

THE MOUNTAIN LIMITED.

A Thrilling Tale of Railroading.

BY ERWIN L. COOLIDGE.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

The business the British American Railroad and the Great Western Railroad sent over the tracks to Athens was enormous. It was time something was done to break the powerful monopoly of the three little roads who held control of all traffic from Summit to Athens.

A company was organized with great capital, and a charter and right of way obtained for the Athens & Northern railroad.

The construction at once begun. The Eastern Central had practical control of the country and business east of the great sheet of water known as Big Lake, and it was to the west of this that the new company devoted its attention.

Minnetta and Pilot were large inland towns which had long been crying for railroad facilities and paralleling the Eastern Central tracks to Lincoln, 18 miles the Athens & Northern skirted Big Lake on the west shore, passing through Pilot and Minnetta and thence to Mountain Junction.

Here for a time they rested. By contract with the British American Railroad, whose managers had a feeling that there had always been a discrimination against them in favor of the Great Western Railroad, their outlet was made over the tracks of the Athens & Northern Railroad from Mountain Junction.

Then between the Eastern Central and the Athens & Northern Railroad there grew a bitter feeling of rivalry.

Fast trains between Mountain Junction and Athens superseded the slow, sleepy trains of earlier days.

By a strange circumstance the distance between the two terminals of each railroad was exactly the same, sixty-six miles.

The Eastern Central express made four stops and the Athens & Northern three.

The trains of the rival roads left Mountain Junction at the same time and were scheduled for arrival at Lincoln at the same time and then their tracks were side by side to Athens.

Day after day the Athens & Northern trains distanced the Eastern Central and soon commanded nearly all of the business from Lincoln.

Northern business also began to gradually turn from the Eastern Central toward its rival.

To counteract this, the Eastern Central began and then rushed the construction of a short line from Lyons to Lincoln via Lakeport and the six miles saved in distance soon placed the Athens & Northern in the rear.

There was joy in the camp of the Eastern Central magnates.

But not to be outdone the Athens & Northern sent emissaries to Col. James Wilson Newburn and made overtures to buy out his 24-mile connection to North Falls.

He snapped his fingers in derision. He was happy as he was.

Would he put on a fast train from North Falls to Mountain Junction in place of the slow accommodation trains now running?

Emphatically no. The Eastern Central had been refused. And so was the Athens & Northern.

The Athens & Northern got out their Italian laborers and their construction train and before the grumpy old colonel realized the fact they had a new road built to North Falls by way of Graybrook, a very prosperous slate town.

But it was thirteen miles further from Mountain Junction to North Falls by the new road and so Col. James Wilson Newburn kept in his old ruts.

The Athens & Northern, however, by running express from North Falls where they took their British American trains now, which was a heavy loss of business to the Mountain River Railroad, gained considerably and before the Eastern Central had awakened fully to the fact, had their trains in ahead again and were getting new business daily.

It was good business management on the part of the Athens & Northern people.

But the rivalry grew hotter and hotter. Forty-three miles north in the mountains a little mining town cried for a railroad and fearing that the Athens & Northern Railroad would get in ahead of them the Eastern Central constructed a branch line from Mountain Junction to Quarryville.

They hammered away at the old colonel who sat serenely in his office at The Springs, but they couldn't get a train over the Mountain River Railroad from North Falls in a minute less than an hour.

And the Athens & Northern were in clover.

A call had arisen for a fancy train from Athens to the west to accommodate the mountain and through western traffic and the Eastern Central in conjunction with the North Falls & Summit Railway and the Grand Western railroad put on what

at once became known as the Mountain Limited.

It was the fastest train according to schedule that ran in the eastern states.

Leaving Athens at nine o'clock every morning it went north via the Dayona branch to Mountain Junction stopping at Lincoln, Point, Dayona and Lyons.

This run of 66 miles was scheduled for 90 minutes, including stops.

The return trip was made via Lakeport short line with a stop at Lyons only.

Seventy-five minutes was the time scheduled for this 60 mile run.

It was a fast train as far as Mountain Junction but then was encountered Col. James Wilson Newburn's accommodation time on the Mountain River Railroad.

From North Falls to the west the train again became a hummer.

The Athens & Northern people couldn't stand this and they at once stirred up their British American allies and in a month after the Mountain Limited went on the Northern Flyer kept it at an even pace.

The time of the Mountain Limited from Mountain Junction on the inward trip was shortened as much as possible and the schedule read a mile a minute, including the stop at Lyons.

The Athens & Northern kept pace again by rushing their train from North Falls to Mountain Junction enough to make up the difference.

The Eastern Central threatened to build a line across country from Quarryville to Summit if Col. James did not run faster time but he wouldn't weaken even a little bit.

But now that they had their train on lightning time the Eastern Central found that they were unable to make the speed they advertised and day after day their train came in late and the Athens & Northern on time.

Engine and engineer followed one another in succession, as the reader already knows, but not one had yet been found who could bring in the Mountain Limited on time.

This was the state of affairs when Hal Harrod, the Boy Runner, opened the throttle of the *Hesperus* with the Mountain Limited behind him.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOUNTAIN LIMITED ON TIME.

Hal Harrod with a steady motion drew back the throttle of the *Hesperus* and as the steam passed into the cylinders the great wheels began to revolve and the long line of coaches comprising the Mountain Limited began to move.

The locomotive wheezed and snorted but as the great pressure of steam made its power felt a momentum was obtained that rapidly increased.

Out through the innumerable switches and tracks of the railroad yard the train rapidly whirled on its way, leaving the great train shed of the depot far behind. The *Hesperus* did her duty well.

From the round-house and from the cabs of a number of engines standing about the yard brother engineers waved Hal a salute as he passed them.

A smile of satisfaction passed over the Boy Runner's face as he cast a quick glance backward and saw the long line of Pullman's, mail and baggage cars following him.

The Mountain Limited was indeed an important train.

Joe Grace had not spoken a word since taking his position in the cab, but busied himself studiously with his duties, and piled the fuel into the fire box as if his life depended on it.

Out across the drawbridges, watching the signals and targets as he held his hand firmly on the throttle, the Boy Runner saw the train gain increased speed with a kindling eye.

He had some doubts as to the power of the *Hesperus*, but he had on the preceding evening with the Mountain Junction local express, given her a severe test after leaving Lincoln, and so he kept his courage good.

The Mountain Limited was bowling along at a good speed when Circuit Junction, four miles out, was passed, and at Minerva Junction, two miles further on, all was well.

It was now a clear track and straight as a die to Lincoln.

At 9:26 the Limited drew into the station at that city, and a crowd of passengers immediately bustled about.

Half a minute later, the Northern Flyer of the Athens & Northern Railroad puffing into the rival station, not a rod distant.

In fact, a high picket fence alone separated the tracks of both roads from Lincoln to the yards at Athens.

Point was the next city and the nine miles were run on schedule time in twelve minutes.

The *Hesperus* was doing handsomely. From Point to Dayona Joe Grace was

kept busy at the fire box, and the eleven mile run was covered in fourteen minutes.

Lyons was thirteen miles further on and a bad grade to climb.

It made the *Hesperus* groan a little as she was hustled over those thirteen miles in sixteen minutes, but she pulled into Lyons on time.

While the baggage was being handled and passengers were getting off and on the train, Lon Woods from the special car hurried to the cab and found the Boy Runner with an oil can in hand.

"How is it, Hal?" he asked.

"O K!" was the reply.

"Will she stand it?"

"Yes. She's getting warmed up."

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it. There isn't another man on the road could make her start this train, even."

The Boy Runner smiled.

"All aboard!"

Frank Maynard gave the signal. The bell rang.

The *Hesperus* puffed and snorted and again the train moved.

Mountain Junction, fifteen miles further up into the hills, and twenty minutes left to do it in.

Stops had used up three minutes.

Click, click went the wheels along the iron, little villages flashed by, and Mountain Junction came in sight.

The hands of the big clock stood at 10:30 as the *Hesperus* came to a standstill at the grand union station.

Hal felt just pride in the result of his first effort, but could the return of sixty miles be made in sixty minutes?

The *Hesperus* had groaned under the strain of 66 miles in 90 minutes.

What would she do on the way back to Athens?

This was no time to stop and ponder. The Mountain River Railroad engine was waiting for the train and Hal Harrod quickly had the *Hesperus* out of the way.

As he ran her back to the roundhouse the Northern Flyer came booming into the station.

At Lincoln they had been neck and neck, so to speak.

Running the *Hesperus* into her stall in the roundhouse, Hal was glad to take a few moments rest.

It had been a severe strain on him, that fast run.

Through the open door he saw that President Wellington's special car was being side-tracked by a shifter.

"I suppose that car will go back with me to-night," was Hal's thought.

And he was right. He had just washed the dirt and grease from his hands and face when a messenger came to him and informed him that he was wanted at the special car.

Ten minutes later he stood in the presence of the full board of officers of the Eastern Central Railroad.

He felt somewhat uneasy at the thought but to himself he said:

"Brace up, Hal, you are as safe here as you are in the cab at a mile a minute."

And he was, as he immediately discovered.

A pleasant word from President Wellington put him at his ease.

For half an hour he was in the special car listening to suggestions by Lon Woods and the others and answering questions.

Then he once more returned to the roundhouse where Joe Grace had put things trim and tidy about the engine.

When Hal had left them President Wellington turned to Lon Woods and said:

"Do you know, Mr. Woods, I rather like that boy?"

"I am glad you do," was the master mechanic's reply. "He is worthy of anybody's admiration."

"I think so," said Mr. Wellington, slowly, "but it looks to me like a mighty risky thing to place such a youth in the cab of an engine with so many human lives behind him."

"It is, of course," said General Manager Edwards, "but I can't see as it's any more dangerous than it would be if he were ten or twenty years older."

"No," interposed Lon Woods, "that boy knows his duty. He appreciates all that is imposed on him. His youth is in his favor. I will predict that the time is coming when our railroads will be glad to get engineers of his age. They are young, strong, keen-eyed, quick and active, and I really believe that there is less danger of finding a careless engineer among young men than there is among older."

"I see your point, Mr. Woods, and I agree that you are nearly correct," said President Wellington. "But what I was about to say is that I think we have struck the right man at last. That boy seems to me to be perfectly fearless and honest, at least he looks so to my eyes, and he can be depended on."

"You are right," said Lon Woods.

"Now I have my suspicion that sometimes our engineers have neglected our interests because they have been afraid to run our Limited train on the night trip at the required speed."

"The time card calls for the fastest time in the country," was Lon Wood's reply, "and I must admit that I shouldn't care to run the engine, and I am a man of considerable experience, too."

"It's the result of bitter railroad rivalry," said President Wellington.

"Yes, and may result one of these days in the biggest railroad wreck that has ever been known," said Lon Woods.

"Oh, I think not," was General Man-

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eger Edward's quick retort. "We use every precaution for our passengers' safety. A clear track is ordered for at least half an hour ahead of the Mountain Limited and danger from collision is well-nigh impossible."

"I don't think an accident probable, but still one is possible. An open switch, a broken wheel or a broken rail, an open draw or a dozen other causes may one of these evenings send the Mountain Limited to Kingdom Come flying," said Woods, "and if the accident does come I tell you there will be a frightful loss of life."

"You are right, Woods," said General Manager Edwards, "but it is not a pleasant way you have of telling us about the matter. We don't want to think we are courting a bad accident."

"No, I don't intend my words to mean exactly that," said the master mechanic with a grim smile, "I am merely excusing to President Wellington the men who have perhaps been afraid of the run on the Limited, as he remarks."

"I understand."

"Do you think our new boy, or rather man, will be afraid of his work?" asked the President of the road.

"Not he!" was Lon Woods' reply, "and he is just the lad to reduce the possibility of accident to the very minimum. I could not but appreciate the way he looked his engine over before starting on the up trip this morning. He didn't neglect a single spot in her entire make-up."

"Yes, and there is something queer about that engine of his," said General Manager Edwards. "I think it's less than a month since Woods reported to me that she was dead as a rat, and now she is on the Limited."

"Yes," said Lon Woods, "it is so. After we laid Ed. Barnes off the Limited he was put on a Lakeport local and given *Hesperus*. He worked her about a week and had constant trouble with her. Sometimes she would stop short on him without the least warning. Day after day she went to and from the shop, all to no purpose. It was no use and we agreed that her days of usefulness were done. We hauled her into the dead room and I gave orders to have her knocked to pieces. On the very next day, however, Engine 22 broke down and her engineer, none other this same Boy Runner, came to me for a new machine. He was then, as you all know, running the Mountain Junction local express. There was not a single spare engine for him and I was in a quandary."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Forest fires started near Pubnico N. S. last Wednesday morning and are now burning fiercely, and if not checked soon may have serious results. Considerable damage has been done to the ties of the Coast railway and unless the flames are subdued it will prove even more disastrous to the road.

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