

The Manager Of the B. & A.

By VAUGHAN KESTER

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(Continued from Sunday.)

"Some people's easily upset here in the cupola," tapping his brimless covering. "I wouldn't want to give you rain fever. I don't hate you bad though."

"Well, move on. You ain't wanted round here. It may get me into trouble if I'm seen fooling away my time a you."

"I hope it will," remarked Branyon's boy, Augustus, with cordial ill will. He was literally bursting with the importance of the facts which he possessed, and Clarence's indifference gave him no opening.

"What will you bet there ain't a strike?"

"I ain't betting this morning," said Clarence blandly, "but if there is one you are ready for it. You bet the hands can't catch us napping. We are ready for 'em any time and all the time." His delivered with a large air, impressed Spide exceedingly.

"Have you sent for the militia ready?" he asked anxiously.

"That's saying," noting the effect of a words. "I can't go blabbing about, telling what the road's up to, but we are awake, and the hands will get it the neck if they tackle the boss."

To Clarence, Oakley was the most grumpy person he had ever known. He vigorously believed his position to be second in point of importance and over to that of the president of the United States. He was wont to invest in with purely imaginary attributes and to lie about him at a great rate along his comrades, who were ready to credit any report touching a man who was reputed to be able to ride on cars without a ticket. Human endeavor had no limits beyond this.

There was a meeting last night. I you didn't know that," said Spide. "I heard something of it. Was your her at the meeting, Spide?" he asked, dropping his tone of hostility for of gracious familiarity. Theurchin nly crossed the ditch and stood his side.

Of course the old man was. You t suppose he wouldn't be in it?" Oh, well, let 'em kick. You see the is ready for 'em," remarked Clarence indifferently. He wanted to know t Spide knew, but he didn't feel he could afford to show any spe-interest. "Where you going—swim-?" he added.

"ep." But Spide was not ready to the fascinating subject of the ce. He wished to astonish Clarence, was altogether too knowing. he meeting was in the room over ritt's saloon," he volunteered. suppose you think we didn't know t the office. We got our spies out o ain't nothing the hands can do in't on to."

de wrote his initials in the soft of the ditch with his big toe while meditated on what he could tell

ell, sir, you'd 'a' been surprised if 'a' been there."

"as you there, Spide?"

h, come off, you can't stuff me," was, too, there. The old lady sent own to fetch pay home. She was d he'd get full. Joe Stokes was , and Lou Bentick and a whole of others, and Griff Ryder." rrence gasped with astonishment. y, he ain't one of the hands."

ell, he's on their side."

hat you giving us?"

y, they are going to make a stiff on old man Oakley working in the . They got it in for him good and g." He paused to weigh the ef- of this and then went on rapidly: done something. Ryder knows it. He told my old man and Joe s. They say he's got to get out. 's a convicted criminal anyhow?" hat do you want to know that for, ?" questioned the artful Clarence, great presence of mind.

ll, that's what old man Oakley is. d Ryder say so myself, and pap oe Stokes just kicked them selves se they hadn't noticed it before. pose. My, but they were hot! 'ou'll see fun tomorrow. I should e surprised if they sent you all g."

ence was swelling with the de- tell Oakley what he had heard. ok the part of a pack of ciga- from his pocket.

ve one?" he said.

e promptly availed himself of his nion's liberality.

ll, so long," the latter added; "I get back." And a moment later ght have been seen making his autously in the direction of the while Spide, he battered hat his arm and the cigarette clutch- one hand, was skipping gayly the cornfield toward the creek, sd by Pink. He was bound for ldy," a swimming hole his had charged him on no account . Under these peculiar circum- it was quite impossible for him lder any other spot.

"What's that you are telling me, Clarence?"

"There's going to be a strike, Mr. Oakley."

Dan smiled good naturedly at the boy.

"I guess that has blown over, Clarence," he said kindly.

"No, it ain't. The men had a meeting last night. It was in the room over Jack Britt's saloon. I've just been talking with a fellow who was there. He told me."

"Sit down," said Oakley, pushing a chair toward him.

"Now, what is it?" as soon as he was seated. And Clarence, editing his reminiscences as he saw fit, gave a tolerably truthful account of his conversation with Spide. The source of his information, its general incompleteness and the frequent divergences occasioned by the boy's attempt to incorporate into the narrative a satisfactory reason for his own presence in the yards, did not detract from its value in Oakley's estimation. The mere fact that the men had held a meeting was in itself significant. Such a thing was new to Antioch, as yet unvisited by labor troubles.

"What is that you say about my father?" For he had rather lost track of the story and caught at the sudden mention of his father's name.

"Spide says they got it in for him. I can't just remember what he did say. It was something or other Griff Ryder knows about him. It's funny, but it's clean gone out of my head, Mr. Oakley."

Oakley started. What could Ryder know about his father? What could any one know?

He was not left long in doubt. The next morning shortly after he arrived at the office he heard the heavy shuffling of many feet on the narrow platform outside his door, and a deputation from the carpenter shop led by Joe Stokes and Branyon entered the room. For a moment or so the men stood in abashed silence about the door and then moved over to his desk.

Oakley pushed back his chair and as they approached came slowly to his feet. There was a hint of anger in his eyes. The whole proceeding smacked of insolence. The men were in their shirt sleeves and overalls and had on their hats. Stokes put up his hand and took off his hat. The others accepted this as a signal and one after another removed theirs. Then followed a momentary shuffling as they bunched closer. Several who looked as if they would just as soon be somewhere else breathed deep and hard. The office force—Kerr, Holt and Miss Walton—suspended their various tasks and stood up so as not to miss anything that was said or done.

Stokes took a step forward and cleared his throat as if to speak. Then he looked at his comrades, who looked back their encouragement at him.

"We want a word with you, Mr. Oakley," said he.

"What have you to say?"

"Well, sir, we got a grievance," began Stokes weakly, but Branyon pushed him to one side hastily and took his place. He was a stockily built Irish-American, with plenty of nerve and a loose tongue. The men nudged each other. They knew Mike would have his say.

"It's just this, Mr. Oakley: There's a man in the carpenter shop who's got to get out. We won't work with him no longer!"

"That's right," muttered one or two of the men under their breath.

"Whom do you mean?" asked Oakley, and his tone was tense and strenuous, for he knew. There was an awkward silence. Branyon fingered his hat a trifle nervously. At last he said doggedly:

"The man who's got to go is your father."

"Why?" asked Oakley, sinking his voice. He guessed what was coming next, but the question seemed dragged from him. He had to ask it.

"We got nothing against you, Mr. Oakley, but we won't work in the same shop with a convicted criminal."

"That's right," muttered the chorus of men again.

Oakley's face flushed scarlet. Then every scrap of color left it.

"Get out of here!" he ordered hotly.

"Don't we get our answer?" demanded Branyon.

While the interview was in progress McClintock had entered and now stood at the opposite end of the room, an attentive listener.

"No!" cried Oakley hoarsely. "I'll put whom I please to work in the shops. Leave the room, all of you!"

The men retreated before his fury, their self confidence rather dashed by it. One by one they backed sheepishly out of the door, Branyon being the last to leave. As he quitted the room he called to Dan:

"We'll give you until tomorrow to think it over. But the old man's got to go."

McClintock promptly followed Branyon, and Clarence darted after him. He was in time to witness the unworking of the master mechanic's visals of wrath and to hear the hot exchange of words which followed.

"You can count your days with the Huckleberry numbered, Branyon," he said. "I'm hanged if I'll have you under me after this!"

CHAPTER XI.
AY. Clarence blurted out, "there's going to be a strike!" Oakley glanced up from his writing

"We'll see about that!" retorted Branyon roughly. "Talk's cheap."

"What's the old man ever done to you, you infernal loafer?"

"Shut up, Milt, and keep your shirt on!" said Stokes in what he intended should be conciliatory tones. "We only want our rights."

"We'll have 'em, too!" said Branyon, shaking his head ominously. "We ain't daogoes or Polacks; we're American mechanics, and we know our rights."

"You're a sneak, Branyon! What's he ever done to you? You needn't be so particular about the old man's record. You know as much about the inside of a prison as he does."

"You're a liar!" Nevertheless McClintock spoke only the truth. At Branyon's last word he smashed his fist into the middle of the carpenter's sour visage with a heavy, sickening thud. No man called him a liar and got away with it.

"Gee!" gasped the closely attentive but critical Clarence. "What a soaker!" Branyon fell up against the side of the building near which they were standing. Otherwise he would have gone his length upon the ground, and the hands rushed in between the two men.

Stokes and Bentick dragged their friend away by main strength. The affair had gone far enough. They didn't want a fight.

McClintock marched into the office, crossed to the water cooler and filled himself a tumbler; then he turned an unruffled front on Oakley.

"I guess we'd better chuck those fellows—fire 'em out bodily, the impudent cusses! What do you say, Mr. Oakley?"

But Dan was too demoralized to consider or even reply to this. He was



"The man who's got to go is your father."

feeling a burning sense of shame and disgrace. The whole town must know his father's history or some garbled version of it. Worse still, Constance Emory must know. The pride of his respectability was gone from him. He felt that he had cheated the world of a place to which he had no right, and now he was found out. He could not face Kerr nor Holt nor McClintock. But this was only temporary. He couldn't stand among his ruins. Men survive disgrace and outlive shame just as they outlive sorrow and suffering. Nothing ever stops. Then he recognized that, since his secret had been wrested from him, there was no longer discovery to fear. A sense of freedom and relief came when he realized this. The worst had happened, and he could still go on. How the men had learned about his father he could not understand, but instinct told him he had Ryder to thank. Following up the clew Kenyon had given him, he had carefully looked into Roger Oakley's record, a matter that simply involved a little correspondence.

He had told Branyon and Stokes only what he saw fit and had pledged himself to support the men in whatever action they took. He would drive Oakley out of Antioch. That was one of his motives. He was also bent on cultivating as great a measure of personal popularity as he could. It would be useful to Kenyon and so advantageous to himself. The congressman had large ambitions. If he brought his campaign to a successful issue it would make him a power in the state. Counting on this victory, Ryder had mapped out his own career. Kenyon had force and courage, but his judgment and tact were only of a sort. Ryder aspired to supply the necessary brains for his complete success. Needless to say, Kenyon knew nothing of these benevolent intentions on the part of his friend. He could not possibly have believed that he required anything but votes.

Oakley turned to Clarence.

"Run into the carpenter shop and see if you can find my father. If he is there ask him to come here to me at once."

The boy was absent only a few moments. Roger Oakley had taken off his work clothes and had gone uptown before the men left the shop. He had not returned.

Dan closed his desk and put on his hat.

"I am going to the hotel," he said to Kerr. "If anybody wants to see me you can tell them I'll be back this afternoon."

(To be continued.)

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Lawyers.

E. L. C. FABRIN,
Attorney-at-Law.
City Attorney, Deputy Dist. Att'y
Lockhart Building, Marshfield, Ore.
Phone 44.

J. M. UPTON,
Attorney-at-Law.
Marshfield, Oregon

J. W. BENNETT,
Office over Flanagan & Bennett Bank.
Marshfield, Oregon

C. F. MCKNIGHT,
Attorney-at-Law.
Upstairs, Bennett & Walter block.
Marshfield, Oregon.

J. W. SNOVER
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Office: Rogers building
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