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#### THE LIFE OF THE SWITCHMAN.

How it Begins and How it Frequently Comes to a Close.

#### THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE CALLING.

The Manner in Which Cars Are Shifted, Trains Made Up and the Wages the Hardy Men Receive for Doing It.

There are few trades or professions attended with more danger than that of the railroad switchman, and the maimed and crippled men about the yards in the city are the best evidence of this fact. But, notwithstanding, there is a fascination about the business so that when a man becomes a switchman he always remains a switchman, unless he is killed, loses a limb or is maimed. Death frequently occurs but promotion is seldom experienced, though a few of the men by attending strictly to business have worked themselves into less hazardous and better paying positions. Switchmen are not born as switchmen. This knowledge of throwing switches, jumping on moving trains and scaling car roofs is only acquired by years of patient and dangerous experience.

To become a switchman, a man, as a rule, graduates from the position of a brakeman. He becomes a hollerer, then he steps to the position of a fireman and the next step is into a switchman's shoes.

The switchman is the especial delight of the ladies and as they watch the active young man, for the switchman is always a young man, climb up the side of a freight car, run along the top, clamor down the side and open or close a switch they look upon him as an object of more than passing importance and courage.

Like every large city, Omaha has her army of switchmen, all of whom are the best of fellows, big-hearted and jolly, and men of the best of habits, seldom looking upon the wild or mingling in bad society. Indeed, good habits are compulsory, because a rule is in force on every road running into the city to the effect that if a man reports for duty when intoxicated, or imbues the ardent while on duty, he is deemed to be discharged. So rigidly is this rule enforced that rather than report white under the influence of drink the switchman will pay a physician \$2 for a sick certificate and lie off until he recovers from the effect of his indulgence. This is not only the case in Omaha, but all over the land.

Years ago, one of the qualifications for a switchman was to be able to dispose of as much liquor as the yardmaster. The yardmaster had a mark that he had to reach in order to hold his job. He had to be able to carry a switchman's engine and the yardmaster's examper was the superintendent. But, during later years, things have changed. The great railroad corporations found too many wrecked engines and cars on their hands, and tracing the cause to the fact that they found that drunken employees were responsible for a great deal of the damage, hence the iron-clad rule regarding liquor drinking.

As the boys hurriedly move about the yards their work seems like child's play; but it is far from that. They must always be ready to go. It does not matter if the Dakota blizzards are coming down at the rate of forty miles an hour, bearing before them the fathery flakes of snow, the switchman must face the storm. If the roofs of the cars are covered with ice, it is all the same to him. The support of some one depends upon him holding his position. He never thinks of danger—not even if death stares him in the face. If a train is bearing down upon the switches he tends, he dare not hesitate, for at such a time to hesitate would be to lose. Instead of stopping to consider the consequences, he blindly throws his switch, climbs upon the car, sets the brake and signals to the engineer to back up or go ahead, as the case may be.

Practically speaking, all of the switchyards in the city are constructed upon about the same plan, and the system of handling

cars is the same all over the United States, so that when a man learns his trade (for it is a trade), in this yard, he has learned it for the others, with the bare exception of becoming familiar with the sidetracks. The handling of a train is when the work begins. The train is pulled into the depot by the regular crew. The engineer and fireman step off the engine. The hostler and his helper take the machine to the roundhouse, and the switch engine attaches to the train. The cars have been picked up at the smaller stations and are in a line and miss order. One car may be loaded with fruit going to the New York market. The next may have on board a load of tea for one of the wholesale grocers and the next may be loaded with hogs for the South Omaha packing houses. Now, the plan of operation is to get each car in its proper place and see that it is kept there until it is sent on to its destination, or unloaded at the warehouse to which it is consigned. To do this without getting things fearfully mixed, requires as much strategy as it does to make the many moves upon the checker board, for the complications that are liable to arise are equally numerous and more disastrous.

The switch engine, with its crew of three men, a fireman and two followers, backs down, hitches on and shoves the train onto the "ship" track. There it is left while the yardmaster's clerk looks over the way bills handed him by the conductor. This requires but a short time, and with the package of bills in one hand and a piece that checks in the other the clerk walks along the line of cars, marking this one to John Smith, the next to Sioux City, another to Lincoln and so on, until he has checked the whole train, which is then ready to be worked over.

The switching crew then takes things in their own hands and for a time all is life and activity. They are consigned to the local dealers are set over on the tracks beside their respective warehouses, while those containing broken lots go to the company warehouse. The cars going to the other roads are thrown onto the "hotel" track, where they remain until a train load has accumulated, after which they are shoved to their respective yards. The cars which are ready to be worked are ready to be worked. Each "lead" has a capacity of thirty-five cars.

In sending out a train, the latter is made up in strict order, that is, the cars of the station nearest the starting point are put nearest the engine. Those for the station farthest out being in the rear or next to the caboose.

The yardmaster of each yard is the responsible man, though the "kick" does not come directly to him from the man to whom the contents of the car may be consigned. Mr. B. has a car in the yards, he wants to get it to his warehouse at once. He learns that the car is ready to be worked, he registers a kick with the up-town freight agent. This gentleman knows nothing about the car. In fact, he doesn't know a freight car from a hand-saw, but he has an order book and that man is the yardmaster. The kick soon finds its way to the yards and the trouble is soon "disposed of." These kicks come in summer and winter and go toward helping to make the yardmaster's life one of misery.

The "switches," or cars after they have been unloaded, are pulled up and set in upon the "leads" and made up into trains going east, west, north or south, depending on where they belong or from what road they were received. When enough to make a train have been gathered on any one "lead," they are "pulled," that is, the cars are taken out of the "lead" and the yardmaster stands beside the train and as it passes holds up one hand and two fingers of the other. The switchman who stands on the rear car catches the signal, passes it in the same way to the engineer and as the train backs down near the open end of the "lead," he climbs down the side of his car, pulls the coupling-pin,

throws the switch and the car rolls into place. He then swings his hand in a circular manner over his head, which means to "pull up." The engineer catches this signal, goes ahead, the switch is closed and the work goes merrily on day after day and week after week.

If the switchman wants the train to back up he swings his hand across the track. If it is to slow up the hand is moved up and down. At night a lantern is carried by the switchman and with it the same signals are used. Should a car be wanted on the track scales the engineer is signalled by the switchman, who crosses his hands. As switches or "leads" are on both sides of the main tracks of the yards, both the fireman and engineer catch the signals. If the fireman catches them he imparts this information to the engineer, who then handles his machine accordingly.

In the early days of railroading those signals were given by calls, or as it required several men to pass them up on long trains, this was soon done away with, and the code in practice at the present time was adopted. The most dangerous part of the work is the coupling and uncoupling of the cars. They claim that hundreds of non-resident men have been killed or maimed, for by a mistake he may be thrown down and under the wheels before the train can be stopped or assistance arrive.

The railroads have taken necessary precaution, but the men do not make the advantage of the situation. Coupling sticks have been provided, but none but new men will use them, the old men preferring to take their chances. These coupling sticks are of hard wood and have the appearance of wooden knives, being eighteen inches long and two inches broad. They are, when not in use, carried in a scabbard which is attached to a broad belt, known as a "harness." With these sticks, a switchman can stand beside his car and couple or pull the pin without any danger of accident. The old men, however, will not use them and when they see a new man using one, he becomes the butt of ridicule and, until he throws stick away, is known as "a fresh." "A fresh," however, he does not want to be and rather than be called one, will use a number of chances to acquire a painful and rapid trip to the hospital.

Among the great army of men employed about the Omaha yards, accidents are very frequent. The men are employed every length of time, having something by which he is reminded of his real life on earth. It may be the loss of a hand or foot; it may be a scarp of a couple of fingers, or it may be a scalp wound received when he fell from the top of a freight car. Twenty-six days constitute a month, for which they receive wages as follows: Day switchmen, \$5 per month; night switchmen, \$30; day engineers, \$20 per month and night \$25. A day's work is ten hours, and all overtime is paid by the hour, the sum being paid in proportion to the monthly wages.

Helpers and foremen are paid by the hour, the former receiving 25 cents per hour and the latter 25¢, but as they always have work they are paid about the same as the other employees of the yards.

In the Union Pacific yards there are 100 switchmen, thirty-six engineers, thirty-six foremen and seventy-two helpers, besides the official force which is as follows: General yardmaster, J. H. Metcay; assistant yardmaster, Con. Hoteler; yardmaster, Robert McNeal; yardmaster at South Omaha, Joe Henry; and W. A. Hyatt at Council Bluffs. These men handle on an average 1,500 cars every twenty-four hours and work them over twenty-five miles of sidetrack. In the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha yards there are eight hundred and fifty switchmen and 1,500 cars handled every twenty-four hours, Edward H. Hewitt is yardmaster, William Smith is night yardmaster and Charles Stockman yardmaster. This road, which also handles the Elkhorn and the Northwestern, business, gives em-

ployment to the yards to fifteen engineers, fifteen foremen, thirty helpers and forty-five switchmen.

#### Licensing Transient Teamsters.

Thursday night the members of the Teamsters' union held a meeting to hear the report of the committee appointed to visit the business men of the city for the purpose of securing signatures to a petition, asking the council to pass an ordinance licensing the transient teamsters.

The meeting was largely attended, and the report was one that gladdened the hearts of all present. It showed that 200 of the leading firms of the city had attached their names to the petition. At the next meeting of the council this matter will be presented in due form.

The movement was started early in the spring, but did not assume definite shape until a few weeks ago. The union will demand that all teams hauling for money be compelled to take out a license. The teamsters say their object is not to oppress any one, but to protect themselves. They claim that hundreds of non-resident team-owners are now in the city, working at wages far below the scale, and by so doing have practically crowded the resident team owners out of business. They argue that these come in from the interior, camp in the woods outside the city limits, and live in tents, thus avoiding the payment of taxes, and as they are at no expense they can work for comparatively nothing.

#### Central Labor Union.

The following are the officers of the Central Labor union of this city. President, George Willard; vice president, William B. Masser; recording secretary, William Sebring; treasurer, Julius Meyer; financial secretary, August Boernman; sergeant-at-arms, J. C. Flanagan.

#### Board of Directors—George Willard, Julius Meyer, John Carnaby, Charles Newstrom, William Goodin, J. W. Baldwin.

The following compose the delegates from the organized trades' unions of this city: Iron Molders—H. Kirby, James R. Young, Ed O'Connor.

Typographical Union—George Willard, N. S. Mahan, P. S. Horton.

Board of Directors—George Willard, Julius Meyer, John Carnaby, Charles Newstrom, William Goodin, J. W. Baldwin.

Wood Machinists—William Sebring, William O'Brien, Frank Heppack.

Painters, No. 100—G. F. Donbrowski, Charles Larson, Charles Stegeman.

Coopers, No. 1—J. M. Baldwin, James Rasmussen, E. H. Irving, E. Drake.

Plumbers—O. A. Hendon, T. Swingwood.

Omaha Mutual Mutual Protective Union, No. 22—F. S. Lassentin, J. Hoffman, Henry Dunn.

sent the Omaha carriers as a delegate, has returned, well pleased with the result of the meeting.

The convention was held in Pythian hall and was attended by delegates from every city in the United States having a free delivery system. During the deliberations a resolution was adopted by which a mutual widows' and orphans' fund was established. A memorial was also adopted asking congress to pass a law giving employees who have passed the civil service examination a hearing when charges are brought against them, and before they can be summarily dismissed from the service.

By the unanimous vote the convention resolved to ask congress to pass a law allowing carriers the following compensation: \$800 for the first year, \$850 the second year, \$1,000 the third year and \$1,200 the fourth year in all cities of the first class.

In cities of the second class, \$600 the first year, \$650 the second year and \$1,000 thereafter.

Some member introduced a resolution to instruct the executive committee to draft a bill to be presented to congress providing for the pensioning of carriers disabled while in the performance of their duties. This was tabled.

A new member introduced a resolution to instruct the executive committee to have a piece of bone which is apparently not complete by some two or three feet in length, is fully twenty-five inches in diameter at its greatest bulk, a foot through at the narrow parts, and about two and one-half feet long.

Dr. Birney cures catarrh, Bee bldg.

#### CONJUGALITIES.

Snooper—Is your wife fond of music? Gazan—Yes, of chin music.

A divorced husband of New York sold his interest in their property to a public debt collector and then it was attached by a lady to whom he owed \$41, the payment of which he had systematically evaded. His wedding garments are now in the hands of a court official and will be put up at auction if the matter is not settled.

Strange stories having come to the ears of D. G. MacFarr, of Bridgeport, Conn., concerning the habits and character of his wife, he takes a novel method of refuting them. He proposes to hire a hall and invite the disbelievers of his domestic power to a public debate in which he will answer all charges which have been made against his slandered spouse.

A well known lawyer of Toronto who is about to be married ordered his wedding frock, when it was attached by a lady to whom he owed \$41, the payment of which he had systematically evaded.

Six years ago Benjamin W. Lightburn, a poor man from Virginia, graduated from Brown university with just \$19 in his pocket. During his university course he became engaged to Miss Della L. Carpenter of Providence. They parted until such time as Lightburn could earn money to support a wife. He went to Kansas City with his \$19, entered a lawyer's office, saved his earnings, invested in real estate, and struck it rich. Lightburn has now arrived in Providence to claim his bride. He is reported to be worth \$100,000.

Why so many bald-headed men are included in this explanation by a recent writer is that the hair is being washed away by a silver or a gold nugget. Local scientists claim that at a great depth and under enormous pressure the water is washing away a ledge of rock whose softer parts go into solution and whose gold and silver, not being dissolved are brought to the surface in a metallic state.

There is a wonderful well down near Norfolk. The force of the water brings up from the depths an occasional lump of native silver or a gold nugget. Local scientists claim that at a great depth and under enormous pressure the water is washing away a ledge of rock whose softer parts go into solution and whose gold and silver, not being dissolved are brought to the surface in a metallic state.

Mrs. Annie Michel of Columbus, O., lived for two years with a frog in her stomach.

She was not confined to her bed but complained most of the time of a peculiar sensation in the stomach as if something having life was moving about. One evening recently she complained of a tickling sensation in her throat and called a doctor, who by the aid of instruments formed the opinion that the sensation was caused by the presence of an immense insect. After swallowing a powerful emetic Mrs. Michel was relieved by the expulsion of a live frog from her stomach. It was about two inches long, almost white and the hind legs were missing.

Of all the roosting places imaginable the hands of a clock would seem the last place a bird would seek. But, nevertheless, a feathered warbler of some description took up quarters for the night on the Lima (O.) town clock, and was as cozy as a "bug in the rug." It was first noticed about 10:30 o'clock, and as the hands would soon pass an interested crowd looked on, anxious to know what the bird would do. Well, that bird knew its business, and when the minute hand drove up in front of it demurely hopped aboard, and taking a seat on the extreme end, rode safely by. The danger over, it resumed the former position on the hour hand.

A big bone was unearthed by workmen in excavating for the east channel span of the new bridge over the river. The bone was found thoroughly imbedded in blue clay at the bottom of the excavation, fifteen feet deep and fully eight feet below the depth of the river. The excavation is but a short distance from the river and is soil that had probably been undisturbed for ages. The piece of bone, which is apparently not complete by some two or three feet in length, is fully twenty-five inches in diameter at its greatest bulk, a foot through at the narrow parts, and about two and one-half feet long.

Dr. Birney cures catarrh, Bee bldg.

#### DOG BITES.

A woman writes to the New York Tribune: I have been bitten by dogs repeatedly, once severely. A pet dog of a neighbor's was very sick and wild, trying to follow me. It bit me in the left thumb just below the nail. That member became black as far down as the wrist. It remained so until the nail came off. The owner talked of hydrophobia and said that the dog had not tasted water for two weeks. Had I been afraid I should no doubt have taken nervous fits and died. The verdict would have been "hydrophobia."

But I simply applied a solution of "salt and vinegar" a more vinegar than salt, washed the wound with it, then tied a clean rag around the thumb, keeping it saturated well with the solution, and moved the rag so that a fresh part covered the wound at intervals. This remedy was once applied to my wrist by a colored woman in the south for a snake bite. My arm was then black, hard and painful. The remedy acted like a charm. In two hours the discoloration had disappeared and with it the pain, and only the needle mark where the fang had entered was visible.

Again, I was bitten by a weasel in the Grand Central depot. A girl had it in a bag and had placed it on a seat next to mine, remarking that it was a kitten. I placed my hand on it. Quicker than thought a couple of teeth punctured the joint of my left forefinger to the bone. I compelled the girl to tell me what was in the bag. My finger was badly swollen and painful before I reached home, some hours after. I used the same simple remedy, with the same speedy result.

Dr. Birney cures catarrh, Bee bldg.

#### IMPETIES.

"How did your father receive me? Like the prodigal of old. He jumped on my neck." Teacher—Who was most concerned when Absalom got hung by the hair? Tommy—Absalom.

Sunday School Teacher (in Kentucky)—Johnny, how did the forbidden fruit cause the fall of man? Johnny—They made it inter-brandy!

"You must be as quiet as possible tonight, Johnny," said his mother, "for we are to have the minister for supper." "Have him for supper, eh? Well, I hope he'll taste good."

"His this Colonel H'Ingersoll?" asked the cookery. "At your service," returned the colonel. "Permit me to harkle you, colonel." "Don't you believe there's a hell in the halphlet?"

Revivalist (to old Kaintuck): "Don't you want to go to heaven, my dear friend?" "No, sah." "What! Don't you want to go to heaven? Tell me why." "Cause a feller'd have to die 'fore he could go, an' by gosh, I don't want to die!"

Dr. Birney cures catarrh, Bee bldg.