RAILROADING IN MONTANA.

RAILROAD men have many difficulties, annoyances and dangers to contend with that the traveling public know little of. Sitting in his comfortable seat in the Pullman and engrossed in the morning paper purchased at the last station or in the pages of the latest novel, or enjoying a quiet game of whist with his fellow travelers, the passenger on one of our first class trains is carried at great speed across the continent and never realizes how many times his life has been saved by the steady hand and faithful attention to duty of the engineer. Nor are the conductor of the train, the telegraph operators at the stations and the train despatcher at division headquarters less responsible than the brave engineer and his assistant, the fireman, for the lives of the millions of people who annually travel on the railroad lines of the United States. A slight mistake on the part of either of these might send scores of people to their death and destroy thousands of dollars worth of property. The comparatively few accidents in proportion to the number of trains show with what fidelity, zeal, intelligence and often heroic devotion to duty the employees of our great railroad corporations can be credited. Not only do statistics show that the danger of railroad travel is very light, but the fact that accident insurance companies do not charge a higher premium simply because the insured travels a great deal on the railroad indicates it as well. Perhaps the best evidence is the fact that millions of people annually travel on the lines in the United States without giving a thought to any extra hazard of their lives on that account. And yet, as before stated, this sense of security and this almost certain immunity from accident, is not the result of any inherent safety in that method of traveling, but solely because of the bravery and intelligent fidelity of those who have the management of the trains, especially the engineer.

Sitting in the cab, between the locomotive boiler and the tender holding the coal or wood used for fuel, the engineer and fireman, one on each side, maintain a constant scrutiny of the track as far in advance of the engine as possible. They are looking for all sorts of obstructions and dangers. Perhaps a switch at a siding is not in exact position, a rail may be broken, a land slide may have occurred on the side of a deep cut or a steep hill, heavy rains may have washed the bank out from under the track leaving it unsupported, a trestle, or bridge or culvert may have been burned, possibly some despicable wretch may have put some obstruction on the track just around a sharp bend that would hide it from view until the locomotive approach within a few yards, or it may be that by some one's error another train may come thundering down the track from the opposite direction. All these dangers and many more the lookout is maintained to detect, and the instant he sees one, or hears the warning cry of his mate, as the fireman is called, the engineer grasps the lever, if his hand be not already upon it, reverses his engine, applies the full force of the air-brakes, and shuts his teeth to await the doubtful result. It is here that devotion to duty and heroic courage have been so often displayed, at the sacrifice of the engineer's life, that no men stand higher as a class in the general esteem and confidence of the public than those who, with grimy hands and smutty faces, stand faithfully day and night, in heat and cold, in sunshine and storm, in the cab of the locomotive engine.

There is one danger encountered in railroad travel in the west that is absent, or rather has been overcome in the older states of the east. So frequent and constant is this that "cattle on the track" is the almost instant exclamation whenever the piercing shriek of the locomotive's whistle is heard in any way except the regulation toots for brakes and crossings and the long blasts for stations. The railroads of the west are not guarded by fences from the incurison of cattle, who seem to be attracted by the level grade. They come out of the woods in the day time to sun themselves on the track, and often at night they find upon it a comfortable bed. In times of storm deep cuts furnish them a shelter from the elements they gladly seek, and at other times they are found upon the track simply because they happened to stray there and there was no fence to prevent them. In Montana, where thousands of cattle graze upon the ranges, quite considerable bands of cattle sometimes obstruct the track, but the country being open and but sparsely timbered, the engineer can generally see them in time to stop his train if they do not heed the warning shrieks of the whistle, but in the more densely timbered regions of Oregon and California, the danger is enhanced by the fact that the view is often obstructed by trees and brush at a curve in the track, and the locomotive in rounding the bend suddenly plunges into a band of cattle whose presence was entirely unknown. There is little for the engineer to do. He can not stop the train, and it would be folly to attempt to do so, for if the engine must strike one of them it better do so at full speed, as it will be more certain of throwing the animal off the track, instead of simply knocking it down, as in the latter case it might get under the engine and derail it or turn it over. So he sounds his whistle to frighten the cattle and, perhaps, increases his speed. The startled animals run in all directions, some up the bank and some down, while others start down the track with head and tail erect as though to race the train with only a handicap of a few yards. Occasionally a belligerent steer or