THE MOUNTAIN LIMITED.

A Thrilling Tale of Railroading.

BY ERWIN L. COOLIDGE.

CHAPTER VII—*Continued.*

Nor was the poor sufferer on his bed of pain forgotton.

For the first time since the nearly fatal day he was permitted to receive friends at his bedside.

Hal told the lad that it was he who ran the engine of the Mountain Limited, and with tears in his eyes thanked Hero for the noble act that had nearly cost him his life, but which had saved hundreds of others.

Returning to the drawing-rooms, Mr. Wellington found a card awaiting him. It was that of a reporter of the *Daily Earth*.

"We will receive him here," said Mr. Wellington, and the newspaper man was ushered in.

"How is the sick man to-night?" he inquired, after acknowledging the railroad president's welcome.

"Doctor Grosblach reports him out of danger," said Mr. Wellington.

"So we have heard at the office, much to our joy. I have a letter to you, Mr. Wellington," said the reporter. "It is from our proprietors, and will explain the occasion of my visit."

Mr. Wellington took the message and a glad smile crossed his face.

"A capital scheme," he said. "Grace, get me a pen."

"May I know what it is, papa?" asked Maud.

"Yes, dear, everybody can know. The *Daily Earth* in the morning will start a benefit fund for hero Hero, and starts the subscription with a thousand dollars."

"Good!" cried Maud Wellington.

"He deserves it," said Hal Harrod. "Let me have the pen, sir, when you have used it, please."

"How much will you give, papa?" asked Grace, as she handed the pen to her father.

In a bold hand President Wellington wrote three names and a liberal sum annexed to each.

Eastern Central Railroad, $5,000
Wm. Wellington, Pres. C. E. R. R., 1,000
Hal Harrod, engineer Mountain Limited, 200

"You dear papa!" cried both his daughters, and their arms flew around his neck.

"There, my boy," said President Wellington, pushing the paper and pen towards our hero. "Do you now think I meant it when I said that the Eastern Central was indebted to Hero Raymond?"

"I am not wealthy," said Hal, as he took the paper, "but I will put $100 down on my own account. Hello, what's this? I'm off the iron. You've got me down for $200," and his face flushed scarlet.

"Yes. That's on my account," said President Wellington. "I pay that." And he laughed merrily.

"Am I not in it at all?" asked Hal, instantly comprehending the other's words. "Yes, I'll work my hundred in somehow," and with a dash of the pen he wrote:

Joe Grace, fireman Mountain Limited, $100

"Well done, my boy!" was President Wellington's comment. Then to the reporter of the *Daily Earth*, who was rising to take his departure, he said:

"Say to your people that they have taken hold of a good cause, and they have my thanks for what they are doing. They can talk against them in certain quarters, but I know that there are true gentlemen and real heroes in the newspaper profession. Good-night, sir."

"How rapidly the evening seems to have gone, my boy," said President Wellington to our hero, as the chimes of the clock struck eleven.

"Yes, it has been such a pleasant evening to me," replied Hal, "that I have not noted the passing of time."

"Yes," said Maud Wellington, "and all the time, ever since that reporter gentleman went away, I have kept looking at that clock, wondering if I had the courage to ask a favor of you, Mr. Harrod, before you would get away from here."

"A favor? Ask me a favor? Would you like me to spoil another pair of gloves for you?"

"No, sir, not that," she replied, with a sweet smile. "I told papa I wanted to ride to Mountain Junction and back with you in the engine. He said I must ask you. Can I?"

Hal Harrod stared at the girl in astonishment.

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

"Yes, I do, indeed I do," was the timid reply.

"Then I certainly shall say 'yes' to you, but you must promise me this. That you will not ask me to stop the engine between Athens and Lincoln to let you off into a parlor car," and he smiled pleasantly.

"Thank you," cried the girl in delight. "Can I go to-morrow?"

"Certainly; any day you elect."

"Hear that, papa," she said, "and you told me he would say 'no.'"

"I thought he would," answered Mr. Wellington. "But, Hal, why did you say she must promise not to ask you to stop between Athens and Lincoln to let her off?"

Hal smiled again, showing a set of pearly teeth.

"Well, you see, sir," he said, purposely stammering, "we are parallel to the Athens & Northern, and the Northern Flyer, you know—"

"Oh, you horrid thing," cried Maud, in mock anger, "you do not wish them to see a lady leave your cab, for fear of your reputation, I suppose."

"No," said Hal, pleasantly, "not that. What I was to say was that as yet the Northern Flyer has not beaten me into Lincoln, and I do not wish to give them a chance to."

Mr. Wellington laughed heartily, and the girls both joined him.

"Then it is settled," said Mr. Wellington, "that Maud runs the Mountain Limited to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Hal, as he bowed his parting respects, "but the young lady must not wear silks. Good-night."

The Boy Runner was a very happy young man that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WIRES DOWN FROM LYONS."

Maud Wellington, the daughter of the president of the Eastern Central Railroad, was a brave girl.

She realized the danger to be encountered in the cab of the locomotive of the Mountain Limited, running at its furious speed of a mile a minute.

But the girl had an unconquerable desire to make the trip, and had repeatedly asked her father to request the privilege from the Boy Runner.

President Wellington had seriously demurred and objected to the girl's wish.

Maud had persisted, and finally the doting parent had consented, provided she asked Hal Harrod herself.

This she had done, and received the young engineer's permission to occupy a seat in the cab.

It was just five minutes of nine the next morning when, accompanied by her father and sister, the young maiden, dressed in a jaunty and becoming costume, her curls just peeping from beneath a sailor cap, appeared at the footboard of *Old Big-wheel* and bade Hal Harrod a cheery "good-morning."

Greetings were exchanged, Mr. Wellington and Grace kissed her fondly, and then the Boy Runner assigned her to Joe Grace's seat on the left side of the cab.

"You must sit firmly as we go around the curves," he said, "or Joe," who had been formally presented to the young lady, "will be liable to shovel you from the floor into the fire box. Any thing he finds under foot goes for fuel," and the Boy Runner smiled.

"Be careful of her, Hal," admonished Mr. Wellington. "Grace and I will be here to welcome you to-night."

"We will see you as the clock strikes seven," responded our hero.

"All aboard!"

And they were off.

The powerful driving wheels revolved as the steam plunged the connecting rods from the cylinders, and the girl, with eager eyes sparkling with interest, watched the Boy Runner's every move.

Out across the network of switches and frogs, over the drawbridges and past Circuit Junction, and the Mountain Limited was fairly under way.

It was a glorious autumn day, and the invigorating air blew through the pretty curls of the maiden, and tinted her cheeks with a beautiful glow of crimson.

She did not speak a word.

Hal Harrod and Joe Grace were alike silent.

Not twenty yards distant the Northern Flyer boomed along at the side of the Mountain Limited.

She remembered Hal Harrod's words of the preceding evening, and wondered if the Boy Runner, whose face was perfectly impassive, his eyes straight ahead and his hand on the lever, was aware of the closeness of the rival train.

She saw a white stone with the number 15 on it.

Then she saw the Boy Runner glance at her, then at the Northern Flyer.

His left hand turned a little screw and he drew the throttle a bit toward him.

Joe Grace threw open the door of the fire box and a fierce heat caused the girl to cover her face with her hands.

She heard the quick rattling of a shove and then the heat was shut off

She felt the locomotive give a sort of start and saw the Northern Flyer drop steadily to the rear.

Ten feet, twenty, fifty, and then more and more grew the distance between them.

She could see the fireman in the rival engine shovelling coal, and big clouds of dense smoke poured from the smokestack of the straining locomotive.

The girl leaned from the window, and as Hal Harrod's face flushed with pride, she waved a bit of white linen at the distanced rival.

Lincoln was reached.

The train came to a full stop.

The Northern Flyer was far in the rear, fairly beaten.

"Well, Miss Wellington," asked Hal as he waited for Frank Maynard's signal, "what do you think of railroading?"

"Oh, this is perfectly lovely. How splendidly we ran away from that other train! It was just glorious!"

"This is the best part of the run," said Hal. "From here to Point and to Dayona the road is rougher and there are some sharp curves. You must excuse me if I do not converse with you. I must not forget that there is a train-load of passengers behind us. And remember what I said about keeping firmly on the seat"

Maud Wellington appreciated the meaning of the speaker's words, and felt her already great respect for our hero increase to something like admiration.

"I'll not forget," she said.

Once more the train moved.

Point and Dayona were reached and the regular stops made.

"Do you still enjoy the ride?" asked Hal of his fair passenger.

"Yes, better and better as I get more accustomed to the plunging of the engine, she replied. "But it is wonderful how quickly we come to an object. We see it ahead, it is gone behind instantly. I can't understand how you can stop the train quick enough to avoid an accident when you see an obstruction on the track ahead of you."

"It's done by prompt action," was Hal's quick response. "But we have little show if we are rounding a curve."

"If you should lose your presence of mind, you would surely be lost."

"Yes," said Hal, "but we remember that it is others who are lost, and never get rattled. I have been scared sometimes, though, I'll admit that. I was scared the night poor Hero saved us."

"All aboard!"

"Lyons next," said Hal, to the young lady, as he started the wheels to moving

Maud Wellington thought deeply over his words as the Mountain Limited thundered over the iron toward the great factory city.

She fastened her large eyes on the handsome face of the Boy Runner and watched him at his work.

How noble he looked!

Calm and resolute he now stood on the footboard, grasping firmly, ready for instant action, the lever that controlled the power that forced *Old Big wheel* over the rails.

Around the curves that caused the train to bend and sway like the sinewy motion of a snake they flashed.

Hal Harrod's keen eye was fixed ahead

Joe Grace piled in the fuel.

Maud Wellington was in dangerous company.

The Boy Runner did not belong to her walks of society.

"Lyons!" said Hal, as the Mountain Limited stopped again. "Now what do you think of it? Are you ready to go back to a parlor car?"

Maud Wellington laughed a merry, happy laugh.

"I never enjoyed a ride so much in my life," she said. "I shall finish this trip and then be anxious for the time to come for the return."

"You are enthusiastic," said Hal. "I am glad you do enjoy it, as the best part of the ride is from here to Mountain Junction. We enter the mountain country now and the road, with Mountain River in the gorges on our left and the high peaks on our right, is unsurpassed for scenery."

"Then you have an eye for the beautiful in nature?" Maud asked.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "I can appreciate all things good and beautiful."

Once more came Frank Maynarn's interruption to their conversation, and the run continued.

Maud Wellington found the scenery through which they now passed wonderfully beautiful.

Hal Harrod's description had been very moderate.

The glorions hues of autumn had colored the foliage, and the mountains bore all the colors of the rainbow.

She marvelled at the strange difference between the view as she now had it from that she had always obtained from the passenger coaches.

She regretted that darkness would cover all this beauty on the return trip.

Swinging around a curve she suddenly beheld the towers, the chimneys, and then the buildings of a city.

They were bounding through a network of railroad tracks.

At her side again appeared the Northern Flyer.

The engineer from his window waved his hand to Hal's fair passenger.

They had reached Mountain Junction.

Hal Harrod breathed a sigh of relief as he assisted the girl to the platform of the depot.

"You will join me soon?" she asked.

"Here?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes. Can you not pass the day with me?" she inquired, anxiously.

Hal Harrod had not thought of such a thing.

"Yes—if—you—desire it," he stammered. "That, is after I see that *Old Big-wheel* is taken care of."

"I do desire it," she said earnestly. "I will now telegraph to papa and then expect you here."

That was a red-letter day to the Boy Runner.

We will not dwell on the events of the day, but pass over eight hours' time, with the reader's permsssion.

Maud Wellington once more sat in the cab of *Old Big-wheel*

Joe Grace Willingly resigned his seat to her.

On the bulletin at the telegrapher's window at the Union Station the Mountain Limited was reported on time.

The Northern Flyer had already gone.

Frank Maynard stood at the step of the engine chatting with Hal and the fair passenger as they waited the coming of the Limited.

"Frank," said Hal, "when you step to the telegraph window again will you please wire 'all well,' to President Wellington?"

"Yes, now," said the old conductor, and he left them abruptly.

A minute later he returned, and in a troubled voice whispered to the Boy Runner.

"*Wires down from Lyons.*"

"That's bad," said Hal.

Toot—oo——ooo——.

The Mountain Limited was coming through the upper yard of the Mountain River Railroad.

Old Big-wheel was backed on.

Darkness had fallen.

In Hal Harrod's ears Frank Maynard's words rang ominously.

"*Wires down from Lyons.*"

In itself that meant little to the ordinary individual.

To Hal Harrod, the Boy Runner, with ten carloads of human beings behind him, and hurling them at a rate of a mile a minute over two slender iron threads it meant a great deal.

It meant that telegraph communication in case of danger was cut off.

It was a blind rush to——

With the wires working, the smallest station on the Eastern Central Railroad held the means to warn the Mountain Limited within ten minutes after danger appeared on its track.

Without them there might be a wreck at the first curve he reached.

"I must watch for the red lights to-night!" muttered Hal Harrod as he threw open the throttle of *Old Big-wheel* and glanced anxiously at the beautiful girl in whose radiant loveliness he had basked all that happy day.

He wished that she was safe in her father's mansion at Athens

Maud Wellington knew nothing of the thoughts that filled the Boy Runner's mind with anxiety.

Nor did she hear Hal Harrod whisper to Joe Grace after they left Lyons that night:

"Joe, keep your eyes peeled! The wires are down."

Joe Grace never betrayed anything.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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