

And all the time the rhythmic clackety-clackety-clack of steel wheels on steel rails, of speed through the night.

Even the clipping of tickets is not the perfunctory business it may appear. You ask the guard. If he's got time he'll tell you. He'll also tell you that it's only one of his jobs. The internal affairs of that whole train are, in fact, his responsibility. The safety and comfort of those four hundred passengers have his care and attention. It



takes many years to know the needs of that job, the ordinary routine; and, in addition, there are special instructions for every trip that must not be forgotten.

Each ticket has to be carefully clipped, its validity checked; possible errors in issuing must be looked for, misuse detected. The work has to be done methodically, not a minute wasted. And all the time other and equally important matters have to be kept in mind.

A reduction in speed, not noticed by passengers, has its significance for the guard. From the carriage door he reaches for a tightly-folded piece of paper from a wayside station official. The train picks up speed again. The guard reads the note—the crumpled piece of paper is a crossing order, an important message telling him that the scheduled crossing with a train from “up the line” has been altered. Ticket clipping is resumed, questions answered, seats found; by the time that guard is back in his own compartment the next stop is not far away. A few puffs of a cigarette, but there are still reports and returns to be finished, letters sorted and pigeon-holed ready for delivery at the right stations. And to ensure as short a delay as possible at stopping stations, piles of luggage and parcels have to be looked over and sorted.

Ten minutes for refreshments. Crowds rush the counter. But there is no cup of tea for the guard. A dozen things have to be attended to before the clang of the minute bell, the blast of the whistle, the smooth turning of the wheels. The station is left black in the night. Hurricane lamp swinging, the guard makes his careful way through the sleeping train for fresh tickets to clip, if necessary (these days, if possible) to find seats for the latest arrivals.

At the next stopping station he is to hand over to another guard. Before then everything has to be squared up. Less than an hour later he will take over the running of a south-bound express, for another four hours' rush before he is finished for the night. It will be daylight before he is in bed, but his sleep won't be disturbed. With so much to do and the responsibility for the comfort of several hundred passengers, his working-time has been fully taken up. But everything has gone smoothly; for him it is all in the night's work.

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You giggle. You can't help it. You're in the cab of the engine. Behind is seven tons of coal, or what is left of it; in front a mass of gauges and levers and handles. The huge fire in the huge furnace is almost frightening in its intensity. The fireman looks strong and tough enough to lay low any man in the world—except the driver. That engine is not troubled with mountain ranges. It has power to spare; and everything of it is a sign of its strength. But you giggle to yourself. You can't help it—because in front of the furnace, neatly on the floor, is a tiny household hearth brush, painted cherry-red.

You've talked yourself into a ride in that cab. While you're waiting, a small