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A LONG NEW YEAR'S TRIP.

BY EDGAR F. JORDAN.

Train men are a jolly lot of fellows among themselves, and they are accustomed to lighten their labors with the aid of laughter evoked by comedy or farce. Their daily life is surrounded on every hand by dangers, and it takes a buoyant, steady heart to endure the strain. When grim tragedy steps forward they bear a bold front and appear almost too unconcerned. Seen beneath the surface, however, all brains are indelibly impressed with the many painful scenes they witness. A proof of this is the frequency with which they tell and retell the bloody tales of the past, and the extreme interest evinced by each circle of hearers in the stories of sudden accident and sudden death.

What makes these stories particularly interesting to the trainmen is the fact that they know the stage so well. They are personally acquainted with all the scenes, drops, traps and so forth, and they never can tell but that, at some supreme moment, they themselves may be the central actors in a tragic finale on which the curtain slowly falls.

Here is a New Year's story a yard-master once told me. He is an old railroad man and has been between all the stones of the mill without being ground to powder.

When my brother was a brakeman on the local freight his conductor, George Bailey, was one of the most careful men on the road, although he had been a rather harum-scarum fellow until he fell in love with Maggie Dexter. Maggie was one of the best women that ever lived, and she used her influence over George to make him a good, sound, reliable man. He stopped drinking, he became clean in his talk, he obeyed his orders and the Book of Rules to the letter—in fact the foolish youngsters thought him too good to be a successful railroad man. His superiors judged differently, luckily for him, and he was promoted rapidly until he was made conductor of the local freight.

Maggie watched his rise with joy, and did not attempt to conceal it. But when he talked of love and of a happy married life she would stave him off.

"I like you, George," she would say. "I like you, and I don't mind telling you so. But I don't like you enough to marry you. I am afraid of you. I am not sure that you won't fall back into your old ways if you have me fast. Keep up your fight! Be good and prove yourself a man with or without Maggie Dexter."

George kept up his fight, and laid by his dollars. His whole life was bound up with the girl, and he resolved to win her. He was not afraid of any backsliding on his part. What he did fear was that she would marry Dave Harlan, a handsome passenger engineer with a great reputation as a lady-killer. Harlan drew a check each month twice as large as Bailey's, and he had never been overpowered by bad habits. Maggie respected him for his virtues, was much pleased with his easy, confident manners, and could not bring herself to turn up her pretty nose at the large bank account. She felt sure that as Mrs. Harlan she would lead a smooth life with no need of worry when her husband was out of her sight. But she knew Mrs. Bailey would always feel just a bit nervous if her liege had had money in his pocket and got caught in a swirl of "good fellows."

George and David, at first good friends, soon drifted apart. George believed Dave told tales about his former wildness, and some mean friend told Dave that George had said he was a hypocritical fraud. Hence bad blood rose up between them, and the two men did not speak when they met. Maggie was not one of those women who are pleased to see their adorers at enmity, and she did what she could to patch up a peace. Her efforts were unavailing, much to her distress, so she was compelled to treat both of them a little coldly to show that she was not biased with their conduct. This added fuel to the fire and trouble came of it.

One snowy day, it was New Year's, too, George had the bad luck to leave a switch open at Hampton station, and Dave, who was following him on a passenger train, ran through it. It was what we call a "trailing switch," and was not liable to cause any damage when set the wrong way. On this particular occasion no one would have been the wiser if Dave had not been moved by his evil spirit to report it. He, however, saw a way to get George into serious trouble, and, though naturally a manly fellow, he could not resist the temptation to wire to the superintendent from his next stopping place that he had "run through a switch at Hampton which had been left open by Conductor Bailey."

Strictly speaking he was right in reporting this negligence, but it is not generally done, you know, among good fellowship men, when no damage follows and nothing was endangered. Hence he felt rather badly over it the rest of that run, and when he started on his return trip he would have given a good deal to have called back his message. He could not get it out of his head that he had done a mean thing, although he argued to himself that the company's interests demanded a prompt reporting of those who failed to do their duty. But his act seemed odious to him.

George started out on his return trip, as usual considerably ahead of

the passenger train that Dave ran back. He was not aware of having left the Hampton switch open, and he was feeling very happy as he neared home, for he had planned to see Maggie as soon as he got there. It was always a race between George and Dave to "get in," as the one first home was able to reach Maggie's house before the other, and that meant a blissful evening for the successful suitor. Well, when George got near the end of his trip, he was stopped by a red signal at a tower, which, by the way, was just outside my yard. It was snowing hard, and the eager fellow hastened to find out why he was detained. He was close on the time of Dave's passenger train, following close behind, and if he were kept there many minutes he knew he would have to back his train in on a siding so as to clear the express. And then he would not see Maggie that happy New Year's evening, for Dave would be with her.

Once in the tower he found that the operator had stopped him in order to deliver the following message from his superintendent:

"G. Bailey, Newville.—Engineman Harlan reports running through an open switch at Hampton on No. 21 this A. M., which was left open by you. Please report particulars at once."

The message was a hard blow to poor George. An "open switch" meant a suspension; possibly he would be set back to a brakeman's position again. The thought of Harlan reporting it, too, was poison. What a mean thing it was especially, on New Year's day. And what would Maggie say? He could imagine Dave telling her all about it, winding up with: "You see you cannot trust the man; he is not reliable." And then, I suppose, he swore a little bit.

After writing a careful answer to the message, he looked at his watch. The passenger train was about due, and he dashed out toward his train, which was still standing on the main track opposite the tower.

"I'll get in ahead of him to-night, so help me," he cried, as he jumped on the caboose, seized with a sudden and irresistible impulse, and he gave the signal to go ahead. He knew the passenger train with Dave running it was due. He knew his own train had no business to be where it was under those circumstances. He knew he would get into trouble by the probable delay to the passenger. But "I will see Maggie to-night ahead of that fellow if I die for it," he muttered to himself.

He had the desperate feeling of a temporary abstainer who has not touched liquor for some time, and then, some reverse happening, makes a bull's rush for the red stuff, regardless of anything else.

His train had barely started when there was a wind rush through the falling snow behind it. There was a howling whistle—a flare of light, a churning of big wheels, an awful crash. The passenger train had run into the local freight.

Roused from a nearly New Year's dinner, I was sent there with the wreck train, but by the time we arrived the "pile-up" was decked with a beautiful covering of white. It was one of the worst messes I ever looked at, from a railroad man's point of view, but an artist would have admired the picture. Everything was quiet about the wreck, except the soft hissing of steam, and under a jagged mass of cars I could see parts of the engine. My main impression was the peacefulness of the scene, queer as it sounds. I think this was due to the stillness and the soft fall of the large flakes of snow. No one was stirring around the wreck. The sight was a weird one, and chilled me to the bone.

"Where's the engineer?" I asked. "Under the wreck."

"Anybody else?"

"The conductor of the freight."

And so it turned out. After some hours of work we came across their bodies. George Bailey and David Harlan had taken a long trip together that New Year's day.

I often hear the trainmen talking about this accident, which was a celebrated one, and they use the words "if he hadn't" very frequently. I often think about it myself. If George and Dave had only been friends; if George had not left that Hampton switch open, if Dave had not reported the petty thing; if—Gracious, but it is queer how one matter leads to another in this world. You never can tell, when you do a thing, just where the end of it will be. I cannot help speculating over the might-have-beens in spite of the uselessness and sadness of it. And yet there is a good deal of philosophy of life to be gotten from the deaths of those two men.

Maggie? She is still Maggie Dexter.

Amber from the Baltic.

Amber is a fossilized vegetable resin, found in great abundance on the shores of the Baltic sea, especially between Königsberg and Memel. In all probability, it is derived from extinct coniferous trees. It becomes negatively electric when rubbed, and manifests this property in a marked degree. The word "electricity" is derived from *elektron*, the Greek word for amber.

According to an ancient fable, amber is the tears of the sisters of Prometheus, who, after his death, were turned into poplars. By some, amber is said to be a concretion of birds' tears; and this fancy finds expression in the following lines from "The Five Worshippers" by Thomas Moore: Around thee shall glisten the loveliest amber That ever the sorrowing sea-bird has wept.

LIVING PICTURE PARTY.

A jolly evening's entertainment for a holiday house party, and one that will not lose its charm in the preparation, is a series of tableaux of the old masters. Every one has a favorite picture, a pet Van Dyke or a well loved Rembrandt. The arrangement of these portraits will afford amusement for many mornings. Start first on the frame, so that it shall be done in time. A frame made of twelve inch boards, with an opening four by five and a half feet, is needed. Either paint this or cover with dark canvas or cloth, stand this between portieres or folding doors, if the tableaux are in a house. Then prepare a mat a foot wide to fit inside the frame for the pictures that require a smaller setting. Cover the mat with some neutral shade—a dark gray is best, though a rich red or green velvet might be used.

If electricity is obtainable the lighting problem solves itself, for, by connecting to a long tube, the bulb can be hung on a hook just inside the frame, at any height the picture demands, either above, below or on one side. This done, look about for the subjects to fit the people on hand, or the people to fit the subjects.

It is surprising how many people resemble some of the old portraits, if they dress the part. In selecting the pictures to be reproduced it is well to keep in mind the wardrobe at your disposal. Have a copy of each picture, and follow every minute detail, being particular about the pose and even the expression. Don't forget that "trifles make perfection, but perfection is no trifle." It is the chain and locket, the queer shoe buckle, the snuff box or the eardrops, all trifles, that make the living picture a perfect imitation of the old portrait. For variety choose pictures of children, men, women and groups.

The children are always graceful and willing little posers. The little "Age of Innocence," so well known, or Valasquez's "Little Queen Marguerite" or his group of the children of Charles V., with the dogs is very effective. Van Dyke's "Blue Boy" is a fine bit of color. Mme. Le Brun and her daughter, or several others of Mme. Le Brun are pretty and easily costumed.

Gainsborough's "Duchess of Marlborough" is stately and admits of a stunning hat. So is "The Three Daughters of George III." Romney's stately portraits are all good for single figures. Rembrandt's "Russian Officer" will give a bit of change, or his portrait of himself with his wife, Saskia.

Frans Hals' old Dutch Burghomasters is stately and simply arranged. A Watteau would offer this but is more difficult.

A few pictures that a bit of a song make a break in the program, and are easily found. An imposing finale is "The Angels," with its dim twilight coloring and the solemn chant of the old hymn, sung by a hidden chorus. Individual taste and the pictures at command will suggest endless possibilities. The search for characters and costumes will become so absorbing, the careful arrangement and posing so entertaining to the participants, that there will be general regret when "the last picture is painted."

New Year Superstitions.

In some parts of Lincolnshire it is considered most unlucky to be murdered by a dark man on New Year's eve.

In Lancashire, if an unmarried woman loses either leg in a railway accident on New Year's eve, it is regarded as an evil omen, and a sign that she will not meet her future husband during the ensuing twelve months.

Dorsetshire folk firmly believe that if they meet a mad bull on New Year's morning it is an almost certain sign that they will shortly go on a journey.

A native of the Outer Hebrides would be greatly upset if he were to drop a five-pound note into the fire on New Year's eve.

In many homes of the North mistletoe is looked for who never the first New Year visitor happens to be a criminal lunatic. Punch.

A Strange Plant.

In Sumatra grows a plant which is wonderful in certain ways. It is called the rafflesia, after a former British governor of the island. It is said to be the largest and most magnificent flower in the world. It is composed of five roundish petals each a foot across and of a brick-red color, covered with numerous irregular yellowish white swellings. The petals surround a cup nearly a foot wide, the margin of which bears the stamens.

This cup is filled with a fleshy disk, the upper surface of which is everywhere covered with projections like miniature cow's horns. The cup when free from its contents would hold about twelve pints of water. The flower weighs fifteen pounds. It is very thick, the petals being three-quarters of an inch in thickness.

With its beauty one is led to expect sweetness, but its odor is that of tainted beef. Dr. Arnold, a naturalist, who was the first to describe it, believed that even the flies were deceived by the smell and deposited their eggs in the thick disk, taking it for a piece of carrion.

EXTREMELY LONG NOVELS.

Appalling Number of Words in English Serials.

Reviewers and others (writes a correspondent) who talk of the "disappearance of the very long novel" seem to forget or to be ignorant of the fact that the novel of great length—longer even than those written by Dickens or Thackeray—is still very much with us. The serial stories in certain of the morning papers are extremely long, as a well known London publisher recently had occasion to find out. He liked a certain serial, and he wrote to the author to come and see him. The author called, and the publisher said he would like to publish the story in book form "if it could be cut down a bit."

"About what size would you want?" inquired the author.

"Oh, say, 70,000 words," said the publisher.

"But, my dear sir," said the author, "there are in my story more than 600,000 words, and to cut it down to the length you require would involve more work than the rewriting of the tale!" He added that he had brought the manuscript with him. He had: it was outside the publisher's office in a four-wheeler, the interior of which was packed with paper, while there were also bundles in the box! And 600,000 is not the record. There has just been ended a serial which had in it no fewer than 800,000 words. One author who makes serials a specialty, and is in big demand, gets £2 a thousand words, so his annual income is considerable. Some papers, it may be added, pay their serial writers so much a week, regardless of the amount of their contributions.

The same correspondent gives an experience that befel him the other day as a serial writer. His story was appearing in a northern weekly, which paid him £1 for each instalment and gave no time limit, so to speak. The author wrote each week for about six months, and then came a day when he was ill and unable to take up the tale. He wired to a writer on the staff of the paper, asking him to do two chapters, "just marking time." The writer obliged, but great was the author's astonishment and vast his indignation when he saw at the close of his instalment the words, "The End." The collaborator, acting at the instigation of the editor, had wound up every thing very neatly, and our correspondents £1 a week had ceased to be.—London Post.

The Future World Language.

What will be the world language of the future?

That it will be English is the prediction of many scholarly observers. The probabilities are that it will partake of the best features of all modern tongues.

It is a safe proposition to assume that the race which dominates the commerce of the world will impress its language upon the world.

The English-speaking people are today the leaders in world activity.

As a result the English language is spoken by more people to-day than is any other civilized tongue.

The recent action of Germany in giving the English language preference above all other foreign tongues is formal recognition of the fact and not the mere arbitrary expression of a choice.

The strong point is made, however, that America more than England is responsible for the change.

Two-thirds of the people who speak English live on this side of the Atlantic, and their industrial and commercial conquests are making the tongue familiar in every quarter of the habitable globe.

French is still regarded as the diplomatic and "polite" language of the world, but English, as expanded and rejuvenated by American transplantation, is becoming the universal business tongue.

The world language of the future, therefore, is that which America will speak and teach.

Preventing Railroad Wrecks.

The essential point of the tablet system for preventing railroad collisions is that no engineer is allowed to leave a station without a tablet in his possession. These tablets are supplied by a machine which is so adjusted that it is impossible for two tablets to be out at the same time. If an engineer leaves Auckland for Newmarket with a tablet, that tablet has to be deposited in the machine at Newmarket before another tablet is issued allowing a return train to leave that station for Auckland; and the electric connection between the two stations makes it impossible to extract a tablet from the Auckland machine until the tablet has been deposited in the machine at Newmarket. Railroad experts declare that under this system two trains cannot be on the same section at once, so that danger of collisions is entirely avoided.

From Forest to Reader.

It has been demonstrated in Germany that a tree can be converted into a newspaper in less than two hours and a half. At 7:30 o'clock in the morning three trees were felled, stripped and taken to a paper factory. By 9:31 the first sheet of paper issued from the machines. The printing works of the nearest newspaper were about four miles distant. The paper was carried there in a motor car at full speed, the presses set to work, and exactly at 10 o'clock the newspaper was ready printed. The whole process from the forest to the reader thus took only two hours and twenty-five minutes.

You can at least put your pride in your pocket when it is empty.