

Without Permission.

A Thrilling Railway Ride Through Blazing Forests.

By JOHN MACKIE.

GRAY, the foreman of the little Northern Quebec "round-house," or repairing shed as they might call it here, was very angry, indeed, for Jack Haynes, whom he had advanced from an ordinary section labourer to a position of some little responsibility on the thirty-mile branch railway line, had so far forgotten himself as to answer him back.

"I tell you," said the frate Gray, "if you hadn't been a fool you wouldn't have allowed that Yankee driver to take away our only spare engine on to the main line without my written authority."

"He said he had permission from the assistant-manager of the main line at La Tuque," explained Haynes, sulkily. He had already expressed regret for having allowed the smart American to steal a march on him, but Gray did not seem inclined to let the matter drop.

"But where was his written order?" persisted the boss. "The telegraph clerk says he got none word by wire. It's a queer thing I cannot go away for half an hour without finding everything gone wrong when I come back. I didn't think you'd be such a simpleton as to—"

"Look here, Mr. Gray," interrupted Haynes, with obvious calmness. "I'm willing to admit I did wrong in taking that fellow's word for it, but I didn't think a railway employee was such a fool as to be guilty of doing a job that was pretty sure to be wanted home to him before he was twenty-four hours older."

"Oh, it's not the man who took the engine who will get into trouble," persisted the angry foreman. "It is those who allowed him to take it." Besides, the sub-manager also hails from Chicago. In the course of a sudden call from the branch line we haven't a spare engine."

"There's another in the round-house," said all that thing an engine! It's only a contrivance of a rap round. It's liable to break down at any moment." The soul of the old engineer rose in revolt.

"I've been tinkering it up a bit. It's all right. I'm getting up steam by now at the present moment, in case it should be required."

"And in the name of all that's wonderful, who goes to Haynes to waste yet time over a damned old boiler that's liable to blow up at any moment? You may claim to be Jacks of all trades and masters of none. You're only fresh face jack and shovel work, and—"

"Easy, Mr. Gray. I venture to say I know more as much about an engine as you do. I'll undertake not only to drive one—I've done that often—but I'll take one to pieces, and—"

"Look here, my man, I've had quite enough of you. The next saying about putting a log on a horse's back, and—"

"Well, say, I've got there, and have done with it. I've apologised, but there's a fault."

"You're right," fairly shouted Gray, "and that fault is Saturday night. Do you hear? You'll be paid up on Saturday night. Consider yourself relieved from duty now. You've got too big for your britches—"

The foreman stopped abruptly. He had noted the quick flash of anger in his subordinate's face, the forward step and the spasmodic wrappings of the little, sinewy limbs.

In another moment Haynes had regained control of himself, and, turning abruptly on his heel, walked off.

For the moment Gray felt impelled to shoot some sympathetic condemnation after him, but the sight of the quickly retreating figure somehow mollified the mercurial Cobell's outraged sense of dignity. He observed angrily:—

"I'm going the fellow for a ton by foul, and he's one of the most willing and capable all-round hands I ever had under me!" Then, after a pause, and lapsing into his native Doric: "Ou ay, and I suppose he'll be wanting to go on Saturday. I'm thinking I'll just tak' a wee bit walk to the Fower-Mile Glen to compose myself. I'd give something to be able to wring the neck o' that Chi-

cago engine-driver the noo, for he's the man that has made a' the trouble. And I'm no' quite sure but that I like that eniel Haynes, although he's an awfu' firebrand."

Evidently deep in thought Mr. Gray crossed the railway track, then striking a trail that led up the wooded valley leading north-west, he strode off briskly.

Haynes walked a mile or so westward along the railway track in no enviable frame of mind. Gradually the spirit of indignation and anger against the boss subsided. The choleric Mr. Gray's reference to him as a firebrand struck him as funny. He was obliged to laugh. Like his superior and many more under similar circumstances, he gave vent to his feelings by addressing an imaginary audience:—

"'Confound the peppery old heggart!' he said. 'If he had only taken time to think he would have seen it didn't matter so very much about them taking that engine. It will be back again with the down train to-morrow morning.

but the telegraph operator had gone to dinner at the weather-board hotel. Haynes somehow had lost his appetite, so he went back to the shed and saw to the engine. He spoke to the operator when he returned about the increasing smoke in the air.

"I've seen smoke in the air like this for weeks when a fire has been five hundred miles away," said the operator. "If it were anywhere near the terminus we ought to have heard of it."

"You must recollect that up there, surrounded by forests, they've no means of knowing how far off it really is. Besides, there's the river and lake to cut the fire off from the north."

A couple of hours later there was wild excitement at the little junction. News had come from the terminus that owing to a strong north-westerly wind they feared the forest fire was much nearer than they had imagined. They asked that an engine and a few cars be sent up in case of emergencies. Then a telephone message announced that the fire could actually be seen across the lake. The hundred and fifty odd people at Cornelle hoped that a train was already on its way up to take them away. If the fire jumped the lake, which was comparatively narrow in places, they would all be burned to death.

"What are we to do?" cried the operator, agitated, to Haynes. "I wonder where on earth the boss is. We must send help. Gray's sister is up there, and her husband and children as well." "I expect he's gone up Wawayganaw.

Haynes. His face was grey. A great fear was in his eyes.

"Get away with you as quick as steam can carry you!" he cried. "Those slow-coaches on the section have telephoned at last, as well as those at Cornelle; the fire has jumped the lake. Men, women, and children have started to travel down the track on foot. There's a point where the fire must cut them off. The man who has just telephoned is going to jump on to a trolley. Look out for it. Oh, where on earth is Gray?"

CHAPTER III.

On through the thick smoke that caught one's breath and nipped one's eyes hurried the light relief train down by Haynes. It was risky work being on that engine, for if the fire by reason of the great loop in the line had already reached any part of it, and a sleeper or two had been set alight, then it would be all up with them. It would be a quick death, anyhow.

It was a weird old dervish of an engine, and the carriages had been condemned years before on the main line, and were now hopelessly behind the times. At no distant date, however, they would be objects of curiosity and interest as antiquies in some engineering exhibition. The driver and engine were not shielded from the elements as modern engines, but perhaps this would give them all the better chance of escape in the event of plunging through a burning tree-bridge. The driver's was that the dense smoke got at them and choked them.

"Now, then, Cobell, show us the coal. She's got to go. We've got to make things ham! Our only chance is in speed."

"Hooyay!" cried Cobell. "What's what you call it—rip—rip—rip—hooyay!"

He had all the gallery and 200 of the Gallie origin, had Cobell.

Haynes handled the lever, and the little train with alarming hiss and bangs passed over the points and pulled out. A French Canadian had jumped into the last car, in order, as he said, to act as conductor, and help the man and children if need be. There were some at the little junction who had their own at the terminus, and who would fain have accompanied the relief train, but Haynes was adamant.

With one long blast on the whistle the train passed out of sight. The few who saw it go tried to raise a cheer, but it was the most wretched cheer for one imaginable. Quickly the lights gathered speed.

"We'll beat the record to come this time if we've luck," cried Haynes. "Hello! There's Gray come back, and standing on the track, or I'm a Dutchman! He's signalling for all he's worth. Well, we're not stopping for a man's boss. We don't even see him, and I he doesn't get out of the way, and he jolly well run over." And the stationmaster stepped to one side. "That's right, my man, I thought I'd think better of it."

The French Canadian reared up, his bareheaded and with shirt-sleeves rolled up, he turned to speed on his way, and was worth through the open door.

Up the valley rushed the train, on the side at a depth of 20 or 30 feet above a flowing stream. Great jagged, black, covered rock stemmed the water in places, churning it into foam. Fallen pines at intervals seemed completely to block the current. On the side the narrow track, and against the opposite hill-side, the great forest loomed up dark and forbidding. It had been a dry year, and the thick vegetation growth suggested excellent timber, but that rough, hilly country was so full of no maning to outdistance the wind, if on a wind freshener. A gust with that rattle, Jack Haynes said, but right!

Clang! Clang! Clang! And the engine along the track Haynes bossed the engine of the present hell on the engine, the deep, B-throated notes rang out, and the muffled thunder of the wheels on the torrent below.

Clang! Clang! Clang! And the old engine was tolling in a way that was nothing and snorting like a steam engine. But there was a light load on it, and she made good progress. A sharp curve would round an ugly shoulder of rock, and the river could be heard roaring and below. For now that the smoke had thickened, it was difficult to see the landscape.

Then a null at the throttle and a raucous whistle that would have wakened



If the forest had caught fire, what hope had they? The train dashed boldly on through the flames.

and, of course, I've seen to it that the one here is in good going order."

He stopped to scan the opposite wooded hill-side. Then he gazed around upon the hollow rocky of spruce and pine that hid the rocky chaos of the primeval wilderness. It had been a hundred and indistinct. An a-ril something in his throat made him cough. His eyes had begun to smart.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "That smoke has thickened pretty considerably this last hour or so. They said yesterday it was twenty miles or more from Cornelle at the end of the branch line. If it jumped the La Tuque River those people at the terminus would be in a pretty awkward fix. There's no clearing worth speaking of there. If the fire jumped the water they'd be caught in a death-trap like those people in that dry goods store some time ago, and they've only a trolley or two, which wouldn't be much good to them. And Gray's sister and her family are up there now. I wonder the possibility of a fire didn't occur to him. He's so busy these days perfecting that new patent of his that he doesn't seem capable of thinking of anything else."

He went back to the little station,

Valley to see old Labelle. If so, he'll not be back till dark. One thing he told me was I'd get my money on Saturday, so that practically amounts to the sack. Now there are four cars in the siding, and luckily I got steam up in the engine. Is there no one can take them out? Under the circumstances you don't require to wait for permission from Mr. Gray to do that."

"There's only old St. Croix understands an engine. But I forgot, he's at Quebec now, and Le Maître, he's in hospital. There's only yourself, man. You can drive, and Cobell can go with you as a stoker."

"I'm only an amateur, and I've been sacked," said Haynes. "If I pulled out with that engine and carriages Gray would be on to me again for exceeding my duty. Hello! there goes the telephone again! I know what has happened. The fire has jumped the lake! That settles it. I'm off with that engine and four carriages. Luckily I did speak to Cobell, so we're all ready to pull out."

Haynes watched the operator's face impatiently as he put the receiver to his ear, and cried "Hello!"

A minute later the clerk turned to