



By Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933)
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

THE PARABLE OF THE OWL EXPRESS

I thought deeply of the words of the grimy, oil-stained engineer.

During my college days, I was one of a class of students appointed to fieldwork as a part of our prescribed courses in geology. . . .

A certain assignment had kept us in the field many days. . . . As the time allotted to the investigation drew near its close, we were overtaken by a violent windstorm, followed by a heavy snow—unseasonable and unexpected, but which, nevertheless, increased in intensity so that we were in danger of being snowbound in the hills. The storm reached its height while we were descending a long and steep mountainside several miles from the little railway station at which we had hoped to take [a] train that night for home. With great effort we reached the station late at night while the storm was yet raging. . . .



. . . The train for which we so expectantly and hopefully waited was the Owl Express—a fast night train connecting large cities. . . .

Long after midnight the train arrived in a terrific whirl of wind and snow. I lingered behind my companions as they hurriedly clambered aboard, for I was attracted by the engineer, who during the brief stop, while his assistant was attending to the water replenishment, bustled about the engine, oiling some parts, adjusting others, and generally overhauling the panting locomotive. I ventured to speak to him, busy though he was. I asked how he felt on such a night—wild, weird, and furious, when the powers of destruction seemed to be let loose, abroad and uncontrolled, when the storm was howling and

when danger threatened from every side. . . .

His answer was a lesson not yet forgotten. In effect he said, though in jerky and disjointed sentences: “Look at the engine headlight. Doesn’t that light up the track for a hundred yards [90 m] or more? Well, all I try to do is to cover that hundred yards of lighted track. That I can see, and for that distance I know the roadbed is open and safe. . . . The light of the engine is always ahead of me!”

As he climbed to his place in the cab, I hastened to board the first passenger coach; and as I sank into the cushioned seat, in blissful enjoyment of the warmth and general comfort, offering strong contrast to the wildness of the night without, I thought deeply of the words of the grimy, oil-stained engineer. They were full of faith—the faith that accomplishes great things, the faith that gives courage and determination. . . .

We may not know what lies ahead of us in the future years, nor even in the days or hours immediately beyond. But for a few yards, or possibly only a few feet, the track is clear, our duty is plain, our course is illumined. For that short distance, for the next step, lighted by the inspiration of God, go on! ■

From “Three Parables—The Unwise Bee, the Owl Express, and Two Lamps,” Ensign, Feb. 2003, 8–13.