

IN A GUARD'S VAN : A CHRISTMAS SKETCH.



THOSE who deem that railways have nothing of romance about them cannot have had much experience of the work of a guard thereon, nor can they have any idea of the suggestiveness of the contents of a guard's van in and just before *the* holiday week of the year. That vehicle

is usually varied in its contents, but before Christmas the variety becomes bewildering. In ordinary weeks heavy articles of luggage alternate with the parcels of daily newspapers, and the occasional hamper of the Parcels Post is flanked by a couple of hounds; an unwieldy piece of machinery, sent so hurriedly, points to breakage of part of locomotive or engine; and the huge milk-cans perform their daily journey in the van. But as Christmas draws near the "parcel traffic" develops alarming proportions: widens in its area, increases in its kind; and every station, from the huge metropolitan terminus to the smallest station on the little valley-branch, contributes to and receives from the overflowing contents of that then popular portion of the train. There are parcels proper, of all shapes and sizes; there are evergreens, plants; there are ducks and geese, alive and dead; hares and rabbits obtrude their presence; and crates, Hampers, jars, and baskets crowd the van. It is, indeed, a veritable postman's delivery bag—the parcels becoming the letters, and the stations the houses.

Starting from the junction, there is a varied load to begin the journey, and the guard has a task of no little difficulty in the arrangement of these "parcels" for readily shooting out at the respective stations. A huge tree for some Christmas gathering fills one corner of the van, and obtrudes its boughs into the high seat whence the guard dominates the brake; Hampers of evident mistletoe are tightly packed in another corner, and a few hares repose in dead rest thereon. A scent of apples indicates the contents of a basket; another parcel has its cover-corner torn, and there peeps out the suggestive Christmas cake that tells of a present from provident mother to distant daughter. And then the eye loses itself in a mass of countless parcels, Hampers, and packages, as varied in contents as in colour, and in dimensions as in destination, but all indicating clearly the kindly thought and the observance of a custom that grows, and that has greatest honour in the observance. The toy for a child will not survive the holiday parties, but the pleasure is an enduring memory that passes not away.

As the brake checks the speed, and the train ultimately stops, the guard has opened the van doors, and has ready the many parcels for a small suburban

station, the two or three neck-labelled turkeys that he had ranged near the door, and then he raises the wicker box of the Parcels Post and shoves it quickly on the trolley. And thus, from station to station, leaving and receiving, the guard's van does its work. It is a Christmas carrier, for the ordinary work that it does is overshadowed by that vaster traffic which the guard looks on with an amusement that lightens the labour, and which the porters at the stations regard with undisguised glee. It is a pleasant sight, too: the pictures of the stations, with their platforms banked with snow, eaves snow-tinted, and the plants snow-sprinkled: with unaccustomed life about even the smallest, the passengers muffled from the cold, the busy porters, the panting engine, and the country over which a slight snowfall spreads a thin mantle, marked and scored by hedges, roads with the dark ruts of many wheels. The air is keen, purer, more invigorating; passengers have put off some of the work-a-day trouble; and the mission of the guard's van is to aid in that evanescent emancipation.

So, on its frequent journey the guard's van brings with it the savour of kindly remembrance. It serves alike the rich and the poor; it brings to the one the "polar marvels and a feast of wonders from the west and east," that are to enrich and decorate the magnificent fir that a distant plantation has given; and it will also add to the limited meal—even in the



SOMETHING FOR THE OLD FOLKS.



AT A COUNTRY STATION.

holiday times—of the poor, by the quaintly wrapped little package that is the contribution of son or daughter to the old home. There are indications of varied positions of recipients in the carriage that waits, in the little spring-cart that is in the station-yard,

and in the more homely group still that from the platform watch the parcels thrown from the van. It is in such circumstances that our railways become romantic, and that the guard's van does picturesque service.

WHAT TO WEAR IN THE NEW YEAR.

CHIT-CHAT ON DRESS: FROM OUR LONDON AND PARIS CORRESPONDENTS.

I.—FROM OUR LONDON CORRESPONDENT.



BONNETS, small as they are, are really to cover the head in 1890, and it would be better if they more often replaced the hats which are the general wear in town and country, and are adopted by most women. For matrons over forty, they need to be chosen with more care than is always bestowed on them, consequently their wearers in unsuitable hats look ten years

older than their actual age, which is not by any means their desire. Strings carried beneath the chin, as in our model in the initial letter, soften the outline of the face and are really more juvenile-looking than hats. This particular model is made in terra-cotta velvet,

the front overshadowed with gold lace, which, like so many laces of all kinds, is in vandykes. Above the face there are a few upstanding bows, and that is all the trimming. The shape is arranged for wearing with the hair dressed low down, which is without doubt the style of the immediate future; and the backs of dresses and collars will once more fare badly. Still it is not at all unbecoming to most English faces. This class of bonnet is particularly adapted for making up in materials to match dresses; and many gowns trimmed with silk embroidery have the back of the crown entirely composed of this work; the front of the bonnet only is made of the plainer fabric, set off by any trimming desired. Black wings are still much to the fore. They show to advantage with the fashionable terracotta tones which are certainly dominant this winter.

Women are often shrewd, clever, practical, and persevering, and yet they do not always bring common sense to bear on fashions, or else I think the open-crowned hats would not have found favour as