

The Kid Engineer

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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WHEN the big strike caught us at Zanesville we had 180 engineers and firemen on the payroll. One hundred and seventy-nine of these men walked out. One fireman—just one—stayed with the company; that was Dad Hamilton.

"Yes," growled Dad, combating the protests of the strikers' committee, "I know it. I belong to your lodge. But I'll tell you now—an' I've told you afore—I ain't goin' to strike on the company so long as Neighbor is master mechanic on this division; ain't a goin' to do it, an' you might as well quit. If you jaw here from now till Christmas, I won't change my mind nar a bit."

And they didn't change it. Through the calm and through the storm, and it stormed hard for awhile, Dad Hamilton, whenever we could supply him with an engineer, fired religiously.

No other man in the service could have done it without getting killed, but Dad was old enough to father any man among the strikers. Moreover, he was a giant physically and eccentric enough to move along through the heat of the crisis indifferent to the abuse of the other men. His gray hairs and his tremendous physical strength saved him from personal violence.

Our master mechanic, Neighbor, was another big man, six feet an inch in his stockings, and strong as a drawbar. Between Neighbor and the old fireman there existed some sort of a bond—a liking, an affinity. Dad Hamilton had fired on our division ten years. There was no promotion for Dad; he could never be an engineer, though only Neighbor knew why. But his job of firing on the river division was sure as long as Neighbor signed the payrolls at the roundhouse.

Hence there was no surprise when the superintendent offered him an engine. Just after the strike, that Dad refused to take it.

"I'm a fireman, and Neighbor knows it. I ain't no engineer. I'll make steam for any man you put in the cab with me, but I won't touch a throttle for no man. I laid it down, and I'll never pinch it again—an' no offense t' you, Neighbor, neither."

Thus ended the negotiations with Dad on that subject; threats and entreaties were useless. Then, too, in spite of his professed willingness to throw coal for any man we put on his engine, he was continually rowing about the green runners we gave him. From the standpoint of a railroad man they were a tough assortment; for a fellow may be a good painter, or a handy man with a jack plane, or an expert machinist even and yet a failure as an engine runner.

After we got hold of Foley, Neighbor put him on awhile with Dad, and the grizzled fireman quickly declared that Foley was the only man on the payroll who knew how to move a train.

The little chap proved such a remarkable find that I tried hard to get some of his eastern chums to come out and join him. After a good bit of hustling we did get half a dozen more Reading boys for our new corps of engine men, but the East End officials kept all but one of them on their own divisions. That one we got because nobody on the East End wanted him.

"They've crimped the whole bunch, Foley," said I, answering his inquiries. "There's just one fellow reported here—he came in on 5 this morning. Neighbor's had a little talk with him, but he doesn't think much of him. I guess we're out the transportation on that fellow."

"What's his name?" asked Foley.

"Is he off the Reading?"

"Claims he is; his name is McNeal"—

"McNeal?" echoed Foley, surprised.

"Not Georgie McNeal?"

"I don't know what his first name is. He's nothing but a boy."

"Dark complexioned fellow?"

"Perhaps you'd call him that; sort of soft spoken."

"Georgie McNeal, sure's you're born. If you've got him you've got a bird. He ran opposite me between New York

and Philadelphia on the limited. I want to see him right off. If it's Georgie, you're all right."

Foley's talk went a good way with me any time. When I told Neighbor about it he pricked up his ears. While we were debating in rushed Foley with the kid, as he called him.

As luck would have it, Neighbor put the boy on the 244 with Dad Hamilton, and Dad proceeded at once to make what Foley termed "a great roar."

"What's the matter?" demanded Neighbor roughly when the old fireman complained.

"If you're goin' to pull these trains with boys, I guess it's time for me to quit. I'm gettin' pretty old, anyhow."

"What's the matter?" growled Neighbor, still surlier, knowing full well that if the old fellow had a good reason he would have blurted it out at the start.

"Nothin's the matter, only I'd like my time."

"You won't get it," said Neighbor roughly. "Go back on your run. If McNeal don't behave, report him to me, and he'll get his time."

It was a favorite trick of Neighbor's. Whenever the old fireman got to "buckling" about his engineer the master mechanic threatened to discharge the engineer. That settled it. Dad Hamilton wouldn't for the world be the cause of throwing another man out of a job, no matter how little he liked him.

The old fellow went back to work mollified, but it was evident that he and McNeal didn't half get on together. The boy was not much of a talker. Yet he did his work well, and Neighbor said next to Foley he was the best man we had.

About a week later Foley came into the office one morning very much excited.

"Did you hear about the boy's getting pounded last night—Georgie McNeal? It's a shame the way these fellows act. Three of the strikers piled on him while he was going into the postoffice and thumped the life out of him. The cowardly hounds, to jump on a man's back that way!"

"Foley," said I, "that's the first time they've tacked one of Dad Hamilton's engineers."

"They'd never have done it if they thought there was any danger of Dad's getting after them. They know he doesn't like the boy."

"It's an outrage, but we can't do anything. You know that. Tell McNeal to keep away from the postoffice. We'll get his mail for him."

"I told him that this morning. He's in bed and looks pretty hard, but he won't dodge those fellows. He claims it's a free country," grinned Foley. "But I told him he'd get over that idea if he stuck out this trouble."

It was three days before McNeal was able to report for work, though he received full time just the same. Even then he wasn't fit for duty, but he begged Neighbor for his run until he got it. The strikers were jubilant while the boy was laid up, but just



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what Dad thought no one could find out. I wanted to tell the old growler what I thought of him, but Foley said it wouldn't do any good and might do harm, so I held my peace.

One might have thought that the injustice and brutality of the thing would have roused him, but men who have re-

pressed themselves till they are gray headed don't rise in a hurry to resent a wrong. Dad kept as mute as the sphinx. When McNeal was ready to go out the old fireman had the 244 shunting, but if the pale face of his engineer had any effect on him he kept it to himself.

As they rattled down the line with a long stock train that night neither of them referred to the break in their run. Coming back next night, the same silence hung over the cab. The only words that passed over the boiler head were "strickly business," as Dad would say.

At Oxford they were laid out by a Pullman special. It was 3 o'clock in the morning and raining hard. Under such circumstances an hour seems all night. At last Dad himself broke the unsupportable silence.

"He'd have waited a good bit longer if he had waited for me to talk," said the boy, telling Foley afterward.

"Heard you got licked," growled Dad after tinkering with the fire for the twentieth time.

"I didn't get licked," retorted Georgie; "I got clubbed. I never had a chance to fight."

"These fellows hate to see a boy come out and take a man's job. Can't blame 'em much neither."

"Whose job did I take?" demanded Georgie angrily. "Was any one of those cowards that jumped on me in the dark looking for work on this engine?"

There was nothing to say to that. Dad kept still.

"You talk about men," continued the young fellow. "If I am not more of a man than to slug a fellow from behind, the way they slugged me, I'll get off this engine and stay off. If that's what you call men out here, I don't want to be a man. I'll go back to Pennsylvania."

"Why didn't you stay there?" growled Dad.

"Why didn't you?"

Without attempting to return the shot Dad pulled nervously at the chain.

"If I hadn't been fool enough to go out on a strike, I might have been running there yet," continued Georgie.

"Ought to have kept away from the postoffice," grumbled Dad after a pause.

"I get a letter twice a week that I think more of than I do of this whole road, and I propose to go to the postoffice and get it without asking anybody's permission."

"They'll pound you again."

Georgie looked out into the storm. "Well, why shouldn't they? I've got no friends."

"Got a girl back in Pennsylvania?"

"Yes, I've got a girl there," replied the boy as the rain tore at the cab window. "I've had a girl there a good while. She's gray headed and sixty years old—that's my girl—and if she can write letters to me I can get them out of the postoffice without a guard-ian."

"There she comes," said Dad as the headlight of the Pullman special shone faint ahead through the mist.

"I'm mighty glad of it," said Georgie, looking at his watch. "Give me steam now, Dad, and I'll get you home in time for a nap before breakfast."

A minute later the special shot over the switch, and the young runner, crowding the pistons a bit, started off the siding. When Dad, looking back for the hind end brakeman to lock the switch and swing on, called all clear, Georgie pulled her out another notch, and the long train slowly gathered headway up the slippery track.

As the speed increased the young man and the old relapsed into their usual silence. The 244 was always a free steamer, but Georgie put her through her paces without any apology, and it took lots of coal to square the account.

In a few minutes they were pounding along up through the Narrows. The track there follows the high bench between the bluffs, which sheer up on one side, and the river bed, thirty feet below the grade, on the other.

It is not an inviting stretch at any time with a big string of gondolas behind. But on a wet night it is the last place on the division where an engineer would want a side rod to go wrong, and just there and then Georgie's rod went very wrong indeed.

Halfway between centers the big steel bar on his side, dipping then so fast you couldn't have seen it even in daylight, snapped like a stick of licorice. The hind end ripped up into the cab like the nose of a swordfish, tearing and smashing with appalling force and fury.

Georgie McNeal's giant burst under him as if a stick of giant powder had exploded. He was jammed against the cab roof like a link pin and fell sprawl-

ing, while the monster steel flail thrashed and tore through the cab with every lightning revolution of the great driver from which it swung.

It was a frightful moment. Anything thought or done must be thought and done at once. It was either to stop that train, and quickly, or to pound along until the 244 jumped the track and lit in the river, with thirty cars of coal to cover it.

Instantly—so Dad Hamilton afterward told me—instantly the boy, scrambling to his feet, reached for his throttle—reached for it through a rain of iron blows, and staggered back with his right arm hanging like a broken wing from his shoulder. And back again after it—after the throttle with his left; slipping and creeping carefully this time up the throttle lever until, straining and twisting and dodging, he caught the latch and pushed it tightly home, Dad whistling vigorously the while for brakes.

Relieved of the tremendous head on the cylinder, the old engine calmed down enough to let the two men collect themselves. Rapidly as the brakes could do it, the long train was brought up standing, and Georgie, helped by his fireman, dropped out of the cab, and they set about disconnecting—the engineer with his one arm—the formidable ends of the broken rod.

It was a slow, difficult piece of work to do. In spite of their most active efforts the rain chilled them to the marrow. The train crew gave them as much help as willing hands could, which wasn't much, but by every man doing something they got things fixed, called in their flagmen just before day-break and started home. When the sun rose Georgie, grim and silent, the throttle in his left hand, was urging the old engine along on a dogtrot across the Blackwood flats, and so, limping in on one side, the kid brought his train into the Zanesville yards, with Dad Hamilton unable to make himself helpful enough, unable to show his appreciation of the skill and the grit that the night had disclosed in the kid engineer.

The hostler waiting in the yard sprang into the cab with amazement on his face and was just in time to lift a limp boy out of the old fireman's arms and help Dad get him to the ground, for Georgie had fainted.

When the 244 reached the shops a few minutes later they photographed that cab. It was the worst case of rod smashing we had ever seen, and the West End shops have caught some pretty tough looking cabs in their day.

The boy who stopped the cyclone and saved his train and crew lay stretched on the lounge in my office waiting for the company surgeon. And old Dad Hamilton—crabbed, irascible old Dad Hamilton—few ground that boy exactly like an excited old rooster, first bringing ice and then water and then hot coffee and then fanning him with a time table. It was worth a small smashup to see it.

The one sweep of the rod which caught Georgie's arm had broken it in two places, and he was off duty three months. But it was a novelty to see that boy walk down to the postoffice and hear the strikers step up and ask how his arm was, and to see old Dad Hamilton tag around Zanesville after him was refreshing. The kid engineer had won his spurs.

Buzzy Man Versus Busy Man.

Those who tell you they "always are rushed to death" usually accomplish the least, and largely because they are imaginative. The really busy man, who turns off an immense amount of work with the quiet and precision of a perfect machine, must have the imagination to look ahead a day or a month or a year. At the least, his thought is always a few seconds ahead of his action; his head saves his heels; he is not continually tripping over his own feet. But the buzzy man can never understand the busy man. Having no imagination himself, he saves his own face by saying that the man who never fusses over his work has little to do.

Let us hear no more about imagination being impracticable. It is one of the most practical things in the world. A due proportion of it used with judgment "will for many a blunder free us and foolish notion." The only condition under which it may seem superfluous is that of one who has some monotonous task to perform automatically day after day. Doubtless if one is to be in an automatic job forever the less imagination the better, but if he is ever to get out of it the quicker he cultivates some imagination the sooner will he get out.—Chicago Tribune.

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