



# BALLAST

- ¶ Analyzing his folly enrages a fool.
- ¶ A self-made rich man will do more for a dollar than a self-made poor man.
- ¶ There are two kinds of growlers—use the can for both.
- ¶ If money was the only incentive to success, the margin between the best and the worst would be very narrow.
- ¶ Ethics is merely a proper consideration for the rights of others enforced by decency and reason.
- ¶ There is a vast difference between what you hear and what you know.—For further details see legal department.
- ¶ There is beautiful scenery along the way to success; dreamers are always looking at it, but hustlers keep their eyes on the path.
- ¶ Everything comes to him who waits provided he hustles while he waits.
- ¶ It is astonishing how much of your conversation you can reduce to yes and no and how much trouble you can avoid by doing it.
- ¶ An appropriate joke is the best possible argument.
- ¶ Some men's grit is like sunshine—fades in the shadow.

**REMINISCENCES OF AN OLD TIMER—NO. 3.**

*Mr. Editors*

*The old man read this piece before I sent it. "Sorter sunlight and shadow," he said. "Who was the shadow?"*

*"He's dead," I replied.*

In reading over the last two pieces which I have written, I realize that I was too good to last—and I didn't.

The details are hardly essential; the result was what interested me.

I had become convinced that without me the section would look like a vivisection.

Frequent visits to the little town nearby with "good friends" and consequent late hours, made me physically unfit for hard work the next day; my fogged brain was the fruitful field for foolish fancies and mild reprimands became insults.

The old foreman put up with this much longer than he should have, but, when he saw that it was affecting the discipline of the men, my troubles, not his, began.

The crash came one morning when I appeared late considerably the worse for the wear and generally undesirable.

The easiest way to enrage a fool is to show him his folly, and, when the foreman took me to one side and pleasantly and even kindly proved conclusively what an absurd jackass I was making out of myself, he certainly dragged the band saw across a sore spot.

All the meanness, vanity and foolishness of my nature united into blind rage and I brayed loud and furious.

However, the old foreman did not lose his temper, but after I had finished, said:

"Me boy, you're fired, not for what you said to me, but for what you're sayin' to yourself. Maybe you'll wake up some time with your ears a trifle shorter, and the proof will be that

you'll come back and thank me for firin' you."

"However," he continued, "your bein' fired is a confidential matter between you and me. I'll note upon my official records that you've resigned to accept service elsewhere, and, me boy, you may thank me for that too, some day. It's not a good thing for a young fellow to be fired, and it means a lot to him to be allowed to resign."

He scribbled out a discharge check, handed it to me, and turned away. For several minutes I stood dazed and speechless, watching him 'telling the men about some work.

Of course, the gang caught on that I was fired, but it appeared to me that they were pleased rather than offended; anyhow there was no sympathy strike.

Assuming as best I could, I-don't-give-a-darn air I walked back to the section house, slipped up to my room, made a bundle of my clothes and sneaked out. It never occurred to me to go home, and without any definite idea as to where I was going, or what I intended to do, I started down the track.

It didn't take many miles in the hot sun before the 'onery in me had melted like butter on a cooking stove, and I began to get a pretty clear idea of two things; one, of what a fool I had made of myself; the other, of what little consequence I was after all in railroad service.

Ever since this walk of penitence and humiliation, I have had a sneaking sympathy for hoboes. After a man spends hours making adjustable compasses of his legs to suit variations

between ties, he deserves a little sympathy, if not consideration, and he is a toiler even though a non-producer.

Not once, but many times during this walk, I did the Dick Whittington act and turned back with intent to patch it up with the old foreman, but the thoughts of the gibes of the men, changed my purpose.

I passed many section gangs on this tour and struck the foremen for jobs, but it seemed as if there was nothin' doin' for me.

However, I finally landed—I am not going to tell where for several reasons which will appear later—except to say that it was on the Frisco, many miles and many hours from my old section.

I was on the point of leaving the right of way and to follow the dusty paths which would lead me to a farm house, and most probably a farm job, when I came upon a section house and saw a woman standing in the doorway.

Perhaps, if she had not been there, the railroads would have lost me, and I tremble to think of the consequences. Anyhow, fate ordained that I should ask her if there was any chance of getting a job on that section. To my surprise she said she thought her husband needed men; that he'd be back soon, and that I had better wait and see him.

I noticed that she did not seem to be particularly cheerful and that the little yard and even the house itself lacked that neat, well-kept appearance which the old foreman's place had shown.

It was hot and I was tired; the door step looked good to me, and, as the novelist would say, I sank upon it.

It seemed I had been there only a few moments before the gang appeared. I walked over to where they

were throwing tools in the shed and struck for a job.

For the life of me I couldn't tell whether the foreman had seen me or not, for his eyes always seemed to be looking at something over your shoulder, but after I told him where I had a little experience, he snarled out a yap to the effect that I had an easy job and why did I leave it?

All the bumptiousness had been taken out of me, and, whereas a short time ago I would have flared up, now I only mumbled something about looking for a job elsewhere.

"Lookin' for another easy job I suppose. Well, you can't be much worse than what I've got," he said with a shifty glance towards the gang, "and I need some more feather bed specialists, so you can start with us tomorrow, anyhow."

I asked him if I could sleep at the section house.

"You can if you put up fifty cents for your night's board," he growled. "I don't want any tramp workin' me for a bed and skinnin' out in the mornin'."

I handed him fifty cents, which he examined carefully before putting into his pocket.

At supper time I had my chance to size up the men. The first thing struck me was that instead of the usual jokes and customary good humor of everyone at the old foreman's section house, these men seemed sullen. They didn't appear to get any pleasure out of their food—which is always a bad sign—and what little talk there was seemed more like snarling than human speech. As quickly as possible each one finished eating, shoved back from the table and went to his bunk. Of course, I didn't know what was the matter, but it didn't take me long to find out.

When we started to work the next morning the tools were slung on the car in a helter-skelter fashion, the men piled on and pumped down the road in a slipshod, careless way as if time was of little value and the saving of energy the most important thing.

As we took the car from the track it looked to me as if the foreman had selected the most difficult spot to do it and one in which there was the greatest likelihood of some of us getting hurt. We had to strain and struggle to slip the car down a sharp incline from the right of way and I suppose we lost about thirty minutes doing it. It was even harder work to get it back, and I can even now see that foreman standing on the track grinning when someone was hurt as we pulled and pushed.

It occurred to me at this time that if ever I was in charge of a section, I would arrange, if possible, a number of harbor tracks at points along my section where it would be easy and safe to get the cars off the right of way.

My first job was putting in new ties. The foreman told us to get to work, then strolled off to some trees nearby, lit his pipe, and sat down. The result was, the gang bunched about three or four ties and everybody was in some one else's way.

In tamping the ties I had to make frequent waits for the men to get out of the way so that I could use the pick safely. So close was the gang bunched about that one of the men was badly hurt by a flying spike which struck on the edge, flew up, and landed against the side of his face cutting a deep gash. The entire gang spent twenty minutes looking after him as result of this accident.

I will never forget my first day on that section. It was the best exhibi-

tion of wasted energy I have ever seen.

In the afternoon we were put to work fixing a little platform for passenger service, and it was necessary to fill in considerably with crushed rock. This crushed rock was about 200 feet from where we were working and the foreman told us to get it. We grabbed our shovels and each man would walk to this pile of chat, get his shovel full, and walk back to the platform. I suppose it never occurred to the foreman to get a wheel-barrow.

Carrying a shovelful of chat this distance, with a slipshod elbow controlling the shovel, meant quite a little distribution along the right of way between the points of origin and destination, but the foolishness of this whole proceeding is too evident to dwell upon at length.

I fairly itched to make suggestions before the evening, but from the occasional remarks the men dropped and the appearance of the foreman, I knew that I had best say nothing. In fact, all this foreman seemed to be able to do was growl and cuss and he certainly filled up intervals between frequent rests in the shade, in this way. It certainly was a peevish bunch.

None of them seemed to care whether the work was done well or not, nor did they have any idea of doing anything but kill time whenever possible. This was not the fault of the men. They were as good men as those I had left, perhaps better, but I defy any man to work under a boss like that foreman and not lose interest in his work.

In the evening, as I have said, we dragged the car back on the track, piled up the tools in a helter-skelter way—and I am sure we must have lost more tools on that section than any other on the Frisco, for I never saw

a check taken of them—and pumped back to the section house.

The foreman's wife, unlike himself, was an energetic, good-hearted woman, but evidently afraid of him. We sat down to a fairly good supper, the foreman complaining all through the meal about the expense of food and how little money he was making either out of us or out of the railroad.

After supper was over the foreman's wife beckoned for me to come to the kitchen. She had heard where I had come from and knew that I always fared well. She began to excuse her husband and at the same time handed me a big piece of apple pie. Of course, the pie went better than the excuses, but I felt sorry for the woman and said but little.

Since then I have seen all manners and types of men. I have seen a lot of mean men that were capable and had so much ability that, to an extent, it counter-balanced their meanness, but I believe this foreman was the only mean man I ever met that didn't have the slightest amount of ability.

As an example of the man's absolute lack of common sense, I recall that, a few days after I started to work we were ditching along the right of way between the track and a high embankment. I noticed that the men in digging this ditch would throw the dirt up the embankment, most of it sliding back and but little of it reaching the crest.

My experience with the foreman had been such that I knew if I explained the shiftlessness of this kind of work, the very least he would do would be to grunt and ignore me, but to anyone with a teacup of sense it was evident that when the first rain came it would wash the dirt back into the fill.

Sure enough two or three days later a heavy rain came and the ditch we

were digging was a loblolly of mud. The rain was unusually heavy and the water rose up under the track and softened it so that the foreman had to put out slow orders and work almost night and day to get that small section in shape for business, whereas, if we had dug the ditch properly and carried the dirt away, we would not have experienced any trouble.

This piece of ignorance cost the railroad about three days' work of the section gang to say nothing of the expense and annoyance of slowing down the trains.

I regarded it as a rather fortunate thing that I struck this foreman after my old foreman, as it gave me an opportunity to see just how fine a man my first boss was.

As result of the attitude of this foreman towards his men and his job, very few, if any, of them made a success. In fact, I only know of one man who ever worked for him that is still in the land of the livin' and is doing fairly well. But in his case he worked only a little while and, strangely enough, I saw him not long ago and it brought to my mind an incident of later years when he was well up in railroad service, and perhaps it might be worth relating, as it will be of interest to many old timers.

Grover Cleveland, then president of the United States, took a notion to visit the Western country and travel from Kansas City to Memphis via the Fort Scott road.

Every precaution was taken to insure his safety; a pilot train was sent on ahead loaded with material and men—Charley Gardiner, conductor, and Ben McCrum, engineer on the pilot; Jim Dalton, conductor, and Ed Shipley, engineer, on the President's special. A section man was stationed on every mile of track and the Frisco