

"THE RAPPER"—"Iron Stokers Nevermore"

Poem by F. J. Kessler, Lodge 657, Endeavor, N. D. (Fireman, Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie Railway)
Illustrations by our Cartoonist, F. J. Maloney, Lodge 275, Chicago, Ill. (Fireman, Chicago and Northwestern Railway)

ONCE upon a midnight dreary,
on the seatbox, worn and weary,
Napping, napping while she drifted,
dreaming of the days of yore,
Suddenly there came a tapping
as of someone fiercely rapping;
'Twas a rapping most ferocious
just inside the firebox door;
"Tis the engineer," I mumbled,
as towards the scoop I stumbled,
"Only this and nothing more."

Now this engineer in question
oft had made this harsh suggestion:
"Every 2-4-2's digestion
is accelerated more
By a 'Rapper' at the lever,"
and had oft declared that never
Had a name more terse and clever
been conceived in railroad lore,
And that he for one forever
such a title would adore.
Thus I called him evermore.



Towards the scoop I stumbled.

'Twas a night in bleak November,
ah, how well do I remember
How each sep'rate leaping ember
just inside that firebox door
Greeted my despondent gazes
as I tried to feed the blazes.
Far was I from singing praises
as she beckoned me for more;
From that rare and radiant surface
that I'd often fed before,
Craving diamonds evermore.

Looking at the man beside me,
my despairing glance betrayed me
When the engineer espied me,
counting notches left in store
On that quadrant growing fewer,
as I heaved the carbon to her
While the sky above grew bluer
from the smoke that drifted o'er,
And the oozing perspiration
issued out from every pore—
Perspiration evermore.



Beckoned me for more.

Then it seemed my soul grew stronger;
I could bear suspense no longer,
And I said, "Thou lever demon,
my poor soul is sick and sore."
"Heartless sir," said I entreating,
"kindly discontinue beating
Since the coal that she is eating
sinks my spirits to the floor.
Are there any higher notches,
tell me, tell me, I implore?"
Quoth the Rapper, "Nevermore."

"Wretch," said I, "thou thing of evil,
imp of Satan born of devil,
When at last thou reach the level,
canst thou hook her up some more?
Tell this soul bent down with trouble,
that you'll ease her off and double
E'er you burst life's fleeting bubble
and to realms above I soar."
"Take the agony," I pleaded,
"from this ignominious chore."
Quoth the Rapper, "Give her more."



Quoth the Rapper, "Give her more."



"Are there any higher notches?"

Then in throes of desperation
born of righteous indignation
I increased the conflagration
while each scoopful spelled encore.
"Engineer," said I, imploring,
"don't you hear that smokestack roaring?
See those rising rockets soaring,
see and listen, I implore.
For behold this greedy monster
gobbles up the coal galore."
Quoth the Rapper, "Give her more."

Startled at his silence broken,
by replies so curtly spoken,
Which I took to be a token
that relief might be in store,
I then sprang that king of jokers,
namely automatic stokers
That dispensed with rakes and pokers.
"Tell me, sir," said I once more,
"Will we ever have these stokers,"
as I oft had asked before?
Quoth the Rapper, "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign of parting,
man or fiend," said I, upstarting.
"Get thee back where thou belongest
in the night's plutonian shore."
"Why this trouble shouldst thou borrow,
putting off beyond the morrow
One lone hope to ease my sorrow,
this lone hope that I adore?
Whether Simplex, Street or Standard,
crush, I pray, my dream no more."
Quoth the Rapper, "Give her more."



I sprang that King of Jokers.

Shocked to hear this sweet delusion
banished in such rude confusion,
Silently in rare profusion,
in my rage I cursed and swore.
Then said I, "Aside all joking,
Will there be no end to stoking
Till the smokestacks all quit smoking,
about nineteen ninety-four,
When electric engines serve us,
only then and not before?"
Quoth the Rapper, "Not before."

Then I paused, engaged in guessing,
but no syllable expressing.
Rapt in agonies distressing,
would my troubles ne'er be o'er.
Then said I, "Sir, can you quote me,
when they'll trouble to promote me?"
For the mental griefs that smote me,
savored of Samsonian lore.
Would there ne'er be an escaping
from the awful load I bore?
Quoth the Rapper, "Nevermore."



In my rage I cursed and swore.

"Sir," said I, "canst thou remind me,
where old age will surely find me;
Twenty years now lie behind me,
can I stand it ten years more?
Canst thou be this heartless master,
who predicts such grave disaster?
Can promotion be no faster,
than in days of heretofore?
Can it be that years of stoking
should be numbered by the score?"
Quoth the Rapper, "Evermore."

Now that Rapper blandly sitting,
still is hitting, still is hitting,
Ne'er relenting, never quitting,
while I face that torrid door.
While a ling'ring premonition
says "the stoker proposition
Is an outworn superstition,
now exploded to the core."
And my sense of intuition
seems to whisper o'er and o'er,
"Iron stokers nevermore."



"Can I stand it ten years more?"