

Lookout Station  
Feb. 26, 1872

Dear Friends,

E. E. Robinson (B-R561-cc)

You probably have been wondering for the past two months why you have not received a letter from me. You have probably seen accounts in the eastern papers of the great snow storms, and the Blockade of the Union Pacific Railroad this winter? Well we have had one which will be remembered for years to come, on account of its severity and long duration. Whittier's "Snow Bound" is good but if J.G. could have spent this winter in rustivating among the wilds of Wyoming, and among the barrens of the Rockies he no doubt could have appreciated his own writings better than he now does. "Snow Bound" is nice to read but it is "bad medicine" to have experienced. I will now endeavor to give you a description in brief of the winter and some of the many storms and blocks we have had.

"On the 2nd of Dec. a solitary footman might have been seen wending his way across the plain (I've seen this expression before somewhere) and approaching Lookout Station. Upon his arrival it proved to be Conductor Harris of the eastern bound Freight, which he reported to be stuck in a drift six miles down the hill, and wanted me to summon assistance to get his train out of the snow, which I immediately did. I reported the state of affairs to the Superintendent who sent out two engines and crews, to Lookout that night. The next morning with forty men and three heavy ten wheel engines we started from here and went down the hill to where the train was stuck but after working six hours we had to abandon the train and work our way back. The snow was flying and drifting into the cuts so fast that it was hard work for the three engines to work their way back to Lookout. Men could not stay out of the cars more than half an hour at a time to shovel on account of the severity of the storm. One man could not keep standing room for himself on the track by shoveling the snow drifting faster into the cut than it could be shoveled out. It was impossible to see more than one car length. The next day we started out again, the storm having moderated somewhat, and by hard work succeeded in getting three cars and the engine belonging to the train out of the drift, and bringing them to Lookout. The third day we started out again brave as ever, and when we reached the cut where the train was the day before, there was no train to be seen. Some thought at first that help had come from the west during the night and had got the train out of the drift, but on examination this was found to be a mistake for the cars were still there but the snow had drifted over them so as to completely bury them from sight. This was pretty good even for a Rocky Mountain storm. The snow was still drifting, and after working hard all day with no success whatever we began to get discouraged--we were "snow bound"-- there had been no train at Lookout for five days. But we still had our engines and plenty of "grub," so we concluded to "wait a little longer till the good time coming," comes. The next morning come clear, calm and pleasant, and off started our train in good spirits, two heavy engines ahead then two cars full of men, then another engine coupled in behind them and backing up so that there would be an engine headed right, whether we went forward or back, and we could buck snow going either way, each engine having a plow.

We started out at a rate of 30 miles per hour, going through drifts from 4 to 6 feet in depth. Myself and four others were riding in the rear car and became frightened on account of the motion of the car, the last engine crowding it so hard when the train struck a drift that it would jump around like corn in a popper, and the Engineer knowing nothing of this kept using more steam. I pulled the coupling pin, clambered over the tender and told the Engineer to stop.--He had just stopped his engine when on looking out of the cab window I saw the other engines and cars in the ditch. If the rear engine had been coupled on, every man in the cars must have been killed or dangerously hurt. Here we were, after six days work at the train, six days worse off than when we first began. The banks at the side of the drifts where they had been shoveled, were in some places fifteen feet high and the track covered with snow to that depth, and the more we shoveled the higher it grew. Our engines in the ditch three miles from anything to eat, and night coming on. The men began to get discouraged. The shovelers all walked to the station and the rest of us stayed with the wreck. One of our party had a Photograph of a chicken



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with him and the six of us lived on that photograph of a chicken 24 hours. This may seem a poor way of living, to you, but we never enjoyed a meal better in our lives than looking at that Photo. The next morning after building a track around the wrecked engines, work was resumed and at 12 o'clock that night help reached us from the west, consisting of Snow plows and men, also more help from the east and at 8 A.M. all the forces reached Lookout with the train and the road was once more open for the running of trains after seven days hard work night and day. Snow fences were immediately constructed and put up along the road in places where it was deemed necessary. Large gangs of men were at work night and day in Omaha constructing this fence and when a sufficient quantity was made, a special train of fencing was started from Omaha and given the right of the road over all other trains. These fences were found to be insufficient protection against the drifting snow. Then the company made every effort to open the road by means of snow plows of which they had thirteen. Three engines were coupled behind each plow, and by this means twenty-five engines were disabled and some of them made total wrecks by being thrown from the track, in one week, the snow being so hard that it was impossible to force a plow through the drifts. Then seven snow train outfits were immediately fitted out and sent to the front. These snow trains were arranged so as to board seventy-five laborers in each and also afford sleeping accommodations as well. By the means of these snow trains in addition to their usual force of men, and each train provided with a strong snow plow, the road has kept trains in motion over the mountainous district by shoveling ahead of ten or twelve trains bound west, and then turning all the plows, engines and outfits and working the same force back ahead of as many more eastern bound trains. Every train since Dec. 1st, with but very few exceptions, has been worked through the snow in this way. The snow belt extends from Laramie to Washakie, a distance of one hundred and eighty miles and embracing the divide of the Continent. This is a barren country, destitute of supplies and during the blockade these had to be forwarded long distances by mules or other conveyances at a great cost to the company all snow trains were stocked with two weeks provisions and no passenger trains were started out without a train of provisions and coal enough for thirty days supply. By this arrangement passengers although liable to detention by snow were in no danger whatever of suffering from a want of fuel and provisions, and some have said the company made no effort to supply them--This is false. During the blockade from Feb. 2nd to Feb. 17th was the only time when there was any danger of suffering. Then the company immediately purchased provisions for five hundred men for 30 days and started a train out from Evenston, Utah, loaded with this supply and sent it to the west end of the snow district and from there forwarded it by horses, and by men on foot, to the snow bound passengers as fast as possible and there was no reasonable cause for complaint. We have had the most severe storms in rapid succession than any before experienced on these plains for thirty years, and no human labor could buck against them. Of course this winter will injure the company; it will injure the reputation it has already earned as a short route to the Pacific. But the company profiting by the experience of this winter can keep the road open during any coming winter, no matter if more severe than this one. They will prepare for it during the summer months and no one need have any fear of traveling by this route in the future. The Union Pacific Railroad is still the "Highway of Nations" and always will remain so. But this winter will be remembered for years as the most severe one ever experienced on the plains. But there has been a humorous side to the blockades as well. The minutes of a meeting held by Snow Train, 3 at this station Jan. 2nd, while laying still on account of the storms will show you that fun was not blocked out if trains were. Meetings were held in my office every night nearly to express our views in regard to the weather and as to the continuance of the blockade, &c. At last we resolved, that we did not want to dictate to the Almighty but would suggest with all due humility to providence that this thing of snow every day and wind blowing every night was getting altogether monotonous. One of our party found a poem "The Beautiful Snow" and read it for our benefit, we passed a resolution, That the author of "Beautiful Snow" was a Damphool and had no respect for Pacific Railroads. Carried Unanimously. But now the great blockade is over (so we think) and probably the like will never happen again on this or any other road--three months of severe storms following each other in rapid succession each storm making a blockade of a week or more in duration is something that does not happen but once in a lifetime.

I have given you as good a history of our troubles as I can at present you may hear more about it soon, and you may hear that the block is not over yet.

E.E. Robinson.