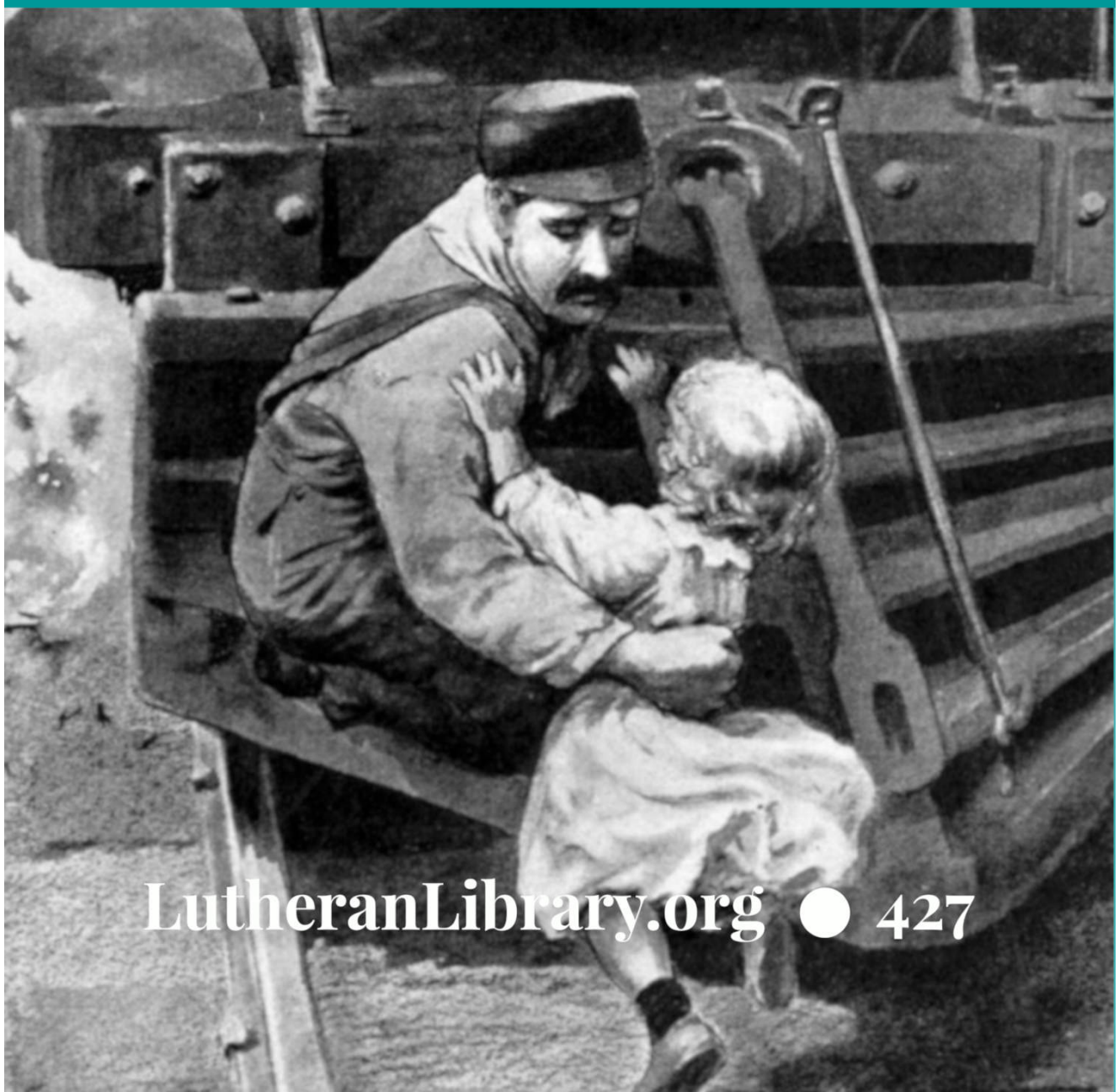
Burton Stevenson

The Young Section Hand



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The Young Section Hand

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"CAUGHT THE CHILD FROM UNDER THE VERY WHEELS OF THE ENGINE" (See page 65)

THE YOUNG SECTION-HAND

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "The Holladay Case," "Tommy Remington's Battle," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
L. J. BRIDGMAN

Boston ❦ L. C. PAGE & COMPANY ❦ *Mdccccv*

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By Burton E. Stevenson

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BOSTON
L.C. PAGE & COMPANY

To
E. R. S., G. W. P.
And The Other “Boys” of Yard
And Shop And Office
In Memory
Of That Far-Off Time
When I “Covered” The Railroad

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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

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Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

1. The Bottom Round

"EXCUSE ME, SIR, but do you need a man?"

Jack Welsh, foreman of Section Twenty-one, on the Ohio division of the P. & O., turned sharply around at sound of the voice and inspected the speaker for a moment.

“A man, yes,” he said, at last. “But not a boy. This ain’t boy’s work.”

And he bent over again to sight along the rail and make sure that the track was quite level.

“Up a little!” he shouted to the gang who had their crowbars under the ties some distance ahead.

They heaved at their bars painfully, growing red in the face under the strain.

“That’ll do! Now keep it there!”

Some of the men braced themselves and held on to their bars, while others hastened to tamp some gravel solidly under the ties to keep them in place. The foreman, at leisure for a moment, turned again to the boy, who had stood by with downcast face, plainly undecided what to do. Welsh had a kindly Irish heart, which not even the irksomeness of section work could sour, and he had noted the boy’s fresh face and honest eyes. It was not an especially handsome face, yet one worth looking twice at, if only for its frankness.

“What’s yer name, sonny?” he asked.

“Allan West.”

“An’ where’d y’ come from?”

“From Cincinnati.”

The foreman looked the boy over again. His clothes were good, but the worn, dusty shoes told that the journey of nearly a hundred miles had been made on foot. He glanced again at the face — no, the boy was not a tramp; it was easy to see he was ambitious and had ideals; he was no idler — he would work if he had the chance.

"What made y' come all that way?" asked Welsh, at last.

"I couldn't find any work at Cincinnati," said the boy, and it was evident that he was speaking the truth. "There's too many people there out of work now. So I came on to Loveland and Midland City and Greenfield, but it's the same story everywhere. I got some little jobs here and there, but nothing permanent. I thought perhaps at Wadsworth —"

"No," interrupted the foreman. "No, Wadsworth's th' same way — dead as a doornail. How old 're you?" he asked, suddenly.

"Seventeen. And indeed I'm very strong," added the boy, eagerly, as he caught a gleam of relenting in the other's eye. "I'm sure I could do the work."

He wanted work desperately; he felt that he had to have it, and he straightened instinctively and drew a long breath of hope as he saw the foreman examining him more carefully. He had always been glad that he was muscular and well-built, but never quite so glad as at this moment.

"It's mighty hard work," added Jack, reflectively.

"Mighty hard. Do y' think y' could stand it?"

"I'm sure I could, sir," answered Allan, his face glowing. "Just let me try."

"An' th' pay's only a dollar an' a quarter a day."

The boy drew a quick breath.

"That's more than I've ever made regularly, sir," he said. "I've always thought myself lucky if I could earn a dollar a day."

Jack smiled grimly.

"You'll earn your dollar an' a quarter all right at this work," he said. "An' you'll find it's mighty little when it comes t' feedin' an' clothin' an'

lodgin' yerself. But you'd like t' try, would y'?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Allan.

There could be no doubting his eagerness, and as he looked at him, Jack smiled again.

"I don't know what th' road-master'll say; mebbe he won't let me keep you — I know he won't if he sees you can't do th' work." He looked down the line toward the gang, who stood leaning on their tools, enjoying the unusual privilege of a moment's rest. "But I'm a man short," he added.

"I had t' fire one this mornin'. We'll try you, anyway. Put your coat an' vest on th' hand-car over there, git a pick an' shovel an' go up there with th' gang."

The boy flushed with pleasure and hurried away toward the hand-car, taking off his coat and vest as he went. He was back again in a moment, armed with the tools.

"Reddy, you show him the ropes!" shouted the foreman to one of the men.

"All roight, sir!" answered Reddy, easily distinguishable by the color of his hair. "Come over here, youngster," he added, as Allan joined the group. "Now you watch me, an' you'll soon be as good a section-man as they is on th' road."

The others laughed good-naturedly, then bent to work again, straightening the track. For this thing of steel and oak which bound the East to the West, and which, at first glance, would seem to have been built, like the Roman roads of old, to last for ever, was in constant need of attention. The great rails were of the toughest steel that forge could make; the ties were of the best and soundest

oak; the gravel which served as ballast lay under them a foot deep and extended a foot on either side; the road-bed was as solid as the art of man could make it, pounded, tamped, and rolled, until it seemed strong as the eternal hills.

Yet it did not endure. For every hour of the day there swept over it, pounding at it, the monstrous freight locomotives, weighing a hundred tons, marvels of strength and power, pulling long lines of heavy cars, laden with

coal and iron and grain, hurrying to give the Old World of the abundance of the New. And every hour, too, there flashed over it, at a speed almost lightning-like, the through passenger trains — the engines slim, supple, panting, thoroughbred; the lumbering mail-cars and day coaches; the luxurious Pullmans far heavier than any freight-car.

Day and night these thousands of tons hurled themselves along the rails, tearing at them at every curve, pounding them at every joint. Small wonder that they sometimes gave and spread, or broke short off, especially in zero weather, under the great pressure. Then, too, the thaws of spring loosened

the road-bed and softened it; freshets undermined it and sapped the foundations of bridge and culvert. A red-hot cinder from the firebox, dropped on a wooden trestle, might start a disastrous blaze. And the least defect meant, perhaps, the loss of a score of lives.

So every day, over the whole length of the line, gangs of section-men went up and down, putting in a new tie here, replacing a defective rail there, tightening bolts, straightening the track, clearing the ditches along the road of water lest it seep under the road-bed and soften it; doing a thousand and one things that only a section-foreman would think needful. And all this that passengers and freight alike might go in safety to their destinations; that the road, at the year's end, might declare a dividend.

There was nothing spectacular about their work; there was no romance connected with it. The passengers who caught a glimpse of them, as the train flashed by, never gave them a second thought. Their clothes were always torn and soiled; their hands hard and rough; the tugging at the bars had pulled their shoulders over into an ungraceful stoop; almost always they had the haggard, patient look of men who labor beyond their strength. But they were cogs in the great machine, just as important, in their way, as the big fly-wheel of a superintendent in the general offices; more important, sometimes, for the superintendent took frequent vacations, but the section work could not be neglected for a single day.

Allan West soon discovered what soul-racking work it was. To raise the rigid track a fraction of an inch required that muscles be strained to bursting. To replace a tie was a task that tried every nerve and sinew. The sun beat down upon them mercilessly, bringing out the sweat in streams. But the boy kept at it bravely, determined to do his part and hold the place if he

could. He was under a good teacher, for Reddy, otherwise Timothy Magraw, was a thorough-going section-hand. He knew his work inside and out, and it was only a characteristic Irish carelessness, a certain unreliability, that kept him in the ranks, where, indeed, he was quite content to stay.

"Oi d' want nothin' else," he would say. "Oi does me wor-rk, an' draws me pay, an' goes home an' goes t' sleep, with niver a thing t' worrit me; while Welsh there 's a-tossin' aroun' thinkin' o' what's before him. Reespons'bility — that's th' thing Oi can't stand."

On the wages he drew as section-hand — and with the assistance, in summer, of a little "truck-patch" back of his house — he managed to keep himself and his wife and numerous children clothed; they had enough to eat and a place to sleep, and they were all as happy as possible. So that, in this case, Reddy's philosophy seemed not a half-bad one. Certainly this freedom from responsibility left him in perpetual good-humour that lightened the work for the whole gang and made the hours pass more swiftly. Under his direction, the boy soon learned just what was expected of him, and even drew a word of commendation from his teacher.

"But don't try t' do th' wor-rk all by yerself, me b'y," he cautioned, noting Allan's eagerness.

"We're all willin' t' help a little. If y' try t' lift that track by yerself, ye'll wrinch y'r back, an'll be laid up fer a week."

Allan laughed and colored a little at this goodnatured raillery.

"I'll try not to do more than my share," he said.

"That's roight!" approved Reddy, with a nod.

"Whin each man does his share, why, th' wor-rk goes along stiddy an' aisy. It's whin we gits a shirker on tlT gang like that there Dan Nolan —"

A chorus of low growls from the other men interrupted him. Nolan, evidently, was not a popular person.

"Who was he?" asked Allan, at the next breathing-spell.

"He's th' lazy hound that Jack fired from th' gang this mornin'," answered Reddy, his blue eyes blazing with unaccustomed wrath. "He's a reg'lar bad 'un, he is. We used t' think he was workin' like anything, he'd

git so red in th' face, but come t' find out he had a trick o' holdin' his breath t' make hisself look that way. He was allers shirkin', an' when he had it in fer a feller, no trick was too mean or dir-rty fer him t' try. Y' remimber, boys, whin he dropped that rail on poor Tom Collins's foot?"

The gang murmured an angry assent, and bent to their work again. Rod by rod they worked their way down the track, lifting, straining, tamping down the gravel. Occasionally a train thundered past, and they stood aside, leaning on their tools, glad of the moment's rest. At last, away in the distance, Allan caught the faint sound of blowing whistles and ringing bells. The foreman took out his watch, looked at it, and closed it with a snap.

"Come on, boys," he said. "It's dinner-time!"

They went back together to the hand-car at the side of the road, which was their base of supplies, and slowly got out their dinner-pails. Allan was sent with a bucket to a farmhouse a quarter of a mile away to get some fresh water, and, when he returned, he found the men already busy with their food. They drank the cool water eagerly, for the hot sun had given them a burning thirst.

"Set down here," said the foreman, "an' dip in with me. I've got enough fer three men."

And Allan sat down right willingly, for his stomach was protesting loudly against its continued state of emptiness. Never did cheese, fried ham, boiled eggs, bread, butter, and apple pie taste better. The compartment in the top of the dinner-pail was filled with coffee, but a share of this the boy declined, for he had never acquired a taste for that beverage. At last he settled back with a long sigh of content.

"That went t' th' right place, didn't it?" asked Jack, with twinkling eyes.

"That it did!" assented Allan, heartily. "I don't know what I'd have done if you hadn't taken pity on me," he added. "I was simply starving."

"You had your breakfast this mornin', didn't y'?" demanded Jack, sharply.

Allan colored a little under his fierce gaze.

"No, sir, I didn't," he said, rather hoarsely. "I couldn't find any work to do, and I — I couldn't beg!"

Jack looked at him without speaking, but his eyes were suspiciously bright.

“So you see, I just had to have this job,” Allan went on. “And now that I’ve got it, I’m going to do my best to keep it!”

Jack turned away for a moment, before he could trust himself to speak.

“I like your grit/’ he said, at last.”It’s th’ right kind. An’ you won’t have any trouble keepin’ your job. But, man alive, why didn’t y’ tell me y’ was hungry? Jest a hint would ‘a’ been enough! Why, th’ wife’ll never fergive me when she hears about it!"

“Oh,” protested Allan, “I couldn’t —”

He stopped without finishing the sentence.

“Well, I’ll fergive y’ this time,” said Jack. “Are y’ sure y’ve ate all y’ kin hold?”

“Every mite,” Allan assured him, his heart warming toward the friendly, weather-beaten face that looked at him so kindly. “I couldn’t eat another morsel!”

“All right, then; we’ll see that it don’t occur ag’in,” said Jack, putting the cover on his pail, and then stretching out in an easier position. “Now, d’ y’ want a stiddy job here?” he asked.

“If I can get it.”

“I guess y’ kin git it, all right. But how about your home?”

“I haven’t any home,” and the boy gazed out across the fields, his lips quivering a little despite his efforts to keep them still.

The foreman looked at him for a moment. There was something in the face that moved him, and he held out his hand impulsively.

“Here, shake!” he said. “I’m your friend.”

The boy put his hand in the great, rough palm extended to him, but he did not speak — his throat was too full for that.

“Now, if you’re goin’ t’ stay,” went on the other, “you’ve got t’ have some place t’ board. I’ll board an’ room y’ fer three dollars a week. It won’t

be like Delmonicer's, but y' won't starve — y'll git yer three square meals a day. That'll leave y' fourfifty a week fer clothes an' things. How'll that suit y'?"

The boy looked at him gratefully.

"You are very kind," he said, huskily. "I'm sure it's worth more than three dollars a week."

"No, it ain't — not a cent more. Well, that's settled. Some day, maybe, you'll feel like tellin' me about yerself. I'd like to hear it. But not now — wait till y' git used t' me."

A freight-train, flying two dirty white flags, to show that it was running extra and not on a definite schedule, rumbled by, and the train-crew waved their caps at the section-men, who responded in kind. The engineer leaned far out the cab window and shouted something, but his voice was lost in the roar of the train.

"That's Bill Morrison," observed Jack, when the train was past. "There ain't a finer engineer on th' road. Two year ago he run into a washout down here at Oak Furnace. He seen it in time t' jump, but he told his fireman t' jump instead, and he stuck to her an' tried to stop her. They found him in th' ditch under th' engine, with his leg mashed an' his arm broke an' his head cut open. He opened his eyes fer a minute as they was draggin' him out, an' what d' y' think he says?"

Jack paused a moment, while Allan listened breathlessly, with fast-beating heart.

"He says, 'Flag Number Three!' says he, an' then dropped off senseless ag'in. They'd forgot all about Number Three, th' fastest passenger-train on th' road, an' she'd have run into them as sure as shootin', if it hadn't been fer Bill. Well, sir, they hurried out a flagman an' stopped her jest in time, an' you ort t' seen them passengers when they heard about Bill! They all went up t' him where he was layin' pale-like an' bleedin' on th' ground, an' they was mighty few of th' men but what was blowin' their noses; an' as fer the women, they jest naturally slopped over! Well, they thought Bill was goin' t' die, but he pulled through. Yes, he's still runnin' freight — he's got t' wait his turn fer promotion; that's th' rule o' th' road. But he's got th'

finest gold watch y' ever seen; them passengers sent it t' him; an' right in th' middle of th' case it says, 4 Flag Number Three.'"

Jack stopped and looked out over the landscape, more affected by his own story than he cared to show.

As for Allan, he gazed after the fast disappearing train as though it were an emperor's triumphal car.

2. A New Experience

"WHEN I WAS A KID," continued Welsh, reminiscently, after a moment, "I was foolish, like all other kids. I thought they wasn't nothin' in th' world so much fun as railroadin'. I made up my mind t' be a brakeman, fer I thought all a brakeman had t' do was t' set out on top of a car, with his legs a-hangin' over, an' see th' country, an' wave his hat at th' girls, an' chase th' boys off th' platform, an' order th' engineer around by shakin' his hand at him. Gee whiz!" and he laughed and slapped his leg. "It tickles me even yet t' think what an ijit I was!"

"Did you try braking?" asked Allan.

"Yes — I tried it," and Welsh's eyes twinkled;

"but I soon got enough. Them wasn't th' days of air-brakes, an' I tell you they was mighty little fun in runnin' along th' top of a train in th' dead o' winter when th' cars was covered with ice an' th' wind blowin' fifty mile an hour. They wasn't no automatic couplers, neither; a man had t' go right in between th' cars t' drop in th' pin, an' th' engineer never seemed t' care how hard he backed down on a feller. After about six months of it, I come t' th' conclusion that section-work was nearer my size. It ain't so excitin', an' a man don't make quite so much money; but he's sure o' gettin' home t' his wife when th' day's work's over, an' of havin' all his legs an' arms with him. That counts fer a whole lot, I tell yer!"

He had got out a little black pipe as he talked, and filled it with tobacco from a paper sack. Then he applied a lighted match to the bowl and sent a long whiff of purple smoke circling upwards.

"There!" he said, leaning back with a sigh of ineffable content. "That's better — that's jest th' dessert a man wants. You don't smoke, I guess?"

"No," and Allan shook his head.

“Well, I reckon you’re as well off — better off, maybe; but I begun smokin’ when I was knee high to a duck.”

“You were telling me about that engineer,” prompted Allan, hoping for another story. “Are there any more like him?”

“Plenty more!” answered Jack, vigorously.

“Why, nine engineers out o’ ten would ‘a’ done jest what he done. It comes nat’ral, after a feller’s worked on th’ road awhile. Th’ road comes t’ be more t’ him than wife ‘r childer — it gits t’ be a kind o’ big idol thet he bows down an’ worships; an’ his engine’s a little idol thet he thinks more of than he does of his home. When he ain’t workin’, instead of stayin’ at home an’ weedin’ his garden, or playin’ with his childer, he’ll come down t’ th’ roundhouse an’ pet his engine, an’ polish her up, an’ walk around her an’ look at her, an’ try her valves an’ watch th’ stokers t’ see thet they clean her out proper. An’ when she wears out ‘r breaks down, why, you’d think he’d lost his best friend. There was old Cliff Gudgeon. He had a swell passenger run on th’ east end; but when they got t’ puttin’ four ‘r five sleepers on his train, his old engine was too light t’ git over th’ road on time, so they give him a new one — a great big one — a beauty. An’ what did Cliff do? Well, sir, he said he was too old t’ learn th’ tricks of another engine, an’ he’d stick to his old one, an’ he’s runnin’ a little accommodation train up here on th’ Hillsboro branch at seventy-five a month, when he might ‘a’ been makin’ twict that a-handlin’ th’ Royal Blue. Then, there’s Reddy Magraw — now, t’ look at Reddy, y’ wouldn’t think he was anything but a chuckle-headed Irishman. Yet, six year ago —”

Reddy had caught the sound of his name, and looked up suddenly.

“Hey, Jack, cut it out!” he called.

Welsh laughed good-naturedly.

“All right!” he said. “He’s th’ most modest man in th’ world, is Reddy. But they ain’t all that way. There’s Dan Nolan,” and Jack’s face darkened. “I had him on th’ gang up till this momin’, but I couldn’t stan’ him no longer, so I jest fired him. That’s th’ reason there was a place fer you, m’ boy.”

“Yes,” said Allan, " Reddy was telling me about him. What was it he did?"

“He didn’t do anything,” laughed Jack. “That was th’ trouble. He was jest naturally lazy — sneakin’ lazy an’ mean. There’s jest two things a railroad asks of its men — you might as well learn it now as any time — they must be on hand when they’re needed, an’ they must be willin’ t’ work. As long as y’re stiddy an’ willin’ t’ work, y’ won’t have no trouble holdin’ a job on a railroad.”

Allan looked out across the fields and determined that in these two respects, at least, he would not be found wanting. He glanced at the other group, gossiping together in the shade of a tree. They were not attractive-looking, certainly, but he was beginning to learn already that a man may be brave and honest, whatever his appearance. They were laughing at one of Reddy’s jokes, and Allan looked at him with a new respect, wondering what it was he had done. The foreman watched the boy’s face with a little smile, reading his thoughts.

“He ain’t much t’ look at, is he?” he said. “But you’ll soon learn — if you ain’t learnt already — that you can’t judge a man’s inside by his outside. There’s no place you’ll learn it quicker than on a railroad. , Railroad men, barrin’ th’ passenger train crews, who have t’ keep themselves spruced up t’ hold their jobs, ain’t much t’ look at, as a rule, but down at th’ bottom of most of them there allers seems t’ be a man — a real man — a man who don’t lose his head when he sees death a-starin’ him in th’ face, but jest grits his teeth an’ sticks to his post an’ does his duty. Railroad men ain’t little tin gods nor plaster saints — fur from it! — but they’re worth a mighty sight more than either. There was Jim Blakeson, th’ skinniest, lankest, most woe-begonelookin’ feller I ever see outside of a circus. He was brakin’ front-end one night on third ninety-eight, an’ —”

From afar off came the faint blowing of whistles, telling that, in the town of Wadsworth, the wheels in the factories had started up again, that men and women were bending again to their tasks, after the brief noon hour. Welsh stopped abruptly, much to Allan’s disappointment, knocked out his pipe against his boot-heel, and rose quickly to his feet. If there was one article in Welsh’s code of honour which stood before all the rest, it was this : That the railroad which employed him should have the full use of the ten hours a day for which it paid. To waste any part of that time was to steal the railroad’s money. It is a good principle for any man — or for any boy — to cling to.

“One o’clock!” he cried. “Come on, boys! We’ve got a good stretch o’ track to finish up down there.”

The dinner-pails were replaced on the hand-car and it was run down the road about half a mile and then derailed again. The straining work began; tugging at the bars, tamping gravel under the ties, driving new spikes, replacing a fish-plate here and there. And the new hand learned many things.

He learned that with the advent of the great, modern, ten-wheeled freight locomotives, all the rails on the line had been replaced with heavier ones weighing eighty-five pounds to the yard, — 850 pounds to their thirty feet of length, — the old ones being too light to carry such enormous weights with safety. They were called T-rails, because, in crosssection, they somewhat resembled that letter. The top of the rail is the “head”; the thinner stem, the “web”; and the wide, flat bottom, the “base.” Besides being spiked down to the ties, which are first firmly bedded in gravel or crushed stone, the rails are bolted together at the ends with iron bars called “fish-plates.” These are fitted to the web, one on each side of the junction of two rails, and bolts are then passed through them and nuts screwed on tightly.

This work of joining the rails is done with such nicety, and the road-bed built so solidly, that there is no longer such a great rattle and bang as the trains pass over them — a rattle and bang formerly as destructive to the track as to the nerves of the passenger. It is the duty of the section-foreman to see that the six or eight miles of track which is under his supervision is kept in the best possible shape, and to inspect it from end to end twice daily, to guard against any possibility of accident.

As the hours passed, Allan’s muscles began to ache sadly, but there were few chances to rest. At last the foreman perceived that he was overworking himself, and sent him and Reddy back to bring up the hand-car and prepare for the homeward trip. They walked back to where it stood, rolled it out upon the track, and pumped it down to the spot where the others were working, Reddy giving Allan his first lesson in how to work the levers, for there is a right and wrong way of managing a hand-car, just as there is a right and wrong way of doing everything else.

“That’s about all we kin do to-day,” and Jack took out his watch and looked at it reflectively, as the car came rolling up. “I guess we kin git in before Number Six comes along. What y’ think?” and he looked at Reddy.

“How much time we got?” asked the latter, for only the foreman of the gang could afford to carry a watch.

“Twelve minutes.”

“That’s aisy! We kin make it in eight without half-tryin’!”

“All right!” and Jack thrust the watch back into his pocket. “Pile on, boys!”

And pile on they did, bringing their tools with them. They seized the levers, and in a moment the car was spinning down the track. There was something fascinating and invigorating in the motion.

As they pumped up and down, Allan could see the fields, fences, and telegraph-poles rushing past them. It seemed to him that they were going faster even than the “flier.” The wind whistled against him and the car jolted back and forth in an alarming way.

“Hold tight!” yelled Reddy, and they flashed around a curve, across a high trestle, through a deep cut, and down a long grade on the other side. Away ahead he could see the chimneys of the town nestling among the trees. They were down the grade in a moment, and whirling along an embankment that bordered a wide and placid river, when the car gave a sudden, violent jolt, ran for fifty feet on three wheels, and then settled down on the track again.

“Stop her!” yelled the foreman. “Stop her!”

They strained at the levers, but the car seemed alive and sprang away from them. Twice she almost shook them off, then sullenly succumbed, and finally stopped.

“Somethin’s th’ matter back there!” panted Jack.

“Give her a shove, Reddy!”

Reddy jumped off and started her back up the track. In a moment the levers caught, and they were soon at the place where the jolt had occurred.

The foreman sprang off and for an instant bent over the track. Then he straightened up with stern face.

"Quick!" he cried. "Jerk that car off th' track and bring two fish-plates an' some spikes. West, take that flag, run up th' track as far as y' kin, an' flag Number Six. Mind, don't stop runnin' till y' see her. She'll have her hands full stoppin' on that grade."

With beating heart Allan seized the flag and ran up the track as fast as his legs would carry him. The thought that the lives of perhaps a hundred human beings depended upon him set his hands to trembling and his heart to beating wildly. On and on he went, until his breath came in gasps and his head sang. It seemed that he must have covered a mile at least, yet it was only a few hundred feet. And then, away ahead, he saw the train flash into sight around the curve and come hurtling down the grade toward him.

He shook loose the flag and waved it wildly over his head, still running forward. He even shouted, not realizing how puny his voice was. The engine grew larger and larger with amazing swiftness. He could hear the roar of the wheels; a shaft of steam leaped into the air, and, an instant later, the wind brought him the sound of a shrill whistle. He saw the engineer leaning from his window, and, with a great sob of relief, knew that he had been seen. He had just presence of mind to spring from the track, and the train passed him, the wheels grinding and shrieking under the pressure of the air-brakes, the drivers of the engine whirling madly backwards. He caught a glimpse of startled passengers peering from the windows, and then the train was past. But it was going slower and slower, and stopped at last with a jerk.

When he reached the place, he found Jack explaining to the conductor about the broken fishplates and the loose rail. What had caused it could not be told with certainty — the expansion from the heat, perhaps, or the vibration from a heavy freight that had passed half an hour before, or a defect in the plates, which inspection had not revealed. Allan sat weakly down upon the overturned hand-car. No one paid any heed to him, and he was astonished that they treated the occurrence so lightly. Jack and the engineer were joking together. Only the conductor seemed worried, and that was because the delay would throw his train a few minutes late.

Half a dozen of the passengers, who had been almost hurled from their seats by the suddenness of the stop, came hurrying up. All along the line of coaches windows had been raised, and white, anxious faces were peering

out. Inside the coaches, brakemen and porters were busy picking up the packages that had been thrown from the racks, and reassuring the frightened people.

"What's the matter?" gasped one of the passengers, a tall, thin, nervous-looking man, as soon as he reached the conductor's side. "Nothing serious, I hope? There's no danger, is there? My wife and children are back there —"

The conductor smiled at him indulgently.

"There's no danger at all, my dear sir," he interrupted. "The section-gang here flagged us until they could bolt this rail down. That is all."

"But," protested the man, looking around for sympathy, and obviously anxious not to appear unduly alarmed, "do you usually throw things about that way when you stop?"

"No," said the conductor, smiling again; "but you see we were on a heavy down-grade, and going pretty fast. I'd advise you gentlemen to get back into the train at once," he added, glancing at his watch again. "We'll be starting in a minute or two."

The little group of passengers walked slowly back and disappeared into the train. Allan, looking after them, caught his first glimpse of one side of railroad policy — a policy which minimizes every danger, which does its utmost to keep every peril from the knowledge of its patrons — a wise policy, since nervousness will never add to safety. Away up the track he saw the brakeman, who had been sent back as soon as the train stopped, to prevent the possibility of a rear-end collision, and he understood dimly something of the wonderful system which guards the safety of the trains.

Then, suddenly, he realized that he was not working, that his place was with that little group laboring to repair the track, and he sprang to his feet, but at that instant Jack stood back with a sigh of relief and turned to the conductor.

"All right," he said.

The conductor raised his hand, a sharp whistle recalled the brakeman, who came down the track on a run; the engineer opened his throttle; there was a long hiss of escaping steam, and the train started slowly. As it passed

him, Allan could see the passengers settling back contentedly in their seats, the episode already forgotten. In a momenl the train was gone, growing rapidly smaller away down the track ahead of them. A few extra spikes were driven in to further strengthen the place, and the hand-car was run out on the track again.

"Y' made pretty good time," said Jack to the boy; and then, as he saw his white face, he added,

"Kind o' winded y', didn't it?"

Allan nodded, and climbed silently to his place on the car.

"Shook y'r nerve a little, too, I reckon," added Jack, as the car started slowly. "But y' mustn't mind a little thing like that, m' boy. It's all in th' day's work."

All in the day's work! The flagging of a train was an ordinary incident in the lives of these men. There had, perhaps, been no great danger, yet the boy caught his breath as he recalled that fearful moment when the train rushed down upon him. All in the day's work — for which the road paid a dollar and a quarter!

3. An Adventure And A Story

JACK WELSH, section-foreman, lived in a little frame house perched high on an embankment just back of the railroad yards. The bank had been left there when the yards had been leveled down, and the railroad company, always anxious to promote habits of sobriety and industry in its men, and knowing that no influence makes for such habits as does the possession of a home, had erected a row of cottages along the top of the embankment, and offered them on easy terms to its employees. They weren't palatial — they weren't even particularly attractive — but they were homes.

In front, the bank dropped steeply down to the level of the yards, but behind they sloped more gently, so that each of the cottages had a yard ample for a vegetable garden. To attend to this was the work of the wife and the children — a work which always yielded a bountiful reward.

There were six cottages in the row, but one was distinguished from the others in summer by a mass of vines which clambered over it, and a garden of sweet-scented flowers which occupied the little front yard. This was Welsh's, and he never mounted toward it without a feeling of pride and a quick rush of affection for the little woman who found time, amid all her household duties, to add her mite to the world's beauty. As he glanced at the other yards, with their litter of trash and broken playthings, he realized, more keenly perhaps than most of us do, what a splendid thing it is to render our little corner of the world more beautiful, instead of making it uglier, as human beings have a way of doing.

It was toward this little vine-embowered cottage that Jack and Allan turned their steps, as soon as the hand-car and tools had been deposited safely in the little section shanty. As they neared the house, a midget in blue calico came running down the path toward them.

"It's Mamie," said Welsh, his face alight with tenderness; and, as the child swept down upon him, he seized her, kissed her, and swung her to his

shoulder, where she sat screaming in triumph.

They mounted the path so, and, at the door, Mrs. Welsh, a little, plump, black-eyed woman, met them.

"I've brought you a boarder, Mary," said Welsh, setting Mamie down upon her sturdy little legs.

"Allan West's his name. I took him on th' gang today, an' told him he might come here till he found some place he liked better."

"That's right!" and Mrs. Welsh held out her hand in hearty welcome, pleased with the boy's frank face. "We'll try t' make you comf'terble," she added. "You're a little late, Jack."

"Yes, we had t' stop t' fix a break," he answered; and he told her in a few words the story of the broken fish-plates. "It don't happen often," he added, "but y' never know when t' expect it."

"No, y' never do," agreed Mary, her face clouding for an instant, then clearing with true Irish optimism. "You'll find th' wash-basin out there on th' back porch, m' boy," she added to Allan, and he hastened away to cleanse himself, so far as soap and water could do it, of the marks of the day's toil.

Mrs. Welsh turned again to her husband as soon as the boy was out of ear-shot.

"Where 'd you pick him up, Jack?" she asked.

"He ain't no common tramp."

"Not a bit of it," agreed her husband. "He looks like a nice boy. He jest come along an' wanted a job. He said he'd come from Cincinnati, an' hadn't any home; but he didn't seem t' want t' talk about hisself."

"No home!" repeated Mary, her heart warming with instant sympathy. "Poor boy! We'll have t' look out fer him, Jack."

"I knew you'd say that, darlint!" cried her husband, and gave her a hearty hug.

"Go 'long with you!" cried Mary, trying in vain to speak sternly. "I smell th' meat a-burnin'!" and she disappeared into the kitchen, while Jack joined

Allan on the back porch.

How good the cool, clean water felt, splashed over hands and face; what a luxury it was to scrub with the thick lather of the soap, and then rinse off in a brimming basin of clear water;' how delicious it was to be clean again! Jack dipped his whole head deep into the basin, and then, after a vigorous rubbing with the towel, took his station before a little glass and brushed his black hair until it presented a surface almost as polished as the mirror's own.

Then Mamie came with the summons to supper, and they hurried in to it, for ten hours' work on section will make even a confirmed dyspeptic hungry — yes, and give him power properly to digest his food.

How pretty the table looked, with its white cloth and shining dishes! For Mary was a true Irish housewife, with a passion for cleanliness and a pride in her home. It was growing dark, and a lamp had been lighted and placed in the middle of the board, making it look bright and cozy.

"You set over there, m' boy," said Mary, herself taking the housewife's inevitable place behind the coffee-pot, with her husband opposite. "Now, Mamie, you behave yourself," she added, for Mamie was peeping around the lamp at Allan with roguish eyes. "We're all hungry, Jack, so don't keep us waitin'."

And Jack didn't.

How good the food smelt, and how good it tasted! Allan relished it more than he would have done any dinner of "Delmonicer's," for Mary was one of the best of cooks, and only the jaded palate relishes the sauces and fripperies of French chefs.

"A girl as can't cook ain't fit t' marry," Mary often said; a maxim which she had inherited from her mother, and would doubtless hand down to Mamie. "There's nothin' that'll break up a home quicker 'n a bad cook, an' nothin' that'll make a man happier 'n a good one."

Certainly, if cooking were a test, this supper was proof enough of her fitness for the state of matrimony. There was a great platter of ham and eggs, fluffy biscuits, and the sweetest of yellow butter. And, since he did not drink coffee, Allan was given a big glass of fragrant milk to match

Mamie's. They were tasting one of the best sweets of toil — to sit down with appetite to a table well-laden.

After supper, they gathered on the front porch, and sat looking down over the busy, noisy yards. The switch-lamps gleamed in long rows, red and green and white, telling which tracks were open and which closed. The yard-engines ran fussily up and down, shifting the freight-cars back and forth, and arranging them in trains to be sent east or west. Over by the roundhouse, engines were being run in on the big turntable and from there into the stalls, where they would be furbished up and overhauled for the next trip. Others were being brought out, tanks filled with water, and tenders heaped high with coal, ready for the run to Parkersburg or Cincinnati. They seemed almost human in their impatience to be off — breathing deeply in loud pants, the steam now and then throwing up the safety-valve and "popping off" with a great noise.

The clamor, the hurry, the rush of work, never ceasing from dawn to dawn, gave the boy a dim understanding of the importance of this great corporation which he had just begun to serve. He was only a very little cog in the vast machine, to be sure, but the smoothness of its running depended upon the little cogs no less than on the big ones.

A man's figure, indistinct in the twilight, stopped at the gate below and whistled.

"There's Reddy Magraw," said Jack, with a laugh. "I'd forgot — it was so hot t'-day, we thought we'd go over t' th' river an' take a dip t'-night. Do you know how t' swim, Allan?"

"Just a little," answered Allan; "all I know about it was picked up in the swimming-pool at the gymnasium at Cincinnati."

"Well, it's time y' learned more," said Jack.

"Every boy ought t' know how t' swim — mebbe some day not only his own life but the lives o' some o' his women-folks'll depend on him. Come along, an' we'll give y' a lesson."

"I'll be glad to!" Allan cried, and ran indoors for his hat.

Reddy whistled again.

“We’re cornin’,” called Jack. “We won’t be gone long,” he added to his wife, as they started down the path.

“All right, dear,” she answered. “An’ take good care o’ th’ boy.”

Reddy greeted Allan warmly, and thoroughly agreed with Jack that it was every boy’s duty to learn how to swim. Together they started off briskly toward the river — across the yards, picking their way carefully over the maze of tracks, then along the railroad embankment which skirted the stream, and finally through a corn-field to the water’s edge. The river looked very wide and still in the semi-darkness, and Allan shivered a little as he looked at it; but the feeling passed in a moment. Reddy had his clothes off first, and dived in with a splash; Jack waded in to show Allan the depth. The boy followed, with sudden exhilaration, as he felt the cool water rise about him.

“This is different from a swimmin’-pool, ain’t it?” said Jack.

“Indeed it is!” agreed Allan; “and a thousand times nicer!”

“Now,” added Jack, “let me give you a lesson,” and he proceeded to instruct Allan in the intricacies of the broad and powerful breast stroke.

The boy was an apt pupil, and at the end of twenty minutes had mastered it sufficiently to be able to make fair progress through the water. He would have kept on practicing, but Jack stopped him.

“We’ve been in long enough,” he said; “you mustn’t overdo it. Come along, Reddy,” he called to that worthy, who was disporting himself out in the middle of the current.

As they turned toward the shore the full moon peeped suddenly over a little hill on the eastern horizon, and cast a broad stream of silver light across the water, touching every ripple and little wave with magic beauty.

“Oh, look!” cried Allan. “Look!”

They stood and watched the moon until it sailed proudly above the hill, and then waded to the bank, rubbed themselves down briskly, and resumed their clothes, cleansed and purified in spirit as well as body. They made their way back through the corn-field, but just as they reached the embankment, Reddy stopped them with a quick, stifled cry.

"Whist!" he said, hoarsely. "Look there! What's that?"

Straining his eyes through the darkness, Allan saw, far down the track ahead of them, a dim, white figure. It seemed to be going through some sort of pantomime, waving its arms wildly above its head.

"It's a ghost!" whispered Reddy, breathing heavily. "It's Tim Dorsey's ghost! D' y' raymimber, Jack, it was jist there thet th' poor feller was killed last month! That's his ghost, sure as I'm standin' here!"

"Oh, nonsense!" retorted Jack, with a little laugh, but his heart was beating faster than usual, as he peered through the darkness at the strange figure. What could it be that would stand there and wave its arms in that unearthly fashion?

"It's his ghost!" repeated Reddy. "Come on, Jack; Oi'm a-goin' back!"

"Well, I'm not!" said Jack. "I'm not afraid of a ghost, are you, Allan?"

"I don't believe in ghosts," said Allan, but it must be confessed that his nerves were not wholly steady as he kept his eyes on the strange figure dancing there in the moonlight.

"If it ain't a ghost, what is it?" demanded Reddy, hoarsely.

"That's just what we're goin' t' find out," answered Jack, and started forward, resolutely.

Allan went with him, but Reddy kept discreetly in the rear. He was no coward, — he was as brave as any man in facing a danger which he knew the nature of, — but all the superstition of his untutored Irish heart held him back from this unearthly apparition.

As they drew near, its lines became more clearly defined; it was undoubtedly of human shape, but apparently it had no head, only a pair of short, stubby arms, which waved wildly in the air, and a pair of legs that danced frantically. Near at hand it was even more terrifying than at a distance, and their pace grew slower and slower, while Reddy stopped short where he was, his teeth chattering, his eyes staring. They could hear what seemed to be a human voice proceeding from the figure, raised in a sort of weird incantation, now high, now low. Was it really a ghost? Allan asked himself; was it really the spirit of the poor fellow whose life had been crushed out a few weeks before? could it be . . .

"NEAR AT HAND IT WAS EVEN MORE TERRIFYING THAN AT A DISTANCE"

Suddenly Jack laughed aloud with relief, and hurried forward.

"Come on," he called. "It's no ghost!"

And in a moment Allan saw him reach the figure and pull the white garment down over its head, disclosing a flushed and wrathful, but very human, face.

"Thankee, sir," said a hoarse voice to Jack. "A lady in th' house back there give me a clean shirt, an' I was jest puttin' it on when I got stuck in

th' dum thing, an' couldn't git it either way. I reckon I'd 'a' suffocated if you hadn't come along!"

Jack laughed again.

"We thought you was a ghost!" he said. "You scared Reddy, there, out of a year's growth, I reckon. Come here, Reddy," he called, "an' take a look at yer ghost!"

Reddy came cautiously forward and examined the released tramp.

"Well," he said, at last, "if you ain't a ghost, you ought t' be! I never seed anything that looked more loike one!"

"No, an' you never will!" retorted Jack. "Come along; it's time we was home," and leaving the tramp to complete his toilet, they hurried away.

They found Mary sitting on the front porch, crooning softly to herself as she rocked Mamie to sleep. They bade Reddy good night, and sat down beside her.

"Well, did y' have a nice time?" she asked.

"Yes," laughed Jack, and told her the story of the ghost.

They sat silent for a time after that, looking down over the busy yards, breathing in the cool night air, watching the moon as it sailed slowly up the heavens. Allan felt utterly at rest; for the first time in many days he felt that he had a home, that there were people in the world who loved him. The thought brought the quick tears to his eyes; an impulse to confide in these new friends surged up within him.

"I want to tell you something about myself," he said, turning to them quickly. "It's only right that you should know."

Mrs. Welsh stopped the lullaby she had been humming, and sat quietly waiting.

"Just as y' please," said Jack, but the boy knew he would be glad to hear the story.

"It's not a very long one," said Allan, his lips trembling, "nor an unusual one, for that matter. Father was a carpenter, and we lived in a little home just out of Cincinnati — he and mother and I. We were very happy, and I

went to school every day, while father went in to the city to his work. But one day I was called from school, and when I got home I found that father had fallen from a scaffolding he had been working on, and was so badly injured that he had been taken to a hospital. We thought for a long time that he would die, but he got better slowly, and at last we were able to take him home. But he was never able to work any more, — his spine had been injured so that he could scarcely move himself, — and our little savings grew smaller and smaller."

Allan stopped, and looked off across the yards, gripping his hands together to preserve his self-control.

"Father worried about it," he went on, at last; "worried so much that he grew worse and worse, until — until — he brought on a fever. He hadn't any strength to fight with. He just sank under it, and died. I was fifteen years old then — but boys don't understand at the time how hard things are. After he was gone — well, it seems now, looking back, that I could have done something more to help than I did."

"There, now, don't be a-blamin' yerself," said Jack, consolingly.

The little woman in the rocking-chair leaned over and touched his arm softly, caressingly.

"No; don't be blamin' yerself," she said. "I know y' did th' best y' could. They ain't so very much a boy kin do, when it's money that's needed."

"No," and Allan drew a deep breath; "nor a woman, either. Though it wasn't only that; I'd have worked on; I wouldn't have given up — but — but —"

"Yes," said Mary, understanding with quick, unfailing sympathy; "it was th' mother."

"She did the best she could," went on Allan, falteringly. "She tried to bear up for my sake; but after father was gone she was never quite the same again; she never seemed to rally from the shock of it. She was never strong to start with, and I saw that she grew weaker and weaker every day." He stopped and cleared his voice. "That's about all there is to the story," he added. "I got a little from the furniture and paid off some of the debts, but I couldn't do much. I tried to get work there, but there didn't seem to be any-

body who wanted me. There were some distant relatives, but I had never known them — and besides, I didn't want to seem a beggar. There wasn't anything to keep me in Cincinnati, so I struck out."

"And y' did well," said Welsh. "I'm mighty glad y' come along jest when y' did. Y'll find enough to do here, if y' will keep a willin' hand. Section work ain't much, but maybe y' can git out of it after awhile. Y' might git a place in th' yard office if ye're good at figgers. Ye've got more eddication than some. It's them that git lifted."

"You'd better talk!" said the wife. "'Tain't every man with an eddication that gits t' be foreman at your age."

"No more it ain't," and Jack smiled. "Come on; it's time t' go t' bed. Say good night t' th' boy, Mamie."

"Night," murmured Mamie, sleepily, and held out her moist, red lips.

With a quick warmth at his heart, Allan stooped and kissed them. It was the first kiss he had given or received since his mother's death, and, after he had got to bed in the little hot attic room, with its single window looking out upon the yards, he lay for a long time thinking over the events of the day, and his great good fortune in falling in with these kindly people. Sometime, perhaps, he might be able to prove how much their kindness meant to him.

4. Allan Meets An Enemy

IT WAS NOT UNTIL MORNING that Allan realized how unaccustomed he was to real labor. As he tried to spring from bed in answer to Jack's call, he found every muscle in revolt. How they ached! It was all he could do to slip his arms into his shirt, and, when he bent over to put on his shoes, he almost cried out at the twinge it cost him. He hobbled painfully down-stairs, and Jack saw in a moment what was the matter.

"Yer muscles ain't used t' tuggin' at crowbars an' shovellin' gravel," he said, laughing. "It'll wear off in a day or two, but till then ye'll have t' grin an' bear it, fer they ain't no cure fer it. But y' ain't goin' t' work in them clothes!"

"They're all I have here," answered Allan, reddening. "I have a trunk at Cincinnati with a lot more in, and I thought I'd write for it today."

"But I reckon ye ain't got any clothes tough enough fer this work. I'll fix y' out," said Welsh, good-naturedly.

So, after breakfast, he led Allan over to a railroad outfitting shop and secured himi a canvas jumper, a pair of heavy overalls, and a pair of rough, strong, cowhide shoes.

"There!" he said, viewing his purchases with satisfaction. "Y' kin pay fer 'em when y' git yer first month's wages. Y' kin put 'em on over in th' section shanty. You go along over there; I've got t' stop an' see th' roadmaster a minute."

Allan walked on quickly, his bundle under his arm, past the long passenger station and across the maze of tracks in the lower yards. Here lines of freight-cars were side-tracked, waiting their turn to be taken east or west; and, as he hurried past, a man came suddenly out from behind one of them and laid a strong hand on his arm.

“Here, wait a minute!” he said, roughly. “I’ve got somethin’ t’ say t’ you. Come in here!” And before Allan could think of resistance, he was pulled behind the row of cars.

Allan found himself looking up into a pair of small, glittering black eyes, deeply set in a face of which the most prominent features were a large nose, covered with freckles, and a thick-lipped mouth, which concealed the jagged teeth beneath but imperfectly. He saw, too, that his captor was not much older than himself, but that he was considerably larger and no doubt stronger.

“Ye’re th’ new man on Twenty-one, ain’t you?” he asked, after a moment’s fierce examination of Allan’s face.

“Yes, I went to work yesterday,” said Allan.

“Well, y’ want t’ quit th’ job mighty quick, d’ y’ see? I’m Dan Nolan, an’ it’s my job y’ve got. I’d ‘a’ got took back if ye hadn’t come along. So ye’re got t’ git out, d’ y’ hear?”

“Yes, I hear,” answered Allan, quietly, reddening a little; and his heart began to beat faster at the prospect of trouble ahead.

“If y’ know what’s good fer y’, y’ll git out!” said Nolan, savagely, clenching his fists. “When’ll y’ quit?”

“As soon as Mr. Welsh discharges me,” answered Allan, still more quietly.

Nolan glared at him for a moment, seemingly unable to speak.

"D’ y’ mean t’ say y’ won’t git out when I tells you to? I’ll show y*!" And he struck suddenly and viciously at the boy’s face.

But Allan had been expecting the onslaught, and sprang quickly to one side. Before Nolan could recover himself, he had ducked under one of the freight-cars and come up on the other side. Nolan ran around the end of the car, but the boy was well out of reach.

“I’ll ketch y’!” he cried after him, shaking his fists. “An’ when I do ketch y’ —”

He stopped abruptly and dived back among the cars, for he had caught sight of Jack Welsh coming across the yards. Allan saw him, too, and

waited for him.

"Wasn't that Dan Nolan?" he asked, as he came up.

"Yes, it was Nolan," answered Allan.

"Was he threatenin' you?"

"HE STRUCK SUDDENLY AND VICIOUSLY AT THE BOY'S FACE"

"Yes; he told me to get out or he'd lay for me."

"He did, eh?" and Jack's lips tightened ominously. "What did y' tell him?"

"I told him I'd get out when you discharged me."

"Y' did?" and Jack clapped him on the shoulder.

"Good fer you! Let me git my hands on him once, an' he'll lave ye alone! But y' want t' look out fer him, m' boy. If he'd fight fair, y' could lick him; but he's a big, overgrown brute, an' 'll try t' hit y' from behind sometime, mebbe. That's his style, fer he's a coward."

"I'll look out for him," said Allan; and walked on with beating heart to the section shanty. Here, while Jack told the story of the encounter with Nolan, Allan donned his new garments and laid his other ones aside. The new ones were not beautiful, but at least they were comfortable, and could defy even the wear and tear of work on section.

The spin on the hand-car out into the open country was full of exhilaration, and, after an hour's work, Allan almost forgot his sore muscles. He found that today there was a different class of work to do.

The fences along the right of way were to be repaired, and the right of way itself placed in order — the grass cut back from the road-bed, the gravel piled neatly along it, weeds trimmed out, rubbish gathered up, cattle-guards, posts, and fences at crossings whitewashed. All this, too, was a revelation to the new hand. He had never thought that a railroad required so much attention. Rod after rod was gone over in this way, until it seemed that not a stone was out of place. It was not until the noon-hour, when he was eating his portion of the lunch Mrs. Welsh had prepared for them, that he learned the reason for all this.

"Y' see we're puttin' on a few extry touches," remarked Jack. "Th' Irish Brigade goes over th' road next week."

"The Irish Brigade?" questioned Allan; and he had a vision of some crack military organization.

"Yes, th' Irish Brigade. Twict a year, all th' section foremen on th' road 'r' taken over it t' look at th' other sections, an' see which man keeps his in th' best shape. Each man's section's graded, an' th' one that gits th' highest grade gits a prize o' fifty dollars. We're goin' t' try fer that prize. So's every other section-gang on th' line."

"But what is the Irish Brigade?" questioned the boy.

"The foremen of the section-men. There's about a hundred, and the officers give us that name. There's many a good Irishman like myself among the foremen;" and a gleam of humor was in Jack's eyes. "They say I'm puttin' my Irish back of me in my talk, but the others stick to it, more or less. It's a great time when the Irish Brigade takes its inspection tour."

Allan worked with a new interest after that, for he, too, was anxious that Jack's section should win the fifty dollars. He could guess how much such a sum would mean to him. He confided his hopes to Reddy, while they were working together cutting out some weeds that had sprung up along the track, but the latter was not enthusiastic.

"Oi don't know," he said. "They's some mighty good section-men on this road. Why, last year, when Flaherty, o' Section Tin, got th' prize, his grass looked like it 'ud been gone over with a lawnmower, an' he'd aven scrubbed th' black gr'ase from th' ingines off th' toies. Oh, it looked foine; but thin, so did all th' rist."

But Allan was full of hope. As he looked back over the mile they had covered since morning, he told himself that no stretch of track could possibly be in better order. But, to the foreman's more critical and experienced eye, there were still many things wanting, and he promised himself to go over it again before inspection-day came around.

Every train that passed left some mark behind. From the freights came great pieces of greasy waste, which littered up the ties, or piles of ashes sifted down from the fire-box; while with the passengers it was even worse. The people threw from the coach windows papers, banana peelings, boxes and bags containing remnants of lunch, bottles, and every kind of trash. They did not realize that all this must be patiently gathered up again, in order that the road-bed might be quite free from litter. Not many of them would have greatly cared.

"It's amazin'," remarked Reddy, in the course of the afternoon, "how little people r'ally know about railroadin', an' thin think they know 't all. They think that whin th' road's built, that's all they is to it, an' all th' expinse th' company's got 's fer runnin' th' trains. Why, on this one division, from Cincinnati t' Parkersburg, they's more'n two hunderd men a-workin' ivery day jest kapin' up th' track. Back there in th' shops, they's foive hundred more, repairin' an' rebuildin' ingines an' cars. At ivery little cross-

roads they's an operator, an' at ivery little station they's six or eight people busy at work. Out east, they tell me, they's a flagman at ivery crossin'. Think o' what all that costs!"

"But what's the use of keeping the road-bed so clean?" asked Allan. "Nobody ever sees it."

"What's th' use o' doin' anything roight?" retorted Reddy. "I tell you ivery little thing counts in favour of a road, or agin it. This here road's spendin' thousands o' dollars straightenin' out curves over there in th' mountings, so's th' passengers won't git shook up so much, an' th' trains kin make a little better toime. Why, I've heerd thet some roads even sprinkle th' road-bed with ile t' lay th' dust!

"Human natur' 's a funny thing," he added, shaking his head philosophically, "'specially when it comes t' railroads. Many's th' man Oi've seen nearly break his neck t' git acrost th' track in front of a train, an' thin stop t' watch th' train go by; an' many another loafer, who never does anything but kill toime, 'll worrit hisself sick if th' train he's on happens t' be tin minutes late. It's th' man who ain't got no business that's always lettin' on t' have th' most. Here comes th' flier," he added, as a shrill whistle sounded from afar up the road.

They stood aside to watch the train shoot past with a rush and roar, to draw into the station at Wadsworth on time to the minute.

"That was Jem Spurling on th' ingine," observed Reddy, as they went back to work. "Th' oldest ingineer on th' road — an' th' nerviest. Thet's th' reason he's got th' flier. Most fellers loses their nerve after they've been runnin' an ingine a long time, an' a year 'r two back, Jem got sort o' shaky fer awhile — slowed down when they wasn't no need of it, y' know; imagined he saw things on th' track ahead, an' lost time. Well, th' company wouldn't stand fer thet, 'specially with th' flier, an' finally th' train-master told him thet if he couldn't bring his train in on time, he'd have t' go back t' freight. Well, sir, it purty nigh broke Jem's heart.

"'Oi tell y', Mister Schofield,' he says t' th' trainmaster, 4 Oi'll bring th' train in on toime if they's a brick house on th' track.'

All right,' says Mr. Schofield; 'thet's all we ask,' an' Jem went down to his ingine.

"Th’ next day Jem come into th’ office t’ report, an’ looked aroun’ kind O 1 ’ inquirin’ like.

"‘Any of it got here yet?’ he asks.

"‘Any o’ what? ’ asks Mr. Schofield.

"‘Any o’ thet coal,’ says Jem.

"‘What coal?’ asks Mr. Schofield.

"‘Somebody left a loaded coal-car on th’ track down here by th’ chute,’ says Jem.

"‘They did?’

"‘Yes,’ says Jem; 4 thought they’d throw me late, most likely; but they didn’t. Oi’m not loike a man what’s lost his nerve — not by a good deal.’

"‘But th’ car — how’d y’ git around it? ’ asks Mr. Schofield.

"‘Oh, Oi didn’t try t’ git around it,’ says Jem.

‘Oi jest pulled her wide open an’ come through. They’s about a ton o’ coal on top o’ th’ rear coach, an’ Oi thought maybe I’d find th’ rest of it up here. I guess it ain’t come down yit.’

"‘But, great Scott, man!’ says Mr. Schofield, ‘that was an awful risk.’

"‘Oi guess Oi’d better run my ingine down t’ th’ repair shop,’ went on Jem, cool as a cucumber. ‘Her stack’s gone, an’ the pilot, an’ th’ winders o’ th’ cab are busted. But Oi got in on toime.’

“Well, they laid Jem off fer a month,” concluded Reddy, “but they’ve niver said anything since about his losin’ his nerve.”

So, through the afternoon, Reddy discoursed of the life of the rail, and told stories grave and gay, related tragedies and comedies, described hair-breadth escapes, and with it all managed to impart to his hearer many valuable hints concerning section work.

“Though,” he added, echoing Jack, “it’s not on section you’ll be workin’ all your life! You’ve got too good a head fer that.”

“I don’t know,” said Allan, modestly. “This takes a pretty good head, too, doesn’t it?”

“It takes a good head in a way; but it’s soon learnt, an’ after thet, all a man has t’ do is t’ keep sober. But this is a, b, c, compared t’ th’ work of runnin’ th’ road. Ever been up in th’ despatcher’s office?”

“No,” said Allan. “I never have.”

“Well, y’ want t’ git Jack t’ take y’ up there some day; then y’ll see where head-work comes in. I know thet all the trainmen swear at th’ despatches; but jest th’ same, it takes a mighty good man t’ hold down th’ job.”

“I’ll ask Jack to take me,” said Allan; and he resolved to get all the insight possible into the workings of this great engine of industry, of which he had become a part.

Quitting-time came at last, and they loaded their tools wearily upon the car and started on the fivemile run home. This time there was no disturbing incident. The regular click, click of the wheels over the rails told of a track in perfect condition. At last they rattled over the switches in the yards and pushed the car into its place in the sectionhouse.

“You run along,” said Jack to Allan. “Fve got t’ make out a report tonight. It’ll take me maybe five minutes. Tell Mary I’ll be home by then.”

“All right!” and Allan picked up his bundle of clothes and started across the yards. He could see the little house that he called home perched high on its bank of clay. Apparently they were watching for him, for he saw a tiny figure running down the path, and knew that Mamie was coming to meet him. She did not stop at the gate, but ran across the narrow street and into the yards toward him. He quickened his steps at the thought that some harm might befall her among this maze of tracks. He could see her mother standing on the porch, looking down at them, shading her eyes with her hand.

And then, in an instant, a yard-engine whirled out from behind the roundhouse. Mamie looked around as she heard it coming, and stopped short in the middle of the track, confused and terrified in presence of this unexpected danger.

5. Allan Proves His Metal

AS ALLAN DASHED FORWARD toward the child, he saw the engineer, his face livid, reverse his engine and jerk open the sand-box; the sand spurted forth under the drivers, whirling madly backwards in the midst of a shower of sparks, but sliding relentlessly down upon the terror-stricken child. It was over in an instant — afterward, the boy could never tell how it happened — he knew only that he stooped and caught the child from under the very wheels of the engine, just as something struck him a terrific blow on the leg and hurled him to one side.

He was dimly conscious of holding the little one close in his arms that she might not be injured, then he struck the ground with a crash that left him dazed and shaken. When he struggled to his feet, the engineer had jumped down from his cab and

Welsh was speeding toward them across the tracks.

"Hurt?" asked the engineer.

"I guess not — not much;" and Allan stooped to rub his leg. "Something hit me here."

"Yes — the footboard. Knocked you off the track. I had her pretty near stopped, or they'd be another story."

Allan turned to Welsh, who came panting up, and placed the child in his arms.

"I guess she's not hurt," he said, with a wan little smile.

But Jack's emotion had quite mastered him for the moment.

"Mamie!" he cried, gathering her to him. "My little girl!" And the great tears shattered down over his cheeks upon the child's dress.

The others stood looking on, understanding, sympathetic. The fireman even turned away to rub his sleeve furtively across his eyes, for he was a very young man and quite new to railroading.

The moment passed, and Welsh gripped back his self-control, as he turned to Allan and held out his great hand.

"You've got nerve," he said. "We won't fergit it — Mary an' me. Come on home — it's your home now, as well as ours."

Half-way across the tracks they met Mary, who, after one shrill scream of anguish at sight of her darling's peril, had started wildly down the path to the gate, though she knew she must arrive too late. She had seen the rescue, and now, with streaming eyes, she threw her arms around Allan and kissed him.

"My brave boy!" she cried. "He's our boy, now, ain't he, Jack, as long as he wants t' stay?"

"That's jest what I was tellin' him, Mary dear," said Jack.

"But he's limpin'," she cried. "What's th' matter? Y're not hurted, Allan?"

"Not very badly," answered the boy. "No bones broken — just a knock on the leg that took the skin off."

"Come on home this instant," commanded Mary, "an' we'll see."

"Ain't y' goin' t' kiss Mamie?" questioned Jack.

"She don't deserve t' be kissed!" protested her mother. "She's been a bad girl — how often have I told her never t' lave th' yard?"

Mamie was weeping bitter tears of repentance, and her mother suddenly softened and caught her to her breast.

"I — I won't be bad no more!" sobbed Mamie.

"I should hope not! An' what d' y' say t' Allan? If it hadn't 'a' been fer him, you'd 'a' been ground up under th' wheels."

"I — I lubs him!" cried Mamie, with a very tender look at our hero.

She held up her lips, and Allan bent and kissed them.

“Well, m’ boy,” laughed Jack, as the triumphal procession moved on again toward the house, “you seem t’ have taken this family by storm, fer sure!”

“Come along!” cried Mary. “Mebbe th’ poor lad’s hurted worse’n he thinks.”

She hurried him along before her up the path, sat him down in a chair, and rolled up his trousers leg.

“It’s nothing,” protested Allan. “It’s nothing — it’s not worth worrying about.”

“Ain’t it!” retorted Mary, with compressed lips, removing shoe and sock and deftly cutting away the blood-stained underwear. “Ain’t it! You poor boy, look at that!”

And, indeed, it was rather an ugly-looking wound that lay revealed. The flesh had been crushed and torn by the heavy blow, and was bleeding and turning black.

“It’s a mercy it didn’t break your leg!” she added. “Jack, you loon!” she went on, with a fierceness assumed to keep herself from bursting into tears, “don’t stand starin’ there, but bring me a basin o’ hot water, an’ be quick about it!”

Jack was quick about it, and in a few moments the wound was washed and nicely dressed with a cooling lotion which Mary produced from a cupboard.

“I keep it fer Jack,” Mary explained, as she spread it tenderly over the wound. “He’s allers gittin’ pieces knocked off o’ him. Now how does it feel, Allan darlint?”

“It feels fine,” Allan declared. “It doesn’t hurt a bit. It’ll be all right by morning.”

“By mornin’!” echoed Mary, indignantly. “I reckon y’ think yer goin’ out on th’ section t’-morrer!”

“Why, of course. I’ve got to go. We’re getting it ready for the Irish Brigade. We’ve got to win that prize!”

“Prize!” cried Mary. “Much I care fer th’ prize! But there! I won’t quarrel with y’ now. Kin y’ walk?”

“Of course I can walk,” and Allan rose to his feet.

“Well, then, you men git ready fer supper. I declare it’s got cold — I’ll have t’ warm it up ag’in! An’ I reckon I’ll put on a little somethin’ extry jest t’ celebrate!”

She put on several things extra, and there was a regular thanksgiving feast in the little Welsh home that evening, with Allan in the place of honor, and Mamie looking at him adoringly from across the table. Probably not a single one of the employees of the road would have hesitated to do what he had done, — indeed, to risk his life for another’s is the ordinary duty of a railroad man, — but that did not lessen the merit of the deed in the eyes of Mamie’s parents. And for the first time in many days, Allan was quite happy, too. He felt that he was making himself a place in the world — and, sweeter than all, a place in the hearts of the people with whom his life was cast.

But the injury was a more serious one than he had been willing to admit. When he tried to get out of bed in the morning, he found his leg so stiff and sore that he could scarcely move it. He set his teeth and managed to dress himself and hobble down-stairs, but his white face showed the agony he was suffering.

“Oh, Allan!” cried Mary, flying to him and helping him to a chair. “What did y’ want t’ come down fer? Why didn’t y call me?”

“I don’t want to be such a nuisance as all that!” the boy protested. “But I’m afraid I can’t go to work today.”

Mary sniffed scornfully.

“No — nor to-morrer!” she said. “You’re goin’ t’ stay right in that chair!”

She flew around, making him more comfortable, and Allan was coddled that day as he had not been for a long time. Whether it was the nursing or the magic qualities of Mary’s lotion, his leg was very much better by night, and the next morning was scarcely sore at all. The quickness of the healing — for it was quite well again in three or four days — was due in no small

part to Allan's healthy young blood, but he persisted in giving all the credit to Mary.

After that, Allan noticed a shade of difference in the treatment accorded him by the other men. Heretofore he had been a stranger — an outsider. Now he was so no longer. He had proved his right to consideration and respect. He was "th' boy that saved Jack Welsh's kid." Report of the deed penetrated even to the offices where dwelt the men who ruled the destinies of the division, and the superintendent made a mental note of the name for future reference. The train-master, too, got out from his desk a many-paged, much-thumbed book, indexed from first to last, and, under the letter "W," wrote a few lines. The records of nearly a thousand men, for good and bad, were in that book, and many a one, hauled up "on the carpet" to be disciplined, had been astonished and dismayed by the train-master's familiarity with his career.

Of all the men in the gang, after the foreman, Allan found Reddy Magraw the most lovable, and the merry, big-hearted Irishman took a great liking to the boy. He lived in a little house not far from the Welshes, and he took Allan home with him one evening to introduce him to Mrs. Magraw and the "childer." The former was a somewhat faded little woman, worn down by hard work and ceaseless selfdenial, but happy despite it all, and the children were as healthy and merry a set of young scalawags as ever rolled about upon a sanded floor. There were no carpets and only the most necessary furniture, — a stove, two beds, a table, and some chairs, for there was little money left after feeding and clothing that ever hungry swarm, — but everywhere there w r as a scrupulous, almost painful, cleanliness. And one thing the boy learned from this visit and succeeding ones — that what he had considered poverty was not poverty at all, and that brave and cheerful hearts can light up any home.

His trunk arrived from the storage house at Cincinnati in due time, affording him a welcome change of clothing, while Mrs. Welsh set herself to work at once sewing on missing buttons, darning socks, patching trousers — doing the hundred and one things which always need to be done to the clothing of a motherless boy. Indeed, it might be fairly said that he was motherless no longer, so closely had she taken him to her heart.

Sunday came at last, with its welcome relief from toil. They lay late in bed that morning, making up lost rest, revelling in the unaccustomed luxury of leisure, and in the afternoon Jack took the boy for a tour through the shops, swarming with busy life on week-days, but now deserted, save for an occasional watchman. And here Allan got, for the first time, a glimpse of one great department of a railroad's management which most people know nothing of. In the first great room, the "long shop," half a dozen disabled engines were hoisted on trucks and were being rebuilt. Back of this was the foundry, where all the needed castings were made, from the tiniest bolt to the massive frame upon which the engine boiler rests. Then there was the blacksmith shop, with its score of forges and great steam-hammer, that could deliver a blow of many tons; and next to this the lathe-room, where the castings from the foundry were shaved and planed and polished to exactly the required size and shape; and still farther on was the carpenter shop, with its maze of woodworking machinery, most wonderful of all, in its nearly human intelligence.

Beyond the shop was the great coal chute, where the tender of an engine could be heaped high with coal in an instant by simply pulling a lever; then the big water-tanks, high in air, filled with water pumped from the river half a mile away; and last of all, the sand-house, where the sand-boxes of the engines were carefully replenished before each trip. How many lives had been saved by that simple device, which enabled the wheels to grip the track and stop the train! How many might be sacrificed if, at a critical moment, the sand-box of the engine happened to be empty! It was a startling reflection — that even upon this little cog in the great machine — this thoughtless boy, who poured the sand into the boxes — so much depended.

Bright and early Monday morning they were out again on Twenty-one. Wednesday was inspection, and they knew that up and down those two hundred miles of track hand-cars were flying back and forth, and every inch of the roadway was being examined by eyes severely critical. They found many things to do, things which Allan would never have thought of, but which appealed at once to the anxious eyes of the foreman.

About the middle of the afternoon, Welsh saw a figure emerge from a grove of trees beside the road and come slouching toward him. As it drew nearer, he recognized Dan Nolan.

“Mister Welsh,” began Nolan, quite humbly, “can’t y’ give me a place on th’ gang ag’in?”

“No,” said Jack, curtly, “I can’t. Th’ gang’s full.”

“That there kid’s no account,” protested Nolan, with a venomous glance at Allan. “I’ll take his place.”

“No, you won’t, Dan Nolan!” retorted Jack.

“He’s a better man than you are, any day.”

“He is, is he?” sneered Nolan. “We’ll see about that!”

“An’ if you so much as harm a hair o’ him,” continued Jack, with clenched fists, “I’ll have it out o’ your hide, two fer one — jest keep that in mind.”

Nolan laughed mockingly, but he also took the precaution to retreat to a safe distance from Jack’s threatening fists.

“Y’ won’t give me a job, then?” he asked again.

“Not if you was th’ last man on earth!”

“All right!” cried Nolan, getting red in the face with anger, which he no longer made any effort to suppress. “All right! I’ll fix you an’ th’ kid, too! You think y’r smart; think y’ll win th’ section prize! Ho, ho! I guess not! Not this trip! Purty section-foreman you are! I’ll show you!”

Jack didn’t answer, but he stopped and picked up a stone; and Nolan dived hastily back into the grove again.

“He’s a big coward,” said Jack, throwing down the stone disgustedly, and turning back to his work.

“Don’t let him scare y’, Allan.”

“He didn’t scare me,” answered Allan, quietly, and determined to give a good account of himself should Nolan ever attempt to molest him.

But Jack was not as easy in his mind as he pretended; he knew Nolan, and believed him quite capable of any treacherous meanness. So he kept Allan near him; and if Nolan was really lurking in the bushes anywhere along the road, he had no opportunity for mischief.

The next morning Jack took his men out directly to the western end of the section, and came back very slowly, stopping here and there to put a finishing touch to the work. Even Reddy was enthusiastic over the condition of the section.

“It’s foin as silk!” he said, looking back over the road they had just traversed. "Ef we don’t git th’ prize this toime, it’s because some other feller’s a lot smarter *n we are!"

6. Reddy To The Rescue

ENGINEER LISTER had often been angry in his life, for, truth to tell, running an engine is not conducive to good nerves or even temper. It is a trying job, demanding constant alertness, and quick, unerring judgment. But when to the usual responsibilities of the place are added a cranky engine and a green fireman, even a saint would lose his patience. Ellis Root was the green fireman, and seemed to possess such a veritable genius for smothering his fire that more than once the engineer had been compelled to clamber down from his box and wield the rake and shovel himself. To add to this difficulty of keeping up steam, the 226, a great ten wheeled aristocrat of a freight-engine, had suddenly developed a leaky throttle, together with some minor ailments, which rendered the task of handling her one of increasing difficulty.

The last straw was the refusal of the dispatcher at headquarters to allow Lister to reduce his tonnage. His train happened to be an unusually heavy one which, ordinarily, the 226 could have handled with ease. The dispatcher knew this; he knew also that Lister had an unfortunate habit of complaining when there was nothing to complain about; so when this last complaint came in, he wired back a terse reply, telling Lister to "shut up, and bring in your train."

So Lister was raving angry by the time his engine limped feebly into the yards at Wadsworth. He jumped off almost before she stopped, and leaped up the stairs to the division offices two steps at a time, in order to unburden himself without delay of his opinion of the dispatcher who had so heartlessly refused to help him out of his difficulties.

He burst into the office like a whirlwind, red in the face, gasping for breath.

"What's the matter, Lister?" asked the trainmaster, looking up from, his desk.

"Matter!" yelled Lister. "Where's that thick headed dispatcher? He ain't fit to hold a job on this road!"

"What did he do?" asked the train-master, grinning at the heads that had been stuck in from the adjoining rooms to find out what the noise was about. "Tell me what he did, and maybe I'll fire him."

"I'll tell you what he did! He made me handle my full train when I wired in here an' told him my engine was leakin' like a sieve. What do you think of a roundhouse foreman that'll send an engine out in that shape?"

"So you want me to fire the foreman, too?" queried the train-master, grinning more broadly.

"Where is the engine?"

"She's down there in the yards," said Lister.

"What! Down in the yards! Do you mean to say you brought her in?"

"Of course I brought her in," said Lister.

"They ain't another engineer on th' road could 'a' done it, but I did it, an' I want to tell you, Mr. Schofield —"

A succession of sharp blasts from the whistle of the yard-engine interrupted him.

"What's that?" cried the train-master, and threw up the window, for the blasts meant that an accident of some sort had happened. The other men in the office rushed to the windows, too, — they saw the yardmen running madly about and gesticulating wildly, — and away up the yards they saw the 226 rattling over the switches at full speed, running wild!

With a single bound the train-master was at the door of the despatched office.

"Where's Number Four?" he demanded. Number Four was the fastest through passenger-train on the road — the east-bound flier, to which all other trains gave precedence.

The dispatcher in charge of the west end of the road looked up from his desk.

“Number Four passed Anderson three minutes ago, sir,” he said. “She’s on time — she’s due here in eight minutes.”

The train-master’s face grew suddenly livid; a cold sweat burst out across his forehead.

“Good Lord!” he murmured, half to himself.

“A wreck — no power on earth can help it!”

A vision danced before his eyes — a vision of shattered cars, of mangled men and women. He knew where the collision must occur; he knew that the flier would be coming down that heavy grade at full speed — and toward the flier thundered that wild engine — with no guiding hand upon the throttle — with nothing to hold her back from her mad errand of destruction!

It had happened in this wise. A moment after Engineer Lister jumped to the ground, and while his fireman, Ellis Root, was still looking after him with a grin of relief, for the trip had been a hot one for him in more ways than one, a yardman came along and uncoupled the engine from the train. The fireman began to kick off his overalls, when he became suddenly conscious that the engine was moving. The leaky throttle did not shut off the steam completely from the cylinders, and, released from the weight of the heavy train which had held her back, the engine started slowly forward.

The fireman, whose knowledge of the engine was as yet of the most primitive description, sprang to the other side of the cab and pushed the lever forward a notch or two. The engine’s speed increased.

“I can’t stop her,” he said, feverishly, half to himself. “I can’t stop her,” and he pulled the lever back.

The engine sprang back in answer and bumped heavily into the train behind her.

“Hi, there, you ijit!” yelled the yard-man, who was under the first car inspecting the air-hose.

“What you mean? D’ y’ want t’ kill a feller? Let that ingine alone!”

Ellis, with the perspiration trickling down his face, threw the lever forward again, and then, as the engine bounded forward in answer, he lost his head entirely and leaped off, with a wild yell of dismay.

In a moment the 226 rattled over the switches westward out of the yards, and shot out upon the main track, gathering speed with every revolution!

Welsh's gang had worked its way eastward along the section as far as the mill switch, when the foreman took out his watch and glanced at it.

"Git that hand-car off th' track, boys," he said.

"Number Four'll be along in a minute."

Two of the men derailed the hand-car, while Welsh glanced up and down the road to be sure that the track was clear, and took a look at the mill switch, a little distance away, where they had been working, to make certain that it had been properly closed. He remembered that a work-train had taken a cut of cars out of the switch a short time before, but he could tell by the way the lever was thrown that the switch was closed.

Far in the distance he could hear the train whistling for the curve just beyond the cut. Then, suddenly from the other direction, he caught a sound that brought him sharply round, and saw with horror a great freight-engine rumbling rapidly toward him.

"My God, she's runnin' wild!" he cried; and, with a yell of warning to his men, turned and ran toward the switch. If he could only get there in time to ditch her!

But the engine whirled past him, and he stopped, seeing already the horror, the destruction, which must follow in a moment. Then, far ahead, he saw Reddy speeding toward the switch, saw him reach it, bend above the short lever that controlled it, and throw it over. Away up the track the "flier" flashed into view, running a mile a minute. He could guess what was happening in her cab, as her engineer saw the danger. The heavy engine rumbled on, all too slowly now, in upon the switch to knock th^ bumper at the farther end to splinters and fight her life out in the mud beyond. He saw Reddy throw the lever back again, only in that instant to be hurled away to one side as the great train swept by in safety. And the engineer, who had reversed his lever and applied the brakes, who had waited the outcome with white face and tight set lips, — but who, never for an instant, had thought of saving himself by jumping, — released the brakes and threw his lever again on the forward motion.

Four minutes later the train swept in to Wadsworth, only forty seconds behind the schedule!

The passengers never knew how near they had been to death — by what a miracle they had escaped destruction! After all, a miss is as good as a mile!

Reddy's comrades found him lying unconscious twenty feet from the track. His right arm 1 — the arm that had thrown the lever — hung limp by his side, and there was a great gash in his head from which the blood was pouring. In a moment Jack had torn off the sleeve of his shirt and made an improvised bandage of it, which checked to some extent the flow of blood.

"We must git him home," said Welsh, "where we kin git a doctor. He's hurted bad. Git th' car on th' track, boys."

In an instant it was done, and Reddy was gently lifted on.

"Now you set down there an' hold his head, Allan," said Jack. "Keep it as stiddy as y' kin."

Allan sat down obediently and placed the mangled head tenderly in his lap. As he looked at the pale face and closed eyes, it was all he could do to keep

himself from breaking down. Poor Reddy — good old Reddy — a hero, Allan told himself, with quickening heart, a hero who had not hesitated to risk his life for others.

But they were off!

And how the men worked, pumping up and down until the car fairly flew along the track. They knew the way was clear, since the flier had just passed, and up and down they pumped, up and down, knowing that a few minutes might mean life or death to their comrade. Down the grade they flashed, along the embankment by the river, through the town and into the yards, where a dozen willing hands lifted the inanimate form from the car and bore it tenderly into the baggage-room.

"How did it happen, Welsh?" asked the train master, after a surgeon had been summoned and an ambulance had taken the still unconscious Reddy to his home.

And Jack told him, while the train-master listened, with only a little nod now and then to show that he understood. At the end he drew a deep breath.

“I thought the flier was gone for sure,” he said.

“It would have been the worst wreck in the history of the road. Thank God it was spared us!”

“Yes, thank God,” said Jack, a little hoarsely; “but don’t fergit t’ thank Reddy Magraw, too!”

“We won’t!” said the train-master, with another little nod. “We’ll never forget Reddy.”

“More especially,” added Jack, a little bitterly, “since it’s not th’ first time he’s saved th’ road a bad wreck. He was fergot th’ first time!”

“Yes, I know,” agreed the train-master. “But he wouldn’t have been if I’d had anything to do with it.”

“I know it, sir,” said Jack, heartily. “I know it, Mr. Schofield. You’ve always treated us square. But I couldn’t help rememberin’!”

Half an hour later Allan and Jack intercepted the doctor as he came out of the little house where Mrs. Magraw sat with her apron over her head, rocking back and forth in agony.

“He’ll be all right, won’t he, doctor?” asked Jack, anxiously. “He ain’t a-goin’ t’ die?”

“No,” answered the doctor, "he’ll not die.

But," and he hesitated, “he got a mighty bad crack, and it will be a long time before he’s able to be out again.”

“He’s come to all right, ain’t he, doctor?” questioned Jack, seeing the doctor’s hesitation.

“Yes, he’s conscious again, but he’s not quite himself yet. But I think he’ll come around all right,” and the doctor walked briskly away, while Jack and Allan, assured that they could do nothing more for Reddy or his family, whom the neighbors had parceled out among themselves, went slowly home.

7. The Irish Brigade

IT WAS NOT UNTIL they were seated around the table that evening that Allan remembered that the next day was to occur the great inspection by the Irish Brigade, and he straightened up suddenly as he thought of it.

"Didn't that engine tear things up some when she ran off the track?" he asked of Jack.

"Yes," answered the foreman, "but it was only at th' end of th' sidin', an' that won't matter. Besides, th' wreckin' crew's up there now gittin' th' engine back on th' track an' fixin' things up ag'in. If th' main line on Twenty-one ain't in good shape, it's because I don't know what good shape is," he added, with decision. "We couldn't do anything more to it if we worked fer a week. I've asked th' boys t' take a run over it t'-morrer mornin' jest as a matter o' precaution. Do y' think y' kin git up at midnight?" he added, suddenly, giving his wife a knowing wink.

"At midnight?" repeated Allan. "Why, yes, of course, if you want me to."

"Well, y'll have t' git up at midnight if y' want t' ketch Number Five fer Cincinnati."

Allan's face flushed with quick pleasure.

"Am I to go, too?" he asked, eagerly. "Can you take me, too?"

Jack laughed in sympathy with his bright eyes.

"Yes," he said; "that's what I kin. I got an extry pass from th' superintendent. I told him I had a boy who wanted t' see th' road because he was goin' t' be superintendent hisself, some day. He said he guessed he knew th' boy's name without bein' told, an' wrote out th' pass."

Allan flushed high with pleasure.

"That was nice of him," he said.

"Yes," said Jack; "an' yet I think he was figgerin' on helpin' th' road, too. Y' see, whenever a bright feller like you comes along an' shows that he's steady an' can be depended on, he never gits t' work on section very long. They need boys like that up in th' offices. That's where th' brains o' th' road are. In fact, th' office itself is th' brain o' th' whole system, with wires runnin' out to every part of it an' bringin' back word what's goin' on, jest like a doctor told me once th' nerves do in our bodies."

"Yes," nodded Allan; "but what has that got to do with my going over the road tomorrow?"

"Jest this," said Jack; "before a feller's fit to hold a job in th' offices, — a job as operator or despatches that is, — and work one o' them little wires, he's got t' know th' road better'n he knows th' path in his own back yard. He's got t' know every foot of it — where th' grades are an' how heavy they are; where th' curves are, an' whether they're long or short; where every sidin' is, an' jest how many cars it'll hold; where th' track runs through a cut, an' where it comes out on a fill; where every bridge and culvert is — in fact, he's got t' know th' road so well that when he's ridin' over it he kin wake up in th' night an' tell by th' way th' wheels click an' th' cars rock jest exactly where he is!"

At the moment Allan thought that Jack was exaggerating; but he was to learn that there was in all this not the slightest trace of exaggeration. And he was to learn, too, that upon the accuracy of this minute knowledge the safety of passenger and freight train often depended.

They sat on the porch again that evening, while Mary rocked Mamie to sleep and Jack smoked his pipe. Always below them in the yards the little yard-engines puffed up and down, placing the cars in position in the trains — cars laden with coal and grain for the east; cars laden with finished merchandise for the west; the farmer and miner exchanging his product for that of the manufacturer.

Only there was no Reddy to come and whistle at the gate, and after awhile they walked over to his house to find out how he was.

Mrs. Magraw let them in. Her stout Irish optimism had come back again, for Reddy was better.

“Though he’s still a little quare,” she added.

“He lays there with his oies open, but he don’t seem t’ notice much. Th’ docther says it’ll be a day or two afore he’s hisself ag’in.”

“Well, I’m glad it’s no worse,” said Jack. “We can’t afford to lose Reddy.”

“We won’t lose him this trip, thank God!” said Mrs. Magraw. “Mr. Schofield was over jist mow t’ see if they was anything he could do. He says th’ road’ll make it all roight with Reddy.”

“That’s good!” said Jack, heartily; “but we won’t keep you any longer, Mrs. Magraw,” and he and Allan said good night.

“We must be gittin’ t’ bed ourselves,” Jack added, as they mounted the path to his home.

“Remember, we have t’ git up at midnight. It’s good an’ sleepy you’ll be, my boy!”

“No, I won’t!” laughed Allan. “But I’ll turn in now, anyway.”

It seemed to him that he had been asleep only a few minutes when he heard Jack’s voice calling. But he was out of bed as soon as he got his eyes open, and got into his clothes as quickly as he could in the darkness. Mary had a hot lunch waiting by the time he got down-stairs. He and Jack ate a little, — one doesn’t have much appetite at midnight, — and together they made their way across the yards to the station, where they caught the fast mail for the city.

The smoking-car of the train was crowded with section-men on their way to the rendezvous, and a jolly, good-natured lot they were. There was no thought of sleep, for this was a holiday for them, — besides, sleep was out of the question in that tumult, — and one story of the rail followed another. As Allan listened, he wondered at these tales of heroism and daring told so lightly — of engineers sticking to their posts though certain death stared them in the face; * of crossing-flagmen saving the lives of careless men and women, at the cost, often, of their own; of break-in-twos, washouts, head-end collisions, of confusion of orders and mistakes of despatches — all the lore that gathers about the life of the rail. And as he

listened, the longing came to him to prove himself worthy of this brotherhood.

One story, in particular, stuck in Allan's memory.

"Then there was Tom Rawlinson," began one of the men.

"Let Pat tell that story," interrupted another.

"Come out here, Pat. We want t' hear about Tom Rawlinson an' his last trip on th' Two-twentyfour."

So Pat came out, shyly, a tall, raw-boned man. As he got within the circle of light, Allan saw that his face was frightfully scarred.

"'Twas in th' summer o' ninety-two," he began. "Rawlinson had had th' Two-twenty-four about a month, an' was as proud of her as a man is of his first baby. That day he was takin' a big excursion train in to Parkersburg. He was lettin' me ride in th' cab, which he hadn't any bus'ness t' do, but Tom Rawlinson was th' biggest-hearted man that ever pulled a lever on this road."

He paused a moment, and his listeners gravely nodded their approval of the sentiment.

"Well, he was pullin' up th' hill at Torch, an' th' engine had on every pound she could carry. There was a big wind whistlin' down th' cut, an' we could hear th' fire a-roarin' when th' fireman pulled open th' door t' throw in some more coal. Th' minute th' door was open, the wind jest seemed t' sweep int' thet fire-box, an' the first thing I knew, a big sheet o' flame was shootin' right out in my face. I went back over that tender like a rabbit, without stoppin' t' argy th' why an' th' wherefore, an' when I got back t' th' front platform o' th' baggage-car, I found that Tom an' his fireman had come, too.

"We stood there a minute, hardly darin' t' breathe, a-watchin' thet fire. It licked out at th' cab, an' quicker'n I kin tell it, th' wood was blazin' away in great shape. Then, all of a sudden, I happened t' think o' somethin' that sent a cold chill down my back, an' made me sick an' weak. Here was we poundin' along at forty miles an hour, with orders t' take th' sidin' fer Number Three at th' Junction, five mile ahead. It looked to me as though they'd be about a thousand people killed inside of a mighty few minutes."

He stopped to take a fresh chew of tobacco, and Allan saw that his hands were trembling at the memory of that fearful moment.

“Well,” he continued, "as I was a-sayin’, I could feel my hair a-raisin’ right up on my head. I looked around at Tom, an’ I could tell by his set face that he was thinkin’ of th’ same thing I was.

“‘Boys,’ he says, low-like, ‘I’m goin’ forrerd. I’ve got to shet her off. I hadn’t no business t’ run away.’”An’ without waitin’ fer either o’ us t’ answer, forrerd he went, climbin’ over th’ coal an’ down into th’ burnin’ cab. It was like goin’ into a furnace, but he never faltered — right on he went — right on into th’ fire — an’ in a minute I felt th’ jerk as he reversed her an’ threw on th’ brakes. It seemed t’ me as though we’d never come to a stop, but we did, an’ then th’ brakeman an’ me went forrerd over th’ coal t’ git Tom out. But it warn’t no use. He was layin’ dead on his seat, still holdin’ to th’ throttle.

“We lifted him down, an’ by that time th’ conductor an’ a lot o’ th’ passengers come a-runnin’ up. An’ then folks begun tellin’ me my face was burned,” and Pat indicated his scars with a rapid gesture. “Till then, I’d never even felt it. When y’re in it, y’ know, y’ only feel it fer others, not fer yourself.”

That ended the story-telling. There was something in that tale of sacrifice which made other tales seem idle and empty.

The dawn was just tingeing the sky in the east when the train rushed into the great, echoing trainshed at Cincinnati. The men got out and hurried forward to the dining-room, where a lunch of coffee and sandwiches awaited them. Here, too, were the train-master and division superintendent, trim-built, well-groomed men, with alert eyes, who knew the value of kind words and appreciative criticism when it came to managing men. Lunch was hastily eaten, and then the whole crowd proceeded to the special inspection train, where it stood on the side-track ready to start on its two hundred mile trip eastward. And a peculiar looking train it was — consisting, besides the engine, of only one car, a tall, ungainly, boarded structure, open at one end, and, facing the open end, tiers of seats stretching upward to the roof.

Into this the men poured and took their seats, so that every one could see the long stretch of track as it slid backward under them. Almost at once the signal came to start, and the gaily decorated engine — draped from end to end in green, that all might know it was the £ 'Irish Brigade" out on its inspection tour — pulled out through the "ditch," as the deep cut within the city limits is called, past the vast stock-yards and out upon the level track beyond. Instantly silence settled upon the car, broken only by the puffing of the engine and the clanking of the wheels over the rails. Seventy pairs of eyes were bent upon the track, the roadbed, the right of way, noting every detail. Seventy pairs of ears listened to the tale the wheels were telling of the track's condition. It was a serious and solemn moment.

Allan, too, looked out upon all this, and his heart fell within him. Surely, no track could be more perfect, no road-bed better kept. It must be this section which would win the prize. Yet, when that section had been left behind and the next one entered on, he could detect no difference. How could anybody rate one section higher than another, when all alike were perfect? And what possible chance was there for Twenty-one?

They were side-tracked at the end of an hour to allow a through passenger to pass, and the babel of voices arose again. But it was silenced at once the moment they ran out to continue on the journey. Hours passed, and at last, with a leaping heart, Allan recognized the west end of Section Twenty-one. He glanced at Jack Welsh, and saw how his eyes were shining, but he dared not look in his direction a second time. He stared out at the track and wondered if it was really here that he had labored for the past week.

Yes, — he recognized the landmarks, — the high trestle over the deep ravine, the cut, the long grade, the embankment along the river. It seemed almost that he knew every foot of the track; but he did not know it so well as he thought, for his eyes did not detect what Welsh's more critical ones saw on the instant, — traces of gravel dug out, of whitewash rubbed away, of a guard-fence broken down. The gravel had been replaced, the whitewash touched up anew, the fence had been repaired, but Welsh knew that the section was not as he had left it the night before, and in a flash he understood.

"It was some of Dan Nolan's work," he said to himself, and, the moment the train stopped in the yards at Wadsworth, he called to Allan and hurried

away to the section-shanty to hear the story.

8. Good News And Bad

HIS MEN were waiting for him, as he knew they would be, and the story was soon told. They had started out in the morning, according to his instructions, for a last run over the section, and soon discovered the work of the enemy. Ties which had been piled neatly at the side of the right of way had been thrown down, whitewashed boulders around the mile-posts had been tom up, in many places holes had been dug in the road-bed, — in short, the section was in a condition which not only would have lost them the prize, but would have brought unbearable disgrace upon their foreman.

They set to work like Trojans righting the damage, for they knew they had only a few hours, beginning at the western end and working slowly back toward the city. More than once it seemed that they could not get through in time; but at last the work was done, just as the whistle of the inspection train sounded in the distance.

“An’ mighty well done,” said Jack, approvingly, when the story was ended. “You’ve done noble, m’ boys, an’ I won’t fergit it! Th’ section’s in as good shape as it was last night.”

“But what dirty criminal tore it up?” asked one of the men.

“I know who it was,” and Jack reddened with anger. “It was that loafer of a Dan Nolan. He threatened he’d git even with me fer firin’ him, but I didn’t pay no attention. I didn’t think he’d got that low! Wait till I ketch him!”

And his men echoed the threat in a tone that boded ill for Daniel.

“Come on, Allan, we’ve got t’ be gittin’ back,” said Jack. “An’ thank y’ ag’in, boys,” and together he and Allan turned back toward the waiting train.

Section Twenty-one was the last inspected before dinner, which was awaiting them in the big depot dining-room at Wadsworth. The officers came down from division headquarters to shake hands with the men as they sat grouped about the long tables, and good-natured chaff flew back and forth. But at last the engine-bell announced that the greendecked train was ready to be off again eastward, over the last hundred miles of the division, which ended at Parkersburg.

The men swarmed into their places again, and silence fell instantly as the train started, rattling over the switches until it was clear of the yards, then settling into a regular click, click, as it swung out upon the main line. It must be confessed that this portion of the trip had little interest for Allan. The monotony of it — mile after mile of track gliding steadily away — began to wear upon him. He was no expert in track-construction, and one stretch of road-bed looked to him much like every other. So, before long, he found himself nodding, and, when he straightened up with a jerk and opened his eyes, he found Jack looking at him with a little smile.

They ran in upon a siding at Moonville to make way for a passenger-train, and Jack, beckoning to Allan, climbed out upon the track.

"I kin see you're gittin' tired," said Jack, as they walked up and down, stretching their legs. "I ought to let you stop back there at Wadsworth. But mebbe I kin give y' somethin' more interestin' fer th' rest o' th' trip. How'd y' like t' ride in th' engine?"

Allan's eyes sparkled.

"Do you think I might?" he asked, eagerly.

Jack laughed.

"I thought that'd wake y' up! Yes, — we've got Bill Higgins with us on this end, an' I rather think he'll let you ride in th' cab. Let's find out."

So they walked over to where the engineer was "oiling round," in railroad parlance — going slowly about his engine with a long-spouted oil-can in one hand and a piece of waste in the other, filling the oil-cups, wiping off the bearings, feeling them to see if they were too hot, crawling under the boiler to inspect the link motion — in short, petting his engine much as one might pet a horse.

“Bill,” began Jack, “this is Allan West, th’ boy thet I took on section with me.”

Bill nodded, and looked at Allan with friendly eyes.

“Yes,” he said, “I’ve heerd o’ him.”

“Well,” continued Jack, “he’s gittin’ purty tired ridin’ back there with nothin’ t’ do but watch th’ track, an’ I thought mebbe you’d let him ride in th’ cab th’ rest o’ th’ trip.”

“Why, sure!” agreed Bill, instantly. “Climb right up, sonny.”

Allan needed no second invitation, but clambered up and took his place on one of the long seats which ran along either side of the cab. Right in front of him was a narrow window through which he could see the track stretching far ahead to meet the horizon. Below him was the door to the fire-box, into which the fireman was at that moment shovelling coal. At his side, mounted on the end of the boiler, was a maze of gauges, cocks, wheels, and levers, whose uses he could not even guess.

The engineer clambered up into the cab a moment later, glanced at the steam and water gauges, to see that all was right, and then took his place on his seat. He got out his “flimsy” — the thin, manifolded telegraphic train order from headquarters, a copy of which had also been given to the conductor — and read it carefully, noting the points at which he was to meet certain trains and the time he was expected to make to each. Then he passed it over to his fireman, who also read it, according to the rules of the road. One man might forget some point in the orders, but it was not probable that two would.

There came a long whistle far down the line, and Allan saw the through passenger train leap into view and came speeding toward them. It passed with a rush and a roar, and a minute later the conductor raised his hand. The engineer settled himself on his seat, pushed his lever forward, and opened the throttle gently, pulling it wider and wider as the engine gathered speed. Never for an instant did his glance waver from the track before him — a moment’s inattention might mean death for him and for the men entrusted to his care.

There was something fascinating in watching the mighty engine eat up mile after mile of track. There were other things to watch, too. At every

crossing there was the danger of an accident, and Allan was astonished at the chances people took in driving across the track, without stopping to look up and down to see if there was any danger. Deep in talk they were sometimes, until roused by a fierce blast from the whistle; or sometimes the curtains of the buggy hid them entirely from view. And although the right of way was private ground and carefully fenced in on either side, there were many stragglers along it, — a group of tramps boiling coffee in a fence corner, a horse or cow that had managed to get across a cattle-guard, children playing carelessly about or walking the rails in imitation of a tight-rope performer. All these had to be watched and warned of their danger. Never once did the engineer lift his hand from the throttle, for that gave him the "feel" of the engine, almost as the reins give the driver the "feel" of a spirited horse. Now and then he glanced at the steamgauge, but turned back instantly to watch the track ahead.

Nor was the fireman idle. His first duty was to keep up steam, and he noted every variation of the needle which showed the pressure, shaking down his fire, and coaling up, as occasion demanded; raking the coal down from the tender, so as to have it within easy reach; sweeping off the "deck," as the narrow passage from engine to tender is called; and occasionally mounting the seat-box to ring the bell, as they passed through a little village.

Allan began to understand the whistle signals — especially the two long and two short toots which are the signal for a crossing, the signal most familiar to travelers and to those who live along the line of a railroad. And he grew accustomed to the rocking of the engine, the roaring of the fire, the sudden, vicious hiss of steam when the engineer tested a cock, the rush of the wind and patter of cinders against the windows of the cab. He began to take a certain joy in it — in the noise, the rattle, the motion. There was an excitement in it that made his pulses leap.

So they hummed along, between broad fields, through little hamlets and crossroads villages, mile after mile. Operators, flagmen, and station-agents came out to wave at them, here and there they passed a section-gang busy at work, now and then they paused until a freight or passenger could thunder past — on and on, on and on. Allan looked out at field and village, catching glimpses of men and women at work, of children at play — they would turn their faces toward him, and in another instant were gone. The life of the

whole country was unfolded before him, — everywhere there were men and women working, everywhere there were children playing, — everywhere there was life and hope and happiness and sorrow. If one could only go on like this for ever, visiting new scenes, seeing new —

A sharp, sudden, agonized cry from the fireman startled him out of his thoughts, and he felt the quick jolt as the engineer reversed his engine and applied the brakes. For a moment, in the shrieking, jolting pandemonium that followed, he thought the engine was off the track; then, as he glanced ahead, his heart suddenly stood still. For there, toddling down the track toward the engine, its little hands uplifted, its face sparkling with laughter, was a baby, scarce old enough to walk!

As long as he lives Allan will never forget that moment. He realized that the train could not be stopped, that that little innocent, trusting life must be ground out beneath the wheels. He felt that he could not bear to see it, and turned away, but just then the fireman sprang past him, slammed open the little window, ran along the footboard, clambered down upon the pilot, and, holding to a bolt with one hand, leaned far over and snatched the little one into the air just as the engine bore down upon it. Allan, who had watched it all with bated breath, fell back upon his seat with a great gasp of thankfulness.

"SNATCHED THE LITTLE ONE INTO THE AIR JUST AS THE ENGINE BORE DOWN UPON IT"

The engine stopped with a jerk, the fireman sprang to the ground with the baby in his arms. It was still crowing and laughing, and patting his face with its hands. Allan, looking at him, was surprised to see the great tears raining down his cheeks and spattering on the baby's clothes.

"It's his kid," said the engineer, hoarsely. "He lives up yonder," and he nodded toward a little house perched on the hillside that sloped down to the track. "That's th' reason th' kid was down here — he come down t' see his daddy!"

The section-men came pouring forward to find out what was the matter, and surrounded the baby as soon as they heard the story, petting him, passing him around from hand to hand — until, suddenly, the mother, who had just missed him, came flying down the hill and snatched him to her breast.

"Pile back in, boys," called the conductor, cutting short the scene. "We can't stay here all day. We've got t' make Stewart in eighteen minutes."

They hurried back to their places, the engineer, stopping only to give his fireman a hearty grip of the hand, opened the throttle. This time they were off with a jump — lost time had to be made up, and in a moment they were singing along at a speed which seemed positively dangerous. The engine rocked back and forth, and seemed fairly to leap over the rails; the wind whistled around them; the fire roared and howled in the fire-box. Eighteen minutes later, they pulled in to the siding at Stewart, on time to the second.

Allan had had enough of riding in the cab, and, thanking the engineer, and shaking hands with the fireman, he climbed down and took his seat again in the inspection-car. But he was very tired, and soon nodded off to sleep, and it was not until the train stopped and a sudden clamor of talk arose that he started fully awake.

The men were handing in their reports to the superintendent, who, with the assistance of the trainmaster, was going over them rapidly to find out which section had received the most points. Zero was very bad; ten was perfection. There were no zeros on any of the seventy reports, however; and, let it be added, not many tens.

The moments passed as the train-master set down in a column under each section the number of points it had received. Then he added up the columns, the superintendent looking over his shoulder. They compared the totals for a moment, and then, with a smile, the superintendent took from his pocket a check upon which the name only was lacking, and filled it in. Then he turned to the expectant men.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I think this company has cause to be congratulated on the condition of its road-bed. A vote of seven hundred, as you know, would mean perfection, and yet, not a single section has fallen below six hundred. The highest vote for any one section is 673, and that vote is given for Section Twenty-one, of which John Welsh is foreman. Mr. Welsh,

will you please come forward and get your check?" and he fluttered the paper in the air above his head.

A great burst of cheering broke forth again and again. They were generous men, these section foremen of the Irish Brigade, and, seeing how all thought of self was forgotten, Allan's eyes grew suddenly misty. Not a man there who seemed to feel the bitterness of the vanquished. But as Allan glanced over to Jack, who was making his way over the seats and stopping to return hand-shakes right and left, a cheer on his own account burst from the boy's lips, and he tossed his cap wildly in the air.

"Good for ye, lad!" cried one of the men, slapping the boy on his back. "Give him a cheer! That's right. Give him another cheer!" and Allan was lifted to the shoulders of one of the brawny men, who cried: "This is the b'y that saved Jack Welsh's colleen, worth more than a prize to Jack Welsh! Give the b'y a cheer!"

And the men responded with a will!

A moment later and they settled down again, as they saw the superintendent was waiting for their attention.

"Welsh," began that official, when quiet was restored, "you're a good man, and I'm glad that you got the prize. But," he added, looking around over the crowd, "you're not the only good man in the Irish Brigade. The only thing I'm sorry for is that I can't give a prize to every man, here. I'm like the Dodo in 'Alice in Wonderland' — I think you've all won, and that you all ought to have prizes. I want to thank you every one for your good work. I'm not overstating things a bit when I say that this division is in better shape than any other on the road. We've had fewer accidents, and we've run our trains closer to' the schedule than any other — all of which is largely due to your good work. I'm proud of my Irish Brigade!"

They cheered him and clapped him, and every man there resolved to do better work, if possible, in the coming year than he had done in the past one.

And yet there were some of the officials in the far-distant general offices at Baltimore who wondered why the superintendent of the Ohio division was so popular with his men!

Jack came to Allan at last and gripped his hand with a strength that proved how deep his emotion was.

"Come on," he said. "We're goin' home on Number Seven. It'll start in a minute."

They went together across the tracks and clambered into the coach. Allan caught a confused picture of a glare of lights and laughing people crowding past. But hardly had the train started when his head fell back against the seat, and slumber claimed him.

Jack waked him up at the journey's end, and together they hurried through the yards and up the steep path to the little cottage. Jack's wife was awaiting him in the doorway, and he drew forth the check and placed it in her hands.

"We won," he said, softly. "'Twas fer you, Mary, I wanted t' win. It means th' new dress you've been a-needin' so long, an' a dress fer Mamie; yes, an' a new carpet."

The wife said not a single word, but drew Jack's face down to hers and kissed it.

"Only," he added, when his head was lifted, "I want t' give tin dollars of it t' th' boys — I'd 'a' lost if it hadn't been fer them. An' Reddy — how's old Reddy?"

"Oh, Jack!" she cried, her eyes suffused with sudden tears, her lips a-tremble, "it's too terrible! He's come to, but he don't remember nothin' — not a thing! He don't know anybody — not even his own wife, Jack, nor th' childer, an' th' doctor says that maybe he never will!"

9. Reddy's Exploit

AS TIME WENT ON, it became more and more evident that the doctor's prediction with regard to Reddy Magraw was to be fulfilled. He regained his strength, but the light seemed quite gone from his brain. The officials of the railroad company did all they could for poor Reddy. When the local doctors failed, they brought an eminent specialist from Cincinnati for consultation, but all seemed to agree there was nothing to be done but to wait. There was one chance in a thousand that a surgical operation might prove of benefit, but there was just as great a chance that Nature herself might do the work better.

Reddy remembered nothing of his past life. More than this, it gradually became evident to his friends that his genial nature had undergone a change through the darkness that had overtaken his brain. He grew estranged from his family, and strangely suspicious of some of his friends, those to whom he had really been most attached. Among these last was Allan. He would have nothing whatever to do with the boy.

"It's one of the most ordinary symptoms of dementia," the doctor had explained, when Jack questioned him about it. "Aversion to friends is what we always expect. His wife feels it more keenly than you do."

"Of course she does, poor woman!" agreed Jack.

"But he hasn't got to abusin' her, sir, has he?"

"Oh, no; he doesn't abuse her; he just avoids her, and shows his dislike in other ways. If he begins to abuse her, we'll have to send him to the asylum. But I don't anticipate any violence — I think he's quite harmless."

It was while they were sitting on the porch one evening discussing the sad situation of their friend, that Allan turned suddenly to Jack.

"Do you remember," he said, "that first noon we were talking together, you started to tell me of some brave thing Reddy had done, and he shut you off?"

"Yes," Jack nodded; "I remember."

"Tell me now, won't you? I'd like to hear about it."

"All right," said Jack, and told the story. Here it is: Six years before, Reddy Magraw had been one of the laborers at the big coal-chute which towered into the air at the eastern end of the yards; just an ordinary laborer, working early and late, as every laborer for a railroad must, but then, as always, happy and care-free.

It was one afternoon in June that a message flashed into the dispatcher's office which sent the chief dispatcher headlong into the office of the superintendent.

"The operator at Baker's just called me up, sir," he gasped, "to report that second Ninety-seven ran through there, going forty miles an hour, and that the engineer dropped a message tied to a wrench saying his throttle-valve had stuck, and his brakes wouldn't work, and that he couldn't stop his engine!"

The superintendent started to his feet, his face livid.

"They'll be here in eight minutes," he said.

"Where's Number Four?"

"Just past Roxabel. We can't catch her, and the freight will run into her sure if we let it through the yards."

"We won't let it through the yards," said the superintendent, and went down the stairs three steps at a time, and sped away in the direction of the coal-chute.

He had reflected rapidly that if the freight could be derailed at the long switch just below the chute, it could be run into a gravel bank, where it would do much less damage than farther up in the yards, among the network of switches there. He ran his swiftest, but as he reached the chute, he heard, far down the track, the roar of the approaching train. Evidently it was not yet under control. Reddy Magraw heard the roar, too, and straightened

up in amazement. Why should a freight approach the yards at that speed? Then he saw the superintendent tugging madly at the switch.

"Thet switch won't work, sir," he said. "A yard ingine hit the p'int about an hour ago an' jammed it."

"Won't work!" echoed the superintendent, and stared blankly down the track at the train which every second was whirling nearer.

"Is it a runaway?" asked Reddy, suddenly understanding.

"Yes, — a runaway, — maybe I can make the other switch," and he started away, but Reddy caught him by the arm.

"Wait, sir," he cried; "wait. We'll fix 'em — throw 'em on to th' chute."

"On to the chute?"

"Yes, on to th' chute. Throw th' switch there," and Reddy, grabbing up two big cans of oil, started for the track leading to the long ascent.

Then the superintendent understood, and, with a gasp of relief, ran to the switch and threw it.

Up the steep ascent ran Reddy, a can in either hand, spurting streams of oil upon the rails — up and up — yet it seemed that he must certainly be caught and hurled to death, for a moment later the great freight-engine reached the structure, which groaned and trembled under this unaccustomed weight. Up the incline it mounted, the weight of the train behind it urging it on. Half-way up, two-thirds, almost upon Reddy, where he bent over the rails, a can in either hand, never pausing to look back.

From under the pounding drivers the smoke flew in clouds — the oil was being burned by friction. Yet down the rails flowed more oil; the drivers were sliding now, the speed of the train was lessening — lessening. The engine was racking itself out, its power was spent, it had been conquered. For an instant it hung poised on the incline, then slowly started down again. The crew had managed to set the hand-brakes, and these held the train somewhat, but still it coasted back down that incline at a speed that brought the watchers' hearts into their throats. The wheels held the rails, however, and a quarter of a mile back on the main line it stopped, its power for evil exhausted. And just then Number Four whistled for signal, and rumbled slowly into the other end of the yards. The superintendent drew a deep

breath of relief and thankfulness as he thought of what the result would have been had the runaway not been stopped in time.

"Was Reddy hurt?" asked Allan, who had listened to the story breathlessly.

"Hurt? Oh, no; he come down th' chute, put th' empty oil-cans back in their places, an' went t' work ag'in."

"But didn't the company do something for him?" persisted the boy. "Wasn't he rewarded?"

"No," said Jack, puffing away at his pipe with a very grim face; "but th' superintendent was promoted."

"The superintendent?"

"Yes; he got his promotion. Y' see, in his report of th' accident, he somehow fergot t' mention Reddy."

Allan flushed with a sudden generous anger.

"But," he began, "that wasn't —"

"Honest?" and Jack laughed a little bitterly.

"No, maybe not; but what could a poor feller like Reddy do about it? Only," he added, "it's jest as well fer that superintendent he didn't stay on this division. Th' boys would 'a' given him some mighty lively times. We've got a gentleman fer a superintendent now. He don't try t' stale nobody else's thunder — he's given Reddy a square deal this time."

Truth to tell, Reddy's family was being better provided for than it had ever been — the superintendent saw to that; and Reddy himself was receiving the best medical attention to be secured, though it seemed more and more certain that even the greatest skill would be unable to restore his memory.

It was long before sleep came to Allan's eyes that night, so excited was he over Jack's story of Reddy's exploit, and so indignant at the injustice that had been done him. He was thinking about it still, next day, until, of a sudden, he was forcibly reminded that he also possessed an enemy who was watching eagerly for an opportunity to injure him, and who would pause at no treachery.

10. A Summons In The Night

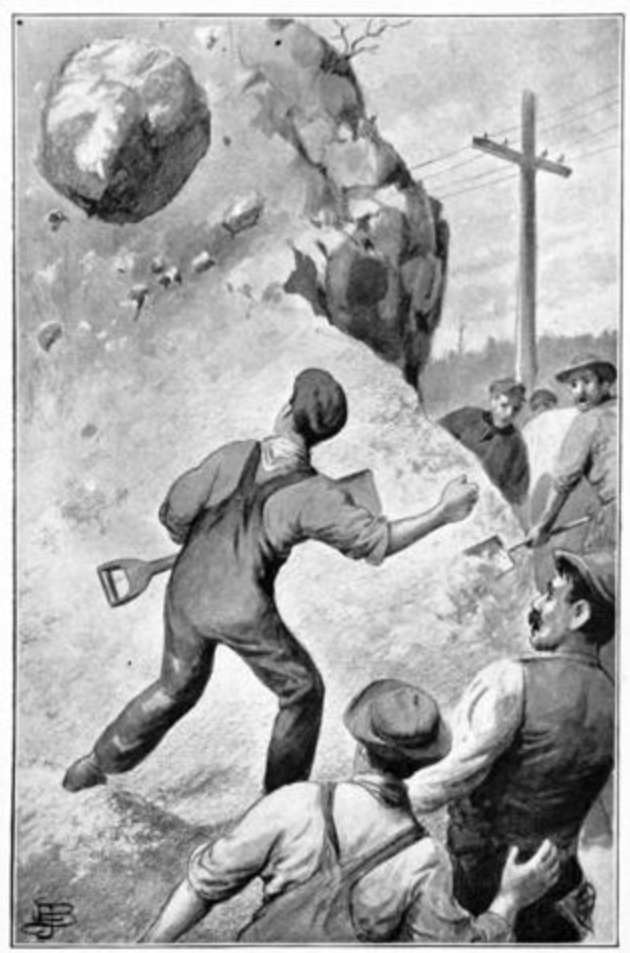
THIS REMINDER came that very afternoon while he was working at the bottom of the deep cut through the spur of the hill which marked the top of the long, stiff grade just west of the mill switch.

The other members of the gang were at the farther end of the cut, and Allan had just finished leveling down a pile of gravel, when he heard a sudden shout of warning from Jack.

"Look out, Allan!" cried the latter. "Look out!"

Allan instinctively sprang aside, and was just in time to escape a large boulder which came crashing down the side of the cut.

Allan gazed at it in astonishment, drawing a deep breath at his escape. Then he saw Jack, followed by the others, charging madly up the side of the hill. Without stopping to reason why, he followed.



"JUST IN TIME TO ESCAPE A LARGE BOULDER"

"What's the matter?" he cried, as he came panting up behind the ones who had just gained the hilltop.

"Matter!" cried Jack, glaring around to right and left over the hillside. "Matter enough! What d' y' suppose made that rock fall that way?"

"Why," said Allan, looking around bewildered,

"the earth under it must have given way —"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the foreman, impatiently. "Look, here's th' hole it left. Th' earth didn't give way a bit. Y' kin see th' rock was pried out —

yes, an' here's th' rail that was used to do it with. Now, who d' y' suppose had hold of that rail?"

Allan turned a little giddy at the question.

"Not Dan Nolan?" he said, in an awed whisper.

"Who else but Dan Nolan. A.n' he's hidin' down there in one o' them gullies, sneakin' along, keepin' out o' sight, or I'm mistaken."

"Did you see him?" asked Allan.

"No, I didn't see him," retorted Jack. "If I'd seen him, I'd have him in jail afore night, if I had t' hunt this whole county over fer him. But I know it was him. Who else could it be? You know he's threatened y'. He's been hangin' around doggin' y' ever since I put y' at this job. There's more'n one of us knows that; an' there's more'n one of us knows, too, that he wouldn't be above jest this kind o' work. He lamed a man on my gang, onct, jest because he had a grudge ag'in him — dropped th' end of a rail on his foot an' mashed it so bad that it had t' be taken off. He said it was an accident, an' I believed him, fer I didn't know him as well then as I do now. He wouldn't stop at murder, Dan Nolan wouldn't — why, that rock would 'a' killed you in a minute, if it had hit you!"

"Yes, I believe it would," said Allan, and he shivered a little at the thought of his narrow escape.

Jack took another long look around at the hills and valleys, but if Nolan was anywhere among them, the trees and underbrush hid him effectually. And Allan was loth to believe Jack's theory; bad as Nolan was, it seemed incredible that he should be so savage, so cold-blooded, as to lie there on the brink of the precipice, waiting, moment by moment, until his victim should be in the precise spot where the rock would strike him. That seemed too fiendish for belief.

"I wouldn't like to think Nolan did it," he said, a little hoarsely, "unless I had some proof. You didn't see him, you know —"

"See him!" echoed Jack. "No — I didn't need to see him! There's th' hole th' stone was pried out of, an' there's th' rail that was used fer a lever. Now who had hold o' that rail? Ain't Nolan th' only enemy you've got in th' world?"

"Yes," said Allan, in a low voice; "yes, I believe he is."

"An' do you suppose a feller would lay fer you like that unless he had somethin' ag'in you? I tell you, Dan Nolan's hidin' down there in the bushes somewhere, an' lookin' up here at us an' swearin' because he didn't git you!" and Jack shook his fist impatiently at the horizon. "If I had him under my heel, I'd kill him like I would a snake!"

Which, of course, Jack wouldn't have done, but his honest Irish blood was boiling at this moment, and he said more than he meant.

"Come on, boys," he added, calming himself by a mighty effort, "we can't ketch him now, but we'll git th' scoundrel yet!" and he started down the hill, a savage scowl still on his face.

The incident had cast a shadow over the spirits of the gang, and they worked the rest of the afternoon in silence. Indeed, ever since Reddy's accident, the gang had lacked that spirit of optimism and gaiety which had marked it; a new man had 'been taken on, but while he did Reddy's work fairly well, he could not take Reddy's place in the hearts of the men. Their day's work lacked the savour which Reddy's wit had given it, and they went home at night more weary than had been their wont. Jack saw, too, that their work had lost some of its alacrity, and yet he had no heart to find fault with them.

But he took no more chances of Allan's suffering any treacherous injury. He had talked the matter over with his wife, and between them, they had laid out a plan of action. Whenever possible, Jack kept Allan near him. When that was not possible, he took care that the boy should not be alone at any spot where his enemy could sneak up on him from behind. He knew if the boy was injured through any carelessness or lack of foresight on his part, he would never dare to go home again and face his wife!

All of this was, of course, plain enough to Allan, and chafed him somewhat, for he did not want the rest of the gang to think him a baby who needed constant looking after. Besides, he had an honest reliance on his ability to look after himself. So, one day, he ventured to protest.

"See here, Jack," he said, "Fm not afraid of Dan Nolan. In fact, I think I'd be rather glad of the chance to meet him in a fair stand-up fight."

“An’ that’s just th’ chance he’ll never give ye,” retorted Jack. “I wouldn’t be afeerd o’ him, either, if he’d fight fair — I believe y’ could lick him. But he won’t fight fair. Th’ coward’ll hit y’ from behind, if he kin — an’ he’s waitin’ his chance. That’s his kind, as y’ ought t’ know by this time. Oh, if I could only ketch him!”

But since the afternoon that great rock had fallen, Nolan had utterly disappeared from his accustomed haunts. Jack made diligent inquiries, but could get no news of him. The gang of scalawags who were his usual companions professed to be utterly ignorant of his whereabouts. He had been sleeping in a little closet back of one of the low railroad saloons, paying for board and lodging by cleaning out the place every morning, but the proprietor of the place said he had not been near there for a week. So at last Jack dropped his inquiries, hoping against hope that Nolan had taken alarm and left the neighborhood.

Reddy continued to improve physically from day to day, but mentally he grew worse and worse. His broken arm had healed nicely, and the wound in his head was quite well, but the injury to the brain baffled all the skill of his physicians. He would sit around the house, moping, seemingly taking notice of nothing; then he would suddenly start up and walk rapidly away as though he had just remembered some important engagement. Frequently he would be gone all day, sometimes even all night. He was rarely at home at meal-times, and yet he never seemed to be hungry.

Mrs. Magraw could never find out from him where he spent all this time. He refused to answer her questions, until, seeing how they vexed him, she ceased from bothering him, and let him go his own way. Of her bitter hours of despair and weeping, she allowed him to see nothing, but tried always to present to him the same cheerful and smiling countenance she had worn in the old days before his injury. In spite of this, he grew more and more morose, more and more difficult to get along with. The doctor advised that he be taken to an asylum, but the very word filled his wife with a nameless dread, and she prayed that he might be left in her care a little while longer. Perhaps he might grow better; at any rate, unless he grew worse, she could look after him.

One morning, about a week after the attempt upon Allan’s life, he and Jack were working together on the embankment by the river’s edge, when

the foreman stopped suddenly, straightened himself, and, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed long and earnestly across the water. Allan, following his look, saw two men sitting by a clump of willows, talking earnestly together. Their figures seemed familiar, but it was not until one of them leaped to his feet, waving his arms excitedly, that he recognized him as Reddy Magraw.

"Who is the other one?" he asked.

"It's Dan Nolan," said the foreman between his teeth. "What deviltry d' y' suppose he's puttin' int' that poor feller's head?"

Allan did not answer, but a strange foreboding fell upon him as he watched Reddy's excited oratory. Then the two watchers saw Nolan suddenly pull Reddy down, and together they vanished behind the trees.

What could it mean? Allan asked himself. What villainy was Dan Nolan plotting? Was he trying to make poor, half-witted Reddy his instrument for the commission of some crime?

Jack, too, worked away in unaccustomed silence and unusual heaviness of heart, for he was asking himself the same questions. Something must be done; Reddy must not be led into any mischief; and no influence which Nolan might gain over him could be anything but bad. It was like the coward to try to get another man to do what he himself shrank from doing.

The morning passed and noon came, but neither Jack nor Allan had relish for their dinner — the incident of the morning had spoiled their appetites.

"We'll have t' look out after Reddy some way," said Jack, at last, and then fell silent again.

They were soon back at work, and Allan, busy with his thoughts, did not notice that the air grew chill and the sky overcast.

"The'll be a storm t'-night," observed Jack at last, looking around at the sky.

"'Fore night," said one of the workmen. "We'll be havin' to quit work purty soon."

Even to an unpractised eye, the signs were unmistakable. Down from the north great banks of black clouds were sweeping, and the wind felt strangely cold, even for the last days of October. At last came the swift patter of the rain, and then a swirl of great, soft, fleecy flakes.

"Snow!" cried Jack. "Well, 'f I ever!"

All stopped to watch the unaccustomed spectacle of snow in October. It fell thick and fast, the flakes meeting and joining in the air into big splotches of snow, which melted almost as soon as it touched the ground. Two of the men, who had been blotted from sight for a moment, came hurrying toward the others.

"We might as well quit," said Jack. "We can't work this kind o' weather;" and so they started homeward through the storm, an hour before the usual time.

As the evening passed, the storm grew heavier and more violent. Looking out from the window after supper, Allan found that the whole world was shut from sight behind that swirling white curtain. From time to time he could hear the faint rumble of a train in the yards below, but no gleam of the engine's headlight penetrated to him.

"It's a bad night fer railroadin'," Jack remarked, looking out beside him. "A bad night. Th' rails 'r so slippy th' wheels can't grip 'em, an' th' engineer might as well shut his eyes fer all th' good his headlight does him. An' th' brakeman — fancy runnin' along th' two-foot path on the top of a train in a storm like this!"

But trainmen cannot stop for wind or weather, darkness or stress of storm, and the trains rumbled in and out through the night, most of them behind time, to be sure, but feeling their way along as best they could, while up in the offices the despatches, with tense nerves and knitted brows, struggled to maintain order in the midst of chaos. The wires were working badly, every train on the road was behind the schedule; out at some of the little stations, the operators, unused to the strain, were growing nervous. The superintendent closed his desk with a bang, after dictating the last letter; but instead of going home, as usual, he stood around with his hands in his pockets, listening to the wildly clicking instruments, and chewing a cigar savagely.

Allan lay for a long time that night listening to the trains, thinking of the wonderful system by which the great business was managed. He could understand, as yet, only a little of this system, and he was hungering to know more. Then the scene of the morning came back to him, and he tossed from side to side, thinking of it. Poor Reddy — yes, he needed looking after if Dan Nolan had got hold of him. Reddy's mind was more that of a child than of a man at present. What an evil influence Dan might have over him if he cared to use it!

At last sleep came; but in an instant he was back again at the river bank* peering across at the figures on the other side. They were talking together; they seemed to be quarreling. Then, suddenly, Nolan caught the other by the throat and hurled him backward over the bank into the water. Reddy sank with a wild cry; then his head reappeared, and he caught a glimpse of the boy standing on the farther bank.

"Allan!" he cried, stretching out his arms imploringly. "Allan!"

Allan sat bolt upright, rubbing his eyes, straining his ears to hear the call again.

"'Allan!"

It was Jack's voice, — he knew it now, — but the dawn was not peeping in at the window, as was usual when Jack called him. He realized that the night had not yet passed. He caught a glimmer of yellow light under his door and heard Jack putting on his boots in the room below.

Fully awake at last, he sprang out of bed and opened the door.

"What is it?" he called down the stair. "Do you want me?"

"Yes. Hurry up," answered Jack's voice.

Allan threw on his clothes with trembling hands, and hastened downstairs. He found Jack already at table, eating hastily.

"Set down," said the latter, "an' fill up. It's mighty uncertain when ye'll git another square meal."

"We're going out?" asked the boy. "Then there's a wreck?"

"Yes, a wreck — freight, near Vinton. Th' caller jest come fer me. It's so bad all th' sectiongangs on this end 'r ordered out. Eat all y' kin. Better

drink some coffee, too. Y'll need it."

11. Clearing The Track

ALLAN DID HIS BEST to force himself to eat, but the strangeness of the hour and the excitement of the promised adventure took all desire for food from him. He managed, however, to drink a cup of coffee, but his hands were trembling so with excitement he could scarcely hold the cup. It was a wreck, and a bad one. How terrible to lose a moment! He was eager to be off. But Jack knew from experience the value and need of food while it could be obtained, in view of what might be before them.

"It'll take 'em some time t' git' th' wreckin' -train ready," he said. "Git our waterproofs, Mary."

But Mary had them waiting, as well as a lot of sandwiches. She had been through such scenes before.

"There, stuff your pockets full," she said to Allan. "You'll want 'em."

Jack nodded assent, and took his share.

"And now, good-bye, Mary," said Jack. "No, don't wake the baby. If we git back by t'-morrer night, we'll be lucky. Come on, Allan."

The snow was still falling heavily as they left the house, and they made their way with some difficulty to the comer of the yards where the wrecking-train stood on its spur of siding. A score of section-men had already gathered, and more were coming up every minute. Nobody knew anything definite about the wreck — some one had heard that Bill Miller, the engineer, was hurt. It seemed they were taking a doctor along, for Allan saw his tall form in the uncertain light. And the trainmaster and division superintendent were with him, talking together in low tones.

Jack began checking off his men as they came up and reported.

An engine backed up and coupled on to the wrecking-train, and the men slowly clambered aboard. The switch at the end of the siding was opened.

“How many men have you got, Welsh?” asked Mr. Schofield, the trainmaster.

“Thirty-six, so far, sir.”

“All right. We’ll pick up the gangs on Twentythree and four as we pass. Go ahead,” he shouted to the engineer. “We’ve got a clear track to Vinton,” and he followed Allan and Jack up the steps into the car.

There was a hiss of steam into the cylinders and the train pulled slowly out upon the main track, the wheels slipping over the rails at first, but gripping better as the train gathered headway and shot eastward into the whirling snow. Operators, switchmen, station-agents, flagmen, all looked out to see it pass. It had only two cars — one, a long flat car loaded with ties and rails, piled with ropes and jacks and crowbars. At one end stood the heavy steel derrick, strong enough to lift even a great mogul of a freight-engine and swing it clear of the track.

In the other car, which looked very much like an overgrown box-car, was the powerful donkeyengine which worked the derrick, more tools, a cooking-stove, and a number of narrow cots. Two oil-lanterns swung from the roof, half-illuminating the faces of the men, who sat along the edges of the cots, talking together in low tones.

At Byers, the section-gang from Twenty-three clambered aboard; at Hamden came the gangs from Twenty-four and Twenty-five. Nearly sixty men were crowded together in the car; but there was little noise. It reminded Allan of a funeral.

And it was a funeral. The great railroad, binding East to West, was lying dead, its back broken, useless, its circulation stopped. The line was blocked, the track torn up — it was no longer warm, living, vital. It had been torn asunder. It was a mere useless mass of wood and steel. These men were hastening to resurrect it, to make it whole again.

At McArthur the superintendent came aboard with a yellow paper in his hand, — the conductor’s report of the accident, — and he and the trainmaster bent their heads together over it. The men watched them intently.

“Is it a bad one, sir?” asked Jack at last.

“Bad enough,” answered the superintendent.

“It seems that first Ninety-eight broke in two on the grade just beyond Vinton. Track so slippery they couldn’t hold, and she ran back into the second section. They came together in the cut at the foot of the grade, and fifteen cars loaded with nut coal were wrecked. Miller seems the only one hurt, but the track’s torn up badly.”

“Nut coal!” said Jack, with a whistle. “We’ve got our work cut out for us, boys.”

The men nodded — they knew now what to expect. And they fell to talking together in low tones, telling stories of past wrecks, of feats of endurance in the breathless battle which always follows when this leviathan of steel is torn asunder. But the superintendent had used one word which Allan had not wholly understood, and he took the first opportunity to ask Jack about it.

“What did Mr. Heywood mean, Jack,” he inquired, “when he said the train broke in two?”

“That’s so,” and Jack laughed. “It’s your first one — I’d forgot that. I wish it was mine,” and he forthwith explained just how the accident had probably happened.

A “break-in-two” occurs usually as a train is topping a heavy grade. The unusual strain breaks a coupling-pin or pulls out a draw-bar, and the portion of the train released from the engine goes whirling back down the grade, carrying death and destruction with it, unless the crew can set the brakes and get it stopped. Or, on a down-grade, a coupling-pin jumps out and then the two sections come together with a crash, unless the engineer sees the danger in time, and runs away at full speed from the pursuing section. It is only freights that “break in two,” for passenger couplings are made heavy enough to withstand any strain; besides, the moment a passenger-train parts, the air-brakes automatically stop both sections. But to freight crews there is no danger more menacing than the “break-in-two,” although, happily, this danger is gradually growing less and less, with the introduction of air-brakes on freight-cars as well as passenger.

Freight-trains, when traffic is heavy, are usually run in sections, with as many cars to each section as an engine can handle. The sections are run as close together as they can be with safety, and, in railroad parlance, the first

section of Freight-train Ninety-eight, for instance, is known as “first Ninety-eight”; the second section as “second Ninety-eight,” and so on.

In this instance, the first section of Train Ninetyeight had broken in two at the top of a long grade, and fifteen coal-cars, together with the caboose, had gone hurtling back down the grade, finally crashing into the front end of the second section, which was following about a mile behind. The conductor and brakemen, who were in the caboose, after a vain attempt to stop the runaway cars with the handbrakes, had jumped off, and escaped with slight bruises, but the engineer and fireman of the second section had had no warning of their danger until the cars swept down upon them out of the storm. There was no time to jump — it would have been folly to jump, anyhow, since the high walls of the cut shut them in on either side; yet the fireman had escaped almost unhurt, only the engineer being badly injured. The impact of the collision had been terrific, and, as the telegram from the conductor stated, fifteen cars had been completely wrecked.

So much the section-men understood from the superintendent’s brief description, and Jack explained it to Allan, while the others listened, putting in a word of correction now and then.

On and on sped the wrecking-train through the night. The oil-lamps flared and flickered, throwing a yellow, feeble light down into the car, where the men sat crowded together, for the most part silent now, figuring on the task before them. It was evident that it would be no easy one, but they had confidence in their officers, — the same confidence that soldiers have in a general whose ability has been fully tested, — and they knew that the task would be made as easy as might be.

The atmosphere of the car grew close to suffocation. Every one, almost, wlas smoking, and the lamps soon glowed dimly through the smoke like the sun upon a foggy day. Outside, the snow still fell, thickly, softly; their engineer could not see the track twenty feet ahead; but the superintendent had told him that the way was clear, so he kept his throttle open and plunged blindly on into the night, for every moment was valuable now; every nerve must be strained to the utmost tension until the task of clearing the track had been accomplished.

So the fireman bent steadily to the work of keeping up steam, clanging the door of the fire-box back and forth between each shovelful of coal, in

order to keep the draught full strength. The flames licked out at him each time the door was opened, lighting the cab with yellow gleams, which danced across the polished metal and illumined dimly the silent figure of the engineer peering forward into the storm. The engine rocked and swayed, the wind swirled and howled about it, and tried to hold it back, but on and on it plunged, never pausing, never slackening. Any one who was on the track to-night must look out for himself; but, luckily, the right of way was clear, crossing after crossing was passed without accident; the train tore through little hamlets, awakening strange echoes among the darkened houses, and, as it passed, the operator would run out to look at it, and, after a single glance, would rush back to his key, call frantically for "G I," — the despatched office, — and tick in the message that the wreckingtrain had got that far on its journey.

Back in the wrecking-car the superintendent had taken out his watch and sat with it a moment in his hand.

"We're going a mile a minute," he remarked to the train-master. "Higgins is certainly hitting her up."

The train-master nodded and turned again to the conductor's report. He was planning every detail of the battle which must be fought.

Jack glanced at Allan, and smiled.

"You're wonderin' how he could tell how fast we're going, ain't ye?" he asked.

"Yes," said Allan, "I am. How did he tell?"

"By listenin' t' th' click o' th' wheels over th' rails," answered Jack. "Each rail's thirty foot long — that is, there's a hundred an' seventy-six to th' mile. Mister Heywood probably kept tab on them fer fifteen seconds and counted forty-four clicks, so he knowed we was goin' a mile a minute."

"Here we are," remarked the train-master, as the wheels clanked over a switch, and, sure enough, a moment later their speed began to slacken.

Jack looked down at Allan and grinned again, as he saw the astonishment written on the boy's face.

"You're wonderin' how Mr. Schofield could tell that, ain't you?" he asked. "Why, bless you, he knows this here division like a book. Put him

down on any part of it blindfolded and he'll tell you right where he is. He knows every foot of it."

Perhaps Jack exaggerated unconsciously, but there was no doubt that Mr. Schofield, like every other good train-master, knew his division thoroughly — the location of every switch, the length of every siding, the position of every signal, the capacity of every engine. Nay, more, he knew the disposition of every conductor and engineer. When Milliken, for instance, wired in a protest that he couldn't take another load, he would smile placidly and repeat his previous orders; if Rogers made the same complaint, he would wire back tersely, "All right." He knew that Milliken was always complaining, while Rogers never did without cause. He knew his track, his equipment, and his men — and that is, no doubt, the reason why, today, he is superintendent of one of the most important divisions of the system.

The wrecking-train slowed and stopped, and the men clambered painfully to the ground, and went forward to take a look at the task before them. It was evident in a moment that it was a bigger one than any had anticipated — so big, indeed, that it seemed to Allan, at least, that it would be far easier to build a new track around the place than to try to open the old one. From side to side of the deep cut, even with the top, the coal was heaped, mixed with splintered boards and twisted iron that had once been freight-cars. High on the bank perched the engine, thrown there by the mighty blow that had been dealt it. On either side were broken and splintered cars, and the track was torn and twisted in a way that seemed almost beyond repair. It was a scene of chaos such as the boy had never before witnessed, and even the old, tried section-men were staggered when they looked at it. It seemed impossible that anything so puny as mere human strength could make any impression upon that tangled, twisted mass.

The doctor hurried away to attend to the injured engineer, who had been removed to the caboose by the crew of the second section, while the officers went forward to look over the battle-field. At the end of three minutes they had prepared their plan of action, and the men responded with feverish energy. Great cables were run out and fastened to the shattered frames of the coal-cars, which were dragged out of the mass of wreckage by the engine, and then hoisted from the track and thrown to one side out of the way. The donkey-engine puffed noisily away, while the derrick gripped trucks and wheels and masses of twisted iron and splintered beams, and swung

them high on the bank beside the road with an ease almost superhuman. The men went to work with a will, under the supervision of the officers, dragging out the smaller pieces of wreckage. Hour after hour they toiled, until, at last, only the coal remained — a great, shifting, treacherous mass — ton upon ton — fifteen car-loads — a veritable mountain of coal. And here the derrick could be of no use — there was only one way to deal with it. It must be shoveled from the track by hand!

It was a task beside which the labors of Hercules seemed small by comparison. But no one stopped to think about its enormousness — it had to be done, and done as quickly as possible. In a few moments, sixty shovels were attacking the mighty mass, rising and falling with a dogged persistence which, in the end, must conquer any obstacle.

Dawn found the men at this trying work. At seven o'clock hot coffee and sandwiches were served out to them, and they stopped work for ten minutes to swallow the food. At eight, a cold rain began to fall, that froze into sleet upon the ground, so that the men could scarcely stand. Still they labored doggedly on. Train-master and superintendent were everywhere, encouraging the men, making certain that not a blow was wasted, themselves taking a hand now and then, with pick or shovel. There was no thought of rest; human nature must be pushed to its utmost limit of endurance — this great leviathan of steel and oak must be made whole again. All along its two hundred miles of track, passengers were waiting, fuming, impatient to reach their destinations; thousands of tons of freight filled the sidings, waiting the word that would permit it to go forward. Here in the hills, with scarcely a house in sight, was the wound that stretched the whole system powerless — that kept business men from their engagements, wives from husbands, that deranged the plans of hundreds; ay, more than that, it was keeping food from the hungry, the ice was melting in refrigeratorcars, peaches and apples were spoiling in hot crates, cattle were panting with thirst, — all waiting upon the labors of this little army, which was fighting so valiantly to set things right.

12. Unsung Heroes

ALLAN LABORED SAVAGELY with the others. One thought sang in his brain, keeping time to the steady rise and fall of the shovels: "The track must be cleared; the track must be cleared." The great pile of coal before him took on a hideous and threatening personality — it was a dragon, with its claws at the road's throat. It must be conquered — must be dragged away. From time to time he stopped a moment to munch one of the sandwiches, not noticing the dirt and coal-dust that settled upon it. He was not hungry, but he felt instinctively that he must eat the food.

Most of the other men were chewing tobacco, their jaws working convulsively in unison with their arms. They had long since ceased to be human beings — they had become machines. Their movements were precise, automatic, regular. Their faces grew gradually black and blacker in the perpetual dust which arose from the coal; their eyes became rimmed with black, and bloodshot under the constant irritation of the dust. They breathed it in, swallowed it, absorbed it. Their sense of smell and taste gradually left them — or, at least, they could smell and taste only one thing, coal-dust. They ceased to resemble men; one coming upon them unawares would have taken them for some horrible group from Dante's inferno, doing terrible penance through eternity. They looked neither to the right nor left; their eyes were always on the coal — on this shifting black monster with which they were doing battle. Their hands seemed welded to the shovels, which rose and fell, rose and fell.

The cold rain beat in sheets around them, soaking their clothes, and yet they scarcely felt this added discomfort, so intent were they upon the task before them. Most of them had thrown off their coats at the beginning of the struggle, and now their wet shirts stuck tightly to their skins, showing every muscle. Gradually, by almost imperceptible degrees, the pile of coal on the

banks of the cut grew higher; gradually the pile on the track grew less, but so slowly that it was agonizing.

Above them on the bank, the great locomotive, hurled there and turned completely around by the force of the collision, stood a grim sentinel. It was the one piece of luck, the officers told themselves, in connection with this wreck, that the engine had been tossed there out of the way. To have raised it from the track and placed it there would have taken hours, and every minute was so precious! It would take hours to get it down again, but that need not be done until the track was clear.

Toward the middle of the morning, three fresh gangs of men came from the east and fell to work beside the others. But the others did not think of stopping. Instead, with staring eyes and tight-set teeth, they worked a little harder, to keep pace with the freshness and vigour of the newcomers. Ninety shovels were hurling the coal aside, digging into it, eating it away. Here, there, and everywhere the officials went, seeing that every stroke told, that not an ounce of energy was wasted, taking a hand themselves, driving themselves as hard as any of the men. Soon the coal was heaped so high along the sides of the cut that a force was put to work throwing it farther back. Almost all of it had to be handled twice!

Noon came — a dark noon without a sun; a noon marked by no hour of rest for these toilers. Back in the wrecking-car a great boiler of coffee steamed and bubbled; the cook carried pails of it among the men, who paused only long enough to swallow a big dipperful. Even Allan, who had no taste for it, drank deep and long, and he was astonished at the flood of warm vigour it seemed to send through him. Every half-hour this coffee was passed around, strong and black and stimulating. It was a stimulation for which the men would pay later on in limp reaction, but it did its work now.

Experience had proved that no other means was so good as this to sustain men against fatigue, hour after hour, and to drive away sleep from the brain. Time was when the railroad company had experimented with other stimulants, but they had long since been discarded.

Still the rain descended, and a biting wind from the north turned the weather steadily colder and colder. A sheet of sleet formed over the coal, welding it into a solid mass, which required the vigorous use of picks to dis-

lodge. The men slipped and stumbled, gasping with exhaustion, but still the shovels rose and fell. Here and there, the twisted and broken track began to appear.

At the side of the track the train-master called a lineman, who carried a wire up a pole and attached it to one of the wires overhead. A telegraph instrument was connected with this, and, sitting down upon the bank, the train-master ticked in to headquarters the news that the track would be clear at midnight, and repaired six hours later.

In this, as in everything, the train-master knew his men. Ten minutes before midnight the last shovelful of coal was out of the way, — the track was clear, — one part of the battle had been won. But another part yet remained to fight, — the track must be rebuilt, and the work of doing it began without a moment's delay. The twisted rails and splintered ties were wrenched out of the way; the road-bed, which had been plowed up by the wheels of the derailed cars, was hastily leveled. From the wrecking-car gangs of men staggered under new ties and rails, which were piled along beside the track where they would be needed.

At last the road-bed was fairly level again, and ties were laid with feverish energy by the light of the flaring torches, which gave the scene a weirdness which it had lacked by day. Phantoms of men moved back and forth, now disappearing in the darkness, now leaping into view again, working doggedly on, to their very last ounce of strength and endurance.

As the ties were got into place, the rails were spiked down upon them and fish-plates were bolted into place. Rod after rod they advanced, tugging, hammering, with the energy of desperation. It was no question now of a perfect road-bed — rail must be joined to rail so that once more the red blood of commerce could be pumped along the artery they formed. After that there would be time for the fine points. And just as the sun peeped over the eastern hills, the last spike was driven, the last bolt tightened. The work was done.

The men cheered wildly, savagely, their voices hoarse and unnatural. Then they gathered up their tools, staggered to the car, and fell exhausted on bunk or chair or floor, and went instantly to sleep. Allan found afterward that he had no memory whatever of those last trying hours.

At the side of the road the train-master was ticking off a message which told that his promise was kept, — a message which sent a thrill of life along the line from end to end, — which told that the road was clear. Then he cut loose his instrument, and he and the superintendent walked back to the car together. They were no longer the trim, good-looking men of every day — they were haggard, gaunt, unshaven. Their eyes were bloodshot, their clothing soiled and torn. They had not spared themselves. For thirty-six hours they had been working without so much as lifting their hats from their heads. But they had won the battle — as they had won many others like it, though few quite so desperate.

On either side the track was piled a mass of twisted wreckage; the engine still lay high on the bank. That could wait. Another crew could haul the engine down and gather up the debris, for the track was open.

The journey back took longer than the journey out. At every siding they headed in to let passenger and freight whirl past; the blood was bounding now, trying to make up for the time it had been stopped. But the men lying in the car saw none of them; the roar of their passage did not awaken them — they knew not whether the trip back took two hours or ten — they were deaf, blind, dead with fatigue. Only at the journey's end were they awakened, and it was no easy task. But at last they had all arisen, gaunt shadows of their former selves.

"Boys," said the superintendent, "I want to tell you that I've never seen a wreck handled as well as you handled this one. You did great work, and I'm proud of you. Now go home and go to sleep, — sleep twentyfour hours if you can. Don't report for duty till tomorrow. And I promise you I won't forget this night's work."

They staggered away through the curious crowd at the station, seeing nothing, turning instinctively in the direction of their homes.

"Why," remarked one white-haired man, gazing after them, "they look just as we looked after we got through the Wilderness. They look like they've been under fire for a week."

The superintendent, passing, heard the remark.

"They have," he answered, dryly. "They've been under the heaviest kind of fire continuously for thirty-six hours. You fellows have had whole li-

braries written about you, and about a thousand monuments built to you. You get a pension while you live, and your grave is decorated when you die. I'm not saying you don't deserve it all, for I believe you do. But there's some other people in the world who deserve honor and glory, too, — section-men, for instance. I never heard of anybody building a monument to them, or calling them heroes; and, if there are any flowers on their graves, it's their families put them there!"

He passed on, while his auditor stared openmouthed, not knowing whether to be moved or angry. The superintendent's nerves were shaken somewhat, or he might have spoken less bitterly; but a sudden sharp sense of the world's injustice had clamored for utterance.

And the wrecking-train was run in again on the siding, ready for the next trip.

The men, of course, paid the penalty for their almost superhuman exertions. No men could work as they had done and not feel the after-effects in diminished vitality. The younger ones among them soon recovered, for youth has a wonderful power of recuperation; the older ones were a little more bent, a little more gnarled and withered, a little nearer the end of the journey. They had sacrificed themselves on the altar of the great system which they served; they had done so without a murmur, with no thought of shirking or holding back. They would do so again without an instant's hesitation whenever duty called them. For that was their life-work, to which they were dedicated with a simple, unquestioning devotion. There was something touching about it, — something grand and noble, too, — just as there is in a man dedicating himself to any work, whether to conquer the world with Napoleon, or to keep clean a stretch of street pavement committed to his care. It was this dedication, this singleness of purpose — this serfdom to the road — which Allan grew to understand more and more deeply, and to glory in.

And it was not an unworthy service, for the road was worth devotion. Not the company of capitalists, who sat in an office somewhere in the East and manipulated its stocks and bonds, but the road itself, — this thing of steel and oak which had rendered possible the development of the country, which had added fabulously to its wealth, which bound together its widely

separated States into one indivisible Union. They were servants of the force which, more than any other, has made our modern civilization possible.

Let me add that the story of this wreck is no imaginary one. It is a true story which actually occurred just as it is set down here; it is an experience which repeats itself over and over again

in the life of every railroad man; it was a battle which, in one form or another, railroad men are always fighting, and always winning. And, more than most battles, is it worth winning!

13. A New Danger

THERE IS A SUPERSTITION among railroad men which, strangely enough, is seemingly warranted by experience, that when one wreck occurs, two more are certain to follow. And, sure enough, two more did follow, though neither was so serious as the one at Vinton; which, indeed, still lives in the memories of those who helped clear it away as the worst that ever happened on the division.

Not so serious, that is, in delaying the traffic of the road, but more serious in another way, since both entailed loss of life. The first one occurred just three days after the wreck at Vinton. A freight-train had taken a siding about five miles east of Wadsworth to allow the through east-bound express to pass, but the brakeman on the freight, who was a green hand, forgot to throw the switch back again after the freight-train had backed in upon the siding. He climbed up into the cab, and he and the engineer and fireman sat there chatting away, all unconscious of the impending disaster. In a moment, they heard the roar of the approaching train, and then it flashed into view far down the track. They turned to watch it, to admire the clean lines of the engine as it whirled toward them; then, as it reached the switch, they were horrified to see it turn in upon the siding. There was no time to move, to cry out, to attempt to save themselves. An instant of horrified suspense, and the crash came, and the two engines, together with the cars immediately behind them, were piled together into a torn and twisted mass of wreckage, — wreckage through which blistering steam hissed and about which in a moment hungry flames began to lap, — wreckage from which no man came forth alive. But, as the accident occurred upon a siding, the main track was not even blocked, and the wreckage was cleared away without the feverish haste which marked the wreck at Vinton.

The third wreck occurred at Torch, a little station on the east end of the road, when both engineer and fireman of an east-bound freight-train forgot

their orders to take the siding there, to make way for the west-bound flier, and continued on full speed past the station. The conductor recognized the error at once, but he was away back in the caboose at the other end of the train. He sent a brakeman flying forward over the cars to warn the engineer of his danger, but, before he had got forward half the length of the train, the express hurtled down upon them, and both engineer and fireman paid for their forgetfulness with their lives. This wreck was so far east that it was handled from Parkersburg, and the gang from Section Twenty-one was not called out.

This series of accidents impressed deeply upon Allan's mind the terrible peculiarity which belongs to railroading. In most of life's ordinary occupations, a mistake may be retrieved; on the railroad, almost never. To make a mistake there is, almost inevitably, to sacrifice life and property. The railroad man who makes a mistake never has the chance to make a second one. If he survives the first one, his dismissal from the road's employ will follow. Mistakes on a railroad are too expensive to risk them by employing careless men.

The employees of the road breathed easier after the accident at Torch. Until the fatal three had occurred, every man feared that his turn would come next; now' they knew that they were safe until another series was started. Whether it was from the increased self-confidence and self-control which this belief engendered, or whether there really was some basis for this railroad superstition, at any rate, no more accidents occurred, and the road's operation proceeded smoothly and uneventfully.

One exciting battle there was in late September. The fall rains had been unusually heavy and persistent; every little brook became a roaring torrent, loosening bridges and culverts, seeping under the road-bed, and demanding constant vigilance on the part of the section-gangs. As the rain continued without abating, the broad river, which usually flowed peacefully along far below the railroad embankment, rose foot by foot until the whole stretch of embankment along the river's edge was threatened. Long trains of flat cars were hurried to the place, loaded with rock and bags of sand. These were dumped along the embankment, which was washing badly in places, and for a time it looked as though the encroachments of the water had been stopped. But the rain continued, and the river kept on rising, until it was seeping along the top of the embankment. If it once began to flow over it,

nothing could save the track, for the water would slice away the earth beneath it in great sections.

All the men that could be spared from the other portions of the road had been hurried to the scene. At the gravel-pit just below the city, a gang of fifty men was working, filling heavy sacks and loading them on flat cars. A great steam-shovel was heaping the loose gravel upon other cars, and, as soon as enough were loaded to make a train, they were hurried away to the danger point. During that culminating day, no effort was made to preserve the train schedule. The work-trains were given the right of way, and even the lordly east-bound passengers had to flag through from the embankment to the gravel-pit. Train-master and superintendent were on the spot, directing where the gravel should be dumped, and watching anxiously the gauge which marked the rise of the water. Another inch and it would be over the embankment.

But from the last inspection of the gauge Mr. Schofield arose with a shout of triumph.

"It's no higher than it was half an hour ago," he said. "It hasn't risen a hair's breadth. It'll begin to fall before long. We're all right if we can only make the embankment hold."

Hope put new life into the men, and they worked like beavers; but whether the embankment could withstand much longer the tremendous pressure of the water against it seemed exceedingly doubtful. The whole length of the river seemed to be concentrating its strength to push against this one spot. Allan, as he paused to look up the muddy current, almost imagined that the water was rushing toward the embankment with the deliberate purpose of overwhelming it. The debris which the broad current hurried along told of the damage it was doing in other places. Lordly trees had been uprooted, outbuildings carried away, stock drowned, fertile bottom land covered with gravel and rendered worthless, — but all this seemed trivial to the boy beside the danger which threatened the road. He could guess how long it would take to rebuild this great stretch of embankment, should it be swept away. For weeks and months, the system must lay powerless, lifeless, disrupted.

Mr. Schofield bent over the gauge again and looked at it.

“She’s going down, boys!” he cried, rising with beaming face. “She gone down half an inch. We’re going to win this fight!”

But how slowly the water receded! It seemed to Allan, at times, that it was rising again; but the crest of the flood had passed, and by the next day the danger was quite over. The embankment had to be rebuilt where it had been badly washed; and it was rebuilt more strongly than ever, and guarded by a wall of riprap, but never for an hour was the traffic of the road interrupted.

So October passed and November came. Always there was the track demanding attention, — an endless round of work which would never be completed. Always there were the trains rushing over it in endless procession, — the luxurious Limited, sending every other train headlong into a siding out of the way; the slower “accommodation,” which stops at every station along the road and is very popular with the farmers and dwellers at crossroads; the big through freight, drawn by a mighty giant of an engine, hauling two thousand tons of grain or beef or coal to the great Eastern market.

And the through freight is the greatest of them all, for it is the money-maker. The Limited, glittering with polished brass and rare woods and plateglass, is for show, — for style. It makes the road a reputation. It figures always in the advertisements in big type and on the back of folder and time-table in gorgeous lithograph. Its passengers look out with aversion at the dingy, ugly freight, standing on the siding, waiting for it to pass. But it is the freight that is meat and drink to the road; it enables it to keep out of the receiver’s hands, and sometimes even to pay dividends.

For Allan, the days passed happily, for one serious cloud was lifted from his life. Dan Nolan had disappeared. He had not been seen for weeks, and every one hoped that he would never be seen in that neighborhood again. Jack had taken good care to spread the story of the fallen rock, and Nolan was wise to keep out of the trainmen’s way.

“He thinks I saw him that day,” remarked the foreman, “an’ he’s afeard of a term in th’ penitentiary. Well, he’ll git it; if not here, somewheres else.”

One trouble still remained, for Reddy showed no sign of improvement. His aversion to all his old friends seemed rather to increase, and he would wander away for days at a time. With this development of vagrant habits, he

fell naturally in with other vagrants; played cards with them under the big coal-chute, rode with them in empty box-cars, — in a word, degenerated utterly from the happy, industrious Reddy of other days. Still, he showed no disposition to harm any one, so his friends deemed it best to let him go his way, hoping against hope that time might work a cure. His wife had been given the position of janitress of the depot building, and so provided for the family.

Physically, Allan had never been in such splendid condition. Constant work in the open air had hardened his muscles and tanned his face; he was lean and hard, his eyes clear, his nerves steady. He was always ready for his bed at night, and always ready for his work in the morning. He felt within himself an abounding health and vitality, that brought him near to nature, and made him love her great winds and tempests. The only things he missed were the books to which he had always been accustomed. He was usually too tired in the evening to do more than read the newspaper; but he was gaining for himself a first-hand experience of life more valuable than any reflection of it he could have caught from the printed page. The foundations of his education had been well laid; now he was laying the foundations of experience. Somehow, for the time being, books seemed to him strangely useless and artificial. He was drinking deep of life itself.

And as the days passed, Allan grew to know the trainmen better. He was admitted to the freemasonry of their fellowship, and sat with them often in the evenings at roundhouse or yardmaster's office, listening to their yarns, which had a strange fascination for him. It was at the roundhouse that engineers and firemen met, summoned by the caller to take their engines out; at the yardmaster's office, conductors and brakemen reported. And the boy found all of them alike prepared for what might befall, ready, instinctively, without second thought, to risk their lives to save the company's property or to protect the passengers entrusted to their care.

A great admiration for these men grew into his heart. They were like soldiers, ready at a moment's notice to advance under fire, — only here there was not the wild exhilaration of battle, of charge and sortie, but only a long, cold looking of danger in the face.

Even the humblest of them had his heroisms, as the boy found out one night; for, surely, none was humbler than Bill Griffith, the lame crossing-

flagman. It was at the roundhouse one evening that Allan chanced to ask how Bill lost his leg.

“Tookey” Morton — the oldest engineer on the road — who had just come in to report, turned around at the question.

“He’s lost both legs, my boy,” he said. “He’s wood on both sides from the knee down, only you can’t see it because his pant-legs hide it. Ten years ago, Bill was one of the best engineers on this road. He had the old Ninety-six, — you remember her, boys, — one of them old passenger-engines, built too light for the business. Well, one night Bill was spinnin’ down the grade at Loveland when the siderod on his side broke, and in about half a second had whipped the cab to pieces and smashed both BilFs legs. His fireman, who was green, jumped at the first crash; so what did Bill do but get up on the stumps of his legs and walk to the throttle and shut her off. They found him layin’ on what was left of the deck, and thought he was dead. But he pulled through, and was given that billet at the crossin’. And there ain’t a man, woman, or child has been hurt there since he’s had it.”

The section-men were soon to have their hours of danger, too, for the road was falling among troublesome times. The first wind of it came in an order to all employees issued from general headquarters.

Jack stuck a copy of it on the order-hook on the wall of the section-shanty, and then read it over again with a very dark face. Thus it ran:

"NOTICE TO EMPLOYES, ALL DEPARTMENTS

"The police department of this road has just been reorganized, and all employees are hereby directed to aid it in every possible way in keeping all trains, freight and passenger, free from tramps. This nuisance has grown to such proportions that it must be checked. Trainmen discovered permitting tramps to ride on their trains will be summarily discharged. Section-men will see that no fires are built by tramps on the right of way, and that they do not linger on railroad property.

“[Signed] A. G. Round,”Supt. and Gen. Manager. “Cincinnati , Ohio , November 14.”

“That means trouble,” said Jack, “if they try t’ carry it out,” and turned away to his work without further comment.

But that night in the yardmaster’s office Allan heard the order discussed with freedom and much emphasis.

“We can’t deny,” said one man, “that th’ hoboes have been robbin’ th’ road right an’ left, but y/hat kin we do? Try t’ put ‘em off an’ git a bullet through us or a knife in us?”

“It’s put ’em off or git fired,” remarked another, grimly.

“The road couldn’t stand it any longer,” remarked the yardmaster. “Car after car has come into the yards here broken open and any amount of stuff missing. It’s been costing the road a pretty figure to straighten things out with the shippers.”

“The tramps get in out here at the heavy grade just east of Byers,” remarked a conductor. “Those fool dispatchers load us up so heavy that we can’t make more than six or eight miles an hour up that grade, — sometimes we stick and have to double over. Well, the tramps lay for us there every night, and, while we’re crawling along, or maybe cutting the train in two to double, they pick out a likely looking car of merchandise, break it open, hunt around inside, and throw off what they want, and then drop off themselves. We don’t even know the seals are broken until we get into the yards here.”

“There’s a dozen other places on the road just as bad,” said the yardmaster.

“But how’s a feller t’ know what’s goin’ on inside a car?” queried a brakeman, sarcastically.

“That’s what I’d like to be told.”

“Well,” retorted the yardmaster, “I guess the superintendent will tell you quick enough, if he ever gets you on the carpet.”

The brakeman snorted skeptically.

“I dunno,” he said. “I guess th’ whole thing’s jest a bluff, anyway.”

But trainmen and tramps alike soon found out that the management of the road was in deadly earnest. The force of police had been strongly rein-

forced. Tramps were summarily thrown off the trains. When they showed fight, as they often did at first, they were promptly arrested, arraigned before the nearest police justice, and given a term in the workhouse.

To be sure, all this was not accomplished without some cost. One detective was shot through the head and killed, and many others had escapes more or less narrow, but the tramps soon lost their boldness. They no longer broke open freight-cars at will and helped themselves to their contents, or rode from place to place as their fancy dictated. But they took their revenge in other ways.

One night an extra west-bound freight ran through an open switch at Greenfield and crashed into the freight-house. An investigation showed that the switch-lock had been broken, and the switch thrown. A night watchman on Section Twentyeight found a big pile of ties on the track, and stopped another freight just in time to prevent a wreck.

Ugly rumors were flying about of the tramps' intentions, and it was at this juncture that another order came from headquarters. It ran:

"NOTICE TO SECTION FOREMEN

"All section-foremen, until further orders, will divide their gangs into tricks, and have one man constantly on duty patrolling the track from end to end of their section. All sections must be gone over not less than once every three hours, and special vigilance is required at night. The road relies upon its section-men to see that this work is faithfully done. Double time will be allowed for this extra duty. To go into effect at once.

"[Signed] A. G. Round,"Sup t. and Gen. Manager. "Cincinnati , Ohio , November 30."

And simultaneously the road's police force was augmented by a dozen special detectives. The management was determined to prove that it could protect its property. Besides, the other roads of the country were looking on with much interest to see what the result of this struggle would be, for the tramp nuisance was rampant everywhere.

For a time, it seemed that these precautions had been effective. There were no more robberies reported, and few tramps attempted to steal rides. To be sure, the station at Madeira caught fire one night and burned to the ground, but there was no proof of incendiarism. Still the road did not relax its vigilance. Threatening rumors came to it from the underworld. The detectives, assuming tramp garb and fraternizing with the "hobos," became aware of something sinister in the air, but could never quite fathom the mystery. They were sure of only one thing — something was going to happen.

14. Allan Makes A Discovery

DURING ALL THIS TIME, Allan had been taking his trick of track-walking with the other men on Section Twenty-one. Jack had arranged it so that the boy's trip over the road was made in the early morning, from four o'clock to seven, when, in his opinion, there was the minimum of danger. For Jack still feared Dan Nolan, although that rascal had not been seen in the neighborhood for months. But Jack had an uneasy feeling that Nolan was still plotting mischief, that he was still watching his opportunity to do Allan an injury.

The boy himself, confident in his growing manhood, laughed at these fears.

"Nolan has cleared out for good," he said to Jack. "He's gone somewhere where he's not known, and has got another job. We'll never see him again."

But Jack shook his head stubbornly.

"I know better," he said. "Mebbe he's gone away for awhile, but he'll come back ag'in, an', if he ever gits a good chance t' hit y' from behind, he'll take it. I've got a sort of idee that Nolan's at th' bottom of most of th' devilment that's been goin' on on this here road. Th' tramps would 'a' cleared out long ago if there hadn't been somebody back of them urgin' 'em on."

"Oh, come, Jack," protested Allan, "you've let that idea get such a hold on you that you can't shake it off."

"Anyway," said Jack, "I want you t' keep your eyes about you when you're out there by yourself. An' you're t' carry that club I made fer you, an' t' use it, too, if Nolan ever comes near enough for you t' git a good lick at him."

Allan laughed again, but he carried the club with him, nevertheless, more to quiet Jack's fears and Mary's than because he thought he would ever need it. Jack had gone down to the carpenter shop the first day the order to patrol the track was posted, and had selected a piece of seasoned hickory, which he had fashioned into an effective weapon. Most of the other section-men were similarly armed, and were prepared to meet force with force.

But Jack's fears were to be verified in an unexpected way a few days later. One of the detectives employed by the road had succeeded in disguising himself as a tramp so effectively that he was admitted to their councils, and one night a force of men was gathered at headquarters for an expedition of which none of them knew the destination. It happened to be Jack's trick, and, when he reported for duty, the train-master called him to one side.

"Welsh," he said, "we're going on a little expedition to-night which promises some fun. I thought maybe you'd like that boy of yours to go along, — you seem to want to get him in on everything going."

"What is it, Mister Schofield?" Jack asked.

"Anything dangerous?"

"No," answered the train-master, "I don't think there'll be any real danger, but there may be some excitement. I want you to go and you'd better bring the boy."

"All right, sir," said Jack, resolving, however, to keep the boy close to himself.

A caller was sent after Allan, who appeared at the end of a few minutes, his eyes big with excitement.

"What is it?" he asked, as he saw the men grouped together, talking in low tones. "Another wreck?"

"No," said Jack; "it ain't a wreck. I don't know what it is. It's got something t' do with th' tramps, I think. Mebbe you'd better not go."

"Of course I'll go," protested the boy. "I wouldn't miss it for anything."

A moment later the men, of whom there were twenty, were divided into parties of four each, and each man was given a short, stout policeman's club

loaded with lead at the end.

"Now, boys," said the train-master, after the clubs had been distributed, "I want you to remember that it's an easy thing to kill a man with one of those clubs, so don't strike too hard if we get into a row. Only, of course, don't hesitate to defend yourselves. Now I guess we're ready to start."

Each party was placed in charge of one of the road's detectives, and left the yards by a different route. The night was very dark, with black clouds rolling overhead and sending down a spatter of rain now and then, so that the men could scarcely see each other as they walked along. The party that Jack and Allan were with followed the railroad track as far as the river-bank; then they turned aside, crossed the long bridge which spanned the river, and pushed their way along a path which led to the right along the opposite bank.

It was anything but easy walking, for the path was a narrow and uneven one, nearly overgrown by the rank underbrush along the river, so that they had to proceed in single file, the detective in the lead, stumbling over rocks, stepping into mudholes, with branches slapping them in the faces, and briars catching at their clothing. At last they came out upon an open field, which they crossed.

Beyond the field was a road, which they followed for half a mile or more, then they struck off along another path through an open hickory wood, and finally halted for breath at the base of a high hill.

In a few moments, the other parties came up, panting and mud-bespattered, and the detectives and Mr. Schofield drew apart for a little consultation.

"Now, boys," said Mr. Schofield, in a low voice, when the consultation was over, "I'll tell you what we're after so that you'll know what to expect. One of our men here has discovered up on this hill the place where the ringleaders among the tramps make their headquarters. If we can capture these ringleaders, all our troubles with the tramps will be over. We're going to surround the place, and we want to capture every one of them. We must creep up on them as quietly as we can, and then a pistol-shot will be the signal for a rush. And, remember, we don't want any of them to get away!"

A little murmur ran through the crowd, and they gripped their clubs tighter. Jack was glad that they had not been given revolvers, — in the darkness and confusion, such weapons would be more dangerous to friend than foe.

They started cautiously up the hill, advancing slowly and painfully, for there was now no vestige of a path. The uneven ground and tangled undergrowth made progress very difficult, but they gradually worked their way upward until they came to the edge of a little clearing. Against a cliff of rock at one side a rude hut was built. There was no window, but, through the chinks in the logs, they could see that there was a light within. The men were spread out along the edge of the clearing, and waited breathlessly for the signal to advance.

The pistol-shot rang out, clear and sharp in the night air, and, even as the men sprang forward, the door of the hut was thrown open and a man's figure appeared silhouetted against the light. He stood an instant listening to the rush of advancing footsteps, then slammed the door shut, and in a breath the hut was in darkness.

But that single instant was enough for both Allan and Jack Welsh to recognize the man.

It was Dan Nolan!

In another second, they were hammering at the door, but they found it strongly barred, and three or four minutes elapsed — minutes that seemed like centuries — before they got the door down and rushed over the threshold into the hut. One of the detectives opened his dark lantern and flashed a brilliant band of light about the place, while the men stared in astonishment.

For the hut was empty!

They lighted the lamp which stood on a box in one corner and made a more careful examination of the place. Two or three boxes, an old stove, a few cooking utensils, and a rude cot in one corner comprised all the furniture, and one of the detectives, pulling aside the largest box, which stood against the back of the hut, solved the mystery of Nolan's disappearance.

A passage had been dug in the bank which formed the back of the hut, and the detective, after flashing his dark lantern within, crawled into it with-

out hesitation. In a few moments, they heard the sound of steps outside, and the detective came in again at the door.

"He's got clear away," he said; "as well as all the rest who were with him. That tunnel leads off to the left and comes out the other side of this bank."

Mr. Schofield's face showed his disappointment.

"It's too bad," he said, "that we didn't know about that tunnel. Then we could have placed a guard at the other end."

"There were precious few knew about it," said the detective who had discovered the place. "I've been here half a dozen times, and never suspected its existence."

"Well," said the train-master, "the only thing we can do is to go home, I guess. We can't hope to find a man in these woods on a night like this."

"You knowed that feller who opened th' door, didn't you, Mister Schofield?" questioned Jack, as they left the hut.

"No," said Mr. Schofield, quickly. "Did you?"

"Yes," replied Jack, quietly; "it was Dan Nolan."

"Dan Nolan!" repeated the train-master, incredulously. "Are you sure?"

"Allan here knowed him, too," said Jack. "It's what I've been thinkin' all along, that Nolan was at th' bottom of all this mischief. He's got t' be a kind o' king o' th' tramps, I guess."

"Perhaps you're right," agreed Mr. Schofield.

"I'll put our detectives on his trail. Maybe they can run him down, if he hasn't been scared away by his narrow escape to-night."

"He'll shift his headquarters," said Jack, "but I don't believe he'll be scared away — not till he gits what he's after, anyway."

"And what is that?" questioned the train-master.

"He's after Allan there," said Jack, in a lower tone. "An' he'll git him yet, I'm afraid."

“Well, we’ll make it hot for him around here,” said Mr. Schofield, and went forward to impart this information to the detectives.

All of the men were completely tired out by the long night tramp, as well as chagrined over their ill success, but Allan was up again as usual next morning and started off upon his tramp along the track.

“Now, be careful of yourself, darlint,” Mary cautioned him, as she saw him off, and Allan promised to be especially alert.

There could be no doubt that it was Dan Nolan they had seen at the door of the hut the night before, but Allan only half-believed that Nolan still preserved his enmity toward him. Certainly, he decided, it was not worth worrying about, — worrying never did any good. He would be ready to meet danger as it came, but he greatly doubted if it would ever come, at least, to himself personally.

He had grown to like this duty of patrolling the track. It had been a pleasant duty, and an uneventful one, for at no time had he found anything wrong, or met with unpleasant adventure of any kind. But those long walks through the fresh, cold air, with the dawn just tingeing the east, opened a new world to the boy. It was no longer the hot, dusty, worka-day world of labor, but a sweet, cool, clean world, where joy dwelt and where a man might grow. He heard the birds greet the sunrise with neverfailing joy; he heard the cattle lowing in the fields; even the river beside the road seemed to dance with new life, as the sun’s rays sought it out and gilded its every ripple. It was not a long walk — three miles out and three back — and what an appetite for breakfast it gave him! Even these few months had wrought a great change in him. He was browned by the sun and hardened by toil, as has been said already; but the change was greater than that. It was mental as well as physical. He had grown older, and his face had gained the self-reliant look of the man who is making his own way in the world and who is sure of himself.

Despite all this extra work, Section Twenty-one was kept in perfect condition, and the train-master noted it, as he noted everything else about the road.

“You’re doing good work, Welsh,” he said to Jack one day, when he chanced to meet him in the yards.

“I’ve got a good gang,” answered the foreman, proudly. “There’s one o’ my men that’s too good fer section work. He ort t’ have a better job, Mr. Schofield; one, anyway, where ther’s a chance fer permotion — in th’ offices.”

“Yes?” and the official smiled good-naturedly.

“I think I know who you mean. I’ll keep him in mind, for we always need good men. This extra work will soon be over, though. As soon as cold weather sets in, the hoboes will strike for the South, and I don’t believe they’ll ever trouble us again.”

“Mebbe not,” agreed Jack, dubiously. “But I’d be mighty glad to hear that Dan Nolan was locked up safe somewhere. You haven’t found any trace of him?”

“No. He seems to have disappeared completely. I believe he’s scared out, and cold weather will rid us of all the rest.”

“Mebbe so,” said Jack; “mebbe so. Anyway, I wish cold weather’d hurry up an’ come.”

But it seemed in no haste about coming. December opened bright and warm, and two weeks slipped by. Although it was evident that the tramps were becoming less numerous, and the management of the road began to breathe more freely, still the head of the police department did not relax his caution. He had his ear to the ground, and, from that hidden, subterranean region of trampdom, he still heard vague and uncertain, but no less threatening, rumblings.

It was clear that the battle was not yet won, for the petty annoyances continued, though in an ever lessening degree, and even in the yards the tramps or their sympathizers managed to do much harm. A freight-train would be standing in the yards, ready for its trip east or west; the conductor would give the signal to start, the engineer would open his throttle, and instantly it would be discovered that some one had drawn all the coupli tig-pins; but, before the engineer could stop his engine, he had torn out all the air-hose on the train. Or, perhaps, the train would start all right, but, in the course of half an hour, the fireman would discover he could not keep the steam up, no matter how hot his fire was; the pressure would fall and fall until the train would be stalled out on the road, and an investigation would

disclose the fact that some one had thrown a lot of soap into the tank. Then the whole system would be tied up until another engine could be sent to the rescue to push the train into the nearest siding. Or, perhaps, the train would be bowling along merrily until, of a sudden, the well-trained noses of conductor and brakemen would detect the odour of a hot box. The train would be stopped, and it would soon be found that some one had removed the packing from the boxes.

All of these things were provoking enough, especially since it was evident that in almost every case the mischief had been done in the yards under the very noses of the trainmen, although no tramps had been seen there. Indeed, the trainmen, after wrestling with such annoyances for a time, came to be of a temper that made it exceedingly dangerous for a tramp to be found anywhere near railroad property. Yet the annoyances went on, and became gradually of a more serious nature. One night a brakeman found the main switch at the east end of the yards spiked, and it was only by a hair's breadth that a serious collision wlas avoided. But the climax came one morning when Bill Morrison, on the crack engine of the road, found that some one had put sand in his boxes, and that the journals were ground off and ruined.

A rigid investigation was ordered at once, but no clue to the perpetrator of the mischief was discovered. Yet it seemed certain that it could not have been done by a tramp. No tramp had been in the yards — the yard-men were sure of that — and the officials were forced to the unwelcome conclusion that some one whom they did not suspect — some one who was permitted to enter the yards — some one connected with the road, perhaps — was guilty. It was a disquieting thought, for there was no telling what might happen next.

And then, one morning, Allan solved the mystery. It was a little after four o'clock and still quite dark as he passed through the yards to start on his morning walk. A freight-train stood ready to start east, with its great mogul of an engine puffing and blowing with impatience. Just as Allan passed it, he saw a figure emerge from underneath it. He thought at first it was the engineer, but, instead of mounting to the cab, the figure slunk away into the darkness, carefully avoiding the glare of the headlight. Then the boy saw the conductor and engineer standing, with heads together, a little

distance away, reading their orders by the light of the conductor's lantern. He ran toward them.

"Mr. Spurling," he said to the engineer, "I just saw a man come out from under your engine."

"You did!" and engineer and conductor, with compressed lips, hurried back to where the engine stood. The former flashed his torch underneath, and then straightened up with a very grim face.

"Look at that link-motion," he said, and the conductor stooped and looked. Then he, too, straightened up.

"It's a good thing we didn't get started," he said. "I'll go and report it. It's lucky for us you saw that scoundrel, my boy," he added, as he hurried away, and the engineer clapped Allan on the shoulder.

"Mighty lucky," he said. "It's a good thing there's one man around here who keeps his eyes open."

But Allan, as he started away at last upon his six-mile tramp, knew not whether to be glad or sorry. If only some one else had passed the engine at that moment instead of him. For, as that crouching figure slunk away through the darkness, he had recognized it!

So he had a battle to fight on that six-mile tramp; but it was fought and won long before the walk was ended. And when, at last, he got back to the yards, instead of turning away toward home, he mounted the stairs to the train-master's office. That official was busy, as always, with a great pile of correspondence, but he looked up and nodded pleasantly as Allan entered.

"Good morning, West," he said. "Want to speak to me?"

"Yes, Mr. Schofield," answered Allan. "This morning, as I was starting out on my trick, I saw a man come out from under Mr. Spurling's engine."

The train-master nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I've got a report of it here. I'm mighty glad you happened to come along just when you did, and had your eyes about you."

"I'd much rather it had been somebody else," said Allan, "for I knew the man, and I think it's my duty to tell you."

The train-master looked at him keenly.

"You knew him?" he repeated. "Better and better. No doubt he's the one who's been giving us all this trouble. Who was he?"

Allan gulped down a lump which had arisen suddenly in his throat.

"Reddy Magraw," he answered, hoarsely.

"Reddy Magraw!" echoed the train-master, with a stare of astonishment. "Are you sure?"

"I wouldn't say so if I wasn't sure, sir," answered Allan, with a little flush of resentment. "I couldn't be mistaken."

"Of course," agreed the train-master, kindly.

"But I didn't think Reddy would do anything like that."

"I don't believe he would have done it, sir," said Allan, "if Dan Nolan hadn't got hold of him," and he told of the conference he and Jack had witnessed on the river-bank. "I believe Dan put all this meanness into his head," he concluded. "I'm sure it's with Dan he stays all the time he's away from home."

Mr. Schofield nodded again.

"No doubt you are right," he assented. "Perhaps we ought to have suspected him before. Of course, the boys never thought of watching him, and so let him stay around the yards as much as he wanted to. But we'll have to protect ourselves. This sort of thing can't go on."

"You mean Reddy will have to be arrested?" questioned Allan, with sinking heart.

"No," and the train-master smiled at his anxious face. "I'll file an affidavit of lunacy against Reddy before the probate judge, and we'll have him sent to the asylum at Athens. He'll be well taken care of there, and maybe will get well again much sooner than he would at home. He's not getting any better here, that's certain; and he's caused us a lot of trouble. Besides, he's only a burden to his wife."

"Oh, she never thinks of that," said Allan, quickly. "It's his staying away that hurts her."

“Yes,” agreed Mr. Schofield, “I know. I’ve talked with her. She’s like all the rest of these big-hearted Irish women, — ready to work herself to death for the people she loves. Though,” he added, "that’s a characteristic of nearly all women.

15. A Shot From Behind

MR. SCHOFIELD FILED his affidavit before the probate judge without delay, but, when the officer of the court went to look for Reddy, he was nowhere to be found. From his wife it was learned that he had not been home for two days, nor was he to be discovered in any of his accustomed haunts around the yards or in the shops, and the quest for him was finally given up in despair. Allan concluded that Reddy had recognized him that morning, as he came out from under the engine which he had tampered with, and knew that he was found out at last; but, whether this was the case, or whether he had got wind of the proceedings against him in some other way, certain it is that Reddy disappeared from Wadsworth, and nothing more was seen of him there for many days.

Word was quietly passed around among the trainmen to be on the watch for him, as he was probably the one who had recently caused the road so much annoyance; and this came to be pretty well proved in time, for, with Reddy's disappearance, the annoyances ceased, in so far, at least, as they originated in the yards at Wadsworth. Out on the line, indeed, they still continued, — switches were spiked, fish-plates were loosened, — and then, of a sudden, even these ceased, and everything ran as smoothly as in the old days. But this very quiet alarmed the chief of detectives more than anything else had done, for he believed it was the calm preceding a storm, and he redoubled his precautions. Some of the officers were rather inclined to laugh at his fears, but not the superintendent.

"You are right, Preston," he said to the chief.

"There's something in the wind. We'll look sharp till after the pay-car gets here, anyway. After that, if nothing happens, we can let up a bit."

"When will the pay-car get here?" questioned Preston.

"I don't know yet; probably the night of the twenty-fourth."

"You'd better order a double guard with it, sir," suggested the detective.

"I will," assented the superintendent. "More than that, Mr. Schofield and I will accompany it. If there's any excitement, we want to be there to see it."

The detective nodded and went away, while the superintendent turned back to his desk. It had occurred to him some days before that an attempt to hold up the pay-car might be the culminating point of the series of outrages under which the road was suffering, and the more he had thought of it the more likely it appeared. The pay-car would be a rich prize, and any gang of men who could get away with its contents would be placed beyond the need of working, begging, or stealing for a long time to come. The pay-car, which always started from general headquarters at Cincinnati, went over the road, from one end to the other, every month, carrying with it the money with which the employees of the road were paid. To Wadsworth alone it brought monthly nearly two hundred thousand dollars, for Wadsworth was division headquarters. Nearly all the trainmen employed on the division lived there, and besides, there were the hundreds of men who labored in the division shops. Yes, the pay-car would be a rich prize, and, as the money it carried was all in small denominations, it would be impossible to trace it, once the robbers got safely away with it.

Let it be said in passing that on most roads the pay-car is now a thing of the past. Payment is now 1 usually made by checks, which are sent out in registered packages from general headquarters, and distributed by the division officials. This method is safe and eminently satisfactory to the road, but some of the employees object occasionally because of the difficulty they sometimes experience in getting their checks cashed immediately.

The road had never suffered any attack upon its pay-car, primarily, no doubt, because it was well-known that there were always half a dozen well-armed men with it, who would not hesitate to use their weapons. In fact, every man, as he stood at the little grated cashier's window, waiting for his money, could see the row of rifles in the rack against the wall and the brace of pistols lying upon the desk, ready to the cashier's hand. Besides, even if the car were broken into and the money secured, the difficulty of getting away safely with the booty was enormous. The road, for the most part, ran through a thickly settled country, and the moment the alarm was given,

posses could be set in motion and the wires set humming in every direction, in the effort to run the robbers down. So, with whatever hungry greed would-be highwaymen had eyed the piles of bills and gold visible through the little grated window, none of them had ever dared to make a forcible attempt to gain possession of them.

Perhaps no one would dare attempt it now, thought the superintendent; perhaps he had been merely alarming himself without cause. At least, the most effective defensive measure would be to keep secret the hour of the pay-car's arrival. If no one knew exactly when to look for it, no attempt could be made to hold it up. Such an attempt, at the best, would be foolhardy, and the superintendent turned back to his work with a little sigh of relief at the thought. In a few' moments, immersed in the pile of correspondence before him, he had quite forgotten his uneasiness.

Certainly, as day after day went smoothly by, there seemed less and less cause for apprehension. The tramps were evidently making southward, like the birds, before the approach of winter. And nothing more was seen of Dan Nolan. A watch had been kept upon the hut on the hillside, but he had not returned there, so the hut was finally demolished and the tunnel in the cliff closed up. Every effort had been made to discover his whereabouts, but in vain. The detectives of the road declared that he was nowhere in the neighborhood; but Jack Welsh was, as always, skeptical.

Just east of Wadsworth, beyond the river, the country rose into a series of hills, sparsely settled and for the most part covered by virgin forest. These hills extended for many miles to the eastward, and among them, Jack told himself, Nolan could easily find a secure hiding-place for himself and half a dozen men.

"An' that's jest where he is," said Jack to Allan one evening, when they were talking the matter over. "That's jest what Nolan'd love t' do — put hisself at th' head of a gang o' bandits. He was allers talkin' about highwaymen an' train-robbers an' desperadoes when he was on th' gang; but we only laughed at him then. Now, I see it would have been a good thing if I'd 'a' taken a stout stick an' beat that foolishness out o' him."

"But Reddy," said Allan; "where's Reddy?"

"Reddy's with him," answered Jack, decidedly.

"An' there's no tellin' what scrape that reptile'll git him into. I dare say, Reddy thinks Nolan's his best friend. That'd be natural enough, since he's got to thinkin' that all his old friends are his worst enemies."

"If we could only find him!" said Allan, wistfully, "and bring him home again. The poor fellow will never get well if he's left to wander about like that."

But there seemed no way of finding him. Allan was the last person who had seen him. That was at the moment, in the early morning, when he had slunk away from under the engine. Some warning of the search for him must certainly have reached him, for he had never again appeared at home. His wife, nearly heart-broken by the suspense, imagining him suffering all sorts of hardships, yet went about her work with a calm persistence which concealed in some degree the tumult which raged within her. The children must be fed and cared for, and she permitted nothing to stand between her and that duty. The division offices had never been so clean as they were since Mrs. Magraw had taken charge of them.

A day or two later, Allan fancied he saw something which proved the truth of Jack's theory. It was one morning as he was returning from his regular trip that he reached the embankment along the river and glanced over at the willows on the farther side, as he always did when he passed the place, for it was there that he and Jack had first seen Reddy in Nolan's company. His heart gave a leap as he saw two men there. He stopped and looked at them, but the early morning mist rising from the river hid them so that he could discern nothing beyond the mere outline of their forms. He stared long and earnestly, until they passed behind the clump of willows and disappeared from sight. Something told him that it was Reddy and Nolan again, but he could not be sure, and at last he went slowly on his way. Perhaps they had a place of concealment somewhere in the woods that stretched eastward from the river-bank.

He mentioned his suspicion to Jack, as soon as he reached home, and the latter was all on fire in a minute.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," he said. "Next Sunday we'll take a walk through th' woods over there, an' it's jest possible we'll run on to 'em. Mebbe we kin save Reddy from that rascal yet!"

So, bright and early the next Sunday morning, they started out, taking with them 1 a lunch, for they did not expect to return until evening. They crossed the river by the bridge which they had used on the night when they had tried to capture Nolan, and struck at once into the woods.

"It's like huntin' a needle in a haystack," said Jack, "but my idea is that they've got a hut somewheres back in th' hollers behind this first range o' hills. They's mighty few houses back there, — nothin' but woods. So mebbe we'll run on to 'em, if we have good luck."

They scrambled up the first low range of hills which looked down upon the broad river, and paused for a moment on the summit for a look about them. Beyond the river lay the level valley which, twelve decades before, had been one of the favorite dwelling-places of the red man. The woods abounded with game of every sort, and the river with fish, while in the fertile bottom his com would grow to ripe luxuriance with little cultivation. More than one fierce battle for the possession of this smiling valley had been fought with the hardy bands of pioneers, who had pushed their way up from the Ohio, but at last the advancing tide of civilization swept the Indian aside, and the modern town of Wadsworth began to rise where formerly there had been no building more substantial than the hide wigwam.

Jack and Allan could see the town nestling among its trees in the wide valley, but, when they turned about, a different view met them. To the eastward were no plains, no bottoms, no city, but, far as the eye could see, one hill rose behind another, all of them heavily wooded to the very summit, so steep and with a soil so gravelly that no one had ever attempted to cultivate them. Nor did any one dwell among them, save a few povertystricken families, who lived in summer by picking blackberries and in winter by digging sassafrasroot, — a class of people so shiftless and mean and dirty that no respectable farmer would permit them on his place.

It was the rude cabin of one of these families which Jack and Allan saw in the valley before them, and they determined to descend to it and make inquiries. There was a rough path leading downwards through the woods, and this they followed until they came to the edge of the little clearing which surrounded the house. They went forward to the door and knocked, but there was no response, and, after a moment, Jack pushed the door open cautiously and looked inside. As he did so, a shot rang out behind him, and Al-

lan felt a sudden sting of pain across his cheek as a bullet sang past and embedded itself in the jamb of the door.

"What's that?" cried Jack, springing around, and then he saw Allan wiping the blood from his cheek. "What is it, lad?" he asked, his face paling. "You're not hurted?"

"Only a scratch," said Allan, smiling. "Just took a little of the skin off."

"Come in here an' we'll look at it," and Jack half-dragged him through the open door, which he closed and barred. "That'll keep th' varmint from takin' another shot at us," he said. "Now let's see the cheek."

But not even Jack's anxiety could make of the wound more than a scratch. The bullet had cut the skin from the left cheek for nearly an inch, and a little cold water, which Jack found in a bucket in the house, soon stopped the bleeding.

"Who could it have been?" asked Allan, at last.

"Y' don't need t' ask that, I hope," cried Jack.

"It was Dan Nolan!"

"Well, he didn't hurt me much," said Allan, with a laugh. "He doesn't seem to have very good luck."

"No," said Jack; "but if that bullet had been an inch further to th' right, you wouldn't be a-settin' laughin' there," and a little shudder ran through him as he thought of it, and he clinched his hands as he imagined what his vengeance would have been.

"Do you suppose Nolan lives here?" asked Allan, looking curiously around the room.

"No," said Jack; "they's one o' th' Waymores lives here, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he was in cahoots with Nolan. These people 're just as much vagabonds as them that go trampin' about th' country."

Allan looked again about the squalid room, and turned a little sick at the thought of living in the midst of such filth and wretchedness.

"Come, let's get out of here," he said. "I want some fresh air. This is enough to turn one's stomach."

“I tell you,” suggested Jack, “suppose we go out th’ back door there an’ sneak around th’ edge of th’ clearin’. Mebbe we kin come on Nolan when he ain’t lookin’ — and what I’ll do to him’ll be a plenty!”

Allan laughed at his ferocity.

“I don’t believe Nolan would stay around here,” he said. “He didn’t know but what there were others with us. He probably decamped as soon as he took that crack at me.”

“Well, it won’t do any harm t’ try,” said Jack, and try they did, but no trace of Nolan was anywhere to be seen.

They went on through the woods, eating their lunch beside a limpid spring which bubbled from beneath a rock in the hillside, and during the afternoon pushed on along the valley, but met no human beings. If it was indeed Nolan who fired the shot, he had taken to cover effectually. Allan began to doubt more and more that it had really been Nolan.

“It might have been a hunter,” he pointed out to Jack, “who wlas shooting at something else, and did not see us at all. Such things happen, you know.”

“Yes,” Jack admitted, “but that wasn’t what happened this time,” and, when they reached home again, he went straight over to the offices and related to Mr. Schofield the details of the morning’s adventures. That official promised to put two detectives on Nolan’s trail at once. They worked on it for two or three days, but, though they even employed a bloodhound in the effort to run him down, all their work was quite in vain. The man to whom the cabin belonged said he had walked over to a neighbor’s that Sunday and had been away from home all day. He denied all knowledge of Nolan or Reddy Magraw. And the search ended, as all the others had done, without finding a trace of either of them.

So the days passed, and the work on section went on in its unvaried round. And even from day to day Allan felt himself changing, as his horizon broadened. He had become a different boy from the diffident youngster who had asked Jack Welsh for a job that morning a few short months before. Work had strengthened him and made him a man; he felt immeasurably older; he had gained self-confidence; he felt that he could look out for himself in any emergency. He was playing a man’s part in the world; he was

earning an honest living. He had gained friends, and he began to feel that he had a future before him. He was going to make the most of every opportunity, for he was ambitious, as every boy ought to be. He longed to get into the superintendent's office, where there would be a chance to learn something about the infinitely difficult work of operating the road, and where there would be a chance for promotion. He never spoke of this to Jack, for such a thought seemed almost like desertion, but he never passed the offices without looking longingly up at the network of wires and signals. Sometimes, when some duty took him up-stairs, he could hear the wild chatter of the instruments in the despatches' office, and he determined to try to understand their language.

Jack came into the section-shanty one morning with a sheet of paper in his hand and a broad smile upon his face.

"I've got a Christmas gift fer y', boys," he said, and stuck the notice up on the hook. They all crowded around to read it.

> "NOTICE TO SECTION FOREMEN
>
> "All patrolling of the tracks will cease on and after December 25th next. This company deeply appreciates the faithful service its section-men have given it, and will endeavor to show that appreciation by increasing the wages of all section-men ten per cent., to go into effect January 1st.
>
> "A. G. Round,"Supt. and Gen'l Manager ., "Cincinnati , Ohio, Dec. 18th."

"How's that, boys?" asked Jack. "That's a Christmas gift worth havin', ain't it?" and he looked about from face to face, for he knew what that increase of twelve and a half cents a day meant to these men. It meant more food for the children, a new dress for the wife, — a little more luxury and ease in lives which were hard enough at best.

The weather had been cool and pleasant, but it changed as Christmas drew near, and the twentyfourth was marked by a heavy storm. All the afternoon the rain fell in torrents, the wind blew a hurricane, and — some-

thing rare for December — the lightning flashed and the thunder rumbled savagely overhead.

Work was out of the question, and, after playing awhile with Mamie, and telling her wonderful stories of Santa Claus and what he was going to bring her that night, Jack Welsh mounted to his room to get a few hours of much-needed rest. For his hours of patrol duty were from nine o'clock to mid-night, and this trying extra work was beginning to tell upon him. With that characteristic unselfishness which endeared him to his men, he had chosen the worst trick for himself.

"I'll be mighty glad when this extry work's over," his wife remarked, as she busied herself with the dishes in the kitchen, "fer all it pays double. There's no use fer a man t' kill hisself jest t' make a little extry money. Jack's purty nigh wore out; — just listen how he snores!"

Allan looked up at her and laughed from the place on the floor where he was helping Mamie construct a castle out of painted blocks.

"We'll let him sleep as long as we can," he said; and so it was not till nearly eight o'clock that Mamie was sent up-stairs to call him. They heard him get heavily out of bed, and, while he was putting on his clothes, Mary trimmed the lamp and stirred up the fire, in order that everything might be bright and warm to welcome him. And Allan, watching her, felt his eyes grow a little misty as he saw her loving thoughtfulness.

"Better hurry up, Jack, dear," she called. "You haven't much time t' spare."

"Comin', Mary, comin'," he answered, "as soon as I git this plaguy boot on."

"It's an awful night," said his wife, as he came sleepily down the stair. "Do you have t' go, Jack? Can't y' stay home on Christmas Eve?"

"No, I have to go, Mary;" and he doused hands and face in a great basin of rain-water. "It's th' last time, y' know, an' I ain't a-goin' t' shirk now. Maybe th' pay-car'll come through t'-night. They promised us our pay this month fer Christmas, y' know, an' we want to be sure that she gits here all right. To-morrow we'll have a great time, an' they'll be no more patrol duty after that."

Mamie danced around the floor, for she had received mysterious hints from Allan of what was to happen on the morrow, and her father picked her up and kissed her before he sat down to the supper that was on the table awaiting him. He drank his coffee and ate his bacon and eggs with an appetite born of good digestion. Then he donned his great boots and rubber coat.

"Now, don't y' worry, Mary," he said, drawing his wife to him. "There won't a drop of rain git to me in this rig. Good-bye, Mamie," and he picked up the child and kissed her again. "Take good care of 'em, Allan."

He rammed his wide leather hat down farther upon his head, made sure that his lantern was burnmg properly, took up the heavy club he always carried, and opened the door.

"Good-bye," he called back, and in a moment had disappeared in the darkness.

16. A Call To Duty

ALLAN SAT DOWN by the table and picked up a book on telegraphy which he had secured from the public library of Wadsworth, and which he was studying faithfully in such odd hours as he had to himself, — without much result, be it said, since he had no instrument to practise on, — while Mrs. Welsh put the excited Mamie to bed, warning her to go to sleep at once, lest she frighten Santa Claus away, and then went slowly about the task of clearing up the supper dishes and putting the house in order for the morrow.

"An' we'll hev t' set up th' Christmas tree tonight," she remarked. "It'll hev t' be ready when Mamie wakes up in th' mornin', an' she'll wake mighty early."

"All right," said Allan; "as soon as you're ready, tell me."

That morning, on his way in from his trip, he had stopped to cut a little evergreen in a grove near the track, and this had been safely deposited in the cellar, out of the reach of Mamie's curious eyes. Long strings of snow-white pop-corn had been threaded, streamers of bright-colored tissue-paper prepared, little red and blue candles bought; all of which, together with the presents and parti-colored candies, would make the tree in Mamie's eyes a veritable fairy picture. It was her first Christmas tree, and it was to be a splendid one!

"Now I'm ready, Allan," said Mrs. Welsh, at last; and Allan laid aside his book and brought up the tree from the cellar, while Mrs. Welsh unlocked the closet where the ornaments and gifts had been carefully hidden. "We'll set it up in that comer by th' winder," she continued; "then th' people that goes by outside kin see it, too."

"I'm glad I'm going to be here when Mamie first sees it," said Allan, as he nailed some crosspieces on the bottom of the tree to hold it upright.

“I’d be out on my trick if it hadn’t been for that order.”

“Yes, an’ I’m glad, too,” agreed Mrs. Welsh.

“That patrol work was hard on all o’ you. But this trip o’ Jack’s t’-night’ll be th’ last that any o’ th’ gang on Twenty-one has t’ make. I only wish th’ patrollin’ had ended today instead o’ to-morrer, then Jack’d be here with us now instead of out in that howlin’ storm.”

They listened a moment to the wind whistling about the house, and to the rain lashing savagely against the windows.

“It is a bad night,” said Allan, “but Jack won’t mind it. He’ll be thinking of the good time he’s going to have tomorrow.”

“Well, I’m glad it’s th’ last time, anyway, — fer your sake, too, Allan. Jack an’ me used t’ worrit ourselves nearly sick when you’d start out alone that way. We never knowed what’d happen.”

“And nothing ever happened, after all!” laughed Allan. “I believe that Dan Nolan has forgotten all about me long before this.”

Mary shook her head doubtfully.

“I don’t know,” she said. “But anyway it won’t matter now, for you’ll allers be with th’ gang after this, an’ Nolan won’t dare show his nose around where they are. Jack’s just achin’ t’ lay hands on him.”

“There,” said Allan, as he drove the last nail, “that’s solid, I think,” and he set the tree up in the corner. “Now, what next?”

“All these things has got t’ have little ribbons tied to ’em,” said Mrs. Welsh, who had been getting out the candy, fruits, and presents. “But I kin do that. You set down an’ read your book.”

“Indeed I won’t!” protested the boy. “I want to feel that I’ve had something to do with this tree,” and he drew a chair up to the table.

“Somethin* t’ do with it!” retorted Mary.

“You’ve had everything t’ do with it, I’m a-thinkin’. It’s your Christmas tree, Allan, an’ mighty nice of you to think of it, my boy.”

“Oh, I wanted Mamie to have one,” he protested; “especially when it was so little trouble to get. Now it’s ready for the pop-corn.”

Mrs. Welsh began to drape the white festoons about the tree. Suddenly she paused and looked up with startled eyes.

“What was that?” she asked.

Allan listened with strained attention, but heard only the dashing of the rain and whistling of the wind.

“It sounded like the trampin’ of men,” she said, after a moment. “Perhaps it wasn’t anything. Yes! There it is ag’in!”

She sprang to the door and threw it open with frenzied haste. Up the path she saw dimly four men advancing, staggering under a burden. Her love told her what the burden was.

“It’s Jack!” she screamed. “It’s Jack! My God! They’ve killed him!” and, forgetting the storm, she sprang down the path toward them.

“Is he dead?” she demanded. “Tell me quick — is he dead?”

It was Jack’s hearty voice that answered her.

“Not by a good deal, Mary! It’ll take more’n a twisted ankle t’ kill Jack Welsh!”

She threw her arms about him, sobbing wildly in her great relief, the men standing by, awkwardly supporting him.

“But there! Here I am keepin’ you out in th’ wet! Bring him in, men,” and she ran on before, radiant wlith happiness. This misfortune was so much less than she had feared, that it seemed almost not to be a misfortune at all. “It’s only a sprained ankle, Allan,” she cried to the boy, and ran on past him to get a chair ready.

The men settled the foreman down into the chair cautiously.

“Shall I git th’ doctor?” asked one.

Jack laughed.

“Th’ doctor, indade!” he said. “Mary’ll fix this all right in no time. It ain’t bad. But I’m much obliged to ye, boys.”

The men took themselves back to work, happier, somehow, for having witnessed the little scene on the pathway.

But when the boot was cut away from the swollen ankle, it was evident that its owner would not go about on it again for many days to come. It was bathed and rubbed with liniment and tightly bandaged by the wife's deft fingers, and the pain gradually grew less.

"I slipped on a rail, y' see," explained Jack, when the injured member had been properly cared for.

"My foot went down into a frog, an' then I had t' fall over and wrench it. I'm sorry it give y' such a turn, Mary; I ought t' have sent a man on ahead t' warn you."

Mary smiled down on him indulgently.

"'Twas better this way, Jack, dear," she said.

"I'm so happy now t' have y' alive here talkin' t' me that it hardly seems you've met with an accident at all! See, we was jest gittin' th' Christmas tree ready; now you kin set there, with your foot up on a chair like this and boss th' job. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good; and I'm glad fer your own sake. Now you won't have to go out in th' storm."

But, at the words, the foreman's face suddenly changed.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "I fergot! Th' track has t' be patrolled. Somebody has t' go," and he raised himself in his chair, but fell back with a groan. "No use," he muttered, between his clenched teeth. "To-night, too, when th' pay-car'll most probably come through! Allan, you'll have t' run over t' th' train-master, an' git him t' send somebody else."

"Mr. Schofield went to Cincinnati this morning, I think," answered Allan. "I saw him getting on the train as I came in from the road."

"O' course!" cried Jack, fiercely. "He's gone down t' come back with th' pay-car. Well, hunt up th' chief dispatcher, then; somebody's got t' patrol that track."

Without a word, Allan donned the foreman's rubber coat and great hat. Then he picked up the heavy club and the red signal-lantern, which was standing, still lighted, on the table, where one of the men had placed it.

"What y' goin' t' do with that?" demanded Jack, eying the boy uneasily. "Y' don't need that to go to th' depot with."

“No,” said Allan, smiling, “but you see, I’m not going to the depot. I’m going to take your trick.”

“No, you ain’t!” cried the other, fiercely.

“Yes, I am. There’s nobody else to be got at this time of night; besides, you said yourself there’s no danger.”

Jack looked at him a moment doubtfully.

“No, I don’t think there is,” he said at last.

“But it’s a bad night.”

“Pooh!” and Allan whirled his club disdainfully.

“Not a drop of water can get to me in this rig,” he added, echoing Jack’s words.

“Anyway,” said the latter, hesitatingly, “y’ll be back in three hours, an’ you kin sleep late in the mornin’. I don’t see no other way,” he added, with a sigh.

“All right,” said Allan; “good-bye,” and went to the door.

But Mrs. Welsh ran after him, threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

“You’re a good boy, Allan,” she cried, half-sobbing. “I’ll have a good hot meal fer you when y’ git back.”

Allan laughed.

“I’ll be ready for it. Be sure to make a good job of that Christmas tree! Good-bye,” and he opened the door and strode out into the night.

17. A Night Of Danger

BUT THE STORM WAS NOT to be dismissed so lightly as Allan had dismissed it. Among the houses of the town he was sheltered somewhat, but, as he strode on westward, out into the open country, it seemed to rage with redoubled violence. The wind swept across the embankment along the river with a fury which threatened to blow him away. He bent low before it, and, swinging his lantern from right to left in unison with his steps, fought his way slowly onward, his eyes on the track. Away down at his right he could hear the river raging, and from instant to instant the lightning disclosed to him glimpses of the storm-tossed water. Once he saw a ball of fire roll down the track far ahead and finally leap off, shattering into a thousand fragments.

The thunder crashed incessantly, and overhead he could see great black clouds rolling across the sky. The rain fell in torrents, and, driven before the wind, dashed into his face with a violence which stung and blinded him whenever he raised his head. From time to time, he was forced to face about, his back to the wind, and gasp for breath. Once a gust of extra violence drove him to his knees, but he struggled up again and on. He knew that he was not the only one who was facing the tempest; he knew that up and down two hundred miles of track others were fighting the same fight. They had left warm homes, just as he had done, where preparations for Christmas were going on; they had not held back from the call of duty, nor would he.

He shut his teeth tight together and staggered on. A vision flashed before him of the bright room he had just left; he could see Jack sitting in his chair, and Mary putting the last touches to the Christmas tree. He knew that they were talking of him, planning for him, and a sudden wave of tenderness swept over him at the thought of how these people had taken him into their hearts and given him another home in place of the one he had lost. The new

one, of course, could never quite take the place of the old one; and yet he was no longer the friendless, hungry, lonely boy who had approached Jack Welsh so timidly that morning and asked for work. He had friends to whom he could look for sympathy and encouragement; there were hearts which loved him; he had a place in the world and was doing useful work; and he hoped in time to prove himself worthy of a higher place and competent to fill it. Tomorrow would be a happy Christmas!

So, as he fought his way on, it was with no despondent heart, but with a bright and hopeful one, that cared nothing for the discomfort of the storm. He was happy and at peace within, and no mere external tempest could disturb him!

A little grove on either side the track, its trees roaring in the tempest, gave him a moment's shelter. Then he pushed on to the two iron bridges which spanned the canal and the highroad just beyond it. These he looked over carefully by the light of his lantern, and assured himself that they were all right. Beyond the bridges was the long grade which led to the deep cut through the spur of hill which stretched across the track, and here the wind was howling with a fury that threatened to sweep him off his feet. But he fought his way on doggedly, step by step, head lowered, eyes on the track, lantern swinging from side to side.

Then suddenly the wind ceased, though he could still hear it roaring far overhead, and he looked up to see that he had gained the cover of the cut. He stopped for breath, rejoicing that the hardest part of his task was over. Beyond the cut was a sharp curve, the road was carried on a high trestle over a deep ravine, and then onward along the top of an embankment, — a "fill," in railroad parlance, — and this embankment marked the western limit of his trick. On his journey home, he would have the wind at his back and could get along easily and rapidly.

Cheered by this thought, he walked on through the cut, but, as he turned the corner at the farther side, the wind struck him again with terrific force. He staggered back for an instant against the rock, when there came a great flash of lightning that silhouetted before him every feature of the landscape. Yet, as the lightning died, there remained photographed on his brain only one detail of the picture, — before him stretched the trestle, and in the middle of it four men were working with feverish energy tearing up a rail!

He leaned back against the rock, dazed at the sight, not understanding for a moment what it meant. Then in a flash its meaning dawned upon him — they were preparing to wreck a train. But what train? It must be nearly eleven o'clock — no train was due for an hour or more — yes, there was — the pay-car, hurrying from Cincinnati with the Christmas money for the men. It was the paycar they were after. But the pay-car was always crowded with armed men — men armed not merely with revolvers, but with Winchester repeaters. Yet, let the car crash over that trestle fifty feet upon the rocks below, and how many of its occupants would be living to defend themselves?

Allan sank back among the rocks trembling, realizing that in some way he must save the train.

His first act was to open his lantern and extinguish it, lest it betray him. Then he tried quickly to think out a plan of action. He must get across the trestle in order to flag the train — but how could he get across it? And of a sudden his heart stood still as two vague forms loomed up before him. They stopped for a moment in the shelter of the wall.

"It was just about here," said a rough voice he seemed to recognize. "I caught a glint of a red light an' then it went out. I was watchin' fer the track-walker, y' know, an' I was sure that was him."

"Flash o' lightnin', most likely," came in a hoarse undertone from another.

Allan heard the newcomers grope about, as he cowered close to the rock, his heart beating fiercely as he expected each moment to feel a hand upon him.

"Y' see they ain't nobody here," said the first speaker, at last.

"Yes," assented the other, uncertainly. "But he's about due, if he's comin'."

"I dunno," protested the other. "Y'd better not bank on that.'"

"I ain't a-bankin' on it!" retorted his companion, impatiently. "You're goin' t' keep a lookout, ain't you? Now I'll go on back an' you stay right here. You kin see a long stretch down th' track from here, so they can't surprise us. If they's more'n one, warn us, — maybe they've put on a double

guard t'-night, — but, if they's only one, wait here behind this rock, an' when he comes past, do fer him — 'specially if it's Welsh 'r th' kid. It's about time we was gittin' even!"

Allan's heart leaped. He knew the voice now — there was no mistaking — it was Nolan's!

Nolan started back toward the trestle through the storm and was lost to sight instantly, while the sentry sat down upon a rock to watch the track, whistling to himself, as though train-wrecking were the most ordinary thing in the world. But Allan was thinking only of one thing — he must get past that man on the rock, he must cross the ravine, he must flag the train.

That was his duty lying clear before him. Danger? Yes, — but which of his comrades would stop to think of that? Yet he must be careful, — not for his own sake, but for the sake of those who were speeding toward this peril. He must run no risk of failure, for their lives depended upon him — upon his coolness, his foresight, his quickness. And whatever he did must be done at once. He gripped his hands together to still their trembling. Come, — this was no time for weakness. He must prove himself a man! He must prove himself worthy the service of the road!

He could not climb the well-nigh perpendicular side of the cut; to go back and work his way over the hill would require too much time — and there was not a moment to be lost. The only thing to do, then, was to go forward. He drew a deep breath; then he tucked his lantern snugly under his left arm, grasped his club firmly, and moved forward cautiously, hugging the side of the cut, his eyes on the sentry.

Once he stumbled heavily over some obstruction, but the storm covered the noise, and the sentry made no sign that he had heard, but sat twirling a heavy stick and looking down the track. Hope began to revive in the boy's breast; perhaps he might be able to steal past unseen. Lower and lower he crouched; slow and more slowly he moved; he was almost past — almost past —

Then, of a sudden, a broad flash of lightning flared down into the cut and revealed them to each other.

"Reddy!" cried the boy. "Reddy!"

The sentry sprang toward him with uplifted club, his face distorted with rage.

“Don’t you know me, Reddy?” cried Allan, springing back to avoid the blow.

“Sure Oi knows y’!” shouted the madman, savagely, coming on. “An’ Oi’m a-goin’ t’ do fer y’, like Dan told me to. He told me y’re all in th’ plot ag’in me!”

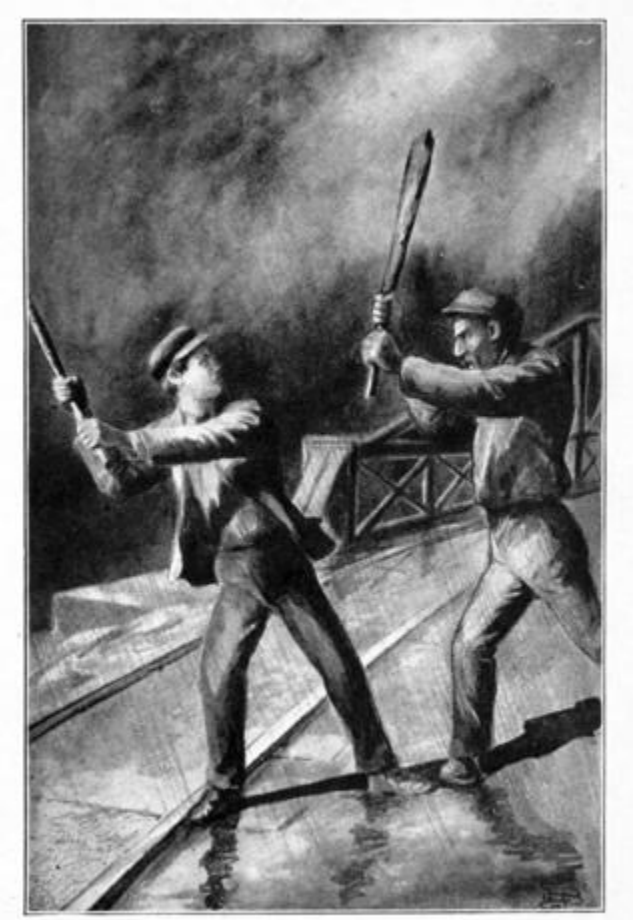
“It’s a lie, Reddy!” protested Allan, violently.

“It’s a lie!”

Reddy paused for an instant.

“A loi, is it?” he repeated. “Wasn’t it you as told on me fer breakin’ that link motion?”

“Yes,” admitted the boy; “but —”



"HE STEPPED TO ONE SIDE, AND . . . BROUGHT DOWN HIS CLUB UPON THE OTHER'S HEAD"

Reddy waited to hear no more.

"Oi knowed it!" he yelled. "Oi knowed it! OiTl show you! Oi'll show you, y' dirty spy! Don't try t' run — it's no use!"

And he came charging down upon Allan, his club swinging savagely.

But Allan was thinking not in the least of running. Instead, he stood his ground, his teeth clenched, his eyes alert, his club ready. He was not in the least excited; now, indeed, he found an instant in which to wonder at his

calmness. Then Reddy was upon him and struck at him savagely. He stepped to one side, and, putting all his force into the blow, — oh, how he hated to do it! — brought down his club upon the other's head.

18. The Signal In The Night

THAT BLOW had all the weight of Allan's muscular young body behind it, for he had realized that this was no moment to hold his hand, however he might wish to do so, and Reddy tumbled in a limp heap upon the track.

The tears were gushing from the boy's eyes as he bent over the body and drew it to one side to the shelter of the rock. That he should have struck Reddy — perhaps even killed him! But he could not linger; with a last glance at the prostrate figure, he turned back to the task before him.

Plainly he could not hope to cross the trestle with half a dozen men working on it — to try to do so would mean certain failure. Yet he must cross the ravine, — there was only one other way, and that not an easy one.

He threw off Jack's waterproof, which would only impede him now that he needed the utmost freedom of movement, and, holding his lantern tight, he jumped from the track and half-scrambled, half-fell down the steep descent below him, disregarding mud and brambles, torn clothes, and bruises, thinking only of one thing — that he must reach the other side and save the train. In a moment he was at the bottom, bruised and breathless, but luckily with no bones broken. Then for an instant he paused. Through the bottom of the ravine ran a stream, usually a gentle, shallow brook, but now swollen to an angry torrent by the pouring rain. There was no time for hesitation — no time to seek a better place — indeed, that was impossible in the darkness — and, holding his lantern high above his head, the boy dashed into the water.

For a moment it seemed that he must be swept away, so fierce was the rush of the torrent; but he got his feet, braced himself against it, and inch by inch fought his way across. The water tore at him and raged around him, hissing and sputtering, determined that he should not escape. Well for him that he had had those months of work on section, which had strengthened muscle and steadied nerve — which had taught him how to fight!

So, at last, he won through to the farther bank, breathless, exhausted, triumphant. And here a new difficulty met him. He had shut himself into a trap from which there seemed no escaping. Again and again he tried to climb the steep side of the ravine, but as many times slipped down to the bottom, bringing with him an avalanche of earth and loose stones.

Dry sobs rose in his throat and choked him as he lay for a moment against the bank, weak and trembling. Was he to be defeated here, with the end almost in sight? Was he to fail, after all? Must he stay here to witness the train take that awful plunge from the trestle down into the torrent beneath? He looked up with a shudder. High above him, he could see the trestle dimly outlined against the sky, and he knew that the work of tearing up the rail must be almost done.

He shook the weakness from him — he must be a man! — and he shut his eyes as he tried to picture to himself how the place looked by daylight. He had crossed the trestle a hundred times and gazed down into the ravine, admiring its rugged beauty. For centuries that little stream, which started in a spring high up on the hillside, had been laboring patiently digging this channel for itself, eating its way through earth and rock and slate, fashioning for itself a little narrow valley, just as the great streams make for themselves broad and fertile ones. It had eaten its way down and down, leaving on either side, extending to a height of nearly a hundred feet, rocky and precipitous banks. Allan remembered how in summer those banks were clothed in green; how he had looked down at them from the trestle. One day he had descried a brilliant patch of wild flowers near the bottom, where they had grown and spread, safe from man's intrusion. He had never thought how much would one day depend upon his knowledge of the place, or he would have examined the banks more closely.

Something swished through the air above him, and fell with a mighty splash into the torrent — it was the rail — it had been torn loose — the wreckers' work was done. Now, they had only to wait until the train came dashing past! Perhaps even at this moment it was nearing the destruction which threatened it! The boy shuddered at the thought, and made another vain and desperate effort to scramble up the bank. This time he managed to get hold of a little bush high above his head, but, as he was pulling himself up, the bush gave way and he fell again to the bottom. He realized that he could never hope to climb that treacherous bank, that he must follow the

ravine until it grew wider and shallower. Yet how could he do that and still be in time to save the train? There must be some way out near at hand! The robbers must have provided some path by which to get down to the wrecked train and get up again with their booty. But no doubt the path, if there was one, was on the other side of the ravine, where it would be of no use to him; very probably there was no path at all. The robbers had merely to let down a rope to provide a means of entrance and exit. He would have to go around, and he started blindly forward down the stream, holding his lantern tight, trembling to think of the precious moments he had wasted, — of the ones that he must yet waste before he could gain the track above and warn the engineer of the peril which lay before him. It was a desperate chance, but it seemed the only one.

He groped his way stumblingly along, walking in the edge of the water, making such progress as he could; slipping, falling full length once or twice, but rising again and pressing forward. His teeth were chattering, for the icy water had chilled him to the bone, but he seemed not to be conscious of the cold; his hands and face were cut and bleeding, scratched by brambles and by the sharp edges of rocks and slate, but he did not feel the sting of the wounds. He was thinking only of one thing — he must get out of this trap — he must flag the train! There must be some way out! He could not fail now!

Then, suddenly, he remembered. Just below the trestle, a little stream, rushing down the hillside to join the torrent below!, had cut for itself a miniature ravine in the side of the larger one. He had noticed it one day not long before — had noticed its rocky bed, which rose steeply to the fields above, but not so steeply as the sides of the ravine itself. Here was a way up which he might escape, if he could only find it. It must be somewhere near, — and he groped his way along, faltering, stumbling, — and at last he found the cut.

Yet it was not so easy of ascent as he had thought it would be; for the water was rushing headlong down it, threatening to sweep him back at every moment. Still he clambered on, digging knees and elbows into the mud, holding with desperate strength to the bushes that grew by the way, using every rock for foothold, up and up, until, at last, wet to the skin, with clothing torn and body cut, covered with mud, bruised and aching, but glowing with triumphant excitement, he reached the top.

He knew the railroad was somewhere to the right, and he stumbled forward as fast as his trembling legs would carry him. More than once he tripped and fell heavily over a log or stone, but always he held tight his precious lantern, not minding his own bruises so that it was safe. And at last, with a great joy at his heart, he saw, stretching dimly ahead of him, the high embankment upon which rested the track.

He sat down for a moment to take breath, then reached into his trousers pocket and drew out his match-safe. It was a company safe, and waterproof, for often the fate of a train depended on whether a watchman's matches were wet or dry, and for this, at least, the company had the foresight to provide. Crouching in the shelter of the embankment, he found a little rock, and, holding it under his coat, struck a match against it. A gust of wind caught it instantly and blew it out. With trembling fingers, he struck another match, which sputtered feebly for a second, flared up and was extinguished; but the third match burned for a moment, and he applied it quickly to the wick of the lantern. How the red glare warmed and cheered him as he snapped the globe back into place! He was in time to save the train!

Then he sprang to his feet. For away down the track before him came the sudden glare of a headlight, as the engine swung around a curve, and the hum of the wheels told that the engineer was speeding through the night, with throttle wide open, anxious, no doubt, to get safely into the haven of the yards at Wadsworth.

Up the bank scrambled the boy and down the track he ran, as fast as his feet would carry him, swinging his lantern in great circles over his head. He knew that the engineer must see it; he knew that on such a night as this his eyes would be turned not an instant from the track.

Then, suddenly, from behind him, there came the sharp crack of a revolver, and his lantern was smashed to pieces in his hand. He wheeled to see a flash of flame, as the revolver spoke again; the world reeled before him, turned black, and a great blow seemed to strike him in the chest and bear him down.

19. Reddy Redivivus

BILL JOHNSON, engineer of the 187, pulling the pay-car, stared out into the night, his hand on the throttle. The long gleam of the headlight shot out through the driving rain, and he could see the wet rails gleaming far ahead. He was making a record run; the superintendent had given him some hint of his fear for the safety of the pay-car, and he heaved a sigh of relief as the train swung around a curve and hurtled down the fill on the straight-away course for Wadsworth. Once in the yards there, the pay-car would be safe.

Then, with a quick gasp, he closed the throttle, reversed the engine, and threw on the brakes, for, far down the track ahead of him he had caught the gleam of a red lantern waved twice in the air. The light had vanished mysteriously in full flight, but a single glimpse of it was warning enough for Johnson.

The moment the brakes were applied, the detectives, back in the pay-car, had grabbed down the Winchesters from the wall and made ready for a fight. It might be that the engineer had sighted an obstruction on the track, and they waited instant by instant to feel the car leave the rails. It stopped with a jerk, and the detectives piled out, ready for anything.

"What's the matter?" they asked, coming to the spot where Johnson was leaning out of his cab window.

"Somebody flagged me a minute ago," answered Johnson, still peering out through the night. "It's funny he don't come ahead an' tell us what's th' trouble."

"Maybe it's a trick to get us away from the car," said somebody, and the detectives faced about in the darkness, instinctively bracing themselves to receive a volley of bullets.

"Climb up here in th' cab," suggested Johnson, "an' I'll go ahead slow, an' find out what's th' matter."

They climbed up instantly, and the engine crept slowly ahead, while they all peered out through the dashing rain, expecting they knew not what.

"There's somethin' on th' track," cried Johnson, after a moment, his trained eyes catching the first glimpse of a dim obstruction. "It's a man!" he said. "It's th' track-walker. Somebody done fer him jest as he was signallin' me! That's why his lantern went out!"

The men ran forward, Mr. Schofield among them. In the white glare of the headlight, they could see a form stretched heavily across the track, lying on its face.

One of the men turned it over.

"My God! It's young West!" cried Mr. Schofield, and dropped on his knee beside him.

"And shot through the breast," added one of the detectives, indicating the growing blood-stain upon the boy's shirt.

They carried him tenderly back to the pay-car and laid him on a cot there. His right hand still grasped the handle of his shattered lantern, holding it so tightly that they could not remove it. Mr. Schofield himself did what he could to stop the flow of blood; then went forward cautiously to investigate. In the center of the trestle, they found that a rail had been tom from the track.

"There's where we'd have been by this time but for that boy," said Mr. Schofield, in a low voice, and motioned toward the abyss, his face set and livid. "How he got past the wreckers I can't imagine. Now I want you men to run down the fiends who did this. We've got to have them, no matter what it costs! Now get after them! I'll get this rail back — don't bother about that — and take the pay-car in. You fellows catch these scoundrels!"

The detectives hurried away into the night, while Mr. Schofield called the train-crew, got out an extra rail which was always kept by the side of the bridge, and soon had it spiked into place.

"Now go ahead, Johnson," he called to the engineer, "but you'd better run slow — maybe there's another rail loose somewhere," and he swung

himself up the steps of the pay-car and sat down by Allan's cot, with a very grim face.

But let Johnson, the engineer, tell the rest of the story, as he told it to a group of interested auditors the very next day in the roundhouse office.

"I tell you, I run over that trestle mighty cautious-like," he said, "an' it give me a turn when I looked down into that ditch an' thought of what would have happened if th' boy hadn't flagged us. But we got across all right, an' started through th' cut, still runnin' slow, fer I didn't know but what there might be a rock on the track, when I heard somebody hollerin' at me, an' in a minute up comes Reddy Magraw climbin' into th' cab, lookin' crazier 'n ever.

"'How did I git out here?' he asked, wild-like. 'Who fetched me out here? What 'm I doin' 'way out here?'

"'If you don't know, I don't,' says I. 'Set down there an' rest. What's th' matter with your head? ' I asked, fer I saw it was all bloody on one side.

"Reddy put his hand up and felt of his head; then he took his hand down an' looked at the blood on it.

"'I dunno,' he says. 'Mebbe th' engine hit me. Where's Welsh an' the rest o' th' gang? They oughtn't to have gone off an' left me layin' out here like this, — I didn't think they'd do that!'

"'What engine hit you?' I asked.

"'Why, th' engine o' Number Four,' he says. * I didn't have time t' git out of th' road after I threw th' switch. But I didn't think th' boys'd 'a' left me layin' out here like this. Why, I might 'a' died!'

"Well, sir, it come to me all in a minute that somehow Reddy Magraw had got his senses back, an' I tell you it set me a-tremblin' jest like th' time my wife had her first baby. I was purty nigh scared to death!

"'I guess th' engine must 'a' hit you, sure,' I says, to ease him up. Then, as th' track was clear, I opened up my engine, while Magraw set on the floor of th' cab in a dazed sort of way. Never a word did he say till we pulled into the yards.

"'You'd better see a doctor,' I says. But he jumped off th' engine th' minute we stopped.

"'I don't want no doctor,' he says. 'I'm goin' home.' An' he started off on a run.

"Well, you orter seen Mr. Schofield when I told him. He went along with th' boy, an' seen him fixed up, an' then hurried away with th' doctor t' see Reddy. An' he found him at home with his wife on one knee an' his children on th' other, — he told us when he got back."

Johnson stopped, took out his handkerchief, and mopped his eyes openly.

"I don't keer," he said, looking around defiantly.

"It's enough t' make any man's eyes wet t' think of what that family's been through, an' now Reddy's give back to 'em ag'in with a head's good as anybody's. Why, it beats anything I ever heard of!"

And, indeed, it was a nine-days' wonder to every one. The doctors came and looked at him and explained what had happened in many learned words, and one of them wrote a paper about it, which he read before a medical society; the newspapers heard of it and wrote it up, and published Reddy's photograph, — why, Mrs. Magraw has all those papers put carefully away, and she gets them out occasionally even yet, and reads them and cries over them, — but they are tears of happiness and thanksgiving. For Reddy was as well as ever, and the gist of all the learned medical opinions was that the blow on the head which Allan dealt him had somehow set right the brain disordered by the blow it had received from the engine months before. It did for him just what an operation might have done, and did it effectually. How it had done it, the doctors couldn't say, and there were many warm discussions over it. It was not without precedent, — not unfrequently a case of the same kind is reported, — but the righting of that delicate mechanism, the brain, is something that no physician, be he never so famous, as yet thoroughly understands.

The one fact remained that Reddy was himself again, and freed for ever from the influence of Dan Nolan. And, indeed, Nolan himself was destined to pay the penalty for his iniquities. For the detectives soon found the trail of him and his companions; the help of the Wadsworth police force was se-

cured, a bloodhound was brought to the scene, and all that night the pursuit was kept up among the hills. When morning dawned, the quarry was run to cover in an old log hut near the top of Mount Logan, and the detectives and police surrounded it.

The robbers put up a short fight, but they saw they had no chance to escape, and the bullets from the Winchesters were whistling through the cabin in a most unnerving w'ay, so they waved a white rag out of one of the windows and surrendered. There were four in the party, Nolan and three tramps whom nobody knew. They were taken back to Wadsworth and lodged safely in jail there, leaving it only to go to the State penitentiary at Columbus to serve a term of years. Nolan broke down at the last, like the great coward he really was, confessed, plead guilty, and turned State's evidence against his comrades in order to save himself a year or two of imprisonment. So that was the end of Nolan for a time; but his power for mischief was not yet at an end, and he later involved some of his old associates in new disasters — but that story cannot be told here.

20. The Road's Gratitude

IT WAS ONLY A MEMORY NOW, that gray, wet Christmas morning when Allan had been brought home pale and limp, on a stretcher. They had started from bed at the first tap on the door, for his prolonged absence had begun to worry them, and Jack, unheeding his sprained ankle, had hobbled to it and flung it open. He stood silent as they brought the boy in and set the stretcher on the floor. He watched the doctor strip back his clothing, remove the rude bandage that had been hastily placed over the wound, wipe away the blood, and begin to probe for the bullet. Mary, too, had thrown on her gown and stood watching the operation with white face.

"Doctor," burst out Jack, at last, almost fiercely, "don't tell me he's dead! Don't tell me he's goin' t' die! He saved my little girl. Don't tell me I let him go t' his death!"

"He'll not die," said the doctor, reassuringly.

"The bullet seems to have been deflected from its course and to have made only a bad flesh wound."

But it turned the watchers sick to see the probe sink in deeper and deeper. Suddenly the surgeon gave a little exclamation and ran his hand under the boy's shoulder.

"Here," he said to his assistant, "turn him over."

He made a quick cut with a knife under the shoulder-blade, and a little flattened piece of lead fell into his hand.

"There's the bullet," and he handed it to Welsh.

"Maybe he'll want it for a keepsake." And he proceeded skilfully to bandage up the wound.

But it was not until Allan opened his eyes and smiled faintly up at them that Jack and Mary believed that he could live. They fell on their knees beside his bed, but the doctor hurried them away.

"What he needs now is sleep," he said. "Let him sleep as long as he can."

"But look at his poor face, doctor," whispered Mary, "an' at his hands, all tore and scratched. Do ye suppose them devils did that to him, too?"

"I don't know," said the doctor. "Those scratches won't hurt him; it's that wound in the breast that's dangerous. Now, let him sleep."

And sleep he did, all through that Christmas Day. The story of his exploit had got about, and a constant stream of railroad men came softly up the path to ask how he was doing, and to stand around afterward and discuss the story. All night he slept, with Mary watching by his bedside, and, when he opened his eyes next morning, she was still sitting there.

The doctor came an hour later, looked at the wound, felt his pulse, and nodded encouragingly.

"He'll pull through all right," he said. "He's got a little fever, but that was to be expected. But he's in first-class shape and will soon rally from that wound. Keep him quiet for a day or two."

Before that time, the fever had subsided, the wound was healing nicely, and the doctor pronounced his patient out of danger.

"He's pretty weak," he said, "and must take things easy. Don't let him strain himself any way, or He may open the wound. Keep him quiet and cheerful — his youth will do the rest."

How they vied with one another to nurse Allan back to strength again. Reddy, his old self, was the first caller, with his heart going out to the boy with a love that was well-nigh worship.

"I don't know nothin' 'bout how it happened, Allan," he said, wringing the hand of the whitefaced boy, "but I think I can count on y' not to be lay in' it up ag'in me."

Allan leaned back and laughed.

“I think if you can cry quits, I can,” he said. How the great load rolled from off his heart as he saw Reddy, whom he had last beheld lying prone at his feet, now his genial old self again!

“But, oh, Reddy, I did hate to hit you!”

“Ho, ho!” cried Reddy; “if it had kilt me intirely, Oi’d ‘a’ been th’ last to complain! Is it true, Allan, that I was runnin’ around with tramps?”

“Yes, that’s true, Reddy.”

“An’ hobnobbin’ with Dan Nolan?”

“Yes.”

“An’ abusin’ my missus?”

“You didn’t abuse her, Reddy.”

“An’ fightin’ my best friends, an’ wreckin’ railroad property, an’ actin’ generally loike a low-down haythen?” went on Reddy, rapidly. “Why, th’ only thing I can’t forgive y’ fer, Allan, is thet y’ didn’t knock me over th’ head long afore!”

“I would, Reddy,” laughed Allan, “if I’d thought it would cure you.”

“If it hadn’t cured me,” said Reddy, “it might ‘a’ kilt me — an’ thet was what I deserved!”

Joy is the best of all medicines, and Allan’s improvement was rapid. At the end of a week he could spend hours lying back in a padded chair, and Jack was finally prevailed upon to go regularly to work and leave the care of the invalid to his wife.

It was on the platform before the station that the superintendent stopped him one evening, as he was hurrying home from work.

“How are things out on the line?” he asked.

“All right, sir.”

“Going to win the track prize again this spring?”

“No, sir,” and Jack grew suddenly grave. “One of my best men is laid up, y’ know.”

“Ah, yes,” and the superintendent nodded.

“How is the boy getting along, Jack?”

“He’ll pull through,” said the other, slowly, “but he had a mighty close call. If th’ bullet hadn’t struck a rib an’ glanced off, he’d ‘a’ been done fer. I went down t’ look at th’ place he got acrost th’ ravine, an’ I don’t see how he done it.”

“Neither do I,” agreed the superintendent. “I took a look at it, too.”

“Well,” continued Jack, “th’ fever’s over now, an’ he’s gittin’ his strength back.”

“And his appetite, too, I dare say.”

“Yes,” assented Jack, with a quick smile of enjoyment, “an’ his appetite, too. Why, it does us more good t’ see him eat than to eat ourselves.”

“I don’t doubt it; but you mustn’t spoil the boy with too much coddling.”

“Spoil him!” retorted Jack. “Not fer a minute! Why, y’ couldn’t spoil him, sir. He’s pure gold, all th’ way through.”

The superintendent started on, stopped for an instant to chew his mustache, then turned back.

“Jack!” he called.

“Yes, sir,” and the foreman stopped.

“You were saying,” began the superintendent, a little awkwardly, “that the boy’s eating again. He ought to have some dainties, Welsh; oysters and chicken and fruit, and that sort of thing.”

“We hope t’ be able t’ git ’em fer him, sir,” answered Jack, with dignity.

“Well, the road won’t let you get them,” said the superintendent. “We owe him a good deal, and we’re going to pay some of it this way. I’m going to stop in over here at the store and tell Fisher to send the boy whatever he wants and send the bill in to the road. I’ll see that it’s paid. Of course, we’ll take care of the doctor and drug bills, too. Now, maybe he’d like some oranges or pineapple or something of that sort right away. Anyway, I’ll tell Fisher,” and he hurried on, as though fearing to hear what the other might say.

Welsh looked after him for a moment without saying anything, then turned toward home.

And Mr. Heywood, hurrying on, stopped at the grocery and gave certain directions.

"And see here, Fisher," he concluded, "you'll send the bill to me, but that's nobody's business but our own. I want them to think that the road's paying for it."

Half an hour later, a grocer's boy knocked at the door of the Welsh cottage and handed in a great basket of dainties, and Allan was soon smiling over a bowl of steaming oyster soup, with Jack and his wife and Mamie grouped about the bed watching him enjoy it. And I don't believe there is any more exquisite pleasure in the world than that which they experienced in that moment!

The winter days were clear and bright, and Allan found a rare enjoyment in lying back in the great chair which Mrs. Welsh had padded expressly for him, and looking out over the yards and watching the busy life there. He was sitting so one afternoon when some one turned in at the gate and mounted the path to the house.

"Why, it's Misther Schofield!" cried Mary, and hastily dusted off a chair with her apron, in honor of the distinguished visitor, — not that it needed dusting.

The train-master came up with smiling face.

"How are you, Mrs. Welsh?" he asked. "And how is the invalid?"

He sat down by the side of the chair, and, reaching over, gave Allan's hand a hearty clasp.

"Do you know, I am ashamed of myself for not getting here before this," he went on, genially, "but I have kept posted about you, because I wanted to know when you were ready to go back to work."

"I'll be ready before long, sir," said Allan, smiling in sympathy with his guest's good humor.

"I'm getting quite strong again."

But Mrs. Welsh interrupted him.

“Listen at th’ boy!” she cried, indignantly.

“Why, Misther Schofield, an’ him with a bullethole clear through him t’ think o’ goin’ out an’ workin’ on section!”

The train-master was smiling more broadly than ever.

“It does seem pretty tough, doesn’t it?” he said.

“Here’s a boy who’s saved the company’s pay-car with two hundred thousand dollars in it, and the lives of ten or fifteen men, and came within a hair’s breadth of getting killed. And yet he has to work on section for forty dollars a month. But then, there’s not so much danger on section any more; we’ve routed the tramps, you know, for good and all. Still, it’s pretty tough.”

“Tough!” and Mrs. Welsh looked at him with flaming eyes. “It’s worse ‘n that, beggin’ your pardon, sir. It’s a sin an’ a shame! It’s a disgrace t’ th’ company!”

Allan tried to silence her, but she would not be silenced. He stole a horrified glance at Mr. Schofield, and was astonished to see that he was still smiling.

“A disgrace!” repeated that official. “Well, I agree with you, Mrs. Welsh. So we’re not going to let him go back on section. We can’t afford to waste a good man that way. It’s a little late for a Christmas gift, maybe, but he’s earned it and he’s going to get it.”

Mary stared at the speaker, speechless.

“There’s a job open in my office, young man,” he went on, turning to Allan. “It’s yours if you want it. It’s not such a very good job, for it pays only fifty dollars a month, but you’ll learn more about railroading there in a month than you can ever do on section, and you’ll be in line for promotion, and you’ll get promoted when you merit it. What do you say?”

What could Allan say, with a heart too full for utterance? He reached out his hands blindly, and the other, understanding, clasped them in his strong, steady ones.

And that was how it came about that Allan got the place in the offices which he had longed for, under the eye of the best train-master in the West,

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“Who is this fellow named West you’ve got down there in your office, Schofield? He seems a good one.”

“He is a good one,” Mr. Schofield had responded, earnestly. “You’ll hear from him again.”

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