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The Nerve of Foley

Copyright, 1900, by Frank H. Spearman

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

THERE had been rumors all winter that the engineers were going to strike. Certainly we of the operating department had warning enough. Yet in the railroad life there is always friction in some quarter. The railroad man sleeps like the soldier, with an ear alert, but just the same he sleeps, for with waking comes duty.

Our engineers were good fellows. If they had faults they were American faults—rashness, a liberality bordering on extravagance and a headstrong, violent way of reaching conclusions—traits born of ability and self confidence and developed by prosperity.

One of the best men we had on a locomotive was Andrew Cameron; at the same time he was one of the hardest to manage, because he was young and headstrong. Andy, a big, powerful fellow, ran opposite Felix Kennedy on the flier. The fast runs require young men. If you will notice, you will rarely see an old engineer on a fast passenger run. Even a young man can stand only a few years of that kind of work. High speed on a locomotive is a question of nerve and endurance—to put it bluntly, a question of flesh and blood.

"You don't think much of this strike, do you, Mr. Reed?" said Andy to me one night.

"Don't think there's going to be any, Andy."

He laughed knowingly.

"What actual grievance have the boys?" I asked.

"The trouble's on the East End," he replied evasively.

"Is that any reason for calling a thousand men out on this end?"

"If one goes out, they all go."

"Would you go out?"

"Would I? You bet!"

"A man with a home and a wife and a baby boy like yours ought to have more sense."

Getting up to leave, he laughed again confidently. "That's all right. We'll bring you fellows to terms."

"Maybe," I reported as he closed the door. But I hadn't the slightest idea they would begin the attempt that night. I was at home and sound asleep when the caller tapped on my window. I threw up the sash; it was pouring rain and dark as a pocket.

"What is it, Barney? A wreck?" I exclaimed.

"Worse than that. Everything's tied up."

"What do you mean?"

"The engineers have struck."

"Struck? What time is it?"

"Half past 3. They went out at 3 o'clock." Throwing on my clothes, I floundered behind Barney's lantern to the depot. The superintendent was already in his office talking to the master mechanic.

Bulletins came in every few minutes from various points announcing trains tied up. Before long we began to hear from the East End. Chicago reported all engineers out; Omaha wired no trains moving. When the sun rose that morning our entire system, extending through seven states and territories, was absolutely paralyzed.

It was an astounding situation, but one that must be met. It meant either an ignominious surrender to the engineers or a fight to the death. For our part, we had only to wait for orders. It was just 6 o'clock when the chief train dispatcher, who was tapping at a key, said:

"Here's something from headquarters."

We crowded close around him. His pen flew across the clip; the message was addressed to all division superintendents. It was short, but at the end of it he wrote a name we rarely saw in our office. It was that of the railroad magnate we knew as "the old man," the president of the system, and his words were few:

"Move the trains!"

"Move the trains!" repeated the superintendent. "Yes, but trains can't be moved by pinch bars nor by main force."

We spent the day arguing with the strikers. They were friendly, but firm. Persuasion, entreaties, threats, we exhausted and ended just where we began, except that we had lost our tempers. The sun set without the turn of a wheel. The victory of the first day was certainly with the strikers.

Next day it looked pretty blue around the depot. Not a car was moved. The engineers and firemen were a unit. But the wires sung hard all that day and all that night. Just before midnight Chicago wired that No. 1—our big passenger train, the Denver flier—had started out on time, with the superintendent of motive power as engineer and a wiper for fireman. The message came from the second vice president. He promised to deliver the train to our division on time the next evening, and he asked, "Can you get it through to Denver?"

We looked at each other. At last all eyes gravitated toward Neighbor, our master mechanic.

The train dispatcher was waiting. "What shall I say?" he asked.

The division chief of the motive power was a tremendously big Irishman, with a voice like a fog horn. Without an instant's hesitation the answer came clear:

"Say 'yes!'"

Every one of us started. It was throwing the gage of battle. Our word had gone out; the division was pledged; the fight was on.

Next evening the strikers through some mysterious channel got word that the flier was expected. About 9 o'clock a crowd of them began to gather round the depot.

It was after 1 o'clock when No. 1 pulled in, and the foreman of the Omaha roundhouse swung down from the locomotive cab. The strikers clustered around the engine like a swarm of angry bees, but that night, though there was plenty of jeering, there was no actual violence. When they saw Neighbor climb into the cab to take the run west there was a sullen silence.

Next day a committee of strikers, with Andy Cameron, very cavalier, at their head, called on me.

"Mr. Reed," said he officiously, "we've come to notify you not to run any more trains through here till this strike's settled. The boys won't stand it. That's all." With that he turned on his heel to leave with his following.

"Hold on, Cameron," I replied, raising my hand as I spoke; "that's not quite all. I suppose you men represent your grievance committee?"

"Yes, sir."

"I happen to represent, in the superintendent's absence, the management of this road. I simply want to say to you and to your committee that I take my orders from the president and the general manager—not from you nor anybody you represent. That's all."

Every hour the bitterness increased. We got a few trains through, but we were terribly crippled. As for freight, we made no pretense of moving it. Train loads of fruit and meat rotted in the yards. The strikers grew more turbulent daily. They beat our new men and crippled our locomotives. Then our troubles with the new men were almost as bad. They burned out our crown sheets; they got mixed up on orders all the time. They ran into open switches and into each other continually and had us very nearly crazy.

I kept tab on one of the new engineers for a week. He began by backing into a diner so hard that he smashed every dish in the car and ended by running into a siding a few days later and setting two tanks of oil on fire, that burned up a freight depot. I figured he cost us $40,000 the week he ran. Then he went back to selling windmills.

After this experience I was sitting in my office one evening, when a youngish fellow in a slouch hat opened the door and stuck his head in.

"What do you want?" I growled.

"Are you Mr. Reed?"

"What do you want?"

"I want to speak to Mr. Reed."

"Well, what is it?"

"Are you Mr. Reed?"

"Confound you, yes! What do you want?"

"Me? I don't want anything. I'm just asking; that's all."

His impudence staggered me so that I took my feet off the desk.

"Heard you were looking for men," he added.

"No," I snapped, "I don't want any men."

"Wouldn't be any show to get on an engine, would there?"

A week earlier I should have risen and fallen on his neck, but there had been others.

"There's a show to get your head broke," I suggested.

"I don't mind that if I get my time."

"What do you know about running an engine?"

"Run one three years."

"On a thrashing machine?"

"On the Philadelphia and Reading."

"Who sent you in here?"

"Just dropped in."

"Sit down."

I eyed him sharply as he dropped into a chair.

"When did you quit the Philadelphia and Reading?"

"About six months ago."

"Fired?"

"Strike."

I began to get interested. After a few more questions I took him into the superintendent's office, but at the door I thought it well to drop a hint.

"Look here, my friend, if you're a spy you'd better keep out of this. This man would wring your neck as quick as he'd suck an orange. See?"

"Let's tackle him anyhow," replied the fellow, eying me coolly.

I introduced him to Mr. Lancaster and left them together. Pretty soon the superintendent came into my office.

"What do you make of him, Reed?" said he.

"What do you make of him?"

Lancaster studied a minute.

"Take him over to the roundhouse and see what he knows."

I walked over with the new find, chatting warily. When we reached a live engine I told him to look it over. He threw off his coat, picked up a piece of waste and swung into the cab.

"Run her out to the switch," said I, stepping up myself.

He pinched the throttle, and we steamed slowly out of the house. A minute showed he was at home on an engine.

"Can you handle it?" I asked as he shut off after backing down to the roundhouse.

"You use soft coal," he replied, trying the injector. "I'm used to hard. This injector is new to me. Guess I can work it, though."

"What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say."

"What is it?" I asked curtly.

"Foley."

"Well, Foley, if you have as much sense as you have gall you ought to get along. If you act straight, you'll never want a job again as long as you live. If you don't, you won't want to live very long."

"Got any tobacco?"

"Here, Baxter," said I, turning to the roundhouse foreman, "this is Foley. Give him a chew, and mark him up to go out on 77 tonight. If he monkeys with anything around the house, kill him."

Baxter looked at Foley, and Foley looked at Baxter, and, Baxter not getting the tobacco out quick enough, Foley reminded him he was waiting.

We didn't pretend to run freights, but I concluded to try the fellow on one, feeling sure that if he was crooked he would ditch it and skip.

So Foley ran a long string of empties and a car or two of rotten oranges down to Harvard Junction that night, with one of the dispatchers for pilot. Under my orders they had a train made up at the Junction for him to bring back to McCloud. They had picked up all the strays in the yards, including half a dozen cars of meat that the local board of health had condemned after it had laid out in the sun for two weeks and a car of butter we had been shifting around ever since the beginning of the strike.

When the strikers saw the stuff coming in next morning behind Foley they concluded I had gone crazy.

"What do you think of the track, Foley?" said I.

"Fair," he replied, sitting down on my desk. "Stiff hill down there by Zanesville."

"Any trouble to climb it?" I asked, for I had purposely given him a heavy train.

"Not with that car of butter. If you hold that butter another week, it will climb a hill without any engine."

"Can you handle a passenger train?"

"I guess so."

"I'm going to send you west on No. 1 tonight."

"Then you'll have to give me a fireman. That guy you sent out last night is a lightning rod peddler. The dispatcher threw most of the coal."

"I'll go with you myself, Foley. I can give you steam. Can you stand it to double back tonight?"

"I can stand it if you can."

When I walked into the roundhouse in the evening with a pair of overalls on Foley was in the cab getting ready for the run.

Neighbor brought the flier in from the east. As soon as he had uncoupled and got out of the way we backed down with the 448. It was the best engine we had left and, luckily for my back, an easy steamer. Just as we coupled to the mail car a crowd of strikers swarmed out of the dusk. They were in an ugly mood, and when Andy Cameron and Bat Nicholson sprang up into the cab I saw we were in for trouble.

"Look here, partner," exclaimed Cameron, laying a heavy hand on Foley's shoulder, "you don't want to take this train out, do you? You wouldn't beat honest workingmen out of a job?"

Nicholson sprang on him like a tiger.

"I'm not beating anybody out of a job. If you want to take out this train, take it out. If you don't, get out of this cab."

Cameron was nonplused. Nicholson, a surly brute, raised his fist menacingly.

"See here, boss," he growled, "we won't stand no scabs on this line."

"Get out of this cab."

"I'll promise you you'll never get out of it alive, my buck, if you ever get into it again!" cried Cameron, swinging down. Nicholson followed, muttering angrily. I hoped we were out of the scrape; but, to my consternation, Foley, picking up his oil can, got right down behind them and began filling his cups without the least attention to anybody.

Nicholson sprang on him like a tiger. The onslaught was so sudden that they had him under their feet in a minute. I jumped down, and Ben Buckley, the conductor, came running up. Between us we gave the little fellow a life. He squirmed out like a cat and backed instantly up against the tender.

"One at a time, and come on!" he cried hotly. "If it's ten to one and on a man's back at that, we'll do it different." With a quick, peculiar movement of his arm he drew a pistol and, pointing it squarely at Cameron, cried, "Get back!"

I caught a flash of his eye through the blood that streamed down his face. I wouldn't have given a switch key for the life of the man who crowded him at that minute. But just then Lancaster came up, and before the crowd realized it we had Foley, protesting angrily, back in the cab again.

"For heaven's sake, pull out of this before there's bloodshed, Foley," I cried, and, nodding to Buckley, Foley opened the choker.

It was a night run and a new track to him. I tried to fire and pilot both, but after Foley suggested once or twice that if I would tend to the coal he would tend to the curves I let him find them, and he found them all, I thought, before we got to Athens. He took big chances in his running, but there was a superb confidence in his bursts of speed which marked the fast runner and the experienced one.

At Athens we had barely two hours to rest before doubling back. I was never tired in my life till I struck the pillow that night, but before I got it warm the caller routed me out again. The eastbound flier was on time, or nearly so, and when I got into the cab for the run back Foley was just coupling on.

"Did you get a nap?" I asked as we pulled out.

"No; we slipped an eccentric coming up, and I've been under the engine ever since. Say, she's a bird, isn't she? She's all right. I couldn't run her coming up, but I've touched up her valve motion a bit, and I'll get action on her as soon as it's daylight."

"Don't mind getting action on my account, Foley; I'm shy on life insurance."

He laughed.

"You're safe with me. I never killed man, woman or child in my life. When I do, I quit the cab. Give her plenty of diamonds, if you please," he added, letting her out full.

He gave me the ride of my life, but I hated to show scare, he was so coolly audacious himself. We had but one stop—for water—and after that all down grade. We bowled along as easy as ninepins, but the pace was a hair raiser. After we passed Arickaree we never touched a thing but the high joints. The long, heavy train behind us flew round the bluffs once in awhile like the tail of a very capricious kite, yet somehow, and that's an engineer's magic, she always lit on the steel.

Day broke ahead, and between breaths I caught the glory of a sunrise on the plains from a locomotive cab window. When the smoke of the McCloud shops stained the horizon, remembering the ugly threats of the strikers, I left my seat to speak to Foley.

"I think you'd better swing off when you slow up for the yards and cut across to the roundhouse!" I cried, getting close to his ear, for we were on terrific speed. He looked at me inquiringly. "In that way you won't run into Cameron and his crowd at the depot," I added. "I can stop her all right."

He didn't take his eyes off the track. "I'll take the train to the platform," said he.

"Isn't that a crossing cut ahead?" he added suddenly as we swung round a hill west of town.

"Yes, and a bad one."

He reached for the whistle and gave the long warning screams. I set the bell ringer and stooped to open the furnace door to cool the fire, when—chug! I flew up against the water gauges like a coupling pin. The monster engine reared right up on her head. Scrambling to my feet, I saw the new man clutching the air lever with both hands, and every wheel on the train was screeching. I jumped to his side and looked over his shoulder. On the crossing just ahead a big white horse, dragging a buggy, plunged and reared frantically. Standing on the buggy seat a baby boy clung, bewildered, to the lazyback—not another soul in sight. All at once the horse swerved sharply back. The buggy lurched half over. The lines seemed to be caught around one wheel. The little fellow clung on, but the crazy horse, instead of running, began a hornpipe right between the deadly rails.

I looked at Foley in despair. From the monstrous quivering leaps of the great engine I knew the drivers were in the clutch of the mighty air brake, but the resistless momentum of the train was none the less sweeping us down at deadly speed on the baby. Between the two tremendous forces the locomotive shivered like a gigantic beast. I shrang back in horror, but the little man at the throttle, throwing the last ounce of air on the burning wheels, leaped from his box with a face transfigured.

"Take her!" he cried, and, never shifting his eyes from the cut, he shot through his open window and darted like a cat along the running board to the front.

Not a hundred feet separated us from the crossing. I could see the baby's curls blowing in the wind. The horse suddenly leaped from across the track to the side of it. That left the buggy quartering with the rails, but not twelve inches clear. The way the wheels were cramped a single step ahead would throw the hind wheels into the train; a step backward would shove the front wheels into it. It was appalling.

Foley, clinging with one hand to a headlight bracket, dropped down on the steam chest and swung far out. As the cowcatcher shot past Foley's long arm dipped into the buggy like the sweep of a connecting rod and caught the boy by the breeches. The impetus of our speed threw the child high in the air, but Foley's grip was on the little overalls, and as the youngster bounded back he caught it close. I saw the horse give a leap. It sent the hind wheels into the corner of the baggage car. There was a crash like the report of a hundred rifles, and the buggy flew in the air. The big horse was thrown fifty feet, but Foley, with a great light in his eyes and the baby boy in his arm, crawled, laughing, into the cab.

Thinking he would take the engine again, I tried to take the baby. Take it? Well, I think not!

"Hi, there, buster," shouted the little engineer wildly, "that's a corking pair of breeches on you, son! I caught the kid right by the seat of the pants," he

Foley dropped down on the steam chest and swung far out.

called over to me, laughing hysterically. "Heavens, little man, I wouldn't 've struck you for all the gold in Alaska. I've got a chunk of a boy in Reading as much like him as a twin brother. What were you doing all alone in that buggy? Whose kid do you suppose it is? What's your name, son?"

At his question I looked at the child again, and I started. I had certainly seen him before, and, had I not, his father's features were too well stamped on the childish face for me to be mistaken.

"Foley," I cried, all amaze, "that's Cameron's boy—little Andy!"

He tossed the baby the higher; he looked the happier; he shouted the louder.

"The deuce it is! Well, son, I'm mighty glad of it." And I certainly was glad—mighty glad, as Foley expressed it—when we pulled up at the depot, and I saw Andy Cameron, with a wicked look, pushing to the front through the threatening crowd. With an ugly growl, he made for Foley.

"I've got business with you—you"—

"I've got a little with you, son," retorted Foley, stepping leisurely down from the cab. "I struck a buggy back here at the first cut, and I hear it was yours." Cameron's eyes began to bulge. "I guess the outfit's damaged some, all but the boy. Here, kid," he added, turning for me to hand him the child, "here's your dad."

The instant the youngster caught sight of his parent he set up a yell. Foley, laughing, passed him into his astonished father's arms before the latter could say a word. Just then a boy, running and squeezing through the crowd, cried to Cameron that his horse had run away from the house with the baby in the buggy and that Mrs. Cameron was having a fit.

Cameron stood like one daft, and the boy, catching sight of the baby that instant, panted and stared in an idiotic state.

"Andy," said I, getting down and laying a hand on his shoulder, "if these fellows want to kill this man let them do it alone—you'd better keep out. Only this minute he has saved your boy's life."

The sweat stood out on the big engineer's forehead like dew. I told the story. Cameron tried to speak, but he tried again and again before he could find his voice.

"Mate," he stammered, "you've been through a strike yourself—you know what it means, don't you? But if you've got a baby—" he gripped the boy tighter to his shoulder.

"I have, partner; three of 'em."

"Then you know what this means," said Andy, huskily putting out his hand to Foley. He gripped the little man's fist hard, and, turning, walked away through the crowd.

Somehow it put a damper on the boys. Bat Nicholson was about the only man left who looked as if he wanted to eat somebody, and Foley, winging his blouse over his shoulder, walked up to Bat and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Stranger," said he gently, "c you oblige me with a chew of bacco?"

Bat glared at him an instant, but Foley's nerve won.

Flushing a bit, Bat stuck his hand into his pocket, took it out, felt hurriedly in the other pocket, and, with some confusion, acknowledged he was short. Felix Kennedy intervened with a slab, and the three men fell at once to talking about the accident.

A long time afterward some of the striking engineers were taken back, but none of those who had been guilty of actual violence. This barred Andy Cameron, who, though not worse than many others, had been less prudent and, while we all felt sorry for him after the other boys had gone to work, Lancaster repeatedly and positively refused to reinstate him.

Several times, though, I saw Foley and Cameron in coafab, and one day up came Foley to the superintendent's office, leading little Andy, in his overalls, by the hand. They went into Lancaster's office together, and the door was shut for a long time.

When they came out little Andy had a piece of paper in his hand.

"Hang on to it, son," cautioned Foley, "but you can show it to Mr. Reed if you want to."

The youngster handed me the paper. It was an order directing Andrew Cameron to report to the master mechanic for service in the morning.

I happened over at the roundhouse one day nearly a year later, when Foley was showing Cameron a new engine just in from the east. The two men were become great cronies; that day they fell to talking over the strike.

"There was never but one thing I really laid up against this man," said Cameron to me.

"What's that?" asked Foley.

"Why the way you shoved that pistol into my face the first night you took out No. 1."

"I never shoved any pistol into your face." So saying, he stuck his hand into his pocket with the identical motion he used the night of the strike, and leveled at Andy, just as he had done then—a plug of tobacco. "That's all I ever pulled on you, son. I never carried a pistol in my life."

Cameron looked at him, then he turned to me, with a tired expression.

"I've seen a good many men, with a good many kinds of nerve, but I'll be splintered if ever I saw any one man with all kinds of nerve till I struck Foley."

How and When to Eat.

There are a few plain facts about how and when to eat which it would be worth a man's while to keep in mind even when well. If you are in a hurry, eat lightly. There is no virtue in gulping down a large meal just because it is mealtime. While the mind is actively engaged in the details and responsibilities of business the digestive apparatus is in no condition to undertake heavy work. The blood supply is drained off elsewhere, giving all the contribution it can to the brain, and if a quantity of food be taken in it simply remains undigested in the stomach. Worry, unsettled mind, low spirits, all tend to delay or to stop the activities of the alimentary canal. Students who go at hard head work immediately after meals often suffer from indigestion. So do letter carriers and other people whose meals are followed by prolonged physical exertion. Indeed, any kind of effort which forces the blood flow away from the alimentary region is injurious after hearty eating.—Dr. Gulick in World's Work.

Indian Medicine Bags.

The medicine bags of Navajoes, Zunis and Apaches, all kindred tribes, contain a curious powder known as corn pollen or hoddentin. This powder, which is the pollen of a rush and also of maize, appears to be used as a medicine, being eaten by the sick and put on the head or other parts to ease pain, but principally as a sacred offering to the sun and moon and as a sanctifier of everything. A pinch of it is thrown toward the sun and then toward the four winds for help in war or the chase, is put on the trail of a snake to prevent harm from it, placed on the tongue of the tired hunter as a restorative, hung in bags round the necks of infants as a preservative and sprinkled on the dead. In fact, every action of these Indians is sanctified by this powder, so that, as Captain Bourke writes in the ninth volume of "The Report of the Bureau of Ethnology" (Smithsonian), "plenty of hoddentin has come to mean that a particular performance or place is sacred."

England's Coast Lights.

"The coastwise lights of England," of which Kipling sings, have been increasing in brilliancy as well as in number ever since the dawn of the nineteenth century. In that dark age weary mariners crawled into port by the flickering glare of twenty-five beacons and six floating lights. Now they may glide safely into haven under the powerful beams of 880. Lighthouses are as ancient as civilization. The Pharos of Alexander flung its light on the decks of oriental barges 2,237 years ago. The Romans, who loved the light, have left the ruins of one of their lighthouses on a cliff at Boulogne, while at Dover may still be seen all that remains of another. Petroleum and the electric light have made the early nineteenth century beacons ridiculous. On the summit of the tower an open grate was fed with billets of wood and later with coal. Scotland abandoned coal altogether for more up to date methods in 1816 and England six years afterward.

Mermaids and Mermen.

Nearly all nations have folklore and fairy tale accounts of mermaids and sometimes of mermen. Even the American Indians had their "woman fish" and "man fish." The Chinese tell stories about their sea women of the southern seas. Sometimes mermaids and mermen are represented as leaving the water and living with human beings, but more frequently they are pictured as being so attractive that they sometimes will lure human beings to destruction in the depths of the sea. These myths have been utilized by many poets and have even been used for stories "with a moral."—St. Nicholas.