

SCENES ABOUT THE UNION DEPOT.

THE COMING AND GOING OF TRAINS.

A Picture of Confusion to the Uninitiated, But Method and Order for Railroad Employes.

Of all the busy, bustling, clamorous scenes of activity in this beautiful city, there is none busier, noisier, or more suggestive of ceaseless energy and progress than that upon which the great stone towers of the union station look down day after day—the ebb and flow of travel and trade. Never the same two days in succession, as to the throngs that come and go, there is still a wondrous uniformity of day with day when viewed from the merely material stand-point, and a thorough understanding of the vast clock-work by which everything moves on and dovetails in harmoniously, can only be a source of wonder and admiration at the perfection of detail achievable by the human brain. Go there when you will, and to the unpracticed eye the scene will seem a little pandemonium, with its trains of all sorts pulling in, starting out and backing down; erratic "switchers," puffing, snorting and rushing back and forth in veritable free-lance fashion, and specimens of all sorts and conditions of men running up and down with faces expressing every emotion from sharp anxiety to blank despair. Women who would be self-possessed in a burning house or sinking ship, succumb to the high nervous pressure brought to bear in the process of changing cars, checking trunks and keeping out of wrong trains, and children who never cried before take this occasion to begin.

Still, there is method in all this madness, and many a period is there in the day when the perfect gorge and crush by the simultaneous arrival of three or four trains will be succeeded in a few minutes by the most perfect calm. The crowd makes short work of getting out on Main street, frequently in a perfect jam of the narrow, temporary walk; the trains back down into the yards without losing a minute, and while the spectator is rubbing his eyes the theater of operations is vacated. It is but for a moment, however, and the right of way goes the next moment to some great rumbling freight, all the way from the western prairies, which pulls through with a volcanic expulsion of cinders, at what is meant to be a frantic rate of speed. But freights have no place in the race when passenger trains are concerned, and they can just stay outside, and puff and whistle, and fume, as they wait, for their betters to be served. They circulate in the lower stratum of railway society, and must await the pleasure of the switchmen who stand as sentinels with flags of white, blue and yellow, which, when waved, give the right of way to trains from the west, south and north, respectively; a red flag being the danger signal. The flags are replaced, at night, of course, by colored lights, and the pyrotechnic display of red, green, blue and white that so mystifies the uninitiated, has a language all its own, and one that is worth learning if for nothing more than the satisfaction of knowing the most picturesque detail of what is at best an adventurous and risky business.

A whole day spent at the station and in the railroad yards, might give a man plenty of new ideas, were he familiar with railroads from his infancy. Let him stroll up Main street at dawn and turn up the narrow walk as the first train of the new day pulls out for New York with a rush and roar that is succeeded by a temporary silence. Then let him wait around till 6.05 o'clock, when business begins in earnest, with the arrival of the Albany express and, if it be Sunday, the fast paper train from New York. Then the early express for Boston and the accommodation for West Springfield, are backed up, leaving 10 minutes later, the latter being the first of a long procession of way-trains bearing laborers to their work in all the outlying districts. The first train for Holyoke goes at 6.30, the short trip to Brightwood is made 10 minutes later, and meanwhile the accommodations from Northampton and West Springfield have pulled in amicably side by side. The train for Longmeadow and New York starts exactly at 7, and is met just below the yard by a companion from the south which disgorges a motley concourse picked up at all the near way stations, and is backed down while the way trains for Boston and Northampton are made up. These depart reluctantly at the same moment, with passengers whose errands are similar, and who are dropped at their places of work all along the road. The crowd, which has been near high-water mark, falls off with their departure, the "Westfield scoot," which leaves at 7.30, taking a good part of those remaining.

Those who would go, up on the Athol branch must be early risers and make the 7.40 train or wait till evening, and the places of those who do this are more than filled as the heavily-loaded train from Holyoke comes in upon their heels. Then there is a scene of jostle and hustle and push in the effort to get out on the street in the first rush, and the way is cleared for the load of a second accommodation from the south at 7.50. The through train for Montreal starts out at 8, the Brightwood special follows at 8.05, and then there is a comparative lull, quickly seized upon by the freight trains waiting without the gates, or across the bridge—which is the same thing. They must watch their time, however, for the Chicopee Falls train has the right of way in at 8.15, a way train from Boston at 8.42, and another from Greenfield at 8.50; while nothing must stand in the way of the 8.55 as it pulls out for Albany. The striking of the hour is followed by the coming of a load of pilgrims from Bridgeport and way-stations, which is followed by a similar consignment from Pittsfield at 9.10. Five minutes later the northern train goes out and the Boston express gathers itself up to launch out on its fast run.

Nothing more but noisy "switchers" and heavy freights for 10 minutes, when the accommodation leaves for New York with a load of passengers, few of whom will stay by till the final stop at Forty-second street. But now comes the express from Boston at 9.49, rushing on across the bridge and off through the Berkshire hills after a four-minute stop, and the lazy time of day is at an end. Chicopee Falls people make up the load that is taken up the road at 10 o'clock, and during the next 25 minutes in come the accommodations from Northampton, Athol, Westfield and New York. Another train goes up the River road at 10.35, one comes down from the Falls at 10.50, and 11 o'clock is the signal for the departure of the ubiquitous "Westfield scoot," and the arrival of trains from the north and west. The way-train from Albany is on hand in a jiffy, pauses five minutes before resuming its journey, and meets its counterpart just outside the city. Then comes the express from Boston, to which Springfield is but a station on the way to Albany, followed by another which is content to stay its mad career and be backed into the yard for a good wash. More people start for Chicopee on the 11.45, and more yet are off for New York on the train that goes out side by side with it—so near each other and so long together that passengers in opposite windows begin to feel acquainted. And so comes in high noon, with the train from Northampton prompt to the minute, and back again up the road after five minutes' grace.

The freights have a fair chance now and then between noon and 1 o'clock, the next trains in being the New York express at 12.27, the way-train from White River Junction three minutes later, and another New York express at 12.45. The New Yorkers are in the dining-room with one jump, and between the two trainfuls, the waiters have a bad quarter of an hour. However, the through express is off for Boston at 12.49, and their labors are lightened. The

half-hour after 1 o'clock sees the incoming and outgoing of five Connecticut River trains, and an express pulls in from Boston at 1.41 and out again for New York. Then comes another calm till 2.15, when an accommodation plods off toward Albany, whistling to keep its courage up, and the insistent quality of Chicopee people is impressed upon the observer by the arrival of another load of embryo mayors and aldermen. New York and Worcester are heard from next, and alarmed at the constant influx of humanity, a heavy load of citizens is exported to Northampton. Trains from the north and south come in together again, and the latter speeds on to Boston. And so before one knows it comes 3 o'clock, when every man is on the jump, when passengers are crowded in the waiting-room like sardines; while the stentorian voice of genial John Kirby is at its loudest as he calls out the tracks where the trains for New York, New Haven, Hartford, Holyoke, Northampton, and Chicopee are to be found. Then too, does Officer Thomas Coote prove himself a helper to the bewildered women who throng around him as he looms up, big and burly, head and shoulders above the tallest of his interlocutors. But the trains are out again in 15 minutes, two up and one down the road, and there is quiet once more. The "Westfield scoot" bobs up again directly, but a passenger train from the Chicopee branch at 3.55 is the only other disturbing element for 45 minutes and the freights have things all their own way.

This is the time of day when the switchmen, flag-men and baggage-smashers snatch a little relaxation, and they certainly have the appearance of seeing life through rose-colored spectacles as they sit around together and joke as they watch the long freights tearing through; snatch a ride to the yard and back on some wandering switcher with a load of "empties;" or seize the opportunity to get an uninterrupted whiff at the cut-plug that fills each weather-beaten pipe. Then there is generally a vociferous stranger or two with a strong breath and quarrelsome disposition; and, altogether, there is no lack of entertainment. Meanwhile the 4 o'clock train east has been made up and starts out on the minute—generally with some disappointed man chasing it for some distance down the track. Once more goes out the "Westfield scoot" with a switcher puffing along in the rear, and the big "hog" engine that has been impatiently waiting on the bridge and whistling for the right of way takes its cue from the waving of white flags and pulls its regulation load of 33 cars over the crossing at the prescribed rate of six miles an hour. The "Hartford local," which has been made up down in the southern yard, backs up at 4.10, and is off 20 minutes later; and meanwhile the crowded express from St. Albans rounds the curve, and a through freight, a "pickup," and a mixed "switcher" load rumble through the station and across the bridge.

Another long express from Northampton at 5 o'clock, and another rush for the street. Then a freight from the Athol branch—and the Chicopee train is in, closely followed by the Northampton accommodation. The inde-fatigable "Westfield scoot" shows up at 5.25, and in its wake, night after night, comes a procession of four single engines from the yards to take out the trains for Athol, Palmer, Pittsfield and Boston. Then the Connecticut River train backs up on the spur track, or No 3, and there are generally two or three badly rattled passengers who have to be dragged off the crossing by the ever-watchful sentinel, W. B. Coote. Then the Athol train comes in, the Boston express is backed up, and the long express from St. Louis, with its sleeping and drawing-room cars with high sounding names, piles up the agony by filling up the last of the four tracks now in use. Everything is out of the way presently, however, and for three minutes the tracks are cleared. Then come the long through train from Vermont, with a long train from Holyoke on its heels, and the 5.55 express from the East thunders in with a tremendous convoy of passenger cars, every one crowded.

As dusk is falling, the long rows of electric lamps flash up in unison, and they shine on what is the busiest, noisiest, most picturesque scene of all the busy day. There is always inspiration in a crowd, and the crowd that pours in now is something worth seeing. The waiting-room is full; the restaurant is full; the platforms are jammed; every nook and corner but one is crowded. The one exception is the room so conspicuously labeled, "For women only." It is comfortable, well lighted and commodious; but strange to say, it is the one spot on the premises where women absolutely will not stay. The Holyoke train brings the first important detachment of the army of workers who set out in the early morning, and from now on to 7.30 o'clock they keep pouring in. The 6.15 train north takes out a corresponding load and equals things up by dropping most of them at Holyoke. The next 15 minutes sees the arrival of the Albany express, the accommodation from Albany and the Boston express, which goes south directly as the New York limited. Another train from Holyoke is signaled in at 6.32, and more careless people are snatched from destruction as it backs down from the spur after disgorging its load. The New Haven and Athol trains are off at 6.40, the former making the briefest of stops on its way from Boston, and again there is peace, till a load of theater-goers from the Chicopee branch, a way train from New Haven, and an express from New York pull in, all within 10 minutes. The Northampton train leaves on the half-hour, the express for Boston a minute later, and the departure of another train for the Falls clears the tracks for the arrival of the 7.45 train down. Then the express from Albany shoots across the bridge and up the track in obedience to the long row of green lights and the white lantern waved by Switchman Mott, the grizzled veteran of 20 years' service, and the departure of the Montreal express shows that it is 8 o'clock.

It is quiet enough from now on, always remembering that freight-trains are counted out. An express for Boston at 8.10, a local for New Haven 15 minutes later, and another that comes down the river at 9.05, are the only breaks up to 9.30 o'clock; when trains from Boston and Chicopee Falls come in together and stop in neighborly proximity. The Boston express, which arrives at 9.51, is off across the bridge with little ceremony, and a lot of Holyokers go up stream at 10 o'clock. The Falls train is in at 10.15, the New York express at 10.30, and a Holyoke train on the next quarter. The River road is doing all the business now, and two more trains are sent up the road within five minutes of each other. Then comes the 11.42 from the Athol branch, the positively last appearance of the Chicopee Falls train at 11.50, and it is midnight. The next hour sees only the arrival of two scantily patronized way-trains from the south. From now on an occasional express is the only nocturnal visitor of the lonely and almost deserted station, but the switchman in his snug lobby has to keep just as wide awake as Lou Aldrich by day. The Albany express comes snorting and rushing up the track to its journey's end at 1 o'clock, and the Adams express from Boston is in at 1.30. The "Owl" is on time from the east at 1.54, and is off again for New York. The Adams express waits leisurely till 2.08 before starting on its trip south, and the last two arrivals of the night are the accommodation and express from New York at 2.35 and 3.02. The latter speeds on its way east with but little delay; the first train for Albany is off into the dark 10 minutes later; another starts for New York at the bright and early hour of 3.40, and the whole unending ground begins once more with the coming of the dawn.