Tales of Life on the Rail.

3.—A PEG-LEGGED ROMANCE.

By JOHN A. HILL.

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Some men are born heroes, some become heroic and some have heroism thrust upon them; but nothing of the kind ever happened to me. I don't know how it is, but, some way or other, I remember all the railroad incidents I see or hear, and get to the bottom of most of the stories of the road. I must study them over more than most men do, or else the other fellows enjoy the comedies and deplore the tragedies and say nothing. Sometimes I am mean enough to think that the romance, the dramas, and the tragedies of the road don't impress them as being as interesting as those of the plains, the Indians, or the seas—people are so apt to see only the everyday side of life anyway, and to draw all their romance and heroics from books.

I helped make a hero once—no, I didn't either; I helped make the golden setting after the rough diamond had shown its value.

Miles Diston pulled freight on our road a few years ago. He was a medium stature, dark complexion, but no beauty. He was a manly-looking, well educated enough, sober and a steady-going reliable engineer; you would never pick him out for a hero. Miles was young yet—not 30—but somehow or other, he had escaped matrimony; I guess he had never had time. He stayed on the farm at home until he was of age, and then went firing, so that when I first knew him he had barely got to his goal—the throttle.

A good many men, when they first get there, take great interest in their work for a few months—until experience gives them confidence; then they take it easier, look around and take some interest in other things. Most of them never hope to get above running, and so sit down more or less contented, get married, buy real estate, gamble or grow fat, each according to the dictates of his own conscience or the inclination of his make-up Miles figured a little on matrimony.

I can't explain it; but when a railroad man is in trouble he comes to me for advice, just as he would go to the company doctor for kidney complaint. I am a specialist in heart troubles. Miles came to me.

Miles was like the rest of them. They don't come right down and say, "Something's the matter with me; what would you do for it?" No, sir. They hem and haw and laugh off the symptoms, until you come right out and tell them just how they feel and explain the cause; then they will do anything you say. Miles hemmed and hawed a little, but soon came out and showed his symptoms—he asked me if I had ever noticed the "Frenchman's" girl.

"The Frenchman," be it known, was our boss bridge carpenter. He lived at a small place half way over my division—I was pulling express—and the freights stopped there, changing engines. I knew Venot, the bridge carpenter, very well; met him in lodge occasionally, and once in a while he rode on the engine with me to inspect the bridges. His wife was a Canadian woman and good looking for her forty years and ten children. The daughter that was killing Miles Diston, Marie Venot, was the eldest, and had just graduated from some sisters' school. She was a very handsome girl, and you could read the romantic nature of her being through her big, round, gray eyes. She was vivacious and loved to go; but she was a dutiful daughter, and at once took hold to help her mother in a way that made her all the more adorable in the eyes of practical men like Miles.

Miles made the most of his opportunities.

But, bless you, there were other eyes for good-looking girls beside those in poor Miles Diston's head, and he was far from having the field to himself; this he wanted badly, and came to get advice from me.

I advised strongly against wasting energy to clear the field and in favor of putting it all into making the best show and in getting ahead of all competitors. Under my advice, Miles disposed of some vacant lots, and bought a neat little home, put it in thorough order, and made the best of his opportunities with Marie.

Marie came to our house regularly, and I had good opportunity to study her. She was a sensible little creature, and, to my mind, just the girl for Miles, as Miles was just the man for her. But she had confided to my wife the fact that she never, never could consent to marry and settle down in the regulation, humdrum way; she wanted to marry a hero, some one she could look up to—a king among men.

My wife told her that kings and heroes were scarce just then, and that a lot of pretty good women managed to be comparatively happy with common railroad men. But Marie wanted a hero, and would hear nothing less.

It was during one of her visits to my home that Miles took Marie out for a ride, and (accidentally, of course) dropped around by his new house, induced her to look at it, and told his story, asking her to make the home complete. It would have caught almost any girl; but when Miles delivered her at our door and drove off, I knew that there would be a "For Rent" card on that house in a few days, and that Marie Venot was bound to have a hero or nothing.

Miles took his repulse calmly, but it hurt. He told me that Marie was hunting for a different kind of man from him; said that he thought perhaps if he would enlist and go out to fight Sitting Bull, and come home in a new brass-bound uniform, with a poisoned arrow sticking out of his breast, she would fall at his feet and worship him. She told him she liked him better than any of the town boys; his calling was noble enough and hard enough; but she failed to see her ideal hero in a man with blue overclothes on and cinders in his ears. If any of Miles' competitors had rescued a drowning child or killed a boar with a penknife, at this juncture, I'm afraid Marie would have taken him. But, as I have indicated, it was a dull season for heroes.

About this time our road invested in some mogul passenger engines, and I drew one. I didn't like the boiler sticking back between me and Dennis Rafferty. I didn't like six wheels connected. I didn't like eighteen-inch cylinders. I was opposed to solid end rods. And I am afraid I belonged to a class of ignorant, short-sighted, bull-headed engineers who didn't believe that a railroad had any right to buy anything but 15x22 eight-wheelers—the smaller they were the more men they would want. I got over that a long time ago; but at the time I write of I was cranky about it. The moguls were high and short and jerky, and they tossed a man around like a rat in a corn popper. One day, as I was chasing time over our worst division, holding on to the arm rest and watching to see if the main frame touched the driving boxes as they rolled, Dennis Rafferty punched me in the small of the back and said, "Jahn, for the love ave Vargin, lave up on her a minit. Oi does be chasing that dure for the lasth twinity minits, and dang the wan'st has I hit it fair. She's the divil on th' dodge."

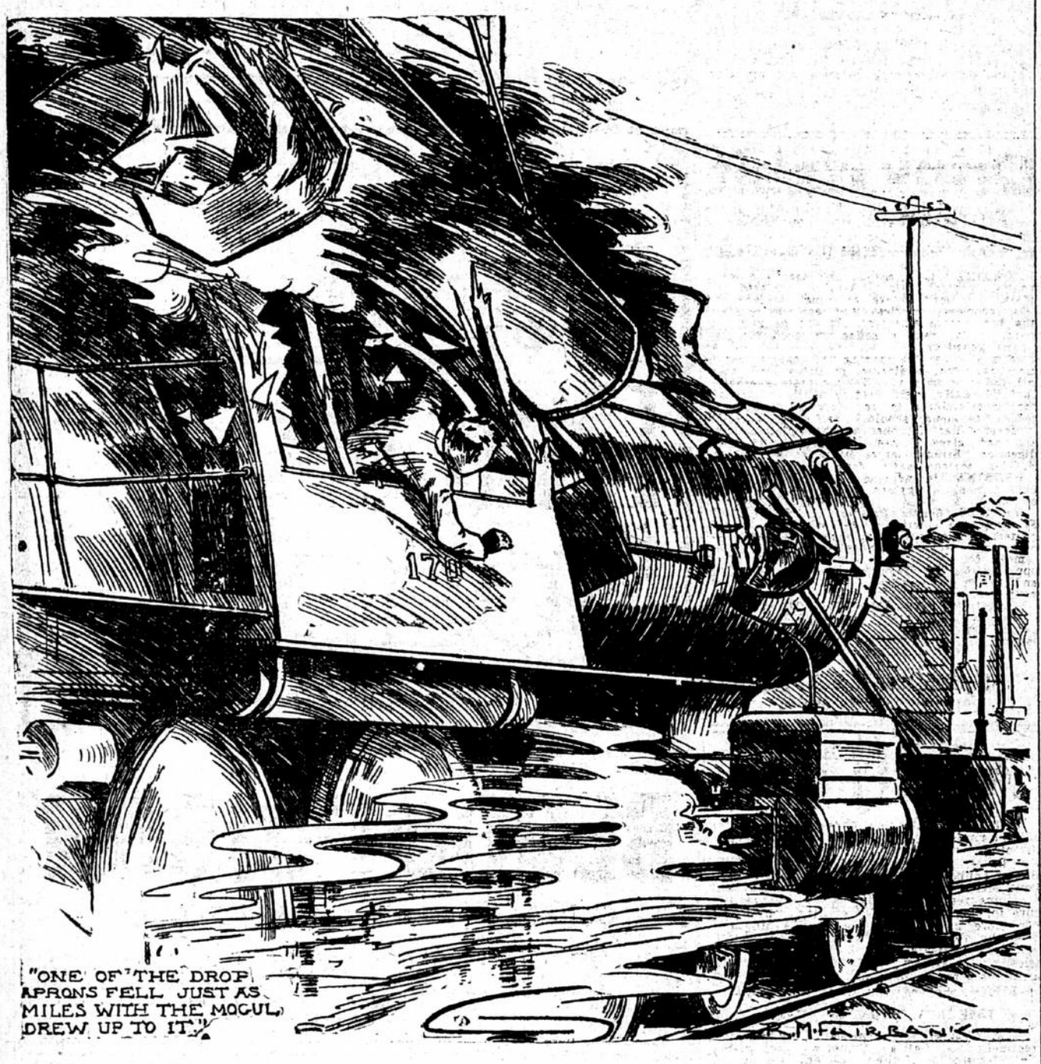
Dennis had a pile of coal just inside and just outside of the door, the forward grates were bare, the steam was down, and I went in seven minutes late, too mad to eat—and that's pretty mad for me. I laid off and Miles Diston took the high-roller out next trip.

Miles didn't rant and write letters or poetry or marry some one else to spite himself, or take the first steamer for Burraga or equatorial Africa, as rejected lovers in stories do. It hurt, and he didn't enjoy it, but he bore up all right and went about his business, just as hundreds of other sensible men do every day. He gave up entirely, however, rented his house, and said he couldn't fill the bill—there wasn't a hero in his family as far back as he could remember.

Miles had been making time with the Black Maria for about a week when the big accident happened in our town. The boilers in the cotton mill blew up and killed a score of girls and injured hundreds more. Miles was at the other end of the division and they hurried him out to take a car load of doctors down. They were given the right of the road, and Miles tested the speed of that mogul—proving that a pony truck would stay on the track at fifty miles an hour, which a lot of us "cranks" had disputed.

A few miles out there is a coaling station, and at that time they were building the chutes. One of the iron drop aprons fell just as Miles with the mogul drew up to it; it smashed the headlight, dented the stack, ripped up the casing of the sand box and dome, cut a slit in the jacket the length of the boiler, tore off the cab, struck the end of the first car, and then tore itself loose and fell to the ground.

The throttle was knocked wide open and the mogul was flying. Miles was thrown down, his head cut open by a splinter and his foot pretty badly hurt. He picked himself up instantly and took a look as he closed the throttle. Everything was "coming" all right; he remembered the emergency of the case and opened the throttle again. A hasty inspection showed the engine in condition to run—she only looked crippled. Miles had to stand up. His foot felt numb and weak, so he rested his weight on the other foot. He was afraid he would fall off if he became weak, and he had Dennis take off the bell cord and tie it around his waist, throwing a loop over the reverse lever as a measure of safety. The right side of the cab and all the roof were gone, so that Miles was in plain sight. The cut in his scalp bled profusely and in trying to wipe the blood from his eyes he merely spread it all over himself, so that he looked as if he had been half murdered.



"ONE OF THE DROP APRONS FELL JUST AS MILES WITH THE MOGUL DREW UP TO IT."

It was this apparition of wreck, ruin and concentrated energy that Marie Venot saw flash past her father's door, hastening to the relief of the victims of a worse disaster forty miles away.

Her father came home for his dinner in a few minutes from his little office in the depot. To his daughter's eager inquiry he said there had been some big accident in town and the "extra" was carrying doctors from up the road. But what was the matter with the engine he didn't know; it was the 170; so it was old man Alexander, he said—and that's the nearest I ever came to being a hero.

Marie knew who was running the 170 pretty well; so after dinner she went to the telegraph office for information, and there she learned that the special had struck the new coal chute at Coalton, and that the engineer was hurt. It was time she ran down to see Mrs. Alexander, she said, and that afternoon's regular delivered her in town.

Like all other railroaders not better employed, I dropped round to the depot at train time to talk with the boys and keep track of things in general. The regular was late but Miles was coming with the special and came while we were talking about it. Miles didn't realize how badly he was hurt until he stopped the mogul in front of the general office. So long as the excitement of the run was on, so long as he saw the absolute necessity of doing his whole duty until the desired end was accomplished, so long as he had a reputation to protect, his will power subordinated all else. But when several of us engineers ran up to the engine we found Miles hanging to the reverse lever by his safety cord in a dead faint. We carried him into the depot, and one of the doctors administered some restorative. Then we got a hack and started him and the doctor for my house, but Miles came to himself and insisted on going to his boarding house and nowhere else.

Mrs. Bailey, Miles' boarding-housekeeper, had been a trained nurse, but had a few years before invested in a rather disappointing matrimonial venture. She was one of the best nurses and one of the "crankiest" women I ever knew. I believe she was actually glad to see Miles come home hurt, just to show how she could pull him through.

The doctor found that Miles had an ankle out of joint, the little toe was badly crushed, there was a bad cut in the leg that had bled profusely, there was a black bruise over the short ribs on the right side, and there was a buttonhole in the scalp that needed about four stitches. The little toe was cut off without ceremony, the ankle replaced and hot bandages applied and other repairs were made which took up most of the afternoon.

When the doctor got through he called Mrs. Bailey and myself out into the parlor, and said that we must not let people crowd in to see the patient; that his wounds were not dangerous, but very painful; that Miles was weak from loss of blood, and that his constitution was not in particularly good conditoin. The doctor, in fact, thought that Miles would be in great luck if he got out of the scrape without a run of fever. Thereafter Mrs. Bailey referred all visitors to me. I talked with the doctor and the nurse, and we all agreed that it would stop most inquisitive people to simply say that the patient had suffered an amputation.

That evening, when I went home, there were two anxious women to receive me, and the younger of them looked suspiciously as if she had been crying. I told them something of the accident, how it all happened and about Miles' injuries. Both of them wanted to go right down and help "do something," but I told them of the doctor's order and of his fears.

By this time the reporters came, and I called them into the parlor and then let them pump me. I detailed the accident in full, but declined to tell anything about Miles or his history. "The fact is," said I, "that you people won't give an engineer his just dues. Now, if Miles Diston had been a fireman and had climbed down a ladder with a child, you would have his picture in the paper and call him a hero and all that sort of thing; but here is a man crushed and bleeding, with broken bones and a crippled engine, who stands on one foot, lashed to his reverse lever for forty miles and making the fastest time ever made over the road because he knew others were suffering for the relief he brought."

"That's nerve," said one of the young men.

"Nerve!" said I; "nerve! Why that man knows no more about fear than a lion; and think of the sand of the man! This afternoon he sat up and watched the doctor perform that amputation without a quiver; he wouldn't take choloform; he wouldn't even lie down."

"Was the amputation above or below the knee?" asked the reporter.

"Below" (I didn't state how far).

"Which foot?"

"Left."

"He is in no great danger?"

"Yes; the doctor says he will be a very sick man for some time—if he recovers at all. Boys," I added, "there's one thing you might mention, and I think you ought to—and that is that it is such heroes as this that give a road its reputation; people feel as though they were safe behind such men."

If Miles Diston had read the papers the next morning he would have died of flattery; the reporters did themselves proud, and they made a whole column of the "iron will and nerves of steel" shown in that "amputation without ether."

Marie Venot was full of sympathy for Miles; she wanted to see him, but Mrs. Bailey referred her to me, and she finally went home, still inquiring every day about him. I don't think she had much other feeling for him than pity. She was down again a week later and I talked freely of going to pick out a wooden foot for Miles, who was improving right along.

Meanwhile, the papers far and near copied the articles about "The Hero of the Throttle," and the item about the road's interest in heroes attracted the attention of our general passenger agent—he liked the free advertising and wanted more of it; so he called me in one day, and asked if I knew of a choice run they could give Miles as a reward of merit.

I told him, if he wanted to make a show of gratitude from the road, and get a big free advertisement in the papers, to have Miles appointed superintendent of the Spring Creek Branch, where a practical man was needed, and then give it out "cold" that Miles had been rewarded by being made superintendent of the road. This was afterward done, with a great hurrah (in the papers).

The second Sunday after Miles was hurt, Marie was down, and I thought I'd have a little fun with her and see how she regarded Miles.

"There's quite a romance connected with Diston's affair," siad I at the dinner table, rather carelessly. "There is a young lady visiting here in town—I hear she is very wealthy—who saw Miles when we took him off his engine. She sends flowers every day, calls him her hero, and is just crazy for him to get well so she can see him."

"Who is she, did you say?" asked my wife.

"I forgot her name," said I, "but I am here to tell you that she will get Miles if there is any chance in the world. Her father is an army officer, but she says that Miles Diston is a greater hero than the army ever produced."

"She's a hussy," said Marie.

I don't know whether you would call that a bull or a bear movement on the Diston stock, but it went up—I could see that.

A week later Miles was able to come down to our house for dinner and my wife asked Marie to come also. I met her at the depot, and after she was safe in the buggy I told her that Miles was up at the house. She nearly jumped out; but I quieted her, and told her she mustn't notice or say a word about Miles' game leg, as he was extremely sensitive about it.

My wife was in the kitchen, and I went to the barn to put out the horse. Marie went to the sitting room to avoid the parlor and Miles, but he was there, I guess, and Marie found her hero, for when they came out to dinner he had his arm around her. They were married a month later, and went to Washington, stopping to see us on the way back.

As I came home that night with my patent dinner pail, and with two rows of wrinkles and a load of responsibility on my brow, Marie shook her fist in my face and called me "an old story teller."

"Story teller," said I. "What story?"

"Oh, what story? That leg story, of course, you old cheat."

"What leg story?"

"Old innocence; that amputation below the knee—you know."

"Wa'n't it below the knee?"

"Yes, but it was the little toe."

"John," said Miles, "she cried when she looked for that wooden foot and only found a slightly flat wheel."

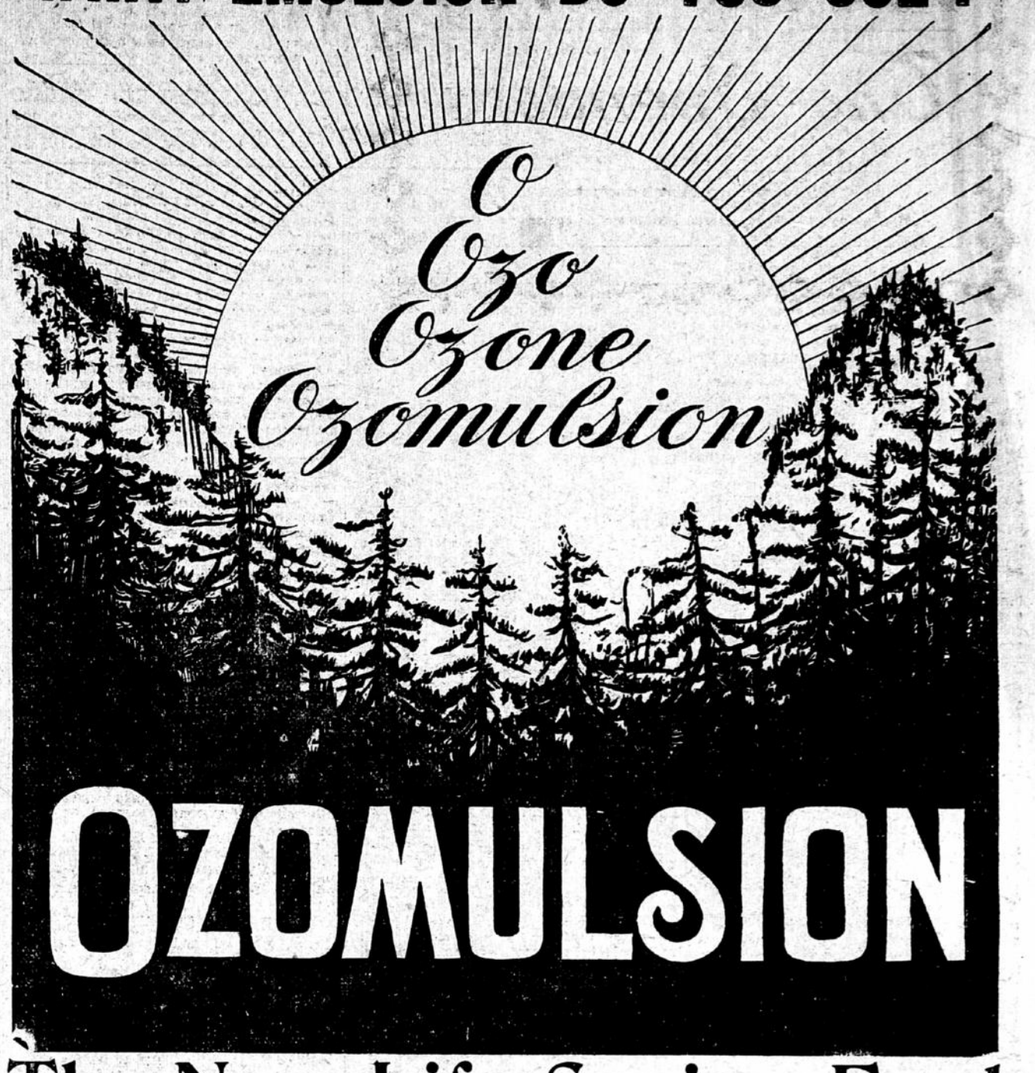
"That's just like 'em," said I. "Here Marie only expected a part of a hero, and we give her a whole man, and she kicks—that's gratitude for you."

"I got my hero all right, though," said Marie; "you told me a big fib just the same, but I could kiss you for it."

"Don't you do that," said I, "but if the Lord should send you many blessings, and any of 'em are boys, you might name one after me."

She said she'd do it—and she did.

WHAT EMULSION DO YOU USE?



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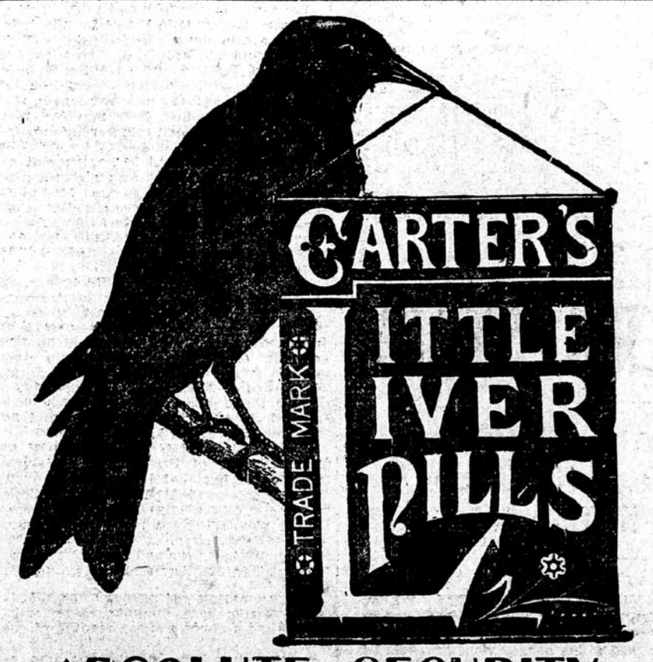

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