

The Manager Of the B. & A.

By VAUGHAN KESTER

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(Continued from Saturday.)

CHAPTER XIV.

ON Thursday the Herald published its report of the trouble at the shops. Oakley had looked forward to the paper's appearance with considerable eagerness. He hoped to glean from it some idea of the tactics the men would adopt, and in this he was not disappointed. Ryder served up his sensation, which was still a sensation, in spite of the fact that it was common property and two days old before it was accorded the dignity of type and ink, in his most impressive style.

The situation at the car shops has assumed a serious phase, and a strike is imminent. Matters came to a focus day before yesterday and may now be said to have reached an acute stage. It is expected that the carpenters, of whom quite a number are employed on repair work, will be the first to go out unless certain demands which they are to make today are promptly acceded to by General Cornish's local representative.

Both sides maintain the strictest secrecy, but from reliable sources the Herald gathers that the men will insist upon Mr. Branyon being taken back by the company.

Another grievance of the men, and one in which they should have the sympathy of the entire community, is their objection to working with the manager's father, who came here recently from the east and has since been employed in the shops. It has been learned that he is an ex-convict, who was sentenced for a long term of imprisonment in June, 1875, for the murder of Thomas Sharp at Burton, Mass.

He was only recently set at liberty, and the men are naturally incensed and indignant at having to work with him. Still another grievance is the new schedule of wages.

A committee representing every department in the shops and possessing the fullest authority met last night at the Odd Fellows' hall on South Main street, but their deliberations were secret. A well authenticated rumor has it, however, that the most complete harmony prevailed and that the employees are pledged to drastic measures unless they get fair treatment from the company.

Ryder tackled a moral to this, and the moral was that labor required a champion to protect it from the soulless greed and grinding tyranny of the great corporations which had sprung into existence under the fostering wing of corrupt legislation. Of course "the picturesque statesman from old Hanover" was the Hercules who was prepared to fight these wrongs of honest industry and to curb the power of Cornish, whose vampire fists fattened on the sweat of the toiler, and especially the toiler at Antioch.

A copy of the paper was evidently sent the "picturesque statesman," who had just commenced his canvass, for in its very next issue the Herald was able to print a telegram in which he "heartily indorsed the sentiments embodied in the Herald's ringing editorial on the situation at Antioch" and declared himself a unit with his fellow citizens of whatever party in their heroic struggle for a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. He also expressed himself as honored by their confidence, and, indeed, he might well have been.

Dan digested the Herald's report along with his breakfast. Half an hour later, when he reached the office, he found McClintock waiting for him.

"The men want to see you, Mr. Oakley. They were going to send their committee in here, but I told 'em you'd come out to them."

"All right. It's just as well you did." And Oakley followed him from the office.

The men were clustered about the great open door of the works in their shirt sleeves. From behind them in the silence and the shadow came the pleasant, droning sound of machinery, like the humming of a million bees. There was something dogged and reckless in the very way they stood around with folded arms or slouched nervously to and fro.

Dan singled out Bentick and Joe Stokes and three or four others as the committee and made straight toward them.

"Well, men, what do you want?" he asked briskly.

"We represent every department in the shops, sir," said Bentick civilly, "and we consider Branyon's discharge as unjust. We want him taken back."

"And suppose I won't take him back, what are you going to do about it, eh?" asked Dan good naturedly, and, not waiting for a reply, with old time defiance he swung himself up into an empty fat car which stood close at hand and faced his assembled workmen.

"You know why Branyon was dismissed. It was a business none of you have much reason to be proud of, but I am willing to let him come back on condition he first offers an apology to McClintock and to me. Unless he does he can never set his foot inside these doors again while I remain here. I agree to this because I don't wish to make him a scapegoat for the rest of you, and I don't wish those dependent on him to suffer."

He avoided looking in McClintock's direction. He felt rather than saw that the latter was shaking his head in strong disapproval of his course. The committee and the men exchanged grins. The boss was weakening. They had scored twice—first against Roger Oakley and now for Branyon.

"I guess Branyon would as lief be



"I don't wish to make him a scapegoat for the rest of you."

Dan set his lips and said sternly, but quietly, "That's for him to decide."

"Well, we'll tell him what you say, and if he's ready to eat humble pie there won't be no kick coming from us," remarked Bentick impartially.

"Is this all?" asked Oakley.

"No; we can't see the cut." And a murmur of approval came from the men.

Dan looked out over the crowd. Why couldn't they see that the final victory was in his hands? "Be guided by me," he said earnestly, "and take my word for it, the cut is necessary. I'll meet you halfway in the Branyon matter. Let it go at that."

"We want our old wages," insisted Bentick doggedly.

"It is out of the question. The shops are running behind. They are not earning any money, they never have, and it's as much to your interests as mine or General Cornish's to do your full part in making them profitable."

"Wages can't go back until the business in the shops warrants it. If you will continue to work under the present arrangement, good and well. If not, I see no way to meet your demands. You will have to strike. That, however, is an alternative I trust you will carefully weigh before you commit yourselves. Once the shops are closed it will not be policy to open them until fall, perhaps not until the first of the year. But if you can afford to lie idle all summer it's your own affair. That's exactly what it means if you strike."

The crowd on the platform gave a faint, unenthusiastic cheer as it caught sight of him. It had been more interested in staring at Bentick and Stokes. They looked so excessively uncomfortable.

Mr. Kenyon climbed down the steps and shook hands with Mr. Ryder. Then, bowing and smiling to the right and left, he crossed the platform, leaning on the editor's arm. At the carriages there were more greetings. Stokes and Bentick were formally presented, and the congressman mounted to a place beside them, whereat the crowd cheered again, and Stokes and Bentick looked, if possible, more miserable than before. They had a sneaking idea that a show was being made of them. Ryder took his place in the second carriage, with Cap Roberts and the Hon. Jeb Barrows, and the procession moved off uptown to the hotel, preceded by the band playing a lively two-step out of tune and followed by a troop of bare legged urchins.

After supper the statesman was serenaded by the band, and a little later the members of the Young Men's Kenyon club, attired in cotton flannel uniforms, marched across from the Herald office to escort him to the rink, where he was to speak. He appeared radiant in a Prince Albert and a shiny tile and a boutonniere, this time leaning on the arm of Mr. Stokes, to the huge disgust of that worthy mechanic, who did not know that a statesman had to lean on somebody's arm. It is hoary tradition, and yet it were meant to indicate that Kenyon couldn't keep straight unless he was propped.

A wave of stifled enthusiasm swept the assembled crowd, and Mr. Stokes' youngest son, Samuel, aged six, burst into tears, no one knew why, and was led out of the press by an elder brother, who alternately slapped him and wiped his nose on his cap.

"Can't we talk it over, Mr. Oakley?"

"There is nothing to talk over, Bentick. Settle it among yourselves." And he marched off up the tracks, with McClintock following in his wake and commending the stand he had taken.

The first emotion of the men was one of profound and depressing surprise at the abruptness with which Oakley had terminated the interview, and his evident willingness to close the shops, a move they had not counted on. It dashed their courage.

"We'll call his bluff!" cried Bentick, and the men gave a faint cheer. They were not so sure it was a bluff after all. It looked real enough.

There were those who thought with a guilty pang of wives and children at home and no pay day, the fortnightly haven of rest toward which they lived. And there were the customarily reckless souls, who thirsted for excitement at any price and who were willing to see the trouble to a finish. These ruled, as they usually do. Not a man returned to work. Instead they hung about the yards and canvassed the situation. Finally the theory was advanced that if the shops were closed it would serve to bring down Cornish's wrath on Oakley and probably result in his immediate dismissal. This theory found instant favor and straightway became a conviction with the majority.

At length all agreed to strike, and the whistle in the shops was set shrieking its dismal protest. The men swarmed into the building, where each got together his kit of tools. They were quite jolly now and laughed and jested a good deal. Presently they were streaming off uptown, with their coats over their arms, and the strike was on.

An unusual stillness fell on the yards and in the shops. The belts, as they swept on and on in endless revolutions cut this stillness with a sharp, incisive hiss. The machinery seemed to hammer at it, as if to beat out some last-ling echo. Then gradually the volume

of sound lessened. It mumbled to a dotage of decreasing force, and then everything stopped with a sudden jar. The shops had shut down.

McClintock came from the office and entered the works, pulling the big doors to after him. He wanted to see that all was made snug. He cursed loudly as he strode through the deserted building. It was the first time since he had been with the road that the shops had been closed, and it affected him strangely.

The place held a dreadful, ghostly loneliness. The belts and shafting, with its innumerable cogs and connections, reached out like the heavy knuckled tentacles of some great lifeless monster. The sunlight stole through the broken, cobwebbed windows to fall on heaps of rusty iron and heaps of dirty shavings.

In the engine room he discovered Smith Roberts and his assistant, Joe Webber, banking the fires, preparatory to leaving. They were the only men about the place. Roberts closed a furnace door with a bang, threw down his shovel and drew a grimy arm across his forehead.

"When do you suppose I'll get a chance to build steam again, Milt?"

"Oakley says we won't start up before the first of September."

CHAPTER XV.

THE first weeks of the strike slipped by without excitement. Harvest time came and went. A rainless August browned the earth and seared the woods with its heat, but nothing happened to vary the dull monotony. The shops, a sepulcher of sound, stood silent and empty. General Cornish, in the role of the avenger, did not appear on the scene, to Oakley's discomfort and to the joy of the men. The women began to develop shrewish tempers and a trying conversational habit, while their husbands squandered their rapidly dwindling means in the saloons. There was large talk and a variety of threats, but no lawlessness.

At intervals a rumor was given currency that Oakley was on the verge of starting up with imported labor, and the men, dividing the watches, met each train, but only familiar types, such as the casual commercial traveler with his grips, the farmer from up or down the line, with his inevitable paper parcels, and the stray wayfarer were seen to step from the Huckleberry's battered coaches. Finally it dawned upon the men that Dan was bent on starving them into submission.

Ryder had displayed what for him was a most unusual activity. Almost every day he held conferences with the leaders of the strike, and his personal influence went far toward keeping the men in line. Indeed, his part in the whole affair was much more important than was generally recognized.

The political campaign had started, and Kenyon was booked to speak in Antioch. It was understood in advance that he would declare for the strikers, and his coming caused a welcome flutter of excitement.

The statesman arrived on No. 7, and the reception committee met him at the station in two carriages. It included Cap Roberts, the Hon. Jeb Barrows, Ryder, Joe Stokes and Bentick. The two last were an inspiration of the editor's and proved a popular success.

The brass band hired for the occasion discoursed patriotic airs, as Kenyon in a long linen duster and a limp, wilted collar presented himself at the door of the smoker. The great man was all blandness and suavity—an oily suavity that oozed and trickled from every pore.

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