

Second Seventy-seven

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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It is a bad grade yet. But before the new work was done on the river division Beverly hill was a terrific trainmen.

On rainy Sunday days old switchmen in the Zanesville yards still tell their shanties of the night the Blackwood bridge went out and Cameron's stock train got away on the hill, with the Denver flier caught at the foot like a rat in a trap.

Ben Buckley was only a big boy then, braving on freights. I was dispatching under Alex Campbell on the West End. Ben was a tall, loose-jointed fellow, but zealous as a kitten; less as long as plumb lines, yet none too long running for the Beverly switch that night. His great chum in those days was Andy Cameron. Andy was the youngest engineer on the line. The first time I ever saw them together Andy, short and chubby as a duck, was dancing around, half dressed, on the roof of the bath house, trying to get away from Ben, who had the fire hose below, playing on him with a two inch stream of ice water. They were up to some sort of a prank all the time.

June was usually a rush month with us. From the coast we caught the new crop Japan tees and the fall importations of China silks. California still sent her fruits, and Colorado was beginning cattle shipments. From Wyoming came sheep and from Oregon steers, and all these not merely in carloads, but in solid trains. At times we were swamped. The overland traffic alone was enough to keep us busy. On top of it came a great movement of grain from Nebraska that summer, and to crown our troubles a rate war sprang up. Every man, woman and child east of the Mississippi appeared to have but one object in life—that was to get to California and to go over our road. The passenger traffic burdened our resources to the last degree.

I was putting on new men every day then. We start them at braking on freights. Usually they work for years at that before they get a train, but when a train dispatcher is short on crews he must have them and can only press the best material within reach. Ben Buckley had not been braking three months when I called him up one day and asked him if he wanted a train.

"Yes, sir, I'd like one first rate, but you know I haven't been braking very long, Mr. Reed," said he frankly.

"How long have you been in the train service?"

I spoke brusquely, though I knew without even looking at my service card just how long it was.

"Three months, Mr. Reed."

"It was right to a day."

"I'll probably have to send you out on 77 this afternoon." I saw him stiffen like a ramrod. "You know we're pretty short," I continued.

"Yes, sir."

"But do you know enough to keep your head on your shoulders and your train on your orders?"

Ben laughed a little. "I think I do. Will there be two sections today?"

"There're loading eighteen cars of stock at Ogallala. If we get any hogs off the Beaver there will be two big sections. I shall mark you up for the first one anyway and send you out right behind the flier. Get your badge and your punch from Carpenter, and whatever you do, Buckley, don't get rattled."

"No, sir. Thank you, Mr. Reed."

But his "thank you" was so pleasant I couldn't altogether ignore it. I compromised with a cough. Perfect courtesy even in the hands of the awkwardest boy that ever wore his trousers short is a surprisingly handy thing to disarm gruff people with. Ben was undeniably awkward, his legs were too long and his trousers decidedly out of touch with his feet, but I turned away with the conviction that in spite of his awkwardness there was something to the boy. That night proved it.

When the flier pulled in from the west in the afternoon it carried two extra sleepers. In all eight Pullmans, and every one of them loaded to the ventilators. While the train was changing engines and crews the excursionists swarmed out of the big cars to walk up and down the platform. They were from New York and had a band with them—as jolly a crowd as we ever hauled—and I noticed many boys and girls sprinkled among the grown folks.

As the heavy train pulled slowly out the band played, the women waved handkerchiefs and the boys shouted themselves hoarse.

The heavy train was well in hand, and it rolled down the long grade as gently as a curtain.

Ben was none too careful, for half way down the hill they exploded for peloses. Through the driving storm the tall lights of the flier were presently seen. As they pulled carefully ahead Ben made his way through the mud and rain to the head end and found the passenger train stalled. Just before them was Blackwood creek, bank full, and the bridge swinging over the swollen stream like a grapevine.

At the foot of Beverly hill there is a siding—a long siding, once used as a sort of cutoff to the upper Zanesville yards. This side track parallels the main track for half a mile, and on this siding Ben, as soon as he saw the situation, drew in with his train so that it lay beside the passenger train and left the main line clear behind. It then became his duty to guard the track to the rear, where the second section of the stock train would soon be due.

It was pouring rain and as dark as a pocket. He started his hind end brakeman back on the run with red lights and torpedoes to warn the second section well up the hill. Then walking across from his caboose, he got under the lee of the hind Pullman sleeper to watch for the expected headlight.

The storm increased in violence. It was not the rain driving in torrents, not the lightning blazing nor the deafening crashes of thunder that worried him, but the wind. It blew a gale. In the glare of the lightning he could see the oaks which crowned the bluffs whip like willows in the storm. It swept quartering down the Beverly cut as if it would tear the ties from under the steel. Suddenly he saw far up in the black sky a star blazing. It was the headlight of Second Seventy-seven.

A whistle cut the wind, then another. It was the signal for brakes. The second section was coming down the steep grade. He wondered how far back his man had got with the bombs. Even as he wondered he saw a yellow flash below the headlight. It was the first torpedo. The second section was already well down to the top of the hill. Could they hold it to the bottom?

Like an answer came shorter and sharper the whistle for brakes. Ben thought he knew who was on that engine; thought he knew that whistle, for engineers whistle as differently as they talk. He still hoped and believed—knowing who was on the engine—that the brakes would hold the heavy load, but he feared—

A man running up in the rain passed him. Ben shouted and held up his lantern. It was his brakeman.

"Who's pulling Second Seventy-seven?" he cried.

"Andy Cameron."

"How many air cars has he got?"

"Six or eight," shouted Ben. "It's the wind, Daley—the wind. Andy can hold her if anybody can. But the wind; did you ever see such a blow?"

Even while he spoke the cry for brakes came a third time on the storm.

A frightened Pullman porter opened the rear door of the sleeper. Five hundred people lay in the excursion train, unconscious of this avalanche rolling down upon them.

The conductor of the flier ran up to Ben in a panic.

"Buckley, they'll telescope us."

"Can you pull ahead any?"

"The bridge is out."

"Get out your passengers," said Ben's brakeman.

"There's no time," cried the passenger conductor wildly, running off. He was panic stricken. The porter tried to speak. He took hold of the brakeman's arm, but his voice died in his throat. Fear paralyzed him. Down

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As the heavy train pulled slowly out the band played, the women waved handkerchiefs and the boys shouted themselves hoarse.

Half an hour after the flier left, 77, the fast stock freight, would like a great snake around the bluff after it. Ben Buckley, tall and straight as a pine, stood on the caboose. It was his first train, and he looked as if he felt it.

In the evening I got reports of heavy rains east of us, and after 47 reported "out" of Turner Junction and pulled over the divide toward Beverly it was storming hard all along the line. By 10 time they reached the hill Ben had his men out setting brakes—tough work on that kind of a night, but when the big engine struck the bluff

With a rattling crash the ponies shot into the switch.

The wind came Cameron's whistle clamoring now in alarm. It meant the worst, and Ben knew it. The stock train was running away.

There were plenty of things to do if there was only time, but there was hardly time to think. The passenger crew were running about like men distracted, trying to get the sleeping travelers out. Ben knew they could not possibly reach a tenth of them. In the thought of what it meant an inspiration came like a flash.

"Daley," he cried in a voice like a pistol crack, "get those two stockmen out of our caboose! Quick, man! I'm going to throw Cameron into the cattle."

It was a chance—single, desperate, but yet a chance—the only chance that offered to save the helpless passengers in his charge.

If he could reach the siding switch ahead of the runaway train he could throw the deadly catapult on the siding and into his own train and so save the unconscious travelers. Before the words were out of his mouth he started up the track at topmost speed.

The angry wind staggered him. It blew out his lantern, but he flung it away, for he could throw the switch in the dark. A sharp gust tore half his rain coat from his back. Ripping off the rest, he ran on. When the wind took his breath he turned his back and fought for another. Blinding sheets of rain poured on him. Water streaming down the track caught his feet. A silvered tripped him, and, falling headlong, the sharp ballast cut his wrists and knees like broken glass. In desperate haste he dashed ahead again. The headlight loomed before him like a mountain of flame. There was light enough now through the sheets of rain that swept down on him, and there ahead, the train almost on it, was the switch.

Could he make it? A cry from the sleeping children rose in his heart. Another breath, an instant floundering, a slipping leap, and he had it. He pushed the key into the lock, threw the switch and snapped it and, to make deadly sure, braced himself against the target rod. Then he looked.

No whistling now. It was past that. He knew the frenzied howl would have jumped. Cameron too? No, not Andy, not if the pit yawned in front of his pilot.

He saw streams of fire flying from many wheels, he felt the glare of a dazzling light, and with a rattling crash, the ponies shot into the switch. The bar in his hands rattled as if it would jump from the socket, and, lurching frightfully, the monster took the siding. A flare of lightning lit the cab as it shot past, and he saw Cameron leaning from the cab window with face of stone, his eyes riveted on the gigantic drivers that threw a sheet of fire from the sandbed rails.

"Jump!" screamed Ben, useless as he knew it was. What voice could live in that hell of noise? What man escape from that cab now?

One, two, three, four cars pounded over the split rails in half as many seconds. Ben, running dizzily for life to the right, heard above the roar of the storm and screech of the sliding wheels a ripping, tearing crash, the harsh scrape of escaping steam, the hoarse cries of the wounded cattle. And through the dreadful dark and the fury of the label the wind howled in a gale and the heavens poured a flood.

Trembling from excitement and exhaustion, Ben staggered down the main track. A man with a lantern ran against him. It was the brakeman who had been back with the torpedoes. He was crying hysterically.

They stumbled over a body. Seizing the lantern, Ben turned the prostrate man over and wiped the mud from his face. Then he held the lantern close and gave a great cry. It was Andy Cameron—unconscious, true, but soon very much alive and no worse than badly bruised. How the good God who watches over plucky engineers had thrown him out from the horrible wreckage only he knew. But there Andy lay, and with a lighter heart Ben headed a wrecking crew to begin the task of searching for any who might by fatal chance have been caught in the crash.

And while the trainmen of the freight worked at the wreck the passenger train was backed slowly—so slowly and so smoothly—up over the switch and past, over the hill and past and so to Turner Junction and around by Oxford to Zanesville.

When the sun rose the earth glowed in the freshness of its June shower bath. The flier, now many miles from Beverly hill, was speeding in toward Omaha, and mothers, waking their little ones in the berths, told them how close death had passed while they slept. The little girls did not quite understand it, though they tried very hard, and were very grateful to that man, whom they never saw and whom they would never see. But the little boys—never mind the little boys—they understood it, to the youngest urchin on the train, and fifty times their papas had to tell them how far Ben ran and how fast to save their lives. And one little boy—I wish I knew his name—went with his papa to the depot master at Omaha when the flier stopped and gave him his toy watch and asked him please to give it to that man who had saved his mamma's life by running so far in the rain, and please to tell him how much obliged he was—if he would be so kind.

So the little toy watch came to our superintendent and so to me, and I, sitting at Cameron's bedside talking the wreck over with Ben, gave it to him. And the big fellow looked as pleased as if it had been a jeweled chronometer. Indeed that was the only medal Ben got.

The truth is we had no gold medals to distribute out on the West End in those days. We gave Ben the best we had, and that was a passenger run. But he is a great fellow among the railroad men. And on stormy nights switchmen in the Zanesville yards, smoking in their shanties, still tell of that night, that storm, and how Ben Buckley threw Second Seventy-seven at the foot of Beverly hill.

The Crittenden Record-Press.

BY JAKKEY BLITZEN.

Py ehings, iss dot a choke? Der Record an der Press— Now pull together in der yoke. Yah, dot is drue I guess.

Republikins nit Democrats— Vas sleeping in von bed, Der bosom of de'vils— Vill holt de oiders bed.

If dot don't beet der devil— It gets me awful flurried— About some things in Crittenden, Dem papers now vas married.

You bet is vas for der public good— Vat brings dese folks together, Und lesser coal und firewood— Dis cold und stormy woeider.

Der good Lord bless der happy pair— In dis their new position— And grant them soon a little heir— To work for prohibition.

Bartow, Fla., Feb. 26, 1907.

Hunting for Trouble

"I've lived in California 20 years, and am still hunting for trouble in the way of burns, sores, wounds, boils, cuts, sprains, or a case of piles that Bucklen's Arnica Salve won't quickly cure," writes Charles Walters, of Alleghany, Sierra Co. No use hunting for Mr. Walters; it cures every case. Guaranteed by Haynes & Taylor's 25c.

A Scotch Joke.

Jamie having come into the possession of considerable wealth through the death of relatives was thus addressed by one of his neighbors:

"Aye, Jamie, it was a guid thing for you that your rich freens waur born afore ye."

"Weel," said Jamie, "I'm use scarce about that; but it was a guid thing that they deed before me."—Chicago Journal.

Dangers of Pneumonia

A cold at this time if neglected is liable to cause pneumonia which is so often fatal, and even when the patient has recovered the lungs are weakened, making them peculiarly susceptible to the development of consumption. Foley's Honey and Tar will stop the cough, heal and strengthen the lungs and prevent pneumonia. La Grippe coughs yield quickly to the wonderful curative qualities of Foley's Honey and Tar. There is nothing else "just as good." J. H. Orme.

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WORMS

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Now that New York has added 41 square miles to her Adirondack forest reserve she ought to get some more deer put in it.—Boston Globe.

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