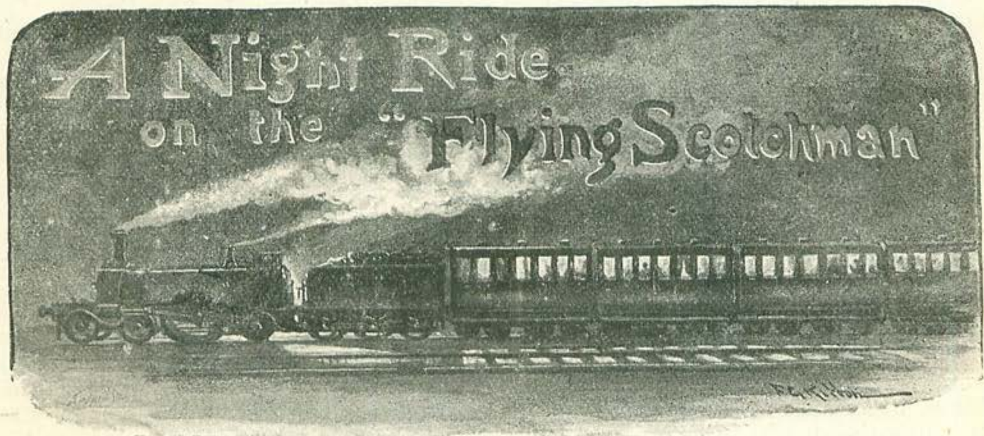


By F. G. Kitton.

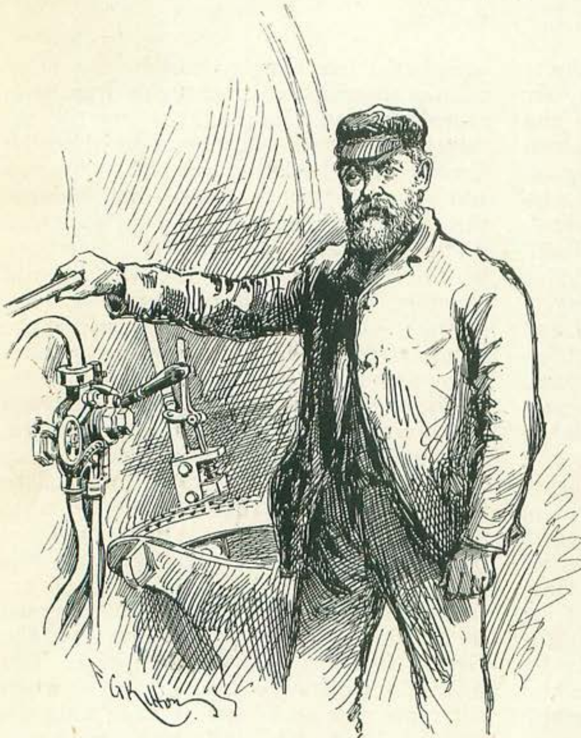
OF the millions who are wont to travel by rail, how many are cognisant of the heavy and serious responsibility which rests upon those in charge of the train? Even those who understand it do not give the subject a passing thought; familiarity begets indifference, and the tired traveller arrives at his destination unmindful of possible dangers that have been averted by the skill and cool judgment of the driver, the watchfulness of the guard, and by the signalman's strict attention to duty. These indispensable qualifications have brought him safely to his journey's end, after, perchance, a cruel battle with the elements and other conflicting conditions; but, unconscious of all this, he alights from the train, secures his belongings, and looks upon the whole transaction as a matter of course. Only those who have experienced what I am about to describe can fully realise the nature and extent of this responsibility for the safety of human lives, or conceive how great is the continued mental strain to which those in charge of an "Express" are subjected.

Having always entertained a strong desire to indulge in the novel sensation of travelling on the footplate of a locomotive, it may readily be imagined with what feelings of pleasurable anticipation I awaited the realisation of my wish. One fine October morning I left King's Cross by the 11.45 train as an ordinary passenger to Grantham, armed with an "Engine Pass" for the return journey by the 4.27 p.m. Special Scotch Express. I had selected this particular train and route for two reasons—first, because this Scotch Express (significantly named "The Flying Scotchman") is believed to be the fastest train in the world; and secondly, because this portion of its long journey from the North is performed at the greatest speed, the distance of 105¼ miles being accomplished without stopping.

The engine that conveys me to Grantham will return with the Scotchman to London. It is known by the Company's servants as "No. 774," and was specially attached to this train in order that I might see what could be accomplished in the matter of speed by this particular class of locomotive. It is technically described as an 8-ft. wheel express passenger engine, and was designed by Mr. Patrick Stirling, the engineer of the Great Northern Railway Company. The first of its class was made in 1869, when there was a prospect of very keen competition for the Scotch traffic, and when speed had to play an important part in the contest. In 1880 one of these engines took a special train with the Lord Mayor from King's Cross to York (a distance of 188¼ miles) in a little more than 3½ hours, the average speed being nearly 55 miles an hour; and during the so-called "Race

to Edinburgh," in the summer of 1888, these engines did very good work, averaging 55¼ miles per hour. Therefore, engines of this class are principally used for "express" work, the drivers preferring them to any other.

We are timed to reach Grantham at 2.25 p.m., and arrive there punctually to the minute. Here our engine is taken off and shunted into a siding, to await the arrival of the "up" express, the Flying Scotchman, due at 4.22 p.m.; but the two hours' interval does not mean a period of entire rest for the men, for both driver and fireman have important duties to carry out. The former must thoroughly overhaul the engine, examine and lubricate the working parts, while the latter lays in a fresh supply of fuel and water, sufficient for the home journey. When this is satisfactorily accomplished, I introduce myself to the driver as his fellow-traveller to London. A hale,



SAMUEL WATSON—DRIVER

genial man is Samuel Watson—of medium stature, with iron-grey whiskers, whose ruddy complexion sufficiently indicates that he is none the worse for years of constant exposure to our variable climate. He and his cheerful mate, Harry Collarbone, the fireman, welcome me as, for the first time, I step on the footplate. Here the apparently complicated array of levers, gauges, and pipes attracts my attention, and an explanation of their various uses renders clear what had hitherto been unintelligible to me; then I ask Watson to tell me something about himself, for we learn that the Scotchman will be twenty minutes late, so there is time for a chat.

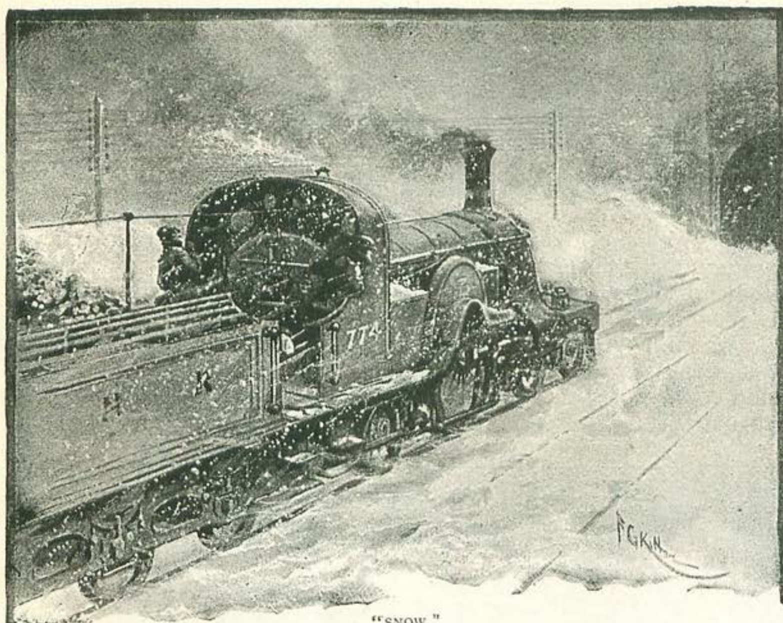
"You want some particulars of my career? Well, sir, I don't know that I have anything important to tell you, for the experience of all engine-drivers is much about the same, although some are unfortunate enough to meet with more accidents than others. I began life as a boy in the lamp-room at Hitchin; then I went into the cleaning-shed at King's Cross, to clean engines at 2s. 6d. a day. After three years I became fireman on a main line passenger train to Peterboro', and in another five years was promoted to the position of driver of a shunting engine in the 'goods' yard at King's Cross. I was then appointed as driver of local traffic trains, and in due time became driver of the Cambridge express. During the last five years (on and off) I have worked express trains on the Great Northern main line; but it was my ambition to be driver of the special Scotch express, the fastest train in the world; and during the last twelve months I have been regularly employed in running this very train from London to Grantham and back, three Sundays in four excepted. Only four drivers are engaged for this particular journey. Some drivers don't care for fast running, because they get so much shaking, and the journeys are longer without a stop."

I ask Watson whether he has felt any ill effects from so much oscillation.

"Well, sir," he replies, with a smile, "during my thirty-one years in the Company's service I have only been three weeks on the sick list. I consider it a healthy occupation, providing the constitution is strong and able to stand exposure to all weathers."

"What is the worst kind of weather you have to contend with?" I inquire.

"Fog, sir, is the worst of all. Snow is bad enough, which blocks up the weather-


"SNOW."

speed when the accident occurred, and couldn't pull up in time to save the lad."

"Besides these sad cases, have you experienced any sensation of fright from narrow escapes?"

"No, sir, except that on thick nights it does give you a bit of a start when you find yourself running with express speed past signals set against you. Then your heart leaps into your mouth, and you put on the brake as quickly as possible. This sort of thing makes you feel queer at the time."

Such is the simple record of Watson's life. But a brave heart beats beneath the rugged exterior of such men as he, who are ever ready to do their duty to the public in times of accident, and often risk their very lives for the public good by remaining at their posts when danger is imminent, thereby hoping to avert it. While the train is running the driver's whole soul is in his work, his attention being entirely concentrated upon the engine and the signals ahead. This constant strain upon his faculties during a long journey is excessively great, and he feels acutely the serious responsibility of his position, well knowing that an oversight on his part may cause a terrible disaster.

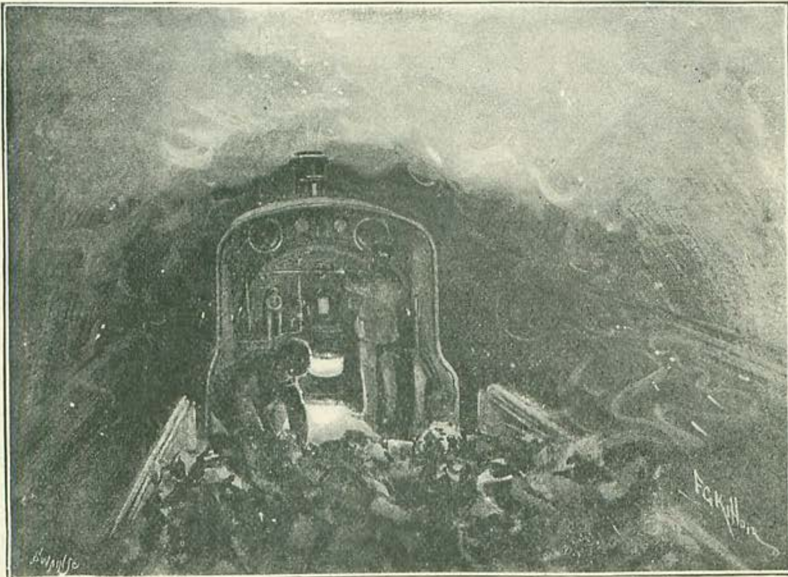
By this time the arrival of the Scotchman is announced, and we steam into the station to be hooked on to the train. With a "Right you are!" from the guard, and a sharp whistle from the engine, off we go on our momentous journey. At Watson's suggestion, I find a convenient post for observation in the corner by the left-hand weather-glass; and, although the view is certainly very much circumscribed, the position is fairly comfortable, being sheltered from wind and smoke, besides which I am out of the way of the men. We are not travelling fast yet, as there is a steady climb of five miles up a steep gradient (or

glasses, and to see the signals you must face the blinding storm; but in foggy weather we can't see them until we are on them. We don't depend entirely upon the fog-signals or detonators."

In reply to my inquiry whether he had ever been the unfortunate cause of an accident, or ever experienced anything unusually exciting during his twenty-four years' career as driver, Watson says:—

"I have never been in any accident, such as collisions or running off the track, but I regret to say that it has been my misfortune to be present at seven inquests held over the bodies of persons whom I had unavoidably run over. Some of these were negligent servants of the Company, while others were strangers unlawfully straying on the line. At night it is impossible to see anybody in danger, but in the daytime we keep a sharp look-out, and give a warning whistle when necessary. Only last week I noticed in the distance ahead a small boy mischievously throwing stones at a 'goods' train. He stood in my road, unconscious of danger; I blew the whistle as the train rushed towards him, but he couldn't get away, and fell back on the metals. I knew it was all up with him; and, having quickly stopped the train, I went back to look for the body. I was first on the spot, but only to find that the poor little chap was literally cut to pieces—a horrible sight. We were travelling full

"bank," as the driver calls it) to Stoke Box, and gradients make all the difference in the running of the train. The stoker shovels coal into the furnace, and everything is done to assist the engine in performing the extra work which is now called for. Our speed gradually increases. The graceful spire of Grantham Church—a conspicuous landmark—is soon lost in the rear, as we bowl along at thirty-five miles an hour, now through a cutting, now under a viaduct, and now with a straight road before us. The tiny aperture in the distance is the entrance to a tunnel, which appears so ludicrously small that it seems as though the funnel of the engine could not escape collision with the arch; but this delusion is quickly dispelled, for now we are rushing into the darkness of the subterranean passage, and can already see a glimpse of daylight at the other end.


"THE EFFECT IN THE TUNNEL IS WEIRD AND IMPRESSIVE."

The effect in the tunnel is weird and impressive, as the glare of the furnace, increased by the surrounding darkness, lights up the features of the fireman as he replenishes the flames, and illumines the cloud of steam and smoke that rushes over the train behind us. Out in the open once more we quickly reach Stoke Box, the summit of the Great Northern route, and directly we get over the brow of the hill, the train gathers fresh impetus, and away we go with a roar and a rattle, past signals and telegraph posts with a speed increasing at every mile. Corby (eight miles from Grantham) is reached in something like twelve minutes, and with a short whistle we fly through the little station with a velocity that hardly permits us to read its name on the board. Still descending the incline, our speed increases until Watson (desirous, no doubt, of exhibiting the best paces of his favourite engine) shouts in my ear, "You are now travelling as fast as anyone ever did travel, I think! *Seventy-five miles an hour!!*" This is really exciting; one feels exhilarated by such rapid motion, the engine leaping along as though endowed with life. Oscillation increases with speed, and, in order to preserve my balance, I find a friendly hook near the weather-glass convenient to hold on by. Away, with a roar and a rattle! No sooner are distant signals seen than we are upon them; no sooner do we realise that an object half-a-mile away is a wayside cottage than we reach it, rush by, and leave it far behind. Another whistle announces our approach to Little Bytham, and down the hill at a fearful pace to Essendine, near which is Crowland Abbey, immortalised in Kingsley's "Hereward the Wake." Although I find some difficulty in preserving my equilibrium, I endeavour to take notes, but under such circumstances even the late Anthony Trollope would have despaired, accustomed as he was to writing in the train. I watch the driver and fireman as they perform their respective duties;

Watson, with his hand upon the brake in readiness for any emergency, looks earnestly for his signals, and the fireman shovels the damp coal upon the gleaming furnace below. Fresh fuel is frequently required—

"THE FIREMAN SHOVELS THE DAMP COAL UPON THE FLAMING FURNACE."

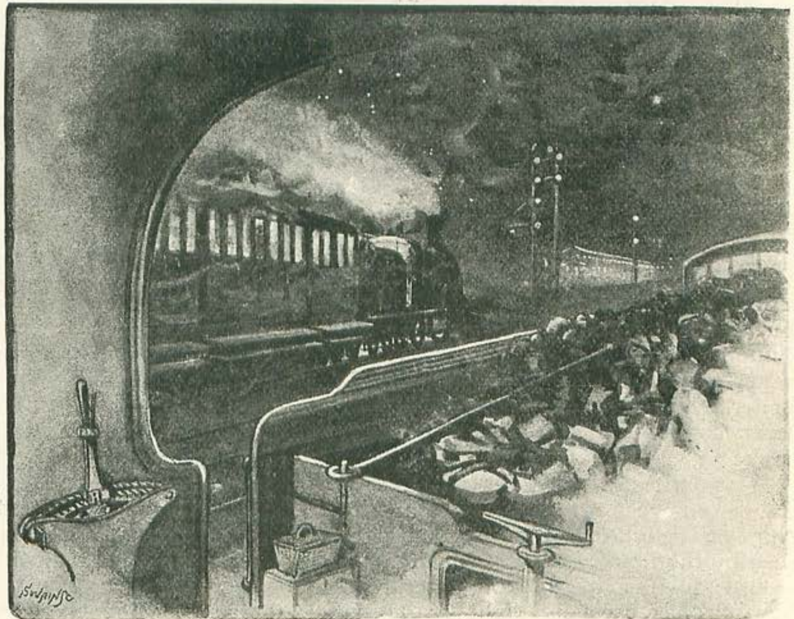
a dozen shovelfuls at a time, fairly distributed, in order to maintain equality of consumption and regularity of heat. The water-gauge must also be watched, and the boiler occasionally replenished by raising a lever connected with the supply in the tank.

Away, with a rattle and a roar! Signals are passed every three or four minutes, and those at Tallington (the next station) are seen by the practised eye of the driver long before my untrained vision detects them. Watson has excellent sight (an essential qualification), for he can distinguish day signals at a distance of nearly two miles, and the red light three or four miles away. Rushing past Tallington Station, we enter Northamptonshire and the level country of the Fen district; here we spin along to Werrington Junction, and soon observe on our left the stately towers of Peterboro' Cathedral, looming grey in the gloaming. As the shades of evening close in, the night signals are lighted, and the coloured illumination at Peterboro' Junction looks pretty in the distance, but to distinguish our particular signal among so many is an intricate problem to me. We slacken pace as we approach Peterboro', having accomplished the twenty-nine miles from Grantham in thirty-two minutes—rather less than a mile a minute. From the bridge spanning the river we notice the picturesque effect of the various lights reflected in the water, and, again increasing our speed, quickly leave the cathedral town behind us.

The sun has set, and, as the night grows darker, the signal-lights gleam more brightly. Now we are in the county of Huntingdon. The little station at Yaxley flashes by, and we have a level run to Holme—thirty-six miles in forty minutes. A steep climb of six miles to Abbots Ripton gives the engine extra work, but it is done gallantly, at the rate of forty-five miles an hour. At Abbots Ripton (where resides Lord de Ramsey, one of the directors of the Great Northern Railway) a terrible accident occurred in January, 1876. The weather was extremely boisterous and stormy, the snow falling in large flakes, and seriously obscuring the look-out of the driver and guards of the train, who declared they never before experienced a storm of such severity. The Scotch express, due at King's Cross at 8.10 p.m., started on its up-journey from Edinburgh, and proceeded in safety as far as Abbots Ripton, where a coal train was signalled to cross into a siding, to allow the express to go by. The greater portion of the trucks had passed into the siding, when the express came up at full speed, and struck the coal train in the rear of the engine. The effect was disastrous, the engine of the express being thrown over and completely disabled, and several carriages broken up. One of the drivers, accompanied by his guard and two or three others, was ordered to go to Huntingdon on his engine for assistance; but he had not proceeded far when the Leeds

express was discerned dashing onwards through the blinding storm. It was the work of a moment for the driver to sound his whistle, in token of danger ahead, the guard meanwhile waving his red lamp; but these signals were disregarded, and the engine of the Leeds express literally cut its way through the tender of the Scotch train. The increasing storm, the piteous cries of the wounded, and the shouts of others anxious to be released from the broken carriages were heartrending, while the lurid glare of burning wreckage, ignited by the furnace fire, produced a scene of painful interest never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. Twelve persons were killed, among whom was the eldest son of the late Mr. Dion Boucicault, the well-known dramatic author and actor. In the Scotch express were Lord Colville, present chairman of the Great Northern Railway Company; Mr. Robert Tennant, then M.P. for Leeds; and Count Schouvaloff, Russian Ambassador at the Court of St. James's, all of whom happily escaped injury. The accident is supposed to have been caused by a blocking of the signals with snow. Fortunately for us, no danger threatens to-night from such a cause, for the sky is cloudless, and the stars shine brightly. Another journey might afford a very different and much more unpleasant experience; as, for example, in foggy or snowy weather, or in blinding sleet, when exposure to the elements would not be enjoyable. A thunderstorm at any time has its disadvantages, but the effect as seen from an engine at full speed must be thrilling and impressive, when the lightning-flash suddenly illumines the country around, bringing instantaneously into view each feature of the landscape, only to plunge it the next moment into obscurity.

Away! With rattle and roar we speed down the bank to Huntingdon; there, a mile off, are the signals and station lights—a shrill whistle, and we are upon them, they flash by, and we are in the open country again. Here we notice a result of the recent heavy rains in the overflow of the Ouse and consequent submersion of the race-course; but, when bowling along at seventy miles an hour, it is not easy to take in every detail of this watery scene. In the distance ahead a curious light is seen, growing larger as it approaches, and looking uncommonly like a gigantic flaming squib, which presently resolves itself into a passing train, whose engine belches forth volumes of sparks—quite a brilliant display against the dark background. We make such a rattle ourselves that other trains rush by apparently without a sound, so this one disappears as mysteriously as it came, like a veritable fiery phantom. Now the station



'A PASSING TRAIN.'

lights at Offord flash by, and we have accomplished half our journey in excellent time, the driver remarking that "we shall do it well to-night." We slacken speed as we ascend the slight incline to St. Neots, then entering level country in Bedfordshire we bowl along to Tempsford and Sandy (the residence of the Speaker of the House of

Commons)—sixty and a half miles in sixty-eight minutes. Owing to some repairs to the main line at Stratford Bridge Dyke, we are unfortunately compelled to shut off steam and diverge on to a siding, thus losing some five or six minutes, but this delay is quickly repaired as we put on an extra spurt to Biggleswade and Arlesey. Now we leave Bedfordshire for the county of Herts, and run up the bank to Hitchin, the signals at the junction being soon perceptible. As we rush through the station we find that we have reduced by four minutes the time lost at Stratford Bridge, and have a record of seventy-three miles in eighty-six minutes. After a stiff climb of four miles to Stevenage and Knebworth (the historic home of the Lyttons), away we go across fairly level country, through two tunnels, arriving at Welwyn Station (eighty-three and a half miles) in one hour forty minutes. Having climbed the bank over Welwyn Viaduct, we accelerate our pace, and quickly reach Hatfield, where, but for the darkness, we could readily discern the regal mansion of Lord Salisbury and the church surmounting the hill. We rush through Hatfield Station with terrific speed, pass Potter's Bar, and enter the county of Middlesex. As we are nearing the end of our journey, the fireman levels the fire to keep it low down, no further coaling being necessary. From Potter's Bar to Wood Green, a distance of eight miles, is a steep down-gradient, and we seem to fly through the intervening stations and the tunnels at Enfield. When the lamps of Hornsey Station are passed, we have completed rather more than a hundred miles—time, one hour fifty-five minutes.

The distant glare of London's innumerable lights is now visible, and frequent whistling announces our speedy approach to the metropolis. "It's all over, sir," shouts Watson—an intimation that our journey is practically finished, and his responsibility over for this occasion. In Copenhagen Tunnel we slacken speed, the signals being against us; presently all is clear, off we go through our last tunnel, and the fireman, whose task is now at an end, sweeps the coal dust from the footplate. With steam shut off and the brake in action, oscillation gradually ceases, and we glide into the brightness of King's Cross Station, having accomplished the entire distance in two hours and three minutes.

Thus ended my memorable trip. With a friendly "good-night" to Watson and his mate, I step on to the platform and out into the busy streets, feeling somewhat dazed and fatigued, but otherwise none the worse for my night ride on the "Flying Scotchman."