denunciations showered upon the head of Superintendent Worthely ought to have made his ears tingle, as they probably would have done, had he been able to hear them.

More than one-half the passengers started to walk to

Irondale, but had gone less than half a mile when they became frightened by a furious snow-storm. It looked as if it would continue all day, but just as they reached the cars again, the squall ceased, and the sun shone more brightly than ever.

Then all were angered because they had returned, but plunging into the cars, vowed they would stay there a week before repeating the attempt.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, when, far down the road, puffing steam was discerned, and the hungry crowd were relieved to know that relief at last was about to reach them. The Irondale office had learned that the express was lost not far from town, and an exploring expedition was organized to make search. This was in the shape of a heavy coal engine, capable, when put to its best, of running some thirty miles an hour.

Approaching head first, it was obliged to back toward Irondale, which point was reached between three and four o'clock, much to the relief of Superintendent Worthley, who had been anxiously inquiring about the train for hours. He instructed the officials at that point to do their best to provide a first-class engine to bring back the express, which should not leave Irondale a second late, since any mishap on the east-bound trip would destroy the confidence the people were beginning to feel in that particular train.

As the best that could be done, Budd Steen was given one of the handsome new engines, recently purchased. It was becoming the fashion to indicate locomotives by numbers instead of names, and this was known as 49. It was one of the finest on the road, and, in the little spins that it had been given, acquitted itself so well that it was ranked as without a superior.

Forty-nine steamed off in fine style, but had made only a few miles, when it began developing an amazing tendency to "foam"—that is the water in the boiler, instead

of remaining honest water or genuine steam, persisted in being neither, but, became frothy, a threatening condition to which new locomotives are liable.

In fact, it looked as if somebody had placed considerable soap in the tender, and Budd Steen declared that if the foaming got much worse he would have to cease running and draw his fires, otherwise a burnt engine might result. As it was, he dropped to a tardy pace, reaching the Junction at precisely nine o'clock, which was an average of ten miles an hour from Irondale.

By this time, 49 was doing a little better, but the engineer informed the impatient passengers who came forward to inquire the cause of the trouble, that the only way to reach their destination was by proceeding with the utmost caution. Even such a course was no guarantee that serious trouble was not ahead. Thereupon, the awed people placed themselves as near the extreme rear of the train as they could, prayed that the trip might be completed without accident, and mentally resolved that, if they were spared to reach home, they would never patronize the I. & O. again.

While caution should mark every step taken by a railway engineer, no infallible safeguard has yet been discovered against accident. It was eleven o'clock, when 49 steamed over Dead Man's Hollow, with Ofalca still a long way in advance, but with the prospect of reaching it shortly after midnight.

By this time, snow had begun falling and it had grown extremely cold. There was an abundance of fuel in the cars when they left Irondale, enough indeed for two ordinary trips, but the train had already been on the road long enough to cover a double run, and there wasn't a pound of coal left in the boxes at the end of the cars where the "death dealing stoves" were located. The people, however, gathered their wraps around them, sat close together

and did their utmost to keep warm, trying hard to console themselves with the reflection that they would soon be in their comfortable homes in Ofalca and able to forget their dismal experience.

Matters were in this form when the coldest shiver of all passed over the passengers, at the consciousness that the train was again coming to a standstill. Someone was heard under the forward car pounding at the brakes, but it lasted only a few minutes, when hope was renewed by the starting forward of the train.

Fate, however, seemed to be toying with its victims on that chilly autumn night. Forty-nine was hardly under way when it left the track, dragging the tender and express car after it.

No more favorable spot could have been selected for a mishap of that nature. The ground was level, so that, although the trucks and drivers of 49 plunged deep into the yielding earth, it did not capsize or fall on its side, and the engineer and fireman received only a moderate shaking up.

Nevertheless the engine and train were done for the night. It was impossible to get 49 on the rails without help, and after passing round the leaning monster with his lantern, and peering at the ponderous wheels and trucks, slewed around and out of shape, Budd Steen made no effort to accomplish that which was clearly impossible.

"We've got to stay here all night," he said, "and you must make the best of it; we've considerable coal on the tender, and as we can't use it, the passengers are welcome to it all."

In the morning, a train was made up at Ofalca, and running down to the scene of the mishap, brought away the passengers who were in as miserable, wretched and exasperated a state as it is possible to imagine.

It was not until the afternoon of the same day that 49 was dragged back on the rails, one of which had snapped

in two, and caused the mishap. During that period all travel and freight were stopped in both directions, and the most annoying block of the strike occurred.

It was on the same day, about noon, that a light broke in upon Matt Fields. He had been convinced from the first that among the new men were several in active sympathy with the strikers, and that while they were ostensibly in the employ of the company, they were doing everything possible against its interests.

He was now satisfied that the name of the principal engineer playing this rôle was Budd Steen.

CHAPTER LX.

FROM THE "ILLUSTRATED RADIATOR."

“THE strike of the employees on the Irondale and Ofalca Railway is attracting general attention throughout the country, and possesses some unique features worthy of record.

“A special correspondent and staff artist of *The Radiator* visited the scene last week, and his sketches of the stirring incidents are furnished the readers of this issue of our paper. *The Radiator* always aims to be impartial in its accounts of matters in which the public is interested, and our representative has performed his duty in a manner worthy of all praise.

“The I. & O. had for its superintendent, until last year, Mr. Cavarly Worthley, a gentleman of ability, worth and skill, and admirably fitted in every respect for the responsible situation. The duties of the office, however, pressed so hard upon Mr. Worthley that his health broke down, and he died abroad. He was succeeded by his son, Lloyd Montague Worthley, who had served as the assistant of his father for a considerable period preceding the death of the latter.

“Upon the assumption of the office of superintendent, this young man was evidently fired by an ambition to place the wealthy corporation ahead of all rivals, and the methods he pursued were, to say the least, original to a striking degree. The company very properly decided to lay a double track, purchase a large amount of rolling stock, and inaugurate a series of improvements fully warranted by its rapidly increasing business. The veriest tyro in railway matters will see in this commendable step the surest means of adding to the wealth and resources of a corporation whose stock has long been above par. It was, in other words, a wise investment, sure of bringing ample returns.

“Common sense will also see that this occasion was the very one which the company should have used to secure the hearty co-operation and good will of their employees by pursuing a liberal course toward them. There are railway companies which we could name that have taken just such opportunities to add a little, by way of compensation, to the men for the extra work rendered necessary at their hands. But Superintendent Worthley is built on an original plan, and prides himself on being different from other railway superintendents. His first step was to order a wholesale reduction of fifteen per cent. in the pay of the engineers, and ten per cent. in that of the firemen, conductors and brakemen, the head officials nobly setting the example by consenting to a cut of twenty per cent. on their liberal salaries.

“The I. & O. are favored with a body of intelligent and faithful servants, who have showed better sense and more self-restraint than could have been expected under the circumstances.

“Had the company made the reduction less, or had it made it for a specified time, with the promise of restoration to the old rates when business warranted it (in fact, we have shown that there was no justification at all for the scaling down), the employees would have accepted the

hardship without protest. But, as we have stated, Superintendent Worthley does business in a way peculiarly original with himself. The committee appointed to call upon him to discuss the situation was headed by Robert Lovell, one of the most intelligent and capable men that ever handled the throttle of a locomotive. This is the young gentleman who, by one of the most brilliant exploits ever known, rescued the daughter of President Walbridge and his own sister from seemingly certain death, and who, but a short time ago, saved a runaway engine and its crazy engineer from destruction. Mr. Lovell is as modest as he is brilliant intellectually, and enjoys the friendship and respect of everyone who knows him, with the possible exception of Superintendent Worthley. The latter deliberately insulted him when he attempted to speak for the aggrieved men. The committee withdrew, but, hoping that some means could be found to avert the calamity of a general strike, appealed to Chief Arthur. That excellent gentleman instantly came from his home in Cleveland, and, first of all, sought an interview with President Walbridge. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Walbridge was prostrated on a bed of sickness, and at this moment is in an exceedingly critical state of health.

“Mr. Arthur then presented himself at the office of Superintendent Worthley. He attempted to submit the case of the men as courteously as possible, but he, too, was not only insulted, but ordered from the presence of the youth. Preserving his self-command, and hoping that the individual who, through the inscrutable orderings of Providence, just now is entrusted with the interests of the I. & O., would think better of the situation, after being allowed time for his temper to cool, he addressed him a temperate letter from Cleveland. The reply was curt, and demonstrated that all hope of a compromise with the I. & O. was at an end.

“Under the circumstances there was but one course for the employees to pursue. The Division of Locomotive Engineers located in Ofalca was given permission to order a strike, and, on the first of the present month, the date when the wholesale cut in their wages went into effect, they stopped work.

“No train was abandoned on the road. Six o'clock, the hour set for the men to go out, found Bob Lovell fairly started from Irondale on the run eastward with the express. He took it into Ofalca on time, saw that his engine was in the round-house and properly looked after, and then he and his fireman quietly quit work. It was the same everywhere, the men conducting themselves like gentlemen, and carefully refraining from doing the least injury to the property of the corporation which displayed such small consideration for them. Up to the present writing this commendable course of the employees has continued. They have won the sympathy and respect of all right thinking men everywhere, and it is to be hoped that the lamentable condition of affairs will remain unmarred by any act of violence on the part of those who have received the best cause in the world for withdrawing their service from their employers.

“Superintendent Worthley welcomed the struggle, and proclaimed that he would teach the employees a much needed lesson. He imported a large number of men and set them at work, but it cannot be said with very encouraging results. As is invariably the case, the majority of the newcomers were incompetent and many of them were addicted to drink, and had all manner of bad habits. The better portion, on learning the real condition of affairs, refused to take the places offered them. The inevitable consequences followed. No trains ran with any regularity, engines have been damaged or utterly ruined, property destroyed, business paralyzed, and damages inflicted amount-

ing to many thousand dollars—far more than can be replaced in a year by the reduction of wages. The present order of things needs to continue but a brief time longer to result in a loss to the company from which it will be impossible to recover in years.

“And for this deplorable result, one man alone is responsible. The name of that extraordinary individual is Lloyd Montague Worthley, Superintendent of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway. How it is the directors of that corporation permit this monumental nincompoop to lead them by the nose to the bow wows, is one of those questions beyond the power of the average man to answer.

“Superintendent Worthley furnished our correspondent with the particulars of his young life, and his comet-like career, with the expectation that it would appear in *The Radiator*. We have read the notes with great interest, but find only one striking fact, which is his actual election to succeed his worthy father in the active control of the interests of the I. & O. railway. This is another impressive illustration of the claim that the best of men are generally the fathers of the most degenerate children.

“Superintendent Worthley wishes to be considered the Young Napoleon of railways. Since he is using every effort to bring the I. & O. to its Waterloo, he needs to be let alone only a brief while longer to secure *that* title to the honor.

“But there is a serious side to this question. We cannot conceive it possible that such an important corporation as the Irondale and Ofalca Company will allow this notoriously incompetent young man to ruin utterly its interests. There must be enough sensible directors left to bring Superintendent Worthley up with a round turn, and deprive him of the power which should never have been entrusted to such incompetent hands.

“The alert directors of the Inverwick & Quitman Railway Company will not be slow to perceive the golden oppor-

tunity placed at their disposal by Superintendent Worthley. Although the two lines are not parallel, yet both extend easterly into one of the richest sections of our country. The distance between the eastern termini, Ofalca and Quitman, is not great, and there are few engineering difficulties in the way of extending a branch, which would effectually tap the I. & O., and withdraw from it a patronage in the way of freight and passengers that would never gravitate again to the I. & O. We are sure that President Horton has perceived the tempting chance, and his energy and farsightedness will not allow it to remain long unimproved. Possibly, however, that is the object sought by Superintendent Worthley, who is entitled to a handsome bonus for playing so effectively into the hands of a rival corporation."

One hundred copies of *The Illustrated Radiator*, containing the foregoing, reached Ofalca, after a number of vexatious delays, directed to Superintendent Worthley and marked C. O. D. Locking the door of his office, he eagerly unfastened the bundle, and sat down to peruse the sketch of himself. We cannot attempt to depict his emotions while thus engaged. Let us draw a veil over the scene.

The proprietors of the enterprising journal despatched a dozen copies each to Bob Lovell, Matt Fields and the officers of the Division, No. 1. The alert correspondent had secured the names of the directors and the same number of copies was forwarded to everyone of them.

This was a stroke of business sure to produce speedy and marked results.

CHAPTER LXI.

AN IMPORTANT MEETING OF THE DIRECTORS OF THE I. & O.

IT need not be said that each one to whom a copy of *The Radiator* was sent, read the account of the great strike. But while they enjoyed, without exception, the caustic

reference to Superintendent Worthley, it was the last paragraph that stung the directors and sent a shiver of alarm down the spine of every man who had a moneyed interest in the corporation, for it was a warning, too pointed to be mistaken, that unless a radical change was made at once, the interests of the I. & O. would be injured beyond possibility of recovery.

The strike had continued over a week, and it was inevitable that every day of disorganization, loss and exasperation should awaken distrust on the part of those that had given the young superintendent unlimited power to do as he chose. They could not be insensible to the just complaints of passengers and shippers, and, instead of the speedy improvements and victory that Worthley had promised, matters were going from bad to worse.

Besides, there had been sharp intimations from the postal authorities of a heavy forfeit for the failure to transport the United States mails regularly and without interruption. Our great and glorious government is inclined to be particular in such things.

Seven of the eleven directors of the I. & O. joined in a call for a special meeting on the second evening succeeding the sad experience of the express train in charge of Budd Steen, and every one of them was present at eight o'clock in the office of the superintendent. It was noteworthy that each, without exception, carried in his pocket a copy of *The Radiator* containing the account of the strike. The faces of the men showed that they were anxious and had met on important business.

Superintendent Worthley was all smiles and courtesy. He had provided a box of cigars for the directors, and as each filed into the handsome office, he shook him warmly by the hand and showed him to a seat, accompanying the act with inquiries as to his health and that of his family.

But there was no disposition for trifling. Mr. Spriggens

was one of the largest stockholders in the company, a charter member, and had been a director from the organization. He lived a number of miles back in the country, and his appearance suggested the proverbial granger ; but, though somewhat uncouth in speech, he possessed an extremely level head, and having opposed the reduction in the pay of the employees from the first, it was not necessary to stultify himself in order to attack the policy that had been adopted against his judgment and protest.

As soon as the brief formalities of the opening were finished, Mr. Spriggens plunged into business.

"I j'ined in this call," said he, "for the reason that I've made up my mind that it's about time something was done. If things go on this way much longer, we'll all land in the poorhouse."

"Oh, I hope not as bad as that," said Worthley with a smile, while the others looked glum. They were unable to see anything mirthful in the situation.

"*You're* the one that will land us there," said Mr. Spriggens pointedly, "if you go on in this way."

The superintendent, seeing clearly that the sentiment of the directors was against him, felt it would not do to delay his defense longer.

"In a difficulty of this kind, it is unavoidable that there should be some annoyances and inconvenience, but we are fighting for a principle——"

"The principle of making men work for less than they're worth, I 'spose is what you mean," interrupted a red-faced director behind Mr. Spriggens, who looked around and nodded his head in approval.

"It isn't that," continued the superintendent, flushing slightly, but well aware of the need of keeping his temper ; "the great outlays required by the double track, the purchase of stock, and the many improvements, render this step necessary."

"I want to ask," said Mr. Spriggens, "how long you calculated it will take to finish the double track?"

"The contractors have agreed to have it completed by the first of next July."

"Our business promises to increase right straight along, and when it is finished it will just boom?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And by that time we'll be able to pay the men the same wages as before?"

"Either at that time or very soon after."

"Then why didn't you tell the committee so when they came to see you?"

"Well, I hadn't any authority."

"Pshaw! You could have took it just as you've took the authority to do a thunderin' sight more than ever we meant you should do; aint that so, gentlemen?"

"Yes, sir," "It is," "Of course," and similar assents, accompanied by the nodding of heads, encouraged Mr. Spriggens to believe he was following the right line.

The young superintendent could not fail to see that he would have to descend from the high pedestal on which he had stood for the past week.

"If it is the wish of the directors that the men shall be notified that their old wages will be restored on the first of next July, I will be glad so to inform them."

"I don't believe it will do any good," remarked another director.

"Why not?" asked Worthley.

"If you had said that to the committee when they came to you, there wouldn't have been any strike, and I don't believe they'll accept those terms now."

The superintendent rose to his feet with all the impressiveness of which he was master.

"Gentlemen, if you had had the experience that I have in railway matters——"

"We wouldn't have ruined the company."

"You would take a broader view of this trouble. It is indispensable that discipline should prevail among the employees, otherwise we shall soon have them dictating to us. If we accede to their terms now, we shall soon have another strike."

"So we order, if you try any more of your tricks."

"They will demand an increase of pay——"

"I don't believe a word of such stuff," interrupted Mr. Spriggens, with a snuff of contempt; "we haven't got that kind of men; they are satisfied with their wages, and I don't think they get a darned cent more than they oughter; do you agree with me, gentlemen?" he demanded, looking around in the faces of his associates, who nodded their heads as vigorously as before.

"There aint a train running as it oughter; passengers are afraid to trust themselves to the road. My wife and darter near friz to death night afore last, after taking half the day to ride to Irondale. People daresn't ship their goods for they don't know as they'll ever git to where they're sent. Ingines is breaking down, cars going to rot, and the old boy is to pay generally."

"But that will all be speedily remedied," said the superintendent in his blandest manner; "we must give the new men a little time to get acquainted with their duties."

"They must be learning mighty fast, when things is wuss to-day than they've been since the strike started."

"We have the law behind us, and all we've got to do is to keep a stiff upper lip——"

"What do you want to keep a stiff upper lip for?"

"To make the men come to us and accept our terms."

"We don't want 'em to do that, and they would be blasted fools if they did. See here, younker," said Mr. Spriggens, leaning forward in his chair and shaking his finger at the superintendent on the other side of the table,

“can you tell how much loss this company has already suffered?”

“Well, I can't say exactly——”

“*I kin*, that is near enough for our purposes,” said the angry farmer, drawing a folded piece of paper from his coat pocket. “I've got the figgers here. In the fust place, 'spose you had kept all the men at work for a year, how much more would it have cost than if you cut down their wages as you tried to do?”

The superintendent had done a great deal of figuring on that question, and he promptly responded:

“Why, sir, this reduction will save the company more than fifty thousand dollars a year.”

“Or in other words,” continued Mr. Spriggens, adjusting his spectacles, “about a thousand dollars a week. The strike has been going on for a week and a half, so that the cut in wages would have saved us fifteen hundred dollars for that time.”

While talking, he unfolded the paper and, hitching his chair to the table, spread it out before him. He had evidently conned the figures, for, pointing his stubby forefinger at them for a moment, he said:

“These figgers I got from that young engineer, Bob Lovell, and Matt Fields. Bob Lovell teaches a Sunday-school class in our church, and anybody that says he'll lie, I'll lick, for all I'm a deacon in the church.”

Deacon Spriggens looked around as if challenging anyone present to take up the matter, but one of them echoed the sentiment of all when he said:

“Go ahead and let us know what that statement is.”

“There have been two engines so badly hurt that they're about spiled and will have to be made over from stem to stern; there is six others that have been damaged like—like thunder, though that aint down here; there is more

that have been hurt not quite so much; there has been the loss from passengers and freight and lots of other things, all of which foot up over forty thousand dollars! There you are, gentlemen," said the deacon, snatching off his glasses, leaning back in his chair and looking savage enough to assault the entire party. "Everything isn't down here. When you come to take inter account the losses that we've got to stand afore we can get things back into shape, not forgettin' some heavy penalties from the government for the failure to carry the mails through on time, you can set down the cost of this week's amusement at one hundred thousand dollars; you'll have to whistle for your dividends for a year or two to come, and I think we orter feel proud of our new superintendent."

It would be hard to conceive a more trying situation than that of Lloyd Montague Worthley. Before the assembling of the directors, he had anticipated the views that would be expressed, and prepared himself so fully that he was confident of bringing all or a majority of them to his support. But the course of Mr. Spriggens took the wind from his sails, and, with a chagrin and humiliation that cannot be described, he foresaw the inevitable action of the governing body.

He tried to look unconcerned, or rather undisturbed, but he never suffered keener mental torture than during that memorable meeting. He would have delighted to bluff those men whom he hated with an intensity they never dreamed of, and there was only one consideration that prevented him from rising then and there and offering his resignation as superintendent.

That was the certainty that it would be accepted off-hand.

"But that aint the wust of it," continued Mr. Spriggens, refolding the paper, showing it back in his pocket, and, producing the abominated copy of *The Radiator*, which,

as it seemed to Worthley when he went on the streets, was in the hands of every person.

"I want to read you an extract of a notice of our superintendent."

Thereupon Mr. Spriggens read in a clear, though hesitating voice, the last paragraph, with which the reader is familiar.

"That's a purty state of affairs. Now, I won't say that Mr. Worthley here wants to help t'other road, but I *do* say he is doing it."

"I was talking with Mr. Horton yesterday," said one of the directors, speaking for the first time; "he had a copy of that paper, and was laughing over it."

"What did he say?" asked Mr. Spriggens, noticing his hesitation.

"Well, he said he supposed our superintendent was elected because he was the son of his father, whom he respected and held in the highest esteem when he was alive, but unless he was checked at once he would ruin the road."

"Did he say anything about building a branch from Quitman to this place?"

"I asked him about that, but couldn't get any satisfaction from him. He told me to be patient, and we would see."

A more terrifying remark than this could not have been framed. The alarmed directors saw in it a distinct threat to do the very thing they dreaded above all others, and which was certain to inflict incalculable injury on their road.

"Mr. Chairman," said Spriggens, facing toward him, "I move that the superintendent notify the former employees of this 'ere road that they're at liberty to go back to their old situations at the same wages as before—that they can do so *to onct*, and that we haint no idee of ever cutting their wages at all."

It was a bitter pill to swallow, but there was no help for

it. The superintendent was chairman of the meeting in the absence of the president (for, rather curiously, the I. & O. had never been provided with a vice president), and was obliged to put the motion, which was carried without a dissenting voice.

"Gentlemen," said Worthley, "your wishes shall be carried out, and I might only ask that you allow me to bring about the close of the strike in my own way."

"We've no objection to that," said Mr. Spriggens, rising from his chair and drawing on his overcoat, "pervedid you do it *right off!*"

CHAPTER LXII.

"ALL RIGHT! GO AHEAD!"

IT was impossible for the members of a gathering like that of the directors of the I. & O., to keep their proceedings secret. Within a half hour after the break-up of the special meeting, a report of what they had done spread through Ofalca. The real cause of this quick dissemination of the news was that the directors themselves took every opportunity to make it known. Deacon Spriggens had frightened them, and they agreed with him that the good step could not be taken a moment too soon.

Superintendent Worthley himself telegraphed to Irondale and the Junction that satisfactory arrangements had been made, and that work would undoubtedly be resumed on the morrow. The main difficulties in the way had been overcome, and as soon as he could hold a conference with representatives of the dissatisfied men, he was confident everything would be adjusted.

It was not unnatural that the young gentleman should want to make his backdown as graceful as possible. He requested the directors, as they were filing out of his office, to make no mention of what had been determined on,

pledging himself to follow their wishes in every particular. The directors gave no promise, but he supposed they would respect his request to that extent at least.

But the next men Deacon Spriggens encountered on the street were Bob Lovell and Matt Fields, who, having learned from the same gentleman of the contemplated meeting, were uneasy until they had ascertained what had been done. They were not long in receiving the news, expressed in the vigorous language of the irate deacon.

Although the hour was quite late, Matt and Bob immediately separated, and succeeded in notifying enough members of their division to bring a goodly representation to the lodge room before ten o'clock. As the news spread, others kept coming in, so that before adjournment a majority of all the members was present.

Naturally they were in jubilant spirits, for they had heard of the utter backdown on the part of the superintendent, to which he had been driven by the indignant directors. It was to be expected that the members would feel in high spirits, and there was a great deal of boisterous enthusiasm. Persons living near the place of meeting agreed that it was the noisiest ever known, and there is little doubt that they were right.

The only real business to be done was the appointment and instruction of a committee to meet the superintendent. There ought not to have been any difficulty in doing this, but the exuberance of the big, muscular men threatened at times to prevent it altogether. The most absurd motions were made. One brother, who was generally the glummiest member of the Brotherhood, insisted on his motion that each of the committee take along a copy of the last number of the *Illustrated Radiator*, pinned upon his coat, and that the chairman should stand in front of the railway office and read aloud the sketch at the top of his voice.

Matt Fields put the motion, and to his dismay it was

carried by a thunderous majority. Bob Lovell whispered to him that his only way out of the dilemma was to declare it out of order, and it was accordingly so done, though it was a fact capable of proof that Bob himself voted for the ridiculous proposition.

Similar resolutions followed, and Matt Fields, although occupying the chair, humored the boyish proceedings, until at last seeing whither they were drifting, he brought his gavel down and said:

"I appoint as that committee, Brothers Lovell, Conklin and myself, with instructions to meet Superintendent Worthley at the earliest convenient hour to-morrow, and agree for our members to return to work, on the condition that everyone is given the situation he had when he quit work, and that the wages shall be the same. This being the only business that has called us here, we'll adjourn."

Bob would have asked to be left off the committee, because of his previous experience with young Worthley, but he made no protest, concluding in his own mind that he was under no obligation in regard to that person's feelings.

At eight o'clock the next morning the committee were ushered into the presence of Superintendent Worthley, who expected them, for he also had facilities for learning what was going on. The young man was in anything but an amiable mood, though the stress of circumstances prevented any outbreak on his part. He knew of course that his callers had heard the result of the meeting of the directors, but believed it was only in a general way.

Greeting the three, as they took their seats, he addressed them collectively:

"Recognizing you as a committee from our employees, I desire to know who is chairman."

"Him—Bob," replied Matt Fields, jerking his thumb toward him.

"I stated expressly at the last interview that I wished to meet no committee of which *he* is chairman."

"That's the reason he was appointed."

This pat remark was made by Dick Conklin, and it was immediately clinched by Matt Fields:

"Being as I appointed the committee, and being as I knowed how you felt on the question, I'll have to own up that Dick has hit the nail square on the head."

"I ought to refuse to hold any communication with you, since you show such a disregard of my wishes."

"Very well," said Bob Lovell, rising to his feet; "we will inform the directors that you refuse to meet us, for the engineers will send no committee to you of which I am not chairman. Good-day, sir."

Young Worthley's eyes snapped. He was checkmated at the very first move.

"Oh, since you're here—sit down. I guess I can stand it."

"You oughter," said Matt, who never had liked and never could like this young man, "for it's worse for *us* than it can be for you."

"Well, gentleman," said the superintendent, ignoring the slurs that had just been uttered, "you may have heard of a special meeting of the directors last evening."

"Yes, we heard of it," said Bob significantly.

"At that meeting the situation was thoroughly gone over and a majority of the directors decided to recall their action in reducing the wages of the men. I am free to say that this step was against my judgment——"

"There aint any need of saying that," interrupted Matt Fields, "'cause we always know where to find *you*."

"There is one difficulty and it is a serious one," added the superintendent; "we have hired a good many men and we shall have to discharge most of them, though, since the purchase of the new engines, we can find places for the

best. But these men were promised permanent situations."

"Who promised them?" asked Dick Conklin, apparently seeking to make himself solid with his associates.

"It was I, of course."

"That's all right, then, for them as knows you won't believe you ever meant to keep your promise."

"If I am to be insulted in this manner, I shall refuse to hold any further conversation with you," said the superintendent, who was certainly justified in resenting the rough expression of the man that had cringed to him but a short time before.

"Dick," said Fields, "I guess we'd better let Bob do the talking ; he understands it better than you and me."

"All right ; I'll shut off steam."

"It is unfortunate," said the chairman, with his natural dignity of manner, "that some of the new men will have to suffer, but they have all earned enough to take them back to their former homes, where their situations will be no worse than before. However, while we may sympathize with some of them, yet it was not *we* who induced them to come here to take our places, and we cannot be expected, therefore, to concern ourselves about them. I understand that the company agrees to pay us precisely the same wages that we were receiving on the first of this month ?"

"Such is their purpose," replied Worthley, with a nod of his head.

"We demand as a condition that every man who went out, whether he be foreman, engineer, fireman, conductor, brakeman, switchman, or what, shall be given the situation in which he was serving on the last day of October just past."

"I don't know about that," said Superintendent Worthley, unwilling to let the ground be cut from beneath him

at that wholesale rate. "That will be quite difficult to arrange."

"Then, perhaps, it would be well for us to withdraw, and give you a week or two in which to complete your arrangements," said Bob, rising as if to leave.

"Sit still, please. Why not go to work at once, under our promise to do the best we can to place each man in his former position, but without the pledge to do so?"

"I have no authority to agree to that; I can see no difficulty in acceding to what we ask. It is necessary to set all the trains, passenger, freight, and coal, running precisely as they were before, and, since the employees stand ready to resume their places, you have only to authorize them to do so?"

"It looks easy enough to you, but you can't comprehend all the obstacles in the way."

"I comprehend there is but one obstacle, and that is your own disposition. We will accept nothing else, and, if you decline to agree to our demand, we will withdraw and report to Mr. Spriggins, who requested me to notify him at once if you dared to refuse."

This was a home thrust, and almost threw Superintendent Worthley into a panic.

"Oh, well," said he airily, "let it go at that. I'll agree that each man shall have his former situation, and that there shall be no cut in the wages."

"Our business is finished; come, boys," said Bob Lovell. "Good-day, Mr. Worthley."

"Good-day, gentlemen," replied the superintendent more graciously than on the former visit.

It was known that the decisive meeting was in progress in the superintendent's office, and the street outside was blocked with the strikers. Although there was a strong confidence, yet a certain uneasiness prevailed, and there were not lacking those who believed that the superintend-

ent would find some pretext for not agreeing to what the men demanded. Their croaking affected the others, so that the crowd became "nervous," as the expression goes, and was impatient for the result.

Fortunately the suspense did not last long. The door was seen to open, and the handsome, glowing face of Bob Lovell appeared, with Matt Fields and Dick Conklin right behind him.

"What is it? Is it settled?" shouted a hundred voices, the instant the committee were recognized.

By way of answer, Bob Lovell took off his cap and flung it fifty feet straight up in the air. Matt Fields swung his somewhat dilapidated head-gear around his crown, and emitted a hurrah that Geronimo himself could not have surpassed, while Dick Conklin's head was seen bobbing up and down, like a rubber ball, the peculiar appearance being caused by the vigorous double-shuffle he was dancing.

The multitude needed no more direct answer to their inquiries. They broke into shouts and hurrahs, and indulged in antics as if they were so many schoolboys let out for a day's vacation. The news went from mouth to mouth, and was speedily known to every man, woman, and child in Ofalca, but not before the messages had been flashed to all points along the line to Irondale.

Everybody except the new men and the superintendent rejoiced, for they sympathized from the first with the strikers. The disagreement had affected all the business interests and induced a state of discontent that was intensified every hour of its continuance. Brief as was the strike, it had done almost incalculable injury to thousands of people along the line of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway.

It was astonishing how soon matters adjusted themselves. There was a running to and fro, and for a brief while the confusion, doubtless, was ten-fold greater than

ever before. Superintendent Worthley appeared on the scene, and, in the general jubilation, he was treated respectfully, though the three cheers which Waycroft called for were so feeble that the effort was palpably a failure.

But from this seemingly inextricable bewilderment and chaos, order was soon evolved. The first train to get in shape was the western bound express. Unfortunately, the Hercules was in too crippled a condition to resume her place as the motive power, but an equally good engine was soon fired up, and Bob Lovell and Kit Hawkins backed the train into the station. When it became known that the brilliant and favorite young engineer was at the throttle, an extra car had to be attached to accommodate all the people who found business or pleasure calling them in the direction of Irondale.

The express was a half-hour late in starting, but as Bob steamed out of the station, he emitted a series of long-continued blasts from his whistle, which was answered by every engine within hearing, that had enough steam to set the little cylinder of bell metal vibrating. Men swung their hats and hurrahed, while Bob, who had managed to recover his cap, somewhat the worse for its rough usage, smilingly waved back his salutations as he sped westward.

The moment he caught sight of the station at the Junction, he received a noisy salute from the three locomotives belonging to the I. & Q. The engineers of that line had heard the good news and none rejoiced more than they. The train had hardly come to a halt, when they clambered upon the engine, and grasped Bob's hand, patted him on the back, and showed their pleasure in every way conceivable.

While Bob was trying to answer their questions, and give them the news, a part of which they had received long before, President Horton walked up the platform and reached his hand through the cab.

"There's only one thing I regret about this business," he said.

"What's that, Mr. Horton?"

"That I didn't succeed in getting you ; I'll never forget that ride you gave me, and I've kept myself posted about you."

"It was kind in you," replied Bob, "but I am sure you appreciate my position."

"I do, and respect you for it. The men were right, and if they hadn't been, you would never have joined them. I know you well enough to know *that*. But Superintendent Worthley escaped by a narrow chance."

"I do not understand you."

"I was about making arrangements to survey for a branch line from Quitman to Ofalca, and if this settlement had been delayed a week longer, the new road would have been a certainty. I need not tell you what result would have followed. I do not wish to enter into a ruinous competition with the I. & O., but the temptation to take advantage of such a vast blunder could not have been resisted by our Directors."

"It is best that it should terminate as it did ; it is impossible that Superintendent Worthley should repeat his mistake."

"It is," said the President emphatically.

The bell in the cab clinked, and, bidding his friends good-by, Bob Lovell resumed his trip westward.

He was handling one of the new first-class passenger engines, and he found it worked admirably. He had made up fifteen minutes in the run to the Junction, and was hopeful of reaching Irondale very nearly on time. Kit Hawkins kept the iron horse plentifully supplied with feed, and, though the load was heavy, the skillful engineer brought out all the work of which the machinery was capable.

At Wolf Gulch he had gained ten minutes and five more were picked up when he reached Little Gypsy.

"We shall do it!" he said, glancing at his watch. "Give her a little more coal, Kit."

At precisely half-past eleven, the express steamed into the broad station at Irondale, Bob Lovell having accomplished the clever feat of making up a half-hour in the run of one hundred and five miles.

The reception at this town was, if possible, noisier than the departure from Ofalca. During the interval a vast deal had been done at that end of the line, where there were nearly a dozen passenger, freight and coal engines ready to resume their places. Some of them had already done so, while others were awaiting the arrival of the trainmen from Ofalca, where most of them lived.

The instant the express was perceived up the road, coming like a whirlwind, all these engines began whistling, and for ten or fifteen minutes pandemonium was let loose. Nothing could be done until the safety valves of the happy men had exhausted the surplus in their treasury of enthusiasm, and the few officials that had not joined in the strike were as exuberant as the rest.

Bob had a long wait at Irondale, but he devoted most of the time to looking after his engine, which had been forced to such a terrific pace that it required attention. He gave her a thorough examination, and found time also to help in setting the vast business of the road in motion again. Familiar with the time-table of the freight and coal, as well as with that of the passenger trains, his cool head and excellent judgment enabled him to give invaluable assistance, of which the officials were only too glad to avail themselves.

When at five o'clock that afternoon, he lightly jerked the throttle-lever of his new engine, and started on his return to Ofalca, it may be said that the business of the I.

& O. was fairly on its feet. This struck many persons as remarkable, in view of the recent demoralization everywhere, but, after all, it was only in accordance with natural laws that it should be so. Experts, thoroughly trained for their positions, were distributed along the road, where they were needed, and simply resumed their regular duties after a brief vacation.

The bulk of the new men were discharged, all receiving free rides over the road and enough money to defray their expenses to their respective homes. Some of them uttered ugly threats, but the majority accepted the situation without protest, and joined in congratulating those whom they had displaced for a time.

It may be worth mentioning that among those who were retained was Budd Steen, to whom was given a freight engine, and it may be worth mentioning, too, that from some cause or other, he seemed to have acquired a sudden skill or good fortune, which kept him free from all kinds of accidents that hitherto had plagued him.

Dick Conklin was placed upon a freight also, and, sticking to his pledge of abstaining from liquor, became one of the most reliable engineers on the road. For a long time he was unable to pass through the little stretch of woods, near Ofalca, without a shudder, for that awful tree, with its gaunt, projecting limb, was in plain sight, and he could never forget the fearful minutes he spent beneath it.

He never learned the name of a single one of the eight men who came within a hair of lynching him. It was well that he did not, for the fierce vigilante who climbed the tree to adjust the rope served for six months under him as fireman, and the two are at this day the closest of friends.

But Dick knew to whom he was indebted, not only for his life, but for his deliverance from the weakness that was the real cause of his peril, and which must have brought him eventually to disgrace, ruin, and death. His heart had

been reached, and many a time he felt as though he would have welcomed suffering and personal danger, if thereby he could have gained the opportunity to prove his gratitude to his deliverer.

CHAPTER LXIII.

ON A CHRISTMAS NIGHT.

CHRISTMAS was a happy day in the Lovell household, for it was the home of perfect love, peace, and happiness. Not only was it the anniversary of the birth of our blessed Saviour, but on that day Bob Lovell, who proved such a stay and staff to the good mother and loving, bright-spirited daughter Meta, was born.

The delightful custom so prevalent among civilized people of making presents to each other was never forgotten by a member of that remarkable family. The mother was sure to be remembered by her children, while she had something which they appreciated, as coming from the dearest person in all the wide world. Meta received a handsome gold watch from Bob, who gave the parent a new, modest silk dress, a pair of golden spectacles and several choice volumes in which he knew she would take great comfort.

As for Bob, he was favored with several remembrances, some of which deserve mention.

First, Meta gave him a dressing gown and his mother a costly and elaborately illustrated Bible. Not only were these appropriate, but one commendable feature about them was that the recipient was never called upon to defray any portion of their cost. Mother and daughter, by strict economy, had provided against that necessity, which too often robs such memorials of their full enjoyment.

Evelyn Walbridge, after consultation with her two sisters, mother and father (who had rallied slightly, sent the young engineer a beautiful ink stand and gold pen.

There was nothing remarkable in this proceeding, but, if the young lady could have known the sweet thrill and flutter that stirred Bob Lovell's heart when he read the dainty note, begging him to accept them, she would have felt repaid a thousand-fold for her thoughtful recollection.

From Dick Conklin came the finest pocket knife he could find after a month's investigation.

It aint much [he wrote], but if I could send you what I'd like to send it would be a farm and ten city lotts. You're the best friend I ever knowed and here's hoping you may enjoy the same blessing.

Yours Respectively,

DICK CONKLIN.

The Worthley Division of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, No. —01, forwarded him a set of elegantly engrossed and framed resolutions, setting forth its gratitude for the interest he had always shown in its welfare, and reciting his many excellent qualities in such glowing terms that Bob's face crimsoned to the roots of his hair, especially when he observed that the names of every member of the Division was signed to the testimonial.

There was something similar from the temperance society, the Sunday school, of which he had become superintendent, and other organizations that appreciated his labors in the cause of religion and humanity.

All this was gratifying beyond description, but the surprise arrived later on Christmas night, when he was sitting alone in the dining room, reading a scientific journal. Wondering who it was that used the knocker so softly, he walked to the front door and to his surprise found Hematite Oxx standing before him.

"Are you alone, Mr. Lovell?" he asked in his deferential way.

"Yes, mother and sister retired some time ago, and I am sure they are sound asleep. Come in; it's a bitterly cold night."

The gentleman stepped within the hall, removed his cap and ulster, and following his friend to the warm, cozy dining room, seated himself in the comfortable rocking chair before the ruddy grate, and briskly rubbed his chilled hands in enjoyment of the warmth.

They discussed nothing in particular for a few minutes, and then Bob, in answer to the inquiries of his friend, brought out the various presents that had been sent him, though his modesty was sorely tried, by being compelled to hear Oxx read aloud the complimentary resolutions from the Division.

"I didn't see much of you during the strike," remarked the visitor, "for I was away, but I kept myself informed, and it's enough to say that you did just as I expected you to do."

"Matt Fields and most of us tried to keep our heads," replied Bob, "for which we deserve no particular credit."

"Perhaps not, but some of us take a different view of your action. However, that isn't what brings me here to-night. During the past month I have traveled over a great deal of country; I have been compelled to enter drinking places, associate with drinking men, and to run into temptation constantly."

"And how did you stand it?"

"There never was a time when I was in the slightest danger of tasting a drop of liquor."

"Thank God for *that!*" was the fervent exclamation of the young engineer; "I knew how it would be."

Then it was that Hematite Oxx uttered the words quoted elsewhere, and which deserve reproduction here:

"I am a saved man. While I give my heavenly Father the credit, the chief means employed was that which you handed me on the day I attempted to throw away my life in front of your train. I have at times felt something of the old longing for stimulants, but it was always so weak that it

was easily overcome, and now, for fully three months, I have had no more desire to indulge in intoxicants than I have at this moment to swallow a dose of nauseous medicine. I believe the thirst is entirely eradicated and never, never can I be grateful enough."

"I cannot tell you how much pleasure your words give me. But, Mr. Oxx, the best way to prove your gratitude for what God has done is to try to save others."

"I have been instrumental, I trust, in accomplishing a little in that direction, and, if my life is spared, I shall try to do a great deal more."

"That is the right spirit."

"But, my friend, I repeat that I have called on business. In the first place, you know that my right name is not that by which you have called me up to the present moment."

"I never believed it was," replied Bob with a smile.

"My name is Perry Aldrich, which I am sure you now hear for the first time."

Bob nodded his head, adding:

"The surname is not unfamiliar, though I associate it with no acquaintance of mine."

"My father, as I believe I have already told you, was a wealthy man and made the mistake of allowing me too great indulgence and freedom. I was an only son, but had one sister, who is the widow of the late Superintendent Worthley and the mother of the present one."

This was interesting news to Bob, who said:

"I never suspected *that*."

"I traveled a good deal, got into bad habits, squandered money right and left, and was sometimes so hard up that I tried to beat my way on railway trains, besides venturing on enterprises that, as I also told you, would hardly bear the light of investigation at the present time."

Bob knew to what he referred, but delicately said:

"It could hardly be otherwise under the circumstances."

"Young Montague Worthley, in some respects, was a man after my own heart, but his parents were too wise to allow him such liberal indulgences as fell to me. He was eager to join me in some of our desperate schemes to raise the wind, but before they culminated in anything serious your good counsel stayed his hand through staying *mine*."

"I am glad I was able to do so, though I must say that Worthley has shown little appreciation of my friendship toward him."

"He was born with a mean nature and never will be a *man*. I am free to say that my influence has been sufficient, now and then, to check him, when he had determined on something to humiliate you."

"Be assured your kindness will never be forgotten."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Perry Aldrich impatiently; "they haven't a feather's weight compared with what *you* have done for *me*. I was such a black sheep that after the death of my parents, my sister and brother-in-law refused to recognize or have anything to do with me. I don't think Mr. Worthley dreamt of my identity when I ran away with the locomotive, and he took care that no one should learn my relationship when he learned it."

"But he knew you at the time I was threatened with discharge."

"Of course; it was impossible that he should not, but we always met as strangers or mere formal acquaintances. I was so resentful toward him and my sister for their ignoring of me, that I meant to push that suit for damages, though Ganzell, my counsel, never suspected the real cause. Worthley was also frightened and gladly agreed to the compromise. Montague kicked fiercely when I let up on you, but, from what I have told, you will understand I held a winning hand."

"No one can question the skill with which you managed the business."

"Some months ago an aunt of mine died and left me a considerable sum of money. The necessity of looking after that is what called me away just before the strike was on. I have entered on a little enterprise which I will explain more fully in the course of a month. I will say, however, that I have made some investments in I. & O. stock. While doing so, it struck me that maybe you would not mind to experiment a little in the same line."

"If I had the money at command, I would be glad to do so, for there is no better stock in the country."

"I bought a few shares for you——"

"But," interrupted the astonished Bob, "I have no means of paying for them."

"Thunderation!—excuse me—but what makes you so stupid, Mr. Lovell? I have bought a few shares, had them regularly transferred to you, and brought them around as my Christmas present."

"But, Mr. Oxx—that is, Mr. Aldrich, you shouldn't have done that; I cannot accept anything in the nature of money from anyone."

"Will you keep your mouth shut till I'm through?" demanded the visitor, as though he was losing his temper. "In the first place, there is no 'if' about it; you've *got to accept them!* They don't amount to a great deal, but if you refuse, I shall throw them into the fire and our friendship ends. I can understand your delicate feelings, but I want you to remember that *I* have some feelings, too, in the matter. They are not intended in the nature of *pay* for what you have done for me; money could never do that, but as a sensible present to you. I suppose if I should back up a cart and dump out several hundred pairs of slippers, or dressing gowns, or penwipers, or paper neckties, you would accept them with thanks; but when it comes to

the most sensible donation that man or woman can make, you begin to tear your hair and swear and all that sort of thing.

"But," continued Aldrich more seriously, "my heart is set on this, Mr. Lovell, and you will grieve me beyond measure if you refuse. Won't you accept my present, even though it is in the shape of a few bonds of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway?"

Bob Lovell was curiously agitated. His sense of good taste rebelled at the acceptance of what was really a money present, but he reflected that the donor was not only abundantly able to part with it without consideration, but that, above all, his feelings would be deeply wounded by a refusal.

The young engineer looked into the glowing grate for a moment and then said:

"I will accept them."

"Thank the Lord for that glimmer of sense! Now, I wish to make two or three conditions before closing this business, or rather pleasure. First, you are to tell no person beside your mother and sister, and you may use your own discretion in informing them; second, you will never refer to this matter in my presence after this evening—that is, I want no gush; you mustn't write me any note containing a hint about the bonds, nor say anything except in answer to some question of mine. Lastly, I want you to send me a power of attorney, which will enable me to vote upon them at the annual meeting of the stockholders next month. As soon as that is done I will return the power of attorney, or better, it should be so worded as to be valid only at the January meeting. Will you comply with the conditions?"

"They don't seem very hard," said Bob laughingly, "so I give you my promise unhesitatingly."

"There they are."

As he spoke Perry Aldrich drew a large, heavy envelope

from the inner pocket of his coat, tossed it into the lap of Bob Lovell, who quietly laid it on the table at his elbow.

"You will permit me to thank you, Mr. Aldrich, now that I have accepted your Christmas present."

"Well, you have done so, but, understand, that ends it for all time. It is late and I must go."

"Wait a few minutes longer; you have given me such a flurry that I won't be able to sleep for some time."

"Are you running the Hercules?"

"Yes; she came out of the shops last week."

"As good as ever?"

"It really seems as if every mishap improves him, or *her*, as an engineer always speaks of his engine. She runs smoothly, makes steam well, and can hold her own with any of the new ones that have been put on the road."

"What is it you were reading when I rang the bell?"

"The *Scientific American*," replied Bob with a smile; "I have taken it for years and always find something valuable in it."

"Do you ever write for it?"

"I have done a little that way, but not much."

"Have you anything in the last number?"

Bob blushed and protested:

"You are becoming pointed in your questions."

"But I want an answer."

"Well, yes; I have a letter on an inside page."

"Is your name signed to it?"

"Only my initials."

"I have been buying that journal of late. Fact is, I read the last number on my way from New York. I was particularly interested in a column article on the development of the iron regions to the eastward of Ofalca. The editors were so struck with what was written that they called attention to it as the views of a correspondent to whom they were indebted for other papers of great value."

"There now!" said Bob, finding himself fairly caught; "you have driven me into a corner before I could help myself. If thou lovest me, say no more."

"All right," laughed his visitor producing a cigar, and asking permission to light it, as he was going out in the blustery wintry air.

"May I inquire," continued Bob, anxious to turn the conversation away from himself, "whether your friendly relations were re-established with Mr. Worthley before his death."

"They were fully, which reminds me of something that slipped my mind. When Mr. Worthley went abroad, I was touched by his condition, being satisfied in my own mind that he would never recover. I wrote him a letter, begging his forgiveness for my course toward him, and he dictated a manly and Christianlike reply, written by my sister."

"That pleases me more than anything you have said to-night."

"After that, my sister acquainted me with everything done, especially relating to the railway. She sent me a copy of his resignation of the superintendency, and cabled me at the same time that President Walbridge was notified of his death. Thus you perceive the means by which I got the news I brought you."

Bob nodded his head, for these words affected him.

"Were you a stockholder in the I. & O. at that time?"

"Yes, but not to the extent I am now. They begged my good offices in behalf of their son, and I had more to do, though in a quiet way, with his appointment than is generally supposed. But I had several plain talks with him. I told him that I would be his friend as long as he remained the gentleman and forbore annoying you by his petty persecutions. He promised to respect what I said, but it is not his nature to do so. Whenever he thought it safe to

interfere, he did so. He insisted that you were aspiring and self-willed, that you exerted an evil influence over the rest of the men, and that the best thing for the road was to get rid of you. However, since we are talking frankly, I tied his hands effectually more than once, and received a berating for it. I wrote to him, protesting against his course in the labor troubles, but I could not come here, and he disregarded everything said to him. I have the satisfaction of knowing that he is convinced he has made the mistake of his lifetime. You know why he hates you, Mr. Lovell?"

Bob did know, but he could not admit it, and he hoped his visitor would push no further in that direction. But he was not to be restrained. Before another veer could be made, he struck in:

"Montague is dead in love with Evelyn Walbridge, the youngest daughter of President Walbridge, and he knows that she thinks a thousand times more of you than of him."

"Why, Mr. Aldrich, how can you say *that*?"

"Do you think Miss Walbridge would lie?"

"Of course not."

"Well, she told him so herself."

Bob Lovell's heart gave a great throb, and he was angry with himself, because he felt his face becoming a burning crimson. He was so embarrassed that he was at a loss to say anything to parry what he knew was coming.

"Montague gave me an account of a certain call he made on Miss Evelyn, at which she imparted that important information, but, to make sure, I asked the lady herself."

"You did not!"

"I did; I drop in there occasionally, for I will admit to you that I am interested in Maud, the eldest sister. I saw Evelyn alone one day and taxed her with it. She owned up like the little lady that she is, and added that she never uttered truer words in her life."

"You distress me, Mr. Aldrich," was all Bob could say.

"I don't see why a fellow should be distressed because he is idolized by one of the brightest, sweetest and best girls in all creation."

"But—but, reflect—I am only an engineer on the road of which her father is president."

"Are you less a man on that account? Is the President of the United States deserving of more respect than you? But you are young and there's a future before you (I don't suppose it could very well be *behind* you), and you can wait; but," added Aldrich, rising to his feet, and placing his hand affectionately on the shoulder of his young friend, who also rose to see him to the door, "Robert Lovell, Evelyn Walbridge is in love with you, and, more than that, you are in love with her, and if you don't prove yourself the champion zany of this glorious country, you can make her your wife. Good-night, Bob—that's the first time I ever called you by that name."

Parting with his friend at the door, Bob Lovell returned to the dining room and sat down in the vacated rocking-chair in front of the grate. It seemed to him he was in a dream, and that the words that had been uttered a few minutes before were those of fancy only.

He looked in the glowing coals for a minute or two and then murmured:

"Can it be that Aldrich is right? Meta has said almost the same to me more than once, and I suppose many persons in my situation would believe the wonderful declaration. But I persuaded myself that it was simple gratitude for the service I was fortunate enough to render her. If that were so, it would have been dishonorable beyond measure for me to take advantage of it, even if I could forget my social status as compared with hers.

"But Aldrich said I loved her and he is right, but heaven knows I never dreamed the secret was suspected by any-

one. I certainly have never uttered a word nor, so far as I know, given a sign of that emotion which has long held full possession of my entire soul. It must be that Aldrich proceeds on the logical supposition that no one can meet Evelyn without falling in love with her.

"Ah," he added with a sigh that spoke the depth of his feeling, "it will not do for me to build those enchanting air castles, that are ravishing, but not only weaken the mind, but make the disappointment the greater by its contrast. I must place them behind me and leave the future, as I have always done, with God."

As his hand dropped upon the table beside him, it came in contact with the large envelope that had been forgotten in the rush of very different emotions.

"Aldrich is a good friend," he muttered, looking at the document for a moment. "It would have grieved him had I refused, though I still wish his gratitude had not taken that form."

Lifting the envelope, he slowly opened it for the purpose of inspecting the contents. His thought was, judging from the donor's words, that there were bonds within to the amount possibly of three or four hundred dollars, but the first handsomely engraved sheet of paper, with its fanciful letters, pictures and signatures, had plainly marked at the top, this legend: "\$1000."

And there was another and another and another until the list footed up ten in number.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE ANNUAL MEETING.

THE most important annual meeting of the stockholders and directors of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company was held in the month of January succeeding the incidents just related.

The interest caused by the strike and the death of President Walbridge, which took place only a few days before, had the effect of bringing every stockholder of any account to the gathering, while the absent ones were represented by proxies. There was a long session, at which a great deal of discussion was had, and the election of directors resulted in several changes. Deacon Spriggens was returned, and among the new ones chosen was Perry Aldrich, formerly known as Hematite Oxx. A little log-rolling was required on the part of this gentleman, but he had the friendship of the deacon, and the large block of shares which he held, united with his proxies, gave him an influence that was shown in his election by an unusually large vote.

This business being completed, the stockholders adjourned to dinner, after which the directors came together again for the purpose of choosing a president, secretary, treasurer and superintendent, after the appointment of a committee to draft appropriate resolutions on the death of President Walbridge.

The first business of account was the election of a successor to the chief officer. Lloyd Montague Worthley had been busy electioneering among the directors, and despite the dissatisfaction he created by his course in the strike, succeeded in arousing considerable sympathy for himself. He was profuse in his promises and enough votes were promised to secure his election. Satisfied that the thing was assured, he gave over his lobbying, and consulted as to the proper composition of the rest of the ticket. One was speedily fixed upon, and the election promised to be as uneventful as that of the stockholders had been stormy.

Young Worthley presided at this meeting, and when the ticket as indicated was presented, he blushed and was on the point of thanking his friends for the honor, when it struck him that it would be in better taste if he waited till after his election.

"Are there any other nominations, gentlemen?" he asked, looking around the room through his eye-glasses.

He was about to declare the nominations closed, when Perry Aldrich rose at the other end of the apartment.

"I beg to nominate for the office of president of this company, Robert Lovell."

This caused a sensation and Montague Worthley stared at his uncle as though doubtful whether he heard aright. Everyone looked at Aldrich, who stood for a minute with his arms folded, thin lips compressed, his face slightly pale and his eyes fixed on the countenance of the chairman, his whole pose showing that he enjoyed the stir he had caused.

"Gentlemen," he said, carefully measuring his words, "you are all astonished at this nomination, and I do not deny that you have cause for surprise. But if you will indulge me a few minutes, I am satisfied that you will agree that the wisest step we can take in the interests of the company is the unanimous election of Mr. Lovell to its chief office."

"But," interrupted Deacon Spriggens, "aint Mr. Lovell too young for such an important place?"

"That is a question that should be fully considered. Mr. Walbridge came in the office when he was an old man. That he had no superior in qualifications is conceded wherever he was known, but the qualities which rendered him such a model railway president were those that were developed in his early and middle life. Could we have him to-day, as he was forty years ago, we would reap the benefit of his admirable skill, foresight and business judgment.

"On the same principle that was unavoidable in his case, we would throw aside the vigorous physical and mental qualifications of Mr. Lovell, until their fruits had been gathered by others, and take them to ourselves when the time of decay and decline is close at hand.

"The responsible situations at the head of many of the

greatest corporations have been given to gentlemen solely on their past record, when those corporations would be benefited beyond calculation could they secure these competent heads in time to monopolize all their ability.

“That this truth is becoming recognized is proven by the fact that at this day the chief directors of our leading railway companies are young men. It is wise that it is so, for all that is of value in their lives will thus be given to the corporations with which their lot is cast, and which have waited only long enough to assure themselves that their officers really possess exceptional ability.

“Now, suppose that Mr. Lovell is fully competent to fill the office of president of the Irondale and Ofalca Railway Company, is not this the very time to secure him? He has passed his majority, and, if his life is spared, we shall reap the benefit of the best work of which he will be capable for half a century to come. Is not that a better business proceeding than to deprive ourselves of his youth, his energy, and the really best years of his life?”

That there was force in Aldrich's presentation of the case was proven by the whispers that went round the room, but Deacon Spriggs interposed:

“How do you know that Mr. Lovell is qualified?”

“I have given much investigation to that matter, which is really the whole question. In the first place, he is a young gentleman of superior education, whose whole mind is wrapped up in the study of railway business. He is far better fitted than anyone in this room suspects. In the last number of *The Scientific American* appears a paper on the development of the iron section to the east of us, which is so striking and valuable that editorial attention is called to it. He has furnished other articles on wider subjects, connected with that of railways, which have been copied, not only in leading journals in this country, but by many of Europe. His views are broad, comprehensive, and far-

reaching, and stamp him as one of the coming railway chieftains.

"I am sincere in the belief that no person can be found anywhere so well fitted as he to guide this company to the prosperity and success that awaits it, if the right steps are taken.

"He is a Christian gentleman, respected and loved by every employee of the road, honored in the community, courageous, clear-headed, skillful, with principles grounded on a bed-rock of integrity. You are all familiar with his work in this place. I am one of the many whom he has been instrumental in saving from disgrace and ruin, and he never tires of his good work. I may add that there has recently been formed in Ofalca, a society which is composed of the most scholarly and cultured members of the community. Mr. Lovell was unanimously selected as its president, and he has already astonished the gray heads by his remarkable mental powers, which are on a par with, if not superior to, the most venerable A. M.'s and D. D.'s that have met him in debate.

"With him as the president of the I. & O., there will never be such a thing known as a strike, for the employees only ask justice, and that he concedes to every man. His judgment on all important questions that can come up for consideration will be of inestimable value. He is industrious, and, outside of the social, religious, literary and charitable questions in which he is interested, he will know nothing but how best to serve this railway company."

"I believe he is a stockholder, is he not, Mr. Aldrich?" asked Deacon Spriggens.

"He is; he owns ten thousand dollars in his own name, though by his authority I represent it at the stockholders' meeting to-day."

"Is not that a large amount for him to own?" continued the good deacon.

"Perhaps it is; but he came by it honestly, and we have no business to go into particulars."

"Does Mr. Lovell know that his name is to be presented afore this body for president?" continued the same director.

"He has no more idea of it than he has of making a journey to the moon with the Hercules."

Superintendent Worthley shifted about in his seat and uttered a contemptuous sniff, his chagrin and anger too overflowing to be hidden from the others. He dreaded the trend of things with a dread beyond the power of description.

"The proper thing to do, gentlemen," continued Aldrich, "is to elect Mr. Lovell president and fill the other offices with those that occupied them last year. With Mr. Lovell at the head, no mistakes will be made."

Having exploded the bomb shell, Perry Aldrich resumed his seat. For a few moments the stillness was oppressive. Then Deacon Spriggens slowly rose, leaning on his heavy cane.

"Mr. Chairman," said he in his impressive manner, "if my friend wanted to make the biggest sensation of the day he's done it as sure as a gun. I've listened keerfully to his remarks and I've come to the conclusion that he's right. Mr. Lovell is the young man intended by Heaven for our president. It would be flying in the face of Providence to disregard the warnings, and I'd expect an airthquake if we done so. He shall have my vote, and I'm purty sure he will have that of the rest of the gentlemen. I wish we could have knowed the views of President Walbridge afore he died on this ere important question."

Ah, but the deacon was sly. Before the directors assembled, he and Mr. Aldrich spent a half-hour together in confidential scheming. Every question that he had asked was agreed upon beforehand, including the one indicated in his last remark.

As he sat down, Aldrich rose once more.

"The words of Mr. Spriggens will excuse a little statement I now make. It is known that before Mr. Walbridge's death he showed a temporary improvement, so marked, indeed, that his family felt strong hopes of his ultimate recovery. It was during that brief period of convalescence that he made his will, to which I was a subscribing witness. It was then, too, he learned the particulars of the strike and expressed his deep regret that he had not been well enough to interpose and prevent that which never should have taken place. At that interview, at which his daughters and wife were present, he made the remark that it would be safe to keep Mr. Worthley in office as superintendent, if it were possible to make Robert Lovell president, for it would never do to associate the two without giving Lovell superior authority. They would work well enough together, harnessed in that fashion, but in no other way. But for that emphatic statement, I might have consented to see Mr. Lovell become superintendent and Mr. Worthley president, but you need not be told that such an arrangement would be disastrous in every respect, and the thought of making it should not be entertained for a moment."

"I observed," said the deacon, "that you voted on the stock of Mr. Walbridge; may I ask how that was?"

"My good friend is forcing more than one secret from me," said Mr. Aldrich, with a hypocritical smile. "President Walbridge was the owner of fifteen hundred shares. He divided them equally among his wife and children, and, at his request, a power of attorney was given to me to vote it at the stockholders' meeting. His wife and three daughters joined in the request that I would use my utmost efforts to secure the election of Mr. Lovell as the president of this company, for, though Mr. Walbridge was much better in health at that time, he would have resigned, had he been spared until to-day."

"Gentlemen," resumed the deacon, "that's to the p'int. After this our duty is too plain for us to shirk it. I second the nomination of Mr. Aldrich."

Superintendent Worthley had learned a great deal during the preceding moments. His resentment, humiliation and fury, as he saw the unmistakable drift of the proceedings, almost overcame him. More than once he was on the verge of explosion, and could he have annihilated Perry Aldrich the moment he rose to his feet he would gladly have done so. He dared not resign, for he knew the feeling among the directors would cause such resignation to be accepted off-hand. He could not afford to yield his only source of income, and he knew it would be the acme of folly to think of it.

The vote for Bob Lovell was unanimous. Young Worthley never did a more sensible or politic act in his life, than when he cast his vote in his favor, saying, after announcing the result:

"Gentlemen, it would be idle for me to pretend that I am not a little disappointed at the outcome. All of you know that I had hope in that direction, for you will admit this election is attended by some unprecedented circumstances. I know of no instance of a locomotive engineer being elevated to the presidency of a railway, without first filling the intermediate positions, in order that he should be fully trained for his duties. I have known of a brakeman becoming president in the course of ten years, but he ascended regularly step by step.

"However, I bow to your decision and have proven my readiness to assist in the interests of the company by casting my vote for Mr. Lovell. He deserves all that Mr. Aldrich has said of him. He is fitted by nature, taste, and education to preside over the weighty interests of this corporation. I gladly take my place as his subordinate, and will render him all the aid in my power and do my utmost to merit the confidence you repose in me."

No one ever fully knew the torture it cost Montague Worthley to utter these sentences. While they were falling like drops of blood from his lips, he saw how the battle begun against Bob Lovell, years before, had ended in that young man's triumph and his own utter overthrow. It was useless to struggle longer, for it was done forever.

If it is impossible to picture the emotions of Worthley, while presiding at his own funeral, what shall he said of the feelings of Bob Lovell, when, just before leaving Irondale that afternoon, with the eastward bound express, he received a telegram from Perry Aldrich, informing him that the directors, at the meeting just closed, had unanimously elected him president of the I. & O.?

It took a great deal to upset the young engineer of the Hercules, but for a time he was bewildered. He knew it was true, for his friend was incapable of so sorry a practical joke. Besides, he recalled several circumstances, which, unsuspected though they were at the time, clearly pointed to some action of this nature. Such, for instance, was Aldrich's request for the right to vote on the stock of Bob.

The latter took his place at the throttle, but he thought it more than likely there would be a general smash up before he reached Ofalca, for at times he was unconscious of what he was doing, and forgot the responsibility on his shoulders; but, by and by, he summoned his native common sense and self-possession to his aid, and was in a measure prepared for the tremendous enthusiasm that greeted him on his arrival in Ofalca.

It is not worth dwelling upon this epoch in his life, except to say that nothing touched the new president more than the presence and action of Montague Worthley at the station. Deacon Spriggens, Matt Fields and the rest held back until the young superintendent took his superior officer by the hand and said:

“Receive my congratulations, Mr. President, and the assurance that you will never have a more faithful and devoted subordinate than I shall be.”

“And you will never have a truer friend than I, Montague,” replied Bob, warmly shaking his hand, but with a feeling of profound pity for his discomfited persecutor.

But need it be said that the most sweetly thrilling thought that stirred the conscience of Bob Lovell, all through the congratulations of his friends, and the joy of his mother and sister, was that the hour at last had come when he dare tell Evelyn Walbridge that he loved her?

And at the proper time and in his own way he did so, and have you any misgiving as to the result?

THE END.

