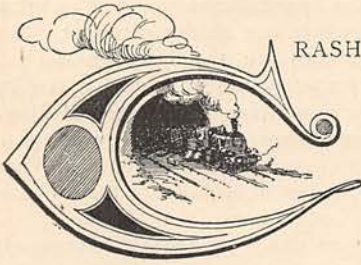


## PEOPLE WHO FACE DEATH: RAILWAY MEN.

BY HENRY FRITH.



RASH! A breaking of glass in our faces. The wind rushes in through the hole in the "window" of the weather-board. In surprise, not unmingled with

consternation, I turn to the engine-driver beside me, and ask what it means.

"One o' them young scamps throwin' brick-bats. Lucky it didn't hit one of us; it might a' been our death. 'Twas a tidy lump!"

Might have caused a death, indeed! The blow might have struck the driver insensible; he would in all probability have fallen upon the permanent way, and fatal injuries would have resulted.

Of all men who face death in this world of ours, the Railway Man is perhaps the most generally in peril. He is daily at work in all weathers, and runs risks which no amount of foresight on his part can minimise. He is the victim of accidents caused by circumstances over which he has no control; and of all railway men, engine-men run the greatest risks on such conditions. Let us look at these men. Come up with me upon the well-swept and water-sprinkled foot-plate (or platform) of the locomotive, and look about you.

There is nothing to suggest danger or death here, surely! A bright array of handles, gauge-glasses, steam-gauge, and many other fixtures, such as steam whistles and safety-valves, outside the protecting weather screen, or the "cab." Facing death in this warm and cosy shelter, with everything at hand! Well, you cannot understand it! Can you not?

Take an instance. We start in excellent trim, as we did the other day from Aylesbury. The train is running pretty fast: a sudden explosion is heard—not an alarming one. The train rapidly pulls up. The guard alights, passengers put their heads out of the windows. Something is burning in the "six-foot";\* and when the people inquire what is the matter, they are informed that what they see burning is the body of the engine-driver, who has been blown off backwards. The gauge-glass of the boiler had burst and scalded him; his clothes had somehow caught fire, and he was even then face to face with death, in a moment, unprepared! The fireman escaped injury and was able to stop the

\* The space between the up and down lines of metals.

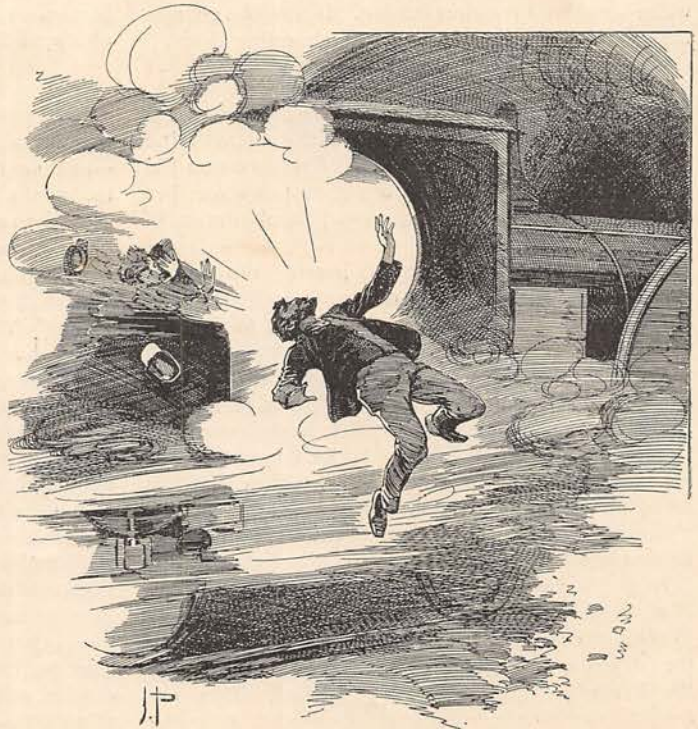
train. But if he also had been injured! Picture the awful consequences! Can you understand danger now?

But we are not going to think of accidents. We are upon the engine now, running at a regular pace, keeping a bright look-out. And here we notice how all the attention of our engine-men is directed to their business. Engine-men don't chatter to each other on duty. They have too much to do in watching the signals, the steam-pressure, the gauges, and the fire. All is well; the line is apparently clear in the darkness; but yet death is lurking for them just ahead—unseen, unsuspected.

The fireman is, perhaps, humming a tune as he brushes the dust from the foot-plate. The driver, with his hand upon the regulator, listens, standing sideways, his head turned slightly, so that he can see out of the round glass in front. Suddenly the locomotive lurches, the driver is thrown upon his fireman, and both off the engine as it rolls down the embankment, followed by two trucks!

A piece of timber had fallen from the preceding "goods" train, and had shot the engine off the road. That was "ail"!

Now, what like are these men who thus—and in many other ways—face death almost daily? Who are these heroes of the foot-plate who receive no



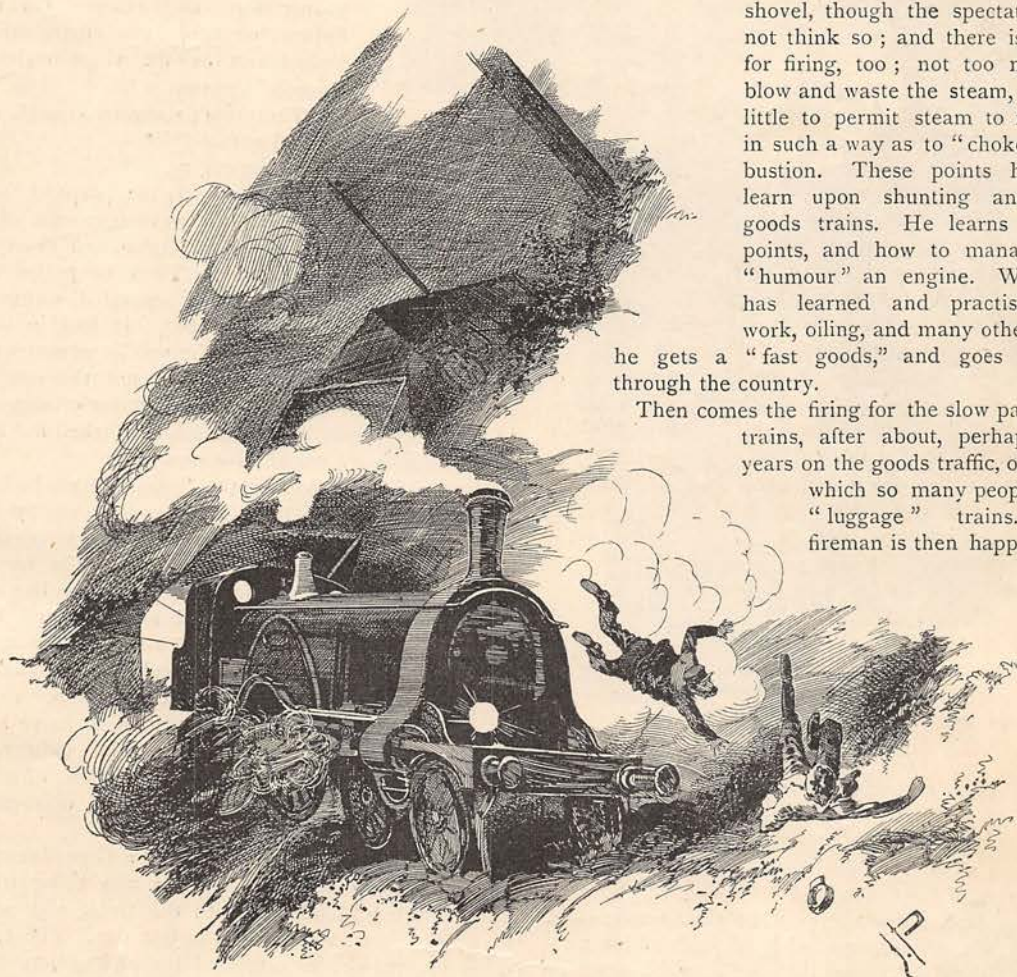
"THE GAUGE-GLASS OF THE BOILER HAD BURST."

Victoria Cross for Valour, and who are seldom even thanked for preserving hundreds of lives in the course of every year. "Oh yes, there is no danger. We came along all right all the way." But, my innocent friend, you did not know that at one portion of your trip only three inches extended between you and certain destruction! The footboard of a badly-shunted carriage had been "shaved" by the engine, and a strip of wood cut away so that a collision was avoided.

But if he survive accident, he begins to "clean"; and there are methods in that operation. In these days he also faces death, for locomotives will collide in the "stables"; and between the buffers of two such engines the young cleaner is sometimes crushed. Indeed, we believe more deaths are caused in this way to lads than in any other.

But our cleaner becomes a fireman, and is taught "firing." There is a proper way to put on coal, and a correct method of handling a shovel, though the spectator does not think so; and there is a time for firing, too; not too much to blow and waste the steam, nor too little to permit steam to fail, nor in such a way as to "choke" combustion. These points he must learn upon shunting and slow goods trains. He learns signals, points, and how to manage and "humour" an engine. When he has learned and practised this work, oiling, and many other tasks, he gets a "fast goods," and goes rushing through the country.

Then comes the firing for the slow passenger trains, after about, perhaps, four years on the goods traffic, on trains which so many people term "luggage" trains. The fireman is then happier: he



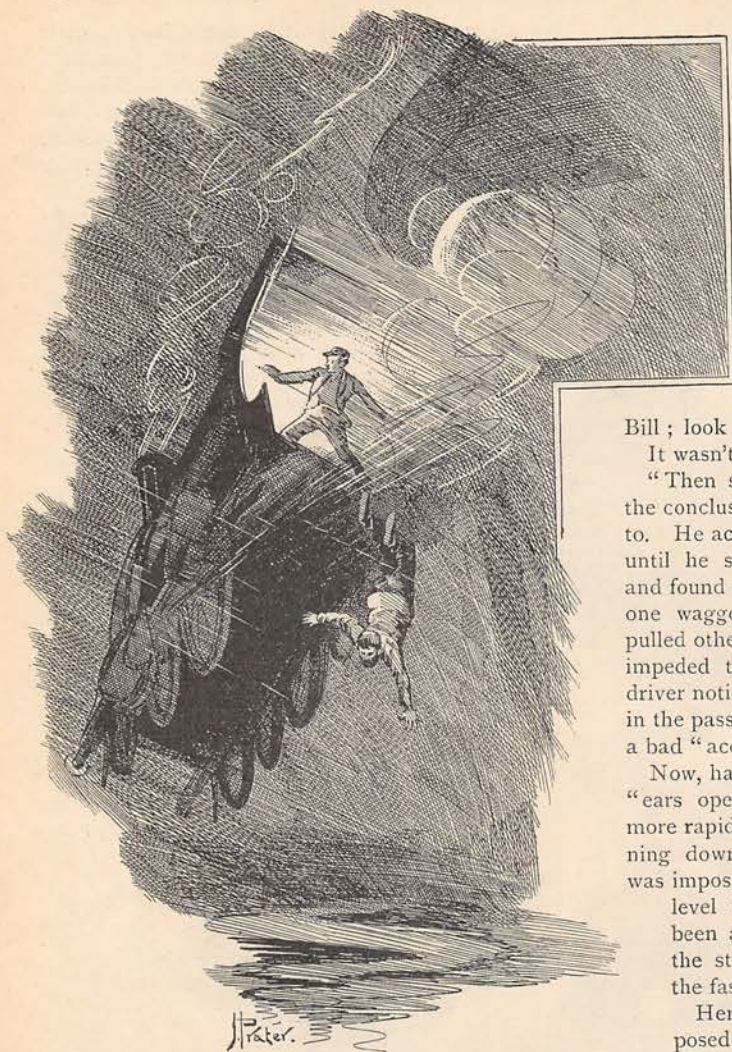
"BOTH ARE THROWN OFF THE ENGINE" (p. 456).

Had the driver slackened speed for one minute, the shock would have caused an accident; but he cut through the obstruction, and by his presence of mind saved the lives of his passengers.

That is the kind of man the engineer is: ready, resourceful, brave. Brought up in the "shops" where the engines he loves are constructed, the driver knows his business and his value. From cleaner to fireman, he rises, and his rise is not rapid. His training is a hard one, almost in the fire-box, where he runs nightly risk of suffocation; or if, when tired, he sleeps in it, he may be burned to a cinder by a careless fire-lighter.

is on the road to promotion, and perhaps matrimony: a condition for the wife not invariably a "bed of roses."

For although engine-men are, in the main, good husbands and fathers, their wives must experience great anxiety. They know how many accidents occur daily (accidents which never appear save in "Returns"), caused by carelessness of others than their own husbands. The wife knows that the superintendent once said that "a fireman is killed every fortnight, and two disabled every week"; and with this burden upon her mind, can you wonder if she is



THE TERRIBLE PLUNGE OVER THE TAY BRIDGE (p. 459).

sometimes anxious until she gets accustomed to the daily return of her "man"?

But suddenly a day arrives when the foreman calls, or a telegram arrives, or a lad hurries up with a message, and then she knows that her Tom will never be an engine-driver! He has faced death once again, and this time his opponent is the victor.

But the driver stage arrives, perhaps, and then life is worth living! The cheery whistle rings out to her as she holds up her latest infant to see "daddy" pass, and he waves, or rather extends, his arm in the mechanical way which all engine-men will recognise and respond to. He flies past on the wings of the wind, thinking not of any danger, but ever on the alert. Straining his eyes through fog and darkness, the driver rushes on through the night or through the day, without any thought of self. His mind is fixed upon his train, upon his work. Ears and eyes are intent upon sounds and signals, upon passing trains, and upon the track.

Why, you may ask, need the men be thus so attentive to sounds and sights? Surely it is not their business to watch a passing train! No; but it may prove their destruction or their safety. There are many occasions upon which the careful engine-men have noticed that a train is too short, as they deemed it; or that a certain train had not passed at the proper time and place. On the former occasion the engine-driver looked out as the short train—a "goods"—passed.

"There ain't waggons enough on, Bill; look for the 'monkey-face!'"\*

It wasn't visible from the engine.

"Then some's broke away, you may depend," was the conclusion the driver of the passenger train came to. He accordingly checked his train, and ran easy until he sighted a red light. Then he pulled up, and found that the "goods" had separated, owing to one waggon having left the rails. It had in time pulled other waggons off, and the wreckage somewhat impeded the "down" line. Had not the passing driver noticed the unusually small number of waggons in the passing train, he would have "pitched in," and a bad "accident" would have resulted.

Now, had the driver of the "goods" train had his "ears open," he ought to have understood by the more rapid beat of his engine that he was either running down-hill or had a lighter load. The former was impossible, as he would have known the line was level there. So, if he had reasoned and had been attentive, he would have become aware of the state of his train, and would have signalled the fast train with his gauge lamp to stop.

Here, for the sake of illustration, we have supposed one man careful and the other indifferent. But most engine-men are fully aware of their duties, and act immediately with marvellous presence of mind and judgment.

Take, for instance, the conduct of a Great Western man only the other day. A tree was being felled on the railroad embankment; the trunk slid down to the line as an express was just due. The train came on, the driver perceived the obstruction. To check his engine meant disaster. He might cut it at high speed; but in any case it was imminent danger.

In a second he decided. With steam full on, he drove *through* the tree (nearly six feet in circumference), and carried his train through in safety after him. Had he hesitated, or had he lacked courage to act, he and the passengers would have been wrecked!

The risks which engine-men run are legion, and almost entirely unknown to the general public. A man may be listening for the "beat," or a "cutting" axle, a grain of sand in the crank, or a heated "squealing" axle-box. He puts his head over the

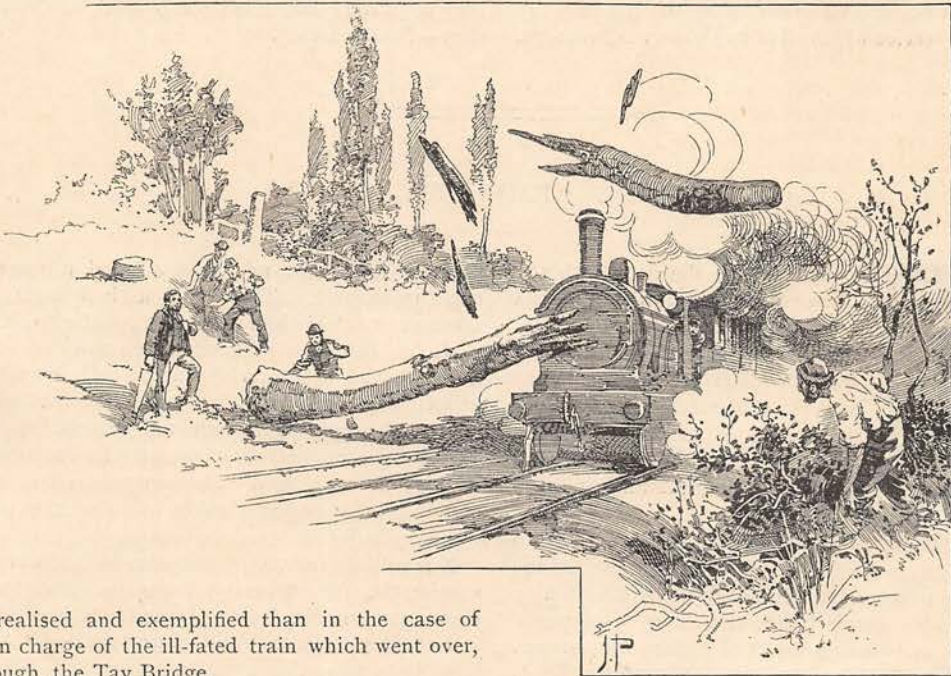
\* This term is used to describe the three red lights at the tail of a goods train, thus "a".

engine, and looking back, leans over to listen. He forgets the bridge, or does not see the approaching "goods" train. In the first case, he may be killed instantly by the contact with the bridge-supports; or in the second, stunned, or less seriously injured, by a projecting crate or some smaller consignment of goods. The present writer once had his "round" hat stove in by something projecting from a waggon under precisely similar circumstances. Had he been leaning out but two inches farther, his head—and not the crown of his hat—would have been crushed and mangled.

The perils and courage of engine-men were seldom

may imagine the feelings of these brave men. Yet, if they feared, they permitted no qualms to check them. "Onward!" Their duty lies in getting the train to its destination, and torn, buffeted as they are, they intend to do so. They know the engine and themselves: they would do their part at any risks. They died on duty as brave men should die: facing death boldly upon the broken bridge.

The training of the engine-man fits him for his position. We have already indicated the dangers of his early days; and when at length his probation is over, as cleaner, relief-man, and fireman, the express driver is a man of cool courage and splendid endurance.



"WITH STEAM FULL ON, HE DROVE THROUGH THE TREE" (p. 458).

more realised and exemplified than in the case of those in charge of the ill-fated train which went over, or through, the Tay Bridge.

The 28th of December, 1879, was a fatal day in the annals of the iron road. The gale was storming the line when the two engine-men on their friendly steed (No. 224), which was expected to carry them safely with the train from Edinburgh to Dundee that Sunday afternoon, started.

The wind blew harder and harder. Bad enough upon the well-laid permanent way, where continual "firing" and the greatest care were necessary on such a rough evening. But these men, Mitchell and Marshall, did not flinch from the ordeal. What they thought no one will ever know. They had their duty to perform, and they intended to perform it, though, as the wind blew harder and harder, as the steam swooped down from the chimney, and the fire wasted, they had their hands full to keep time.

"It's nothin' when you're used to it," replied one of the men to his father who parted with his son for ever that evening. Then the train started to its destruction.

When upon the shaky bridge, rocking with it, we

Think of some sixteen hours on duty, sometimes more than that (though not "running" all the time), with all one's senses to keep alive in all conditions of weather and danger; to read every lamp, to recognise every point and crossing, to know when to expect other trains, and if you do not meet them to argue—wherefore?

To think out the reasons why, to drive your engine so that she will keep up her speed, and come in "handsomely"—to keep time, no matter what weather, if it be humanly possible. To decide in a second whether a half-shown light is meant for "on" or "off," and to act as you decide—in fact, to be almost superhuman, to hold your life in your hand, to be a skilled mechanic, a well-informed man, a pleasant, cheery companion, and a brave, self-respecting fellow in your work, walk, and conversation, is to be something of an engine-driver at his best.

But there are other railway men who are daily risking life and limb. The guards, the plate-layers, the fog-men—who are almost the same as the plate-layers—the porters, the shunters, and others. The guards have many anecdotes to tell of narrow escapes, of trains running to destruction, when the only chance of life was a leap to almost certain death. The collision, the de-railed waggon, the crushed van, all carry the grim spectre nearer to the railway man, who may die, with fog-signal or lamp, at his post; or be run over, and crushed into the ash-pan of his son's engine as "she" is being run home to the shed!

The shunter of waggons is crushed between the buffers one night, and falls never to rise again; or is carried, mutilated, to the hospital for the necessary operation. Many are rash, and suffer for being so; but they run risks in our service which all of us should acknowledge.

For his daily risk of life and limb, for his attainments and skill as a mechanic, for his courage, endurance, and perils, the engine-man receives seven-and-sixpence a day in the higher grade, and perhaps another shilling in the highest. A fireman can rise from four-and-sixpence to five-and-sixpence a day; while a guard's pay is from a guinea to thirty-five shillings a week. A "coal allowance" for coal saved—perhaps a penny a hundredweight—will amount to something in the year for engine-men, and the guards and porters pick up a few trifles on occasion.

But we need not discuss these. Let us respect the men to whom we owe so much—more than most of us ever imagine; and let us remember the danger which they so bravely and intelligently meet on the path of duty—Facing Death.

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### A "BAD" LIFE.

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HE stood outside the door with the brass-plate upon it, watching the rain pour down and the mud swash about, churned up by the traffic. Miserable as the sight was, it relieved the intensity of his sense of isolation. It betokened fellow-suffering. There would have been no kindness in sunshine for him, only grinning indifference.

He stood there shaken and trembling, and tried to play the man, to review his position calmly; all the while ready to burst into tears with the day, and fling himself into the gutter beside the draggled corpse of the cat in its winding-sheet of sodden newspaper. He was just as unnecessary; his life was poisoned too. But the tears were restrained by blinking hard; and the success of that effort, evidence of manhood to the boy, was something to be grateful for.

He stood there condemned, not to death—how grand sentence of death would have been, with its possibilities for heroism!—but to life without the fulness of life: without the one thing that now made life worth living: to life without purpose, help, or comfort: to life different from that of other men: to the outcast's, leper's life. "Thou shalt not marry." Surely it had been thundered at him from Sinai, not lispd from an ebonised revolving chair, in tones of calculated conventional compassion over poised fingertips, as he stood there nervously fumbling at the buttons of his shirt, just risen from the inquisition torture of that hateful little stethoscope, with its tell-tale tubes. They had wrung the secret from his heart, and the sentence was rendered the more merciless by the professional pity of his judge. The owner of the brass-plate had, indeed, held out a hope, and forthwith brought upon himself a stumbling confession, and an

entreaty that none might be allowed if there were none reasonable. Thereupon it had been gently taken away. "He had better not count upon it."

He had borne his sentence fifteen minutes. Ten of them he had spent on the door-step, pretending to himself that he was waiting until the rain left off; really only because he felt too wretched to move. For to move implied direction, and he was altogether without direction now. The boy was very miserable, standing there gazing blankly into the misery of the wet, very badly hit.

Nor without reason. Two years he had devoted to earning this right to marry, from the worldly point of view; and now that he had earned it to have it dashed from his grasp thus! And his greatest comfort would have to be this: that a lurking suspicion of his constitutional defect—"organic" it was labelled—had kept his mouth sealed before her all those two years. She must have seen that he thought much of her; but love had never been mentioned. Would it be possible to hide it always, and make it appear that friendship was all he had been seeking? His manliness would be hardly sufficient to make it possible, thought he. Oh, why had not the door with the brass-plate shut him off from love as well, instead of opening to him the fulness of the store? The starving possessor of money bags on the desert island were happy beside him.

But a cab drove up to the door and revealed the drawn face of another, organically diseased, too, maybe—oh, that difference between "organic" and "functional!"—and he moved away into the slop and the rain. A few yards, and he recollected that he had just been told never to get wet if he could help it—penalty, rheumatism and complications. Not that they mattered; nevertheless, he put up his umbrella.

He had borne his sentence for three years—three