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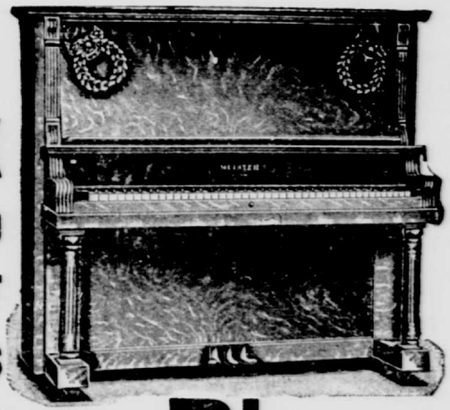

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We have a new way of making pianos—making them to order—making them especially for each customer.

We have a new selling plan—selling the celebrated Meister Piano—made to order—direct from factory—on only Ten Dollars down and One Dollar weekly payments—payments so small that you hardly notice them—payments that are less than you would have to pay for rental of an ordinary piano, should you rent one.

That isn't all.

By letting us make your piano to order, especially for you, we give you a **better** piano than you can possibly find in stock anywhere—and at the same time save at least $150.

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Now, don't think of buying a stock piano from anybody—just an ordinary piano like everybody else's—until you know about our new proposition.

Do you know why we make pianos to order? We'll tell you.

Stock pianos are made in large quantities—on stock pattern—every one just like every other one—and they are all made in a hurry—for anybody, and everybody, and for nobody in particular. There's no individuality—no exclusiveness of design—no choice of wood or finish.

Being made in a hurry and in large quantities, stock pianos are oftentime constructed of green, unseasoned lumber. And that's the great trouble with the ordinary stock piano.

Another thing:

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THE BREAKDOWN GANG

By Day Allen Willey

DID you ever hear of the Minute Men of the Breakdown Gang—the fellows who are the rough and readies of the line? In the round house or repair shop you see them hammering, riveting, perhaps running the drill press or plate cutter. Then in rushes the call boy. Not stopping to get out of jumper and overalls, but grabbing their caps, off they run to the wrecker.

A boulder fell on the track; the switch handle was turned the wrong way; a loose spike may have misplaced the rail; but it is not for them to stop and learn how it happened. The shapeless mass of torn and twisted framework, which a few hours before people called a train, must be attacked with chain and rope, bar and ax,—burned, if need be,—to open the way; for, until they have performed their duty, the line is blocked and the wheels of perhaps a thousand cars cease to turn. So away goes the Breakdown Gang at breakneck speed. Orders have gone ahead for a clear track, and even the Limited and Fast Mail must take the siding until the Minute Men have passed on the way to the rescue.

You don't hear much about them unless you are a railroader; but the superintendent, the manager, perhaps some of the directors, know them. Selected from the veterans in the shops, they are all round mechanics; but brains as well as fingers are needed, and a man has to be quick witted to get into this gang.

Men to Crawl Into Holes

IN the fifteen or twenty which make up the average crew, you can generally find two or three little men; for there are tight places in a wreck where they can do considerable work in propping up or loosening a part, crawling into holes which no one else could reach. The boss wrecker tries to get two or three left handers also, as their services are valuable in hammering away in corners where a right handed man would be useless. Some of the best wrecking crews in the country include a number of sailors. The half hitches and other knots that only the seamen can make are of great service in securely fastening lines to portions of the wreck and to the crane or locomotive used in pulling it away. The old salts are familiar with the assistance that a combination of pulleys will give, for they have been taught it on shipboard, while usually they are very strong and wiry. Consequently, a man of this kind who is out of a job at any time can frequently go with the wrecking crew.

Their Limited is not much for looks. Like the men, it is also rough and ready. Down by the division round house or repair shop it stands on a siding where it can take the line at a minute's notice. There is nothing unusual in its appearance except the crane car, which carries the heavy artillery of this little army of rescue. Two or three flat cars, a box car or so, and at the end a passenger coach or caboose, make up the train, but every article it carries, from the extra truck wheels to the coupling pins, has been loaded with such care that every man knows where to put his hands on what he wants. Usually the running gear gets the worst of it in a wreck, so one of the flat cars contains extra trucks and wheels to be substituted for the broken ones. Next to this car is placed the big steel crane, which yanks masses of wood and metal about as though they weighed pounds instead of tons, and is capable of lifting a fifty-ton engine.

Enter the box car, and you see a miniature lumber yard—square pieces of timber all the way from an inch to a foot through. They are wanted for propping up the wreckage, which may be holding down the living as well as the dead. These props may aid in saving life, but they also are handy to hold up coaches when the crew are putting wheels or other parts in place. In one corner are coils of rope an inch or more thick. Boxes of bolts and nuts and screws lay side by side on the floor. On the walls hang hooks, pulleys, saws, axes. Heavy steel crowbars are piled in another corner. In short, this is a repair shop and storehouse on wheels.

Their Traveling Home

ANY old coach will do for the crew, provided its wheels and axles are sound. Taking out some of the seats gives room for a table where the men can eat and play cards if they don't want to get a nap on the way; but if they have time for a little sleep half a dozen wooden bunks round the sides give them a chance. Sometimes an end is partitioned off into a galley where they can make a pot of coffee or fry a steak while en route.

Such is the usual make up of the "Wreck Special," as the railroader terms it. When called into service, a big driver engine backs down to it and couples on. There is no need of any speed orders. Those are understood in advance. On the straight track the man in the cab opens his throttle to the last notch, and the telegraph poles at the side of the line flit by so fast that they seem only a dozen feet apart. Only on the shorter curves and on the down grades and bridges is the throttle again moved and the air put on, until the heap of ruins, from which too often arise flames and smoke, come into view.

The first thing to find out is if anything human is underneath. Whether dead or alive, it must come out, and the gang need no urging at the task, even if they hear no moan or cry to hasten their rescue. Then the next job is to clear the tracks. Holding up trains for even five or six hours means a big loss to the company, and they don't stop to save anything that takes too long. Beams, wheels, and rods, perhaps entire cars, are thrown down embankments, if necessary to open the right of way. When a car has merely been derailed, it is of course an easy matter to replace it, then it is run to the nearest siding; but it is the unexpected that happens in railroad accidents.

Straightening Up an Engine

A LOCOMOTIVE may turn bottom up on the track, with the driving wheels in the air. Then it must be turned over and pulled to one side of the road bed until there is time between the passing of trains to right it—if it can be righted. Cars may be swung directly across the track, lying on their sides or ends, possibly ground into a mere mass of splintered timbers, or literally reduced to kindling wood, their contents scattered a hundred yards about.

The wrecker who has been in the business for any length of time can tell in a moment the most difficult task before him, and if possible goes at that first. If a loaded freight car prevents him from reaching the partly demolished engine, he sets it afire. One of the greatest delays, however, is caused by the track being torn up, for new ties have to be put in position, and perhaps a dozen rails weighing a ton apiece cut and straightened, in order to form a foundation on which to move.

Everything goes with a rush from the first news of the accident. Once the wreckers get busy there is no stopping for rest or refreshment, although a man may have to work all night or all day. With the broken and twisted mass of steel and wood piled on one side of the road bed, however, there comes a breathing spell, and the superintendent or other officials look over the debris to see what is worth saving. Going from pile to pile, they soon decide what to pull out and block up, and then the wreckers get to work on this. If there is an engine, it is generally secured first. Perhaps it was embedded in two or three feet of mud, or ten or twelve feet down an embankment. Here the little men come in handy. Worming themselves under the boiler, they scrape holes beneath, so that the steel tendons of the crane can be passed round it.

A Powerful Machine

NOW the crane goes into action. If the embankment is sloping, the usual plan is to drag the locomotive along, allowing the earth and ballast to assist in supporting it until the top is reached; but there are places where it has to be lifted clear of the ground, then swung over on the track.

Machinery has done much to aid the Breakdown Gang in recent years; but away back in the early days of the way of steel they were called to many a disaster, for then as now trains sometimes butted into each other on the same track. To clear the road the locomotive of the wreck train could sometimes be pressed into service, but many a derailed car or engine was pulled back on the rails merely by human muscle. Here again the sailorman came in very handy, as he knew so well how to arrange the ropes and pulleys and to make lines fast round the car or engine that had to be moved.

One of the curious methods of employing the locomotive of the wreck train was to make it move a car forward by starting the locomotive backward. Fastening a tackle securely round the car, it would be passed through a pulley fastened to a tree or post in front of it, and the rope then led back to the locomotive. Reversing his lever, the engineer, of course, pulled the rope around the pulley on the tree, thus forcing the car ahead. By this novel plan, which is still used occasionally, much of the debris in front of the wreck train could be cleared away.

There are times, though, when even the most careful riggers make a mistake. They have not realized the strain which the tackle must stand when things begin to move. Then, like the crack of a rifle, snap goes the line. More than once a loose end has caught some poor fellow round the legs, breaking the bones like pipe stems. Many a man on the railroad's payroll who is fit only to wave the signal flag at the street crossing was among the wreckers until the day the rope broke.