

# A Train of Thought

by A.A. Milne

On the same day I saw two unsettling announcements in the papers. The first said simply, underneath a suitable photograph, that the ski-ing season was now in full swing in Switzerland; the second explained elaborately why it cost more to go from London to the Riviera and back than from the Riviera to London and back. Both announcements unsettled me considerably. They would upset anybody for whom the umbrella season in London was just opening, and who was wondering what was the cost of a return ticket to Manchester.

At first I amused myself with trying to decide whether I should prefer it to be the Riviera or Switzerland this Christmas. Switzerland won; not because it is more invigorating, but because I had just discovered a woollen helmet and a pair of ski-ing boots, relics of an earlier visit. I am thus equipped for Switzerland already, whereas for the Riviera I should want several new suits. One of the chief beauties of Switzerland (other than the mountains) is that it is so uncritical of the visitor's wardrobe. So long as he has a black coat for the evenings, it demands nothing more. In the day-time he may fall about in whatever he pleases. Indeed, it is almost an economy to go there now and work off some of one's moth-collecting khaki on it. The socks which are impossible with our civilian clothes could renew their youth as the middle pair of three, inside a pair of ski-ing boots.

Yet to whichever I went this year, Switzerland or the Riviera, I think it would be money wasted. I am one of those obvious people who detest an uncomfortable railway journey, and the journey this year will certainly be uncomfortable. But I am something more than this; I am one of those uncommon people who enjoy a comfortable railway journey. I mean that I enjoy it as an entertainment in itself, not only as a relief from the hair-shirts of previous journeys. I would much sooner go by *wagonlit* from Calais to Monte Carlo in twenty hours, than by magic carpet in twenty seconds. I am even looking forward to my journey to Manchester, supposing that there is no great rush for the place on my chosen day. The scenery as one approaches Manchester may not be beautiful, but I shall be quite happy in my corner facing the engine.

Nowhere can I think so happily as in a train. I am not inspired; nothing so uncomfortable as that. I am never seized with a sudden idea for a masterpiece, nor form a sudden plan for some new enterprise. My thoughts are just pleasantly reflective. I think of all the good deeds I have done, and (when these give out) of all the good deeds I am going to do. I look out of the window and say lazily to myself, "How jolly to live there"; and a little farther on, "How jolly not to live there." I see a cow, and I wonder what it is like to be a cow, and I wonder whether the cow wonders what it is to be like me; and perhaps, by this time, we have passed on to a sheep, and I wonder if it is more fun being a sheep. My mind wanders on in a way which would annoy Pelman a good deal, but it wanders on quite happily, and the "clankety-clank" of the train adds a very soothing accompaniment. So soothing, indeed, that at any moment I can close my eyes and pass into a pleasant state of sleep.

But this entertainment which my train provides for me is doubly entertaining if it be but the overture to greater delights. If some magic property which the train possesses--whether it be the motion or the clankety-clank--makes me happy even when I am only thinking about a cow, is it any wonder that I am happy in thinking about the delightful new life to which I am travelling? We are going to the Riviera, but I have had no time as yet in which to meditate properly upon that delightful fact. I have been too busy saving up for it, doing work in advance for it, buying cloth for it. Between London and

Dover I have been worrying, perhaps, about the crossing; between Dover and Calais my worries have come to a head; but when I step into the train at Calais, then at last I can give myself up with a whole mind to the contemplation of the happy future. So long as the train does not stop, so long as nobody goes in or out of my carriage, I care not how many hours the journey takes. I have enough happy thoughts to fill them.

All this, as I said, is not at all Pelman's idea of success in life; one should be counting cows instead of thinking of them; although presumably a train journey would seem in any case a waste of time to The Man Who Succeeds. But to those of us to whom it is no more a waste of time than any other pleasant form of entertainment, the train-service to which we have had to submit lately has been doubly distressing. The bliss of travelling from London to Manchester was torn from us and we were given purgatory instead. Things are a little better now in England; if one chooses the right day one can still come sometimes upon the old happiness. But not yet on the Continent. In the happy days before the war the journey out was almost the best part of Switzerland on the Riviera. I must wait until those days come back again.

## The Song of Steam

By George Washington Cutter

Harness me down with your iron bands;  
Be sure of your curb and rein;  
For I scorn the power of your puny hands,  
As the tempest scorns a chain.  
How I laughed as I lay concealed from sight  
For many a countless hour,  
At the childish boast of human might,  
And the pride of human power.

When I saw an army upon the land,  
A navy upon the seas,  
Creeping along, a snail-like band,  
Or waiting the wayward breeze;  
When I marked the peasant faintly reel  
With the toil which he daily bore,  
As he feebly turned the tardy wheel,  
Or tugged at the weary oar;

When I measured the panting courser's speed,  
The flight of the courier dove,  
As they bore the law a king decreed,  
Or the lines of impatient love,—  
I could not but think how the world would feel,  
As these were outstripped afar,  
When I should be bound to the rushing keel,  
Or chained to the flying car;

Ha, ha! they found me out at last;  
They invited me forth at length;  
And I rushed to my throne with a thunder-blast,  
And I laughed in my iron strength.  
Oh, then ye saw a wondrous change  
On the earth and the ocean wide,  
Where now my fiery armies range,  
Nor wait for wind and tide.

Hurrah! hurrah! the waters o'er;  
The mountain's steep decline;  
Time—space—have yielded to my power;  
The world—the world is mine!  
The rivers the sun hath earliest blest,  
Or those where his beams decline;  
The giant streams of the queenly West,  
And the Orient floods divine.

The ocean pales where'er I sweep,  
I in my strength rejoice;  
And the monsters of the briny deep  
Cower, trembling, at my voice.  
I carry the wealth and the lord of earth,  
The thoughts of his god-like mind;  
The wind lags after my going forth,  
The lightning is left behind.

In the darksome depths of the fathomless mine  
My tireless arm doth play,  
Where the rocks never saw the sun decline,  
Or the dawn of the glorious day.  
I bring earth's glittering jewels up  
From the hidden caves below,  
And I make the fountain's granite cup  
With a crystal gush o'erflow.

I blow the bellows, I forge the steel,  
In all the shops of trade;  
I hammer the ore, and turn the wheel,  
Where my arms of strength are made;  
I manage the furnace, the mill, the mint;  
I carry, I spin, I weave;  
And all my doings I put into print  
On every Saturday eve.

I've no muscle to weary, no breast to decay,  
No bones to be "laid on the shelf,"  
And soon I intend you may "go and play,"  
While I manage this world myself.  
But harness me down with your iron bands,  
Be sure of your curb and rein;  
For I scorn the power of your puny hands,  
As the tempest scorns a chain!

Sources:

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