

# A Dog-House Detective.

BY HERBERT MACALPINE.

## Old Man Baker's Demise Caused Some Trouble Until a Wild Plunge Unearthed the Truth.



HE night operator at the tower was very thankful that the first crash awakened him so that no one could catch him sleeping on duty, but Pat Drugan, the section boss across the way, found no cause for thankfulness, if one might judge from the remarks he made to his good woman who sat up in bed trying to direct him while he clawed into everything except the matchbox:

"Did ye hear that now? There's another switch smashed an' me up all last night with the wan that blockhead, Jones, ran through. Nary a cent extra pay do I get for it, an' my men gettin' time an' a half.

"The matches—on the corner, are they? 'Tis siven corners I've felt over already an' how many has the washstand? Right in the middle they are now, an' if I'd not listened to ye, there's where I'd reached first. Do I want a bite to eat? What's the good of eating, woman, if I can't get time to sleep?"

Outside the house he ran against the conductor coming to call him.

"Callin' me, are ye? Do you think I'm needin' callin' after a noise like the roof of the universe comin' off? What switches have ye ripped up now, an' is any wan hurted?"

"'Tis a small mix-up for the big noise it made," said O'Halloran, the conductor. "Two cars of sheet-iron and our caboose come together down by the old warehouse and they was so busy mixin' things they'd no time to waste on your track.

"No one's hurt much. A sheet of iron started to scalp old Jake, but finding him bald-headed it skipped him, so barring a few scratches on his pate, he's all right. While you're gettin' out your men I'll go down to the office and rack me brain tryin' to make a report of how this happened to agree with what the old man'll see when he gets here with the wreck-train."

It was a raw, chilly night with a heavy fog drifting in. When O'Halloran, coming from the office, reported that the wreckers would not arrive for a couple of hours, all hands carried wood from the broken cars to the open space between the yard and the main track and started a rousing fire. They gathered around it and were swapping yarns when the fast freight passed. It was a double-header—two big engines, sixty cars, and a pusher behind the caboose

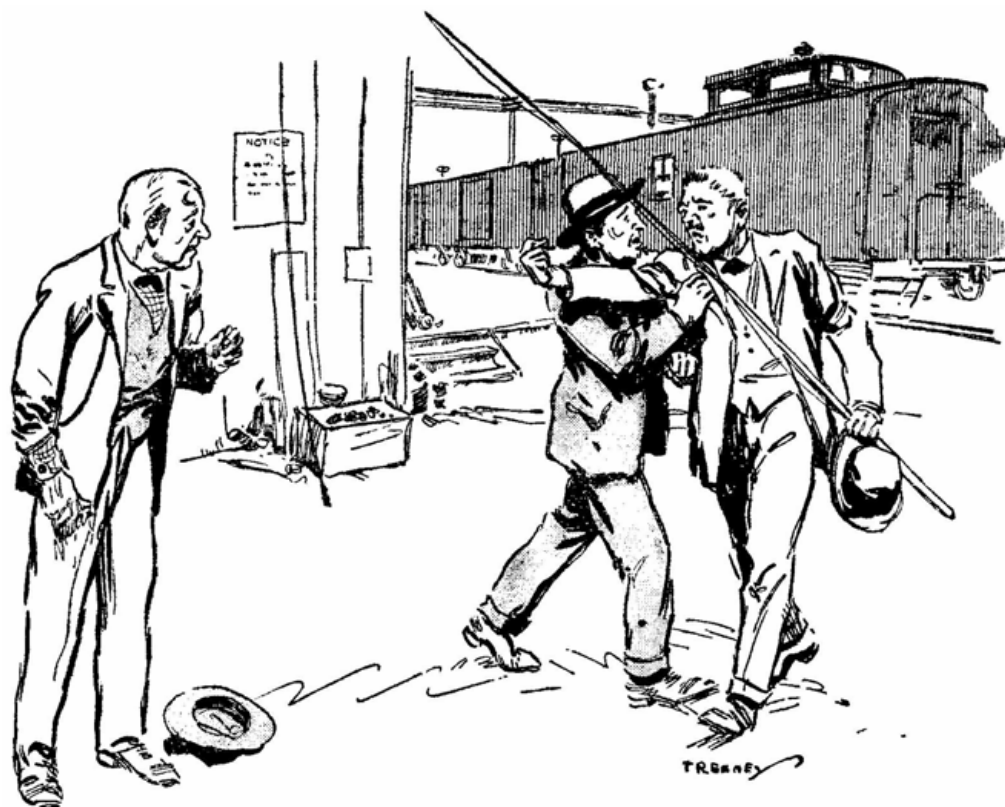
Out of the fog, with a rhythmic *clangity-clang*, it came, the trucks pounding over the low joints as each car flashed into the yellow gleam for a moment and then was lost in the darkness beyond. First, a long line of refrigerators, the aristocrats of the freight service whose rattle and roar says to every railroad man: "We must not be held! We must not be held!"

Then a beer car, the big, foaming glass on its side, a fleeting aggravation to the thirsty souls by the fire. Following this came an iron bridge—long, red spans, two flats to the span—a rush order for some district where the floods had been at work. Then "Bananas. Do not delay. Bananas. Do not delay." A sharp squeal from the stock-car following told that one pig in it had an ill-natured neighbor. All kinds and colors, they rushed by, chased by the caboose and its snorting pusher.

"That's the way to wheel 'em," said Nolan, the flagman. "Did you get the glimpse of old Gus Menkle sitting at the desk making up his reports? Now I'm wondering where he'd go if the head-end stopped sudden."

"I couldn't say that," answered O'Halloran, "but I'd be wondering what would become of the big family he's supporting. A wife and about a dozen of his own, and the sister-in-law, and her four, and the two old ladies—I'm thinking 'tis some stretching his paycheck has to stand.

"'Twas in the warehouse over there that his



"I TRIED TO GET HIM INTO THE CABOOSE, BUT HE WOULDN'T HAVE IT"

brother Tom murdered Old Man Baker, and I've heard, Jake, 'twas your testimony convicted him. If you'll tell us about it maybe the old man's ghost'll appear at one of them windows. Let Nolan inside the circle first; the boy's scared already."

"Aw, I'm not worrying about your ghosts," said Nolan. "It's chilly out here."

"I wish his spirit could appear and tell the truth and get Tom Menkle out of the penitentiary," said Jake. "'Twas not me got Tom in there—'twas circumstantial evidence, and if it hadn't been for the clothes the corpse wore, when they found it in the river with its face all gone, they never could have proved it was the old miser, anyway. I never thought it was him. I couldn't tell just why, but somehow it did not seem like him."

"Tom and I came out on the local freight that day for a little fishing trip. They was to pick up a car of junk at the warehouse on the home run and we came over early in the afternoon to go back with them. Tom was mighty sore at Baker, an' he'd a right to be."

"He'd nearly paid for a nice little property when the old skinflint got a lien against it somehow, and beat him out of everything. We'd been carousing a

bit, and that always made Tom ugly, and when the local, backing down from the station after the junk car, brought the old man along, Tom started for him. I held him back an' tried to get him into the caboose, but he wouldn't have it, so I jumped on and left the two of them quarreling as we pulled out."

"He must have walked in, for it was late that night when he called at my house just outside of town and asked for a wash-basin and soap so he could clean up before going home. I got a lantern and went out to the well with him. His hands were all red. He claimed it was paint that old Baker was using to mark bales of rags."

"He said he followed the old man into the warehouse and hit him one on the nose for luck and when he straightened him up, the can of paint upset over his hands. They had me on oath at the trial and I had to tell the truth, but I never thought Tom killed him. He stuck to it that he left him sitting on a bale of rags nursing a bloody nose and bragging how he'd get satisfaction through the law."

"Everything was against him at the trial. The experts proved that there was blood mixed with the paint on the floor, and it rained hard the next

morning, so there was an excuse for not finding any blood or marks showing where the body was dragged to the river. He was known to be a quick-tempered Dutchman and had made threats against old Baker. They shoved him through a-flying and most people thought he was mighty lucky to escape hanging."

"Well, he can keep warm in jail, while we're freezing here on account of Pat's bad track," said O'Halloran.

"That'll do, now," replied Drugan. "I don't know what's the cause of this wreck ye have an' I don't want to know, but 'tis not the track'll be responsible for it. Ye mind that, now—all of ye!"

"I'll take it back, Pat. I was just for stirring you up a bit. Listen. The freight has stopped on the hill. I thought I smelled a hot-box when they passed here. How old Gus must be cussing just about now. They've none too much time ahead of the night line. I bet a quarter they have to back in here."

"They're backing in now," said young Nolan—and as the rumble from the west increased—"they're comin' in fast. 'Tis a good thing our little pile-up in number two didn't block the long switch. They'll have to go by it to clear all them cars. Say! Where are they? Why, they're in number two!"

A grinding crash followed. It sounded as if the bottom of the universe had fallen out.

As the pusher, backing out of the black fog, shot into the firelight, her crew saw where they were, and jumped clear just before she struck and went rolling and scrambling to get farther away. Head-on, with the two engines and the weight of the whole train shoving her, she might have plowed the tangled mass of sheet-iron and cars, but coming backward, the high trucks of the tender ran up on the wreckage, doubling it over onto the engine.

The big drivers, unable to climb under the weight upon them, turned aside, throwing the engine out at right angles to the track. The caboose, as if proud to do a stunt where an engine had failed, went on up, and up. It hung a moment at the top and plunged over, a car of grapes taking its place. The next car, forcing the grape-car on end, split open across the middle, and a generous supply of bananas was strewn over the wreck.

Then a car of household goods—"released to a valuation of five dollars per hundred pounds in case of loss or damage"—was completely telescoped by the heavy refrigerator following it; a case of hard luck for some citizen who would vote ag'in' the

railroads all the rest of his life. More and more slowly but, with seemingly inexhaustible power, other cars kept pushing into the wreck until the whole mass toppled over against the old warehouse, crushing in its entire front and racking the rotten old structure to its foundations.

They had seen the conductor leaning out from the caboose, holding to the rail with one hand and swinging his lantern in a wide circle to stop with the other. Nolan swore that he could hear him above the din, shouting to the head-end, but that must have been his imagination.

When, with a final bump everything stopped, they hurried to get him out, although they had but little hope of finding him alive. It was O'Halloran who located him and climbed up over the wreck calling to the others to bring bars and levers.

"Is he dead?" they asked.

"Wait a minute now till that steam holds up a bit. There, listen—does that sound like a dead man? An' ye'd not be wantin' to think the man that's using that language was a goin' to die very soon.

"He's caught by the leg like a weasel in a trap. He thinks he's not hurt much, but grape juice, 'tis fairly drowned in it he is. The caboose has gone right through into the old cellar an' the grape car hangs just over him."

"The cellar?" cried old Jake. "I've been around this old shack ever since I can remember anything, but I never heard tell of any cellar."

"Well, this wreck's just dug one then," said O'Halloran, "for there's where he is. Hear him! If that wasn't Dutch cussing it would set the building on fire. We can't get down where he's gone through, but there's a hole over there where this bin has tipped over. Why, it's an old stairway an' 'tis rotten as sin. Hold that torch an' I'll climb down the wall.

"This must 'a' been an old root cellar years ago an' everybody's forgot—Mother of Moses! Let me out!" He scrambled up the stairway, and it fell with a crash, sending up a cloud of dry dust, but he clung to the wall, calling to those above to pull him out. He was shaking like a man with the ague when they got him back on the platform.

"It's—it's a skeleton! He's turned into a skeleton. It's a judgment on him for his swearing. I tell you, I seen him, all white bones—bones an' ribs an' his skull a grinning when he cursed me. Go down yourselves if you want to, but no more of it for me. Hark! There it goes again."



"THIM TWO MUST 'A' HEARD MY PIGS SQUEALIN'!"

"Hey, there! You cursed mutts! You slobs! Throw the big lobster down here again so I can hit him mit a brick. I am not der skeleton. Hurry and get me loose before this car settles some more an' mashes mine leg off."

They thought it no wonder that O'Halloran had beat a hasty retreat, for the flame from the engine torch revealed a gruesome sight. Reclining against a bank of dirt was a skeleton from the limbs of which hung shreds of light-colored clothing. The right arm was bent under the body, and near the right hand was a rusty revolver.

"What are you idiots standing there gaping for? Come around an' get this timber off mine leg an' don't you move anything else. I think I got some interests in that skeleton. Maybe my brudder Tom don't have to stay in jail no more now."

Old Gus was right. Scratched on a piece of pine board that lay beside it, they found this note:

I am losing all my property and fast going to the poorhouse. The brokers telegraphed this morning that my investment in the mining stocks is a total loss. They are trying to beat me out of it. Everyone is cheating me and I can't stand it to see all my money go. They will get it all, even the gold I've hidden.

They'll get its hiding place out of me if I live, so I am going to kill myself.

When the old man arrived with the wreck-train, his first act was to start an inquiry about the switch into number two being left open. No one seemed to know anything about it. It was another mystery of the old warehouse yard. O'Halloran said that Baker's ghost must have thrown it, but he did not suggest this to the old man. That gentleman, being mad all the way through, was in no condition to be trifled with, and it was after passing an exceedingly uncomfortable ten minutes with him that old Jake ran across Menkle nursing his game leg by one of the fires.

"I hear the old man says Tom can have his old job if he comes back on the road. I'm glad of that, but I guess I'm done. I might as well quit now as to wait and be kicked out. What with our hitting that sheet-iron and the fog and everything, I forgot to close that switch.

"The old man had me all to pieces just now, and I believe he knows I done it. He come near giving me my time when the work-train went into Moore's swamp last year, although it was the towerman's

fault, instead of mine, an' he'll sure do it now."

"So it vas you did it? That's bad. I thought it vas that big Irishman. Vell, it is time enough for a man to quit when he gets fired. You keep quiet yourself and say nothing. This is a queer night around here; there's no telling what may happen yet."

Throughout the balance of the night, the shrill call of the wreckmaster's whistle was followed by the clatter of the derrick-engine, the straining of cables, and the sound of rending iron and wood.

The men piled wreckage upon the fires until the whole yard was brilliantly illuminated.

"A fine spectacle it is now in honor of the resurrection of old Baker's bones," said O'Halloran. "If Tom Menkle was only here to enjoy his good luck, the celebration would be complete in every way."

The old man, coming around a pile of salvaged goods, overheard him.

"What is needed to complete this celebration is the name of the man who left that switch open, and the sooner I get it the better it will be for the rest of you," he growled.

Conductor Menkle stepped forward, carefully wiping the blood from his forehead.

"I vill not lie about it; it was me did it. When we stop for that hot-box, mine flagman went back, and when I see we have to back in for der night line, I go back myself and throw the switch from the main track; then I keep on going back to see if everything is clear in it. Because of this fog, I stub mine foot and bump mine head mit der rail.

"When I get up I must have a twist in it, for I forget and think I am coming down the main track and I throw that switch into number two. Then they come back pretty lively, and I jump on that caboose, and when I see where we are, I try to stop them, and it's a wonder I'm not dead already."

"It will take a month's layoff to get that twist out of your head," was the autocrat's grim comment.

Some time later, O'Halloran, after much maneuvering, managed to get Menkle to one side, and said:

"I'm not going to stand for any man's serving time when he's not to blame. That bump you got must have balled you all up. 'Twas old Jake left that switch open."

"Do you think I wass a fool?" said Gus. "Jake has a big family and a plenty of sickness, and he has had bad luck on the road before. I have worked

many years, and until this bump on mine head mit that rail there has never been any trouble. They would clean Jake for good, but I get only thirty days, and what is that? When it is passed by, it is all gone. You keep quiet and say nothing. It is all right."

It was well into the forenoon and the fog was beginning to clear before Drugan got a chance to take his friend Sullivan, the foreman from the adjoining section, over to the house for breakfast.

"Menkle's all right," said his friend as they climbed the path leading by the outbuildings. "Did ye hear how he took the blame to save old Jake? I'd not thought it of him."

"I did that," replied Drugan. "Sure, ivery wan is tellin' ivery wan else to kape it quiet. 'Tis a fine little martyr he is, an' him tellin' me only the last week how he's been after tryin' to get a month's vacation to go see his marrit daughter in Florida, an' they'd not lave him account of the heavy traffic.

"Why, look here, Pat! You only had two pigs, an' here's four, an' two of thim's black an' white like the ones we caught an' put back in the stock-car that had the loose door."

"Well, now! Did ye iver see the likes of that?" said Pat. "Thim two must 'a' heard my pigs squealin' an' they've come here, an' feelin' that lonesome in the strange place, what have they done but climbed up on the roof of that chicken-shed there an' tumbled down in here. How'd they iver do it, now, without hurtin' theirselves? Will ye teel me that, now?"

"'Tis hardly believable, an' we'd best say nothing about it. They'd think maybe I did something to entice thim there. 'Tis not much they are anyway.

"Here's Gus Menkle will be enjoying life in Florida eating oranges offen the trees, an' back here they'll be praising him all over the line for sacrificing hisself to save the job for the man with the big family, bless the tinder heart of him; an' I'll be wadin' through slush an' snow, clanin' up wrecks, with these pigs placing me in a compromising position with the company through no fault of my own at all.

"I tell ye right now, Sullivan, whin you an' I wint into the track department instead o' going into the train service, we should have hired some wan havin' big boots to kick us an' kept him on the job ever since."