

THE CHRISTMAS TRAMCAR

THE matter of a Christmas gift for their employees was one which caused the Tramway Company some concern. Free rides had been somewhat overdone, and the concession tickets that had been sold the year before had not been appreciated. After due deliberation, however, it was decided that the best plan would be to elevate the morale of the whole staff by applying a coat of paint to one of the company's tramcars.

Immediately, in the board room, contention was rife. Which vehicle should receive the honour? The board was equally divided between the preservation of the tramcar and the perpetuation of the paint. Deadlock was reached, and the matter referred to the manager. The manager, for policy reasons, referred it to the Superintendent, who, taking note of popular opinion, asked a motorman.

"Under the circumstances," the motorman said, idly twirling his driving handle, "there is no doubt that the wisest course would be a purely utilitarian one; that is, to apply the paint to the car most in need of it."

This point of view was accepted gratefully by the board, and a commission was promptly despatched to the tram barn to ascertain which of the vehicles was in most need of repair.

It was perhaps unfortunate that the company's first tramcar had not yet been removed for scrap. As it was, it was discovered in a corner, partly concealed by the scenery used in the Christmas pantomime. It was undoubtedly the tramcar most in need of paint. Reluctantly, the board agreed to its renovation.

YET, when the renovation was complete, the tramcar was the Company's finest possession. Its black wheels gleamed, its brass shone, its golden decorations and red and cream panelling dazzled the eye, and there could be no words adequate to describe the translucency of its varnish. Every motorman in the barn wished to drive it, but the board wisely made its choice by lot.

Everyone was overjoyed to hear that the lot had fallen to Llewellyn and Arthur. These two had been fast friends since Llewellyn had been given his first command. In fact, it was rumoured that Arthur had declined to advance his position, even though promotion had been offered, in order that their friendship might not be severed. Few, then, forbore to cheer as Llewellyn drove his proud charge out into the street, and Arthur, the tram having coasted neatly to a halt beyond the points,

drew down the trolley-pole once in smart salute.

Arthur and Llewellyn were most conscientious. At unoccupied moments during the day Arthur would move along the footboard with a square of chamois leather, cleaning and burnishing, and at the termini they took it in turn to lamp-black the wheels and sweep out the interior, carrying a portable broom for the purpose. Llewellyn, of course, exercised the greatest possible care in the traffic, frequently applying the brake, and occasionally admonishing tardy vehicles with chimes upon his bell.

BUT at times Llewellyn was careless. Under the summer sun the bright beauty of the vehicle in his command was like wine in his veins. One day, approaching an intersection, he neglected to give way to a vehicle approaching on his right. The motor skidded to a halt in front of the tramcar, and Llewellyn, shocked by visions of scarred paint, was forced to apply the ratchet brake.

"Where," asked the young man in the motor-car, "do you think you are going?"

"That is a question that might adequately be answered by a glance at our destination board," replied Llewellyn, coldly. "And, as for my thoughts upon the matter, they need be as little taken into account by you as they are by the Despatcher."

"My question was a rhetorical one," said the young man. "The true object of my enquiry was to ascertain whether or not you were cognisant of the right-hand rule."

"Our rule is the rule of fate," cried Arthur, swinging agilely along the footboard. "We tread but the path laid down before us."

"True," said Llewellyn, "Our profession, by its very nature, inclines us towards predestinarianism."

Yet, as the young man drove away, Llewellyn was troubled. "Arthur," he said, "is it really so? Are we moved only by the will of others, bound on an endless chain of arrivals and departures, without freedom?"

"What is freedom?" asked Arthur, gaily, "but to move within limits? If there were no limits, how could we know we were free?"

"That argument is suspect," said Llewellyn, putting the tram in motion. "It touches only upon the quintessence of the matter

and does not approach its practical application. We may be free to travel from place to place, but we are bound because our routes and destinations are always the same."

A YOUNG woman on the pavement indicated her desire to board the vehicle. Arthur studied her for a second. "Her shoes are clean," he said, "and her hands gloved. It would cause us no distress to allow her to travel with us. And yet, if we did so, might we not be binding her in a certain way, whereas if we allow her to walk, she will be free?"

"Alas," said Llewellyn, stopping the tram, "it does not lie within our freedom to make even that decision."

Arthur departed to show the young woman to a seat, and Llewellyn sank into a reverie, from which he was roused only by his friend's signal on the buzzer. When Arthur returned, Llewellyn said, as if in continuation, "Such considerations are trivial. If we wish to widen the bounds that encircle us, we must act positively."

"You have a suggestion?" Arthur asked.

"While you were absent," Llewellyn said, "I thought of the approaching season of Christmas, and of those whose existence on Christmas Day will be colourless and drab. It came to my mind that it might lie within our power to perform a small service for them, at the same time fulfilling for ourselves that thing we were speaking of."

Arthur stared at his friend, entranced.

"On the day I have mentioned," Llewellyn continued, "we shall be travelling this route again, transporting happy children and their parents from one place of festivity to another." (Arthur's face registered distaste at the thought of childish hands on his polished brass.) "There will be few of them, however, who will be truly aware of us."

"Yes," sighed Arthur, "there are some whom we pass so frequently that I fear

they have become completely oblivious of our presence."

"What right, then, have they to see us," cried Llewellyn, "when there are others who may long to and cannot?"

"None," said Arthur, "none. But what is there for us to do?"

"We can go to those who need us," Llewellyn said. "On Christmas Day, we shall."

LATE on Christmas Eve, residents in the streets between two of the city's termini were surprised to see two young men in uniform festooning strands of wire between telegraph poles. Many of the residents assumed the activity to be of an official nature, but there were one or two whose curiosity drove them to the point of enquiry. Among them was a Mr. Lysander, a gentleman connected with the manufacture of gas. Leaving his garden, he approached the young men.

"Could you inform me," he asked, "of the nature of your intentions here?"

"It is not a matter than can as yet be made public," said Llewellyn, "but I have no doubt that, should you station yourself at your window at the time of the arrival of the first tramcar tomorrow morning you will be enlightened."

Mr. Lysander thanked the young man, and turned back to impart the information to his neighbours.

As the sun ascended into the sky on Christmas morning, the residents of those streets where the young men had been gathered with their families at their front gates and windows. They stood, attentive, their eyes focused on the gleaming rails that came towards them over the brow of the hill.

Suddenly a stir passed through the multitude. A tramcar, the colours of

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"They find their happiest moments in the museum"