

The Church Road.

BURDETT'S INTERVIEW WITH THE RAILROAD BRAKEMAN.

On the road once more, with Lebanon fading away in the distance, the fat passenger drumming idly on the window pane, the cross passenger sound asleep and the tall thin passenger reading "Gen. Grant's Tour Around the World," and wondering why "Green's August Flower" should be printed above the doors of "A Buddhist temple at Benares." To me comes the brakeman, and seating himself on the arm of my seat says:

"I went to church yesterday,"

"Yes?" I said, with that interested inflection that asks for more. "And what church did you attend?"

"Which do you guess?" he asked.

"Some union mission church?" I hazarded.

"Naw," he said, "I don't like to run on these branch roads very much. I don't often go to church, and when I do, I want to run on the main line, where your run is regular and you go on schedule time and don't have to wait on connections. I don't like to run on a branch. Good enough but I don't like it."

"Episcopal?" I guessed.

"Limited express," he said, "all palace cars and two dollars extra for a seat; fast time and only stop at the big stations. Nice line, but too exhaustive for a brakeman. All train men in uniform, conductor's punch and lantern silver plated, and no train boys allowed. Then the passengers are allowed to talk back at the conductor, and it makes them too free and easy. No, I couldn't stand the palace car, Rich road, though. Don't often hear of a receiver being appointed for that line. Some mighty nice people travel on it, too."

"Universalist?" I suggested.

"Broad gauge," said the brakeman, "does too much complimentary business. Everybody travels on a pass. Conductor doesn't get a fare once in fifty miles. Stops at all flag stations and won't run into anything but a union depot. No smoking car on the train. Train orders are rather vague though and the train men don't get along well with the passengers. No I didn't go to the Universalist, though I know some awfully good men who run on that road."

"Presbyterian?" I asked.

"Narrow gauge, eh?" said the brakeman, "pretty tarrack, straight as a rule; tunnel right through a mountain rather than go around it; Spirit level grade; passengers have to show tickets before they get on the train. Mighty strict road, but the cars are a little narrow; have to sit one in a seat and no room in the aisle to dance. Then there's no stop over tickets allowed; got to go straight through to the station you're ticketed for, or you can't get on at all. When the car's full, no extra coaches; cars built at the shops to hold just so many and nobody else allowed on. But you don't often hear of an accident on that road. It's run right up to the rules."

"Maybe you joined the Free Thinkers?" I said.

"Scrub road," said the brakeman, "dirt road bed and no ballast; no time card and no train dispatcher. All trains run wild and every engineer makes his own time just as he pleases. Smoke if you want to; kind of go as-you-please road. Too many side tracks, and every switch wide open all the time, with the switchman sound asleep and the target lamp dead out. Get on as you please and get off when you want to. Don't have to show your tickets, and the conductor isn't expected to do anything but amuse the passengers. No, sir I was offered a pass, but I don't like the line. I don't like to travel on a road that has no terminus. Do you know, sir, I asked a division superintendent where that road ran to, and he said he hoped to die if he knew. I asked him if the general superintendent could tell me, and he said he didn't believe they had any general superintendent, and if they had, he didn't know any more about the road than

the passengers. I asked him who he reported to, and he said "nobody." I asked a conductor who he got his orders from and he said he didn't take orders from any living man or dead ghost. And when I asked the engineer who he got his orders from and he said he'd like to see anybody give him orders, he'd run that train to suit himself or he'd run it into the ditch. Now you see, sir, I'm a railroad man, and I don't care to run on a road that has no time, makes no connections, runs nowhere and has no superintendent. It may be all right, but I've railroaded too long to understand it."

"Did you try the Methodist?" I said.

"Now you're shouting," he said with some enthusiasm. "Nice road eh?" Fast time and plenty of passengers. Engines carry a power of steam, and don't you forget it; steam gauge shows a hundred and enough all the time. Lively road; when the conductor shouts "all aboard," you can hear him to the next station. Every train lamp shines like a headlight. Stop-over checks are given on through tickets; passenger can drop off the train as often as he pleases. do the station two or three days and hop on the next revival train that comes thundering along. Good, whole-souled companionable conductors; ain't a road in the country where the passengers feel more at home. No passes; every passenger pays full traffic rate for his ticket. Wesleyanhouse air brakes on all trains, too; pretty safe road, but I didn't ride over it yesterday.

"Maybe you went to the Congregational church?" I said.

"Popular road," said the brakeman, "an old road, too; one of the very oldest in the country. Good road bed and comfortable cars. Well managed road, too; directors don't interfere with division superintendents and train orders. Road's mighty popular but it's pretty independent, too. See, didn't one of the division superintendents down east discontinue one of the oldest stations on this line two or three years ago? But it's a mighty pleasant road to travel on. Always has such a splendid class of passengers."

"Perhaps you tried the Baptist?" I guessed once more.

"Ah, ha!" said the brakeman, "she's a daisy, isn't she? River road; beautiful curves; sweep around anything to keep close to the river, but it's all steel rail and rock ballast; single track all the way and not a side track from the round house to the terminus. Takes leap of water to run it through; double tanks at every station and there isn't an engine in the shops that can pull a pound or run a mile with less than two gauges. But it runs through a lovely country; these river roads always do; river on one side and hill on the other, and it's a steady climb up the grade all the way till the run ends where the fountainhead of the river begins. Yes, sir, I'll take the river road every time for a lovely trip, sure connections and good time, and no prairie dust blowing in at the windows. And yesterday, when the conductor came around for the tickets with a little basket punch, I didn't ask him to pass me, but I paid my fare like a little man—twenty-five cents for an hour's run and a little concert by the passengers thrown in. I tell you, Pilgrim, you take the river road when you want—"

But just here the long whistle from the engine announced a station and the brakeman hurried to the door, shouting:

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