

MERRY CHRISTMAS ON THE RAIL.

BY HERBERT E. HAMBLIN.

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The train was reported half an hour late. We closed the cab windows and dropped the curtain. Harry put the blower on a quarter of a turn, to carry off the gas; we lit our pipes, coughed our heels on the boiler...

Tomorrow would be Christmas, and mother was with us. It was her first visit since our marriage. Katie, her poor little heart, a-flutter at the prospect of a visit from that dreaded inspector general, her mother-in-law's face beaming nearly to tears...

A curling wreath of blue smoke floating across the face of the gauge, treated the selfish course of my thoughts and directed them to the boy on the other side of the cab. Harry Mervin had been on the road only a couple of months, most of which time he had been firing for me. He was bright, pleasant and willing. It was curious to me that I rather liked him, but that I knew absolutely nothing about him. It wasn't so very many years ago that I was a strange boy on the same road myself, and this was Christmas eve. I made a pretense of getting a light for my pipe at the gauge lamp, and leaned across the boiler.

"Where are you going to spend Christmas, Harry?" I shouted above the noise of the gauge and the blating of the curtain.

The fire glowed brightly in the bowl of his pipe once, twice, before he answered. He leaned against the boiler on his side and that would have been his features in the dim light, and replied cheerfully:

"Oh, in the board'n' house, I guess. Where else? They're a-goin' to have roast turkey an' cranberry sauce an' plum puddin', I hear."

I soon knew his story—a stepmother three months after his own mother's death, and I mentally added a red-headed stepson. He had picked up a general idea of firing while beating his way on here from Wisconsin, and happening to arrive at our roundhouse just as a man was urgently needed, he caught on.

"They're callin' us," he concluded, and giving the bellows a jerk, he stepped down to hook up his fire.

When I got coupled up and he stepped up in the cab again, I said to myself: "We expect to have a little time up to our house tomorrow, Harry, and I should like to have you come up and take dinner with us."

"Thank you, Alee," he replied; "I will." There was an inch of snow on the rails keeping out of the way of all regular trains. But Davis, the conductor, said he had a nice, light-running train, cars all loaded with whisky brooms and straw hats. I was glad enough to hear it, for there were 175 miles of iron, slippery with the falling snow, between old 18's pile and home.

It was a fearful night. The gauge howled and the snow drove horizontally like a sand blast. The wind was on the fireman's side, which made it possible for me to look out. But all I could see was an impenetrable white screen, made visible in one small spot by the headlight. I had been casing the throttle when she slipped—for I would need all the sand I had before I got home—until she nearly stalled. That wouldn't do, so I gave her a bare taste and leaned out to hear the gratifying crunch of it under the wheels.

Harry gripped my shoulder and shouted: "Merry Christmas!"

I wished him the same and many of 'em, and noticed that it was just 12 by the engine clock. She hadn't slipped since I gave her the sand, but she was puffing along with suspicious freedom; for we were not up the grade yet. I told the brakeman to go back on top of the train and see if the caboose was coming. He went off growling, but he went, which was the main thing. From the back of the tender he gave me what I expected and dreaded—a signal that the train had broken in two. I whistled the flag back to protect the rear and kept on.

I took the cars I had to the next siding, four miles away. I had two more cars on top of the tender, but I had to leave them at the stop block. Then I cut the two head cars off, pulled them out on the switch and backed down the main track with them until the engine was behind the two head cars in the siding. I had the brakeman cut these two off, and "staked" them out on the main track ahead of the engine, and ran ahead until the two cars behind the engine were over the switch. I backed them in on the siding, leaving the other two out on the main line. Then I came back with the engine and went back after the rest of the train.

I had a four-mile back-up in the teeth of the blizzard. I couldn't see a thing and never knew where I was. I didn't dare go fast, for I expected every minute to hit the train, and I couldn't force myself to go slow enough to stop without punching a hole in a newspaper. Snow and coal dust swirled up under the foot of the curtain, blinding us, and the boiler might have been an ice-cream freezer for all its effect on the temperature. I tried to invent a suitable reward for the yardmaster at Tabor's for not giving me a shove, only to remember that engineers seldom have a chance to get square.

The crew had tied a red lamp to the brakeman of the head car and gone back to the caboose. Long before I got back the lamp was transformed into a miniature iceberg, but I didn't happen to hit hard enough to smash anything. We found the draw-head back into its place in the car and we got away from the siding, we had been four hours coming a little over four miles, a magnificent beginning, truly. "Our turkey's cold, Alee," Harry remarked, jokingly, after we had started again.

"Frozen," I replied slowly. I couldn't get them going over twelve miles an hour, and from that we ran down to about the speed of a slow walk. The didn't steam very freely, which was to be expected. The weather would have chilled a boiler jacketed with a foot of asbestos. She kept calling for more water, so I was not surprised when, while idling, I discovered her fire was leaking badly. After that I never passed a water plug, and the plump vision of my Christmas turkey faded in intense geometrical ratios to my daylight. Bright showed us a white Christmas with a vengeance. The storm was still raging with undiminished fury, and sand-like snow continuing its endless horizontal drive.

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Seventeen would be due in half an hour. There wasn't time to get to the next siding ahead of her, but there was a crossing switch a mile ahead, where I decided to back over, and let her pass. My flag—the head brakeman—had gone back to the caboose; a trip over the top of that train that I would not have taken for a controlling interest in the road. I commenced whistling for the switch as soon as I got to it. Ten minutes after seventeen was due, Davis emerged from the whistling snow, seeking information. His faculties seemed to have become benumbed; I had to go into all the details before he could understand that I wanted to carry the brakeman out ahead to protect us when crossed over.

I carried the man out half a mile, gave him a bucket of fire and told him to burn fence rails or anything he could get hold of to keep himself warm, but under no circumstances desert his post until called in.

I had forgotten that it was hot anywhere, but the experience I went through in that hot firebox, perched over a miniature volcano, surrounded by boiling water, and in spite of the fumes, inhaling smoke and sulphurous fumes would have been invaluable to Davis when seeking locomotive. I drove the dry plugs tightly, they absorbed moisture and swelled until they were the tightest flues in her. "Twas a good job, and well done. The perspiration congealed on my face the instant I stuck it out the firebox door, and before my feet were out, there were icicles on my whiskers."

It was getting late in the afternoon and I was never so hungry in my life before. Harry asked me if there was "any cold tapioca puddin' in the cupboard?" I told him there must be grub in the caboose, or some of them would have come along long ago to see if we had any. He volunteered to go back. It was a risky job, climbing over the tops of those cars in that weather. If anything happened he would be a seaman, with nobody near to help, and a temper-



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ture that meant almost instant death to the partially disabled. I heard him above the noise of the gauge; "couldn't the fireman get down an' open the switch 'bout creakin' a man all the way up from the hind end? Mebbe you think it's fun to wailer 'round in this snow." I told him to cut the engine off and hold 'bout 'rain'; she must be nearly due. I got back from Selden water plug. As we pulled over the switch Harry shouted: "Hey, Davis!"

Davis looked up, squinting comically into the teeth of the storm. Harry threw him a kiss and yelled: "Turkey!" The conductor's reply was inaudible, but we knew what it was—the most common expression in railroad use.

When we got back from the water plug 21 (the mail) was waiting. We followed her, getting good wheeling until she got so far ahead that the snow drifted in behind her. We loaded the tender at Bolton coal platform, piling big lumps that couldn't blow away on top. My watch dropped out of my pocket onto the shovel. I threw it into the tender, and Harry tossed a heavy lump on top of it. After we had found it and stepped back on the engine, he asked looking at the clock: "Is that all 'is, 10:15?"

I looked at my watch; 11:37. We had left the curtain up, while coaling, and the engine clock, less than two feet above the boiler, had frozen up and stopped.

During the next hour we nearly stalled in big drifts twice. This set me to thinking about 'rain'; she must be nearly due. I looked at my watch; 11:37. It hadn't turned a wheel since that lump of coal hit it, and now I had no time on the engine. Seeing me looking at my watch, Harry asked me if it was broken. I told him it was. "That's nothing," said he, "set the record." I tried to grin, but just then the plunger into a cut, at the foot of a slight grade, that was filled twenty feet deep with the beautiful. I had no longer any need to worry about following trains. I was anchored good and solid. I had a full tank of coal; we wouldn't freeze, and there was water enough for a long siege—only for those leaky flues.

Engineers, when snowbound, must keep their engine alive, that trains may proceed immediately the road is opened, otherwise expensive delays will occur from thawing out, watering and firing up dead engines in most inconvenient places. My great problem was how to get water into the boiler. The pumps worked only when the engine ran. The road is opened, otherwise expensive delays will occur from thawing out, watering and firing up dead engines in most inconvenient places. My great problem was how to get water into the boiler. The pumps worked only when the engine ran. The road is opened, otherwise expensive delays will occur from thawing out, watering and firing up dead engines in most inconvenient places. My great problem was how to get water into the boiler. The pumps worked only when the engine ran.

Something had to be done and quickly, for the water was leaking out of her every minute, and I had only two gauges to her when I stopped. We got the spare snow shovel and sunk a shaft through the snow on the left side of her. Then we cleared the snow away from under her and all about the wheels and machinery. I had drafted a natural arch over her by this time, so that it was quite warm down there.

Harry brought down the hammer, some wrenches and the torch and repaired nearly one gauge of water in the boiler. It was time, indeed, to hurry.

It was an awkward place to work, and the smoke from the torch nearly destroyed its usefulness. I took down the slide rods, that I might have but one pair of shovels to turn. I thereby reduced the amount of friction to be overcome by the use of steam, which was water, the article I was interested in economizing.

I pounded my thumb, and cut off a joint of my left forefinger as the last end of the last rod unexpectedly slipped clear. Harry chucked me a shovelful of coal and tied it on with a piece of rag torn from his jumper. We left the rods in the snow, gave the rails and tires a good oiling and hurried up into the cab. There was a flutter of water in the bottom gauge; back so I slipped and jumped her until she threw water out of the stack. The water was spluttering out of four leaky flues in a way that would soon set us to shoving snow into the tank. In spite of my sore finger, my clumsy dressing and dull tools, I made five taper five plugs out of a piece of coal board. Harry covered the fire with the fine coal and snow, and put on the blower to carry off the smoke and gas. I crawled the coal boards in on the banked fire and drew it with my plugs and a hammer.

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On the whole, it has been found that the French ammunition is more reliable than that made in Germany, and there has also been less palm oil, less bribery and corruption in its purchase, shipment and delivery. In the case of one particular lot of German cartridges it was reckoned that the original cost was quadrupled by the time they reached Pretoria, owing to the number of hands through which they passed and the number of officials who had to be unspiced; but when these cartridges were unpacked and distributed among the farmers it was found that they were faulty and dangerous, so that the whole transaction was eminently unsatisfactory from every point of view. These were Mauser cartridges.

The quantity of ammunition stored in the Transvaal is absolutely colossal and would suffice for a ten-year war, even at the present rate of usage.

TAKES A HIGH PLACE Stands Well in the Estimation of the People. Attention is Naturally Excited When Anything is Praised by People When We Know.

A thing that stands high in the estimation of the public, and which is especially recommended by Omaha people, naturally excites attention more than if our own people did not praise the article. Such a thing is going on right here in this city every day, people are praising Morrow's Kid-Ne-Oids because they cure. There is no deception, no humbug, they do positively cure, and we furnish the evidence.

Mr. H. S. Shaler, of 1810 Ohio street, says: "I have suffered from kidney trouble for the past ten years. I had been so badly afflicted lately that I could not do any kind of work. I had a dull heavy pain across the small of my back almost constantly. The pain extended from the region of my kidneys to my shoulders. I was subject to spells of dizziness and urinary disturbances of an alarming nature. I could not sleep at all on account of nervousness. Learning about Morrow's Kid-Ne-Oids I decided to try them. I took them according to directions and was greatly relieved in a very short time. I continued to take them and they have completely cured me of all my former troubles."

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The ammunition is taken away at dead of night on mule wagons to one or other of the forts around Pretoria, and a portion is often sent over to the Johannesburg fort, but not by rail, as the jolting might be dangerous in the case of the carelessly put together explosive. The mule wagons travel the forty-two miles in the night, and unload at the Johannesburg fort on Hospital Hill, in the early morning. An escort of artillery rides with the wagons and reports the due delivery of the ammunition.

In the case of foreign imported ammunition, Lee-Metford, Mauser and heavy gun shells, it comes by German, French or Dutch steamer to Delagoa bay and is there unshipped, stored for a longer or shorter period in the wretched tin shanties on the wharf which do duty for bonded warehouses and then, when all the extraordinary Portuguese formalities are complete, it is forwarded by train by way of Komati Poort to Pretoria, where it is taken again to the fort of night, from the railway station to one of the forts or to the government magazine out on the veldt beyond the race-course. Now and again, as indeed happened just before the present war broke out, the Portuguese officials at Lourenço Marques (Delagoa bay) for some reason not known to themselves refuse to pass the ammunition, and when there is an angry and heated exchange of letters in a queer mixture of Portuguese, Dutch and English, and after a long delay the goods may arrive at their destination or they may not.

In at least one instance an amusing circumstance occurred. A large lot of ammunition, some 1,200 boxes, went astray at the port and could not be found. The port authorities were sure that they had been landed, but the railway officials could not account for them in any way. At last, after the lapse of many months, it turned out that by some unaccountable error the whole lot had been reshipped to Belra and had got through to Bulawayo and was comfortably reposing in the magazines of the Chartered Company of British South Africa. The Boers indignantly claimed their ammunition. Mr. Rhodes' official said: "Very well, come and fetch it; but as we happen to want some of this particular brand ourselves you had better let us pay you for it and say no more on the subject." This actually happened, but it was never found out whether the mistake occurred in purpose or by accident.

came in and interposed the hearty welcome she had already received from the woman folks. He told us the well we fell into was forty feet deep and had been abandoned when he was a boy, because the water "got spoiled somehow." As none but his own folks ever went there and nobody had ever fallen into it before he himself bothered to cover it up. We knew now that the avalanche that enabled us to get out of was not the first that had fallen into it, and we thanked our lucky stars that we didn't start the day before. Mrs. Belknap and Susie soaked out my soiled finger and dried it with some of the scolding alive, foot-made for father when he cut his foot with the ax.

The warmth, light and comfort of the cozy parlor led to meditation, the danger of the party, contrasted so strongly with the bitter gale and the dirty, cheerless cab that we found it impossible to combat the urgent invitation of our kind friends to remain with them.

That night we slept on feathers, between blankets, and as I drowsed off I remember Harry drooping a lot of rapacious twaddle in my ear about sweet Susie Belknap. In the morning the storm had moderated somewhat and I began to worry about the stove. Should anything happen to her in my absence the cold, fishy eye of the master mechanic would fall to discern extenuating circumstances. We each took an package big tank of home-made sausage and sandwiches and left for the food of our lives. Dear, motherly Mrs. Belknap would have loaded up with provisions, but I declined everything but a piece of boiled salt pork, a loaf of bread and a package of coffee and sugar.

I had to speak twice—a little sharply the last time—to Harry, who was hiding Susie good-bye in the kitchen. I thought I heard a suspicious snuff, but I won't swear to that; still, those red-headed fellows—hang him, he came away and forgot the coffee? Mr. Belknap told us a better road than the way we came, so we got back without much trouble. The curtain had caught fire from the furnace door and broken every pane of glass in the cab, rendering it uninhabitable. The clock had thawed out, run seven minutes and frozen up again. But there was both fire and water in her so I didn't much care. I jumped her full again, and though the weather was moderating rapidly, as the cab was untenable we adjourned to the snow hole under her. We



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A thing that stands high in the estimation of the public, and which is especially recommended by Omaha people, naturally excites attention more than if our own people did not praise the article. Such a thing is going on right here in this city every day, people are praising Morrow's Kid-Ne-Oids because they cure. There is no deception, no humbug, they do positively cure, and we furnish the evidence.

Mr. H. S. Shaler, of 1810 Ohio street, says: "I have suffered from kidney trouble for the past ten years. I had been so badly afflicted lately that I could not do any kind of work. I had a dull heavy pain across the small of my back almost constantly. The pain extended from the region of my kidneys to my shoulders. I was subject to spells of dizziness and urinary disturbances of an alarming nature. I could not sleep at all on account of nervousness. Learning about Morrow's Kid-Ne-Oids I decided to try them. I took them according to directions and was greatly relieved in a very short time. I continued to take them and they have completely cured me of all my former troubles."

Morrow's Kid-Ne-Oids are not pills, but Water Tablets and will at fifty cents a box at all druggists and by the Myers-Dillon Drug Co. Mailed on receipt of price. Manufacturers by John Morrow & Co., Chemists, Springfield, Ohio.

I noticed after that, during the winter, Harry had a way of banging out of the gateway as we approached Belknap's, so I made it my business to blow a crossing signal there. And as I peered slightly from under the peak of my cap I would see a grish figure wave a white cloth from the back piazza. Harry was promoted the following spring, and the next Christmas Katie and I and Bob stretched out our toes under the hospitable mahogany of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Mervin.

Yes, as I look back at it now, I think, take it all in all, it was the very merriest Christmas I ever spent, and I know Sue and Harry do.

AMMUNITION FOR THE BOERS. Most in Stock to Last Through Ten-Year War. The ammunition for the Boers, says the London Mail, is of German manufacture. A comparatively small quantity was produced in England, and the majority of the proportion was manufactured at the Transvaal government works near Pretoria. A vast amount of mystery and secrecy surrounded the government powder factory, as it was called, and no one was allowed to visit it, or even to approach within half a mile of the inclosed buildings without an extra special permit. The factory was entirely run by Germans, and, curiously enough, the head thereof was a Mr. Kruger, who was always careful to assure that he was no relation whatsoever to the president. The works were near Dorspoort, about four miles outside of Pretoria, and in the immediate neighborhood of the cement works, where so-called Transvaal Portland cement was badly made. The powder factory is most jealously guarded from intruders, and even the Italians from the dynamite factory not many miles away know nothing of its internal economy. It is thought questionable by many whether any actual manufacture takes place here, or whether, as is the case of the dynamite works ("Maatschappij voor Ontploofbare Stoffen" in the "Taal"), the imported ingredients are just put up in cartridges on the spot, so as to appear to carry out the requirements of the exclusive concession.

The ammunition is taken away at dead of night on mule wagons to one or other of the forts around Pretoria, and a portion is often sent over to the Johannesburg fort, but not by rail, as the jolting might be dangerous in the case of the carelessly put together explosive. The mule wagons travel the forty-two miles in the night, and unload at the Johannesburg fort on Hospital Hill, in the early morning. An escort of artillery rides with the wagons and reports the due delivery of the ammunition.

In the case of foreign imported ammunition, Lee-Metford, Mauser and heavy gun shells, it comes by German, French or Dutch steamer to Delagoa bay and is there unshipped, stored for a longer or shorter period in the wretched tin shanties on the wharf which do duty for bonded warehouses and then, when all the extraordinary Portuguese formalities are complete, it is forwarded by train by way of Komati Poort to Pretoria, where it is taken again to the fort of night, from the railway station to one of the forts or to the government magazine out on the veldt beyond the race-course. Now and again, as indeed happened just before the present war broke out, the Portuguese officials at Lourenço Marques (Delagoa bay) for some reason not known to themselves refuse to pass the ammunition, and when there is an angry and heated exchange of letters in a queer mixture of Portuguese, Dutch and English, and after a long delay the goods may arrive at their destination or they may not.

In at least one instance an amusing circumstance occurred. A large lot of ammunition, some 1,200 boxes, went astray at the port and could not be found. The port authorities were sure that they had been landed, but the railway officials could not account for them in any way. At last, after the lapse of many months, it turned out that by some unaccountable error the whole lot had been reshipped to Belra and had got through to Bulawayo and was comfortably reposing in the magazines of the Chartered Company of British South Africa. The Boers indignantly claimed their ammunition. Mr. Rhodes' official said: "Very well, come and fetch it; but as we happen to want some of this particular brand ourselves you had better let us pay you for it and say no more on the subject." This actually happened, but it was never found out whether the mistake occurred in purpose or by accident.

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W. T. STEAD, Editor of the "English Review of Reviews,"