

Ten Years' Trial

By Gen. CHARLES KING

Continued from First Page.
ing of the peppy little major, a veteran of the civil war, and of Langdon, who, though in civilian dress, had been "spotted for a soldier" even before they got to Gunnison. Ball cartridges had been issued to Captain Linkenfelder's men as they stood in the depot at Missouri Junction awaiting the coming of a train bearing two companies from the south, and then came a funny thing. Linkenfelder could have shown them all about "loading in nine times," as they did in the war days, but this was a new company. He was an old officer, and the manual, minus the loadings and fringes, was all he had yet taught them of the new breechloader when came the call to arms. Mr. Channing, impatiently pacing the platform and reading dispatch after dispatch and occasionally dictating an answer to his new and silent secretary, presently saw that Langdon's attention was wandering and looked at him inquiringly.

"Those men have never been taught to load and fire," said Langdon, "and their captain doesn't know how. There will be trouble if they get into a snarl with rioters."
"Then, for God's sake, you show them! Here, Captain Linkenfelder," he continued impudently, "my friend is a West Point officer. Let him teach you there." Linkenfelder knew Channing well, as who along the line did not? He wiped his brow and tried to look pleased as he explained that he hadn't been drilling long. But in five minutes Langdon had the eight non-commissioned officers present in a squad, the rest of the company eagerly surrounding and looking on. In 20 minutes they had "got the hang" of



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the most important parts. In an hour, when the other train came sweeping in, he had the whole company in line practicing "fire by company," "fire by rank," "fire by file," and never in a dozen drills had the Junction Light guard learned as much as they had that day. "That fellow's a dandy drillmaster," was the verdict, and the fame of the exploit and the praise of this unknown soldier had gone through the train before ever it reached the bridge. Next morning when Company G was told off for a possibly hazardous piece of duty and its captain was found to be still in arrest and "sitting in his tent" a committee went to the peppy little major with the gray mustache and blinking eyes, not, as might have been expected, to ask "cap's release," but to say that "the boys wanted a man who was way up in the 'bis' if there was any fighting to be done and could not that West Point fellow take command?" "Will you do it?" asked the little major of Langdon. "Will you do it?" asked Channing, and away went Eric across a maze of tracks to strapping young fellows striding confidently after him, rejoicing in the ring and power of his word of command. An hour later they stood confronting a furious mob ten times their number, hurling bricks and billingsgate and foul abuse. At the point of the bayonet they had cleared the Big Horn shops of strikers, driven them into the open yards and the street beyond and opened a passage for a train of cattle cars.

But by this time, nothing that one of Melville's forces were afar up the tracks rescuing cattle trains, from every direction tramps, toughs and the desperados among the strikers dropped the devilment they happened to be engaged in and came howling to re-enforce the expelled gang. Only 20 yards away, just outside and along the picket fence, they crowded, clamoring, cursing, brandishing weapons and hurling missiles, but these latter, having to be hurled high, generally fell short. Many among Langdon's new command were lads whose "nerve" would long since have fled but for their leader's placid unconcern. He had backed them, as it were, up against the brown wooden walls of the freighthouse and then stood coolly forth ten feet in front of them, facing the raging throng without, sometimes quietly smiling as though he enjoyed the situation, sometimes slowly pacing up and down. At last as the clamor increased it became evident that the mob was bent on a dash at the office building to their right, standing alone opposite the great wooden gates—gates which gave directly on the buildings containing the most valuable local properties of the Big Horn road, excepting possibly the locomotives in the roundhouse. It was a moment of excitement. No man in the little band of defenders could estimate the extent of damage that would unquestionably result if that maddened throng broke through. It seemed as though by this time all the devilment of the disaffected was concentrated here at one spot, for the mob was vastly increased in size, and the jeers, howls and curses were now continuous. Small wonder that many a young state "guardsman" in the little command felt a nervous thrill as he gazed at the host of semisavage faces peering in between the brown slats and listened to the hideous threats of the leaders. "We'll have your farms' blood, you liveried dogs!" "We'll burn you in soldiers' a lesson!" "Burn down the fence!" "Kill the murdering

hounds!" "Cut their throats!" were expurgated samples of the yells. But still the company stood at ordered arms and "at ease," for Langdon continued his cool promenade along the front, calmly eyeing the howling mob, keeping wary watch upon the fence and gates, but ever and anon glancing up the yards in search of support or re-enforcement, for, to all outward appearance the coolest, most unconcerned person on the ground, his heart was filled with grave anxiety. It was by long odds the most critical position of any man, soldier or civilian, that day in all Nebraska.

For now that he had time to face the facts and consider the position in all its bearings, he realized that he had no authority whatever in law, or fact, to enable him to discharge the grave duties of his position—not so much as a commission in the state troops, not even a warrant as a deputy sheriff. If the mob charged and to defend the lives of these men he was compelled to order them to fire, an indictment for murder would doubtless lie at his door. It is one thing to do a man's whole duty with the law behind him; it is another to stand and face a thousand voters and realize that every drop of blood that might be shed on either side would, in the event of success or failure, be charged up to him. And still he never seemed disturbed.

But Langdon's heart beat quick when, just as it seemed probable that, neck or nothing, he should have to face the situation and fight, he caught sight of Channing with a staff in hand and a brace of deputies coming toward him on the run. The crowd having concentrated here, it was possible for the officials now to leave other threatened points. He strode, as it were, with almost exaggerated quiet to the right flank of his men to meet them. The mob redoubled its screams of defiance.

"Major Melville wants to know how you're getting along," panted Channing as he hastened up, red faced, anxious, but plucky.

"Well, you see for yourself," said Eric, with a nod of his head toward the fence. "These fellows mean to burst through in a minute or two."

"Can't you scare 'em? Fire a volley over their heads?" puffed the sheriff, eager and willing, but utterly inexperienced.

"That's murder," was the cool reply. "A mob gains tenfold in daring and devilment when it sees you're afraid to fire anything but blanks. You'll simply have to kill 'em then where five would have sufficed in the first place. No, sir. Ball cartridges—no nothing. And here's another point. I'm not an officer either of the troops or of the law." And now Eric had to raise his voice above the outer clamor. "I can give the necessary commands and at the proper instant, and I can drive those howlers back in one volley if they attempt to force the gates, but you, Mr. Sheriff, must stand by my side and assume responsibility; otherwise a week from now you'll be around with a warrant for my arrest."

"My God, I can't!" said the civil official, wiping the sweat from his brow despite the cold wind from the west-ward breeze. He gazed almost fearfully along that surging fence line. It resembled by this time nothing so much as one continuous cage of snarling, roaring beasts. It was plain the poor fellow was losing his nerve. "Me and my family couldn't live in this community another week. Can't you say something to them, Mr. Channing?"

Like many another civil official, the sheriff was realizing that it was quite one thing to tackle a lot of tramps, friendless and desperate as they were down at Bridgeiding; it was quite another to think of letting drive a deadly volley into the breasts of a mob that might contain friends and fellow citizens, and that would be sure to turn in retaliation and possibly murder his own beloved ones. Small wonder the sheriff hesitated!

"Too late to talk!" shouted Channing impatiently. "Besides, there isn't one sane railroad man in 20 in that lot. They're toughs from every town along the Big Muddy, and, by heaven, they'll sack these yards before the regulars can get here unless you can stop it, Langdon! That infernal Seattle train ought to have been in long ago, but it may get here inside of an hour, and their general manager's just behind 'em on a special. What can you do?"

And Channing set his stern jaw and glared at the crowd, light, almost fury, in his blazing eyes, then turned back to Langdon. Before the latter could answer there came a scream from the sheriff.

"Look! Sledge hammers, by heaven!" he cried, pointing to the gate, already shaken by the furious heaving of the throng.

"Then there's only one thing to do," answered Langdon, his face very pale, but his eyes adamant. "Out of the way, please, Mr. Sheriff." And, thus dismissing and disposing of that now useless functionary, he stepped quickly back to the front of his men. Even in that supreme moment he was counting the chances of every move. He had faced rioters before and knew how vital it was that every movement of the troops should be machine-like and precise.

Barely 60 feet interposed between his men and the mob as, all alone, he sauntered down to the gates. In spite of themselves the cursing ringleaders, the brazen widders of sledge and crow, dropped blasphemy and bars to speech. They saw he had something to say, and, curiosity prevailed. That while he faced, gray-eyed "cuss" had nerve and grit certainly and seemed profoundly unmoved by their uproar. What they heard was not to their liking, but hear it they had to, for he lifted up his voice so that it reached some hundred ears, and yet his words were as calm, deliberate, passionless, as he himself might prove merciless. He spoke as though it were a matter of utter indifference to him whether they burst through and "got it" or staid without and were spared.

"You seem bent on breaking in," the clear tones rang out over the murmur and mutter close at hand—the tumult at the distance. "Now, understand—If these gates fly open, the instant you attempt to enter you get a volley in the face!"

Then slowly, calmly, placidly as before, he turned and walked back half way, only ten steps or so, and there, first glancing along his waiting line to insure its readiness and close attention, in clear, sharp, commanding tone, with a distinct pause after every word, so that even the mob could hear, gave the order:

"With ball cartridges—load!"

"Ten seconds more, and the silent 70 stood in the position preliminary to firing, the muzzle sloping to the front, the muzzles chin high, every eye fixed upon the gate in stern, calm determination, the ranks inspired by the soldier commander's intrepid and resolute bearing—70 men in uniform obeying to the letter the will of that one soldier in civilian dress—and then, once more in front of the center, Langdon calmly faced the hard breathing, half paralyzed mob without and dropped on his right knee. The act spoke for itself. From that position, instead of in rear of the line, he meant to give the word, and the death dealing volley would flash into their faces over his head.

CHAPTER VIII.

That was a memorable day in railway circles all over the west, but especially so in Nebraska. What made it more remarkable was that, with the stroke of the sun, the Big Horn road was practically in running order again, while the Seattle, its powerful rival of the past, was still blocked. Traversing as they did for 20 miles the same territory, the lines divided only by the narrow gorge of the Red Water, it was strange to mark the bustle and life along the north bank—the lights, head and tail, of passenger, freight and cattle trains hurrying away eastward; and by contrast to note the silence on the lither shore. All day long the "booming" western city, the railway center of the populous section, had been thronged with people over and above its postoffice list—first, the farmers and villagers from all over the county; second, the tramps and toughs and vagrants from all over creation. These latter, having joined forces with the strikers early in the game, had speedily, as has been seen, taken the bit in their teeth, the game into their own hands, and the destruction of trains by fire and flame and the wholesale robbery of freight cars were their doing, not that of the disaffected railway men, who, all too late, wished themselves rid of their desperado allies. But all over the neighborhood now—among the saloons that bordered the yards, the cheap taverns and lodging houses, all through the crowds of idlers, disheartened men skulking about the street corners, undecided whether to give up and go back to duty or launch out on some new enterprise at the expense of the road—the story had gone far and wide how that fellow in the derby hat and plain clothes had taken command of a company of "militia," "tin soldiers—nothing better," and had so easily handled them and in so cold blooded a way had loaded up with solid lead and given the gang to understand that he'd let daylight through their hides if they stirred a foot through the company's gates that the mob that went there bent on destruction, determined to burn and loot the offices and war-houses, slunk away completely cowed. "That fellow's boss of the Big Horn yards this day, boys, and we ought to be in it," was the cry of the leader of the strikers expressed it, and there was no sane man who cared to put it to the test.

Ascribe it to whatever cause we may, it was a petrifed fact that from the instant Eric Langdon stepped out at the head of that company the Big Horn's property was safe. The few willing workers left to the management took hold with a vim. An experimental train, guarded by militiamen from other companies, was started down the Red Water. A construction train followed with soldier boys manning both brakes and shovels. Channing, the bustling manager, tumbled clerks, bookkeepers, switchmen and carmen into engine cabs, wired for orders to meet them at Gunnison and actually had his trains moving at the very moment when the Seattle sheds were going up in flame, and the great general manager of that great corporation, with curses in his heart and his hands in his pockets, stood scowling on the scene of ruin through which the belated regulars were driving the last vestiges of the mob, and Mr. Barclay, the general manager aforementioned, was both thinking and saying unwholesome things of the regulars' commander, at whose hospitable board he had been dining and dining but a month or so ago, the too deliberate Captain Nathan.

What Melville would have said to that erstwhile officer when at last, about noon, his train and command arrived cannot well be conjectured, but

that the long delay with a serious import there can be no doubt, for Captain Nathan's explanation in writing was demanded and forwarded a day or two later, and both the unique explanation and old Gray-Fox's (the name of Gray Fox was given by the Indians to the famous frontier soldier at that time commanding the department of the Platte) telling reply was speedily the talk of the department of the Platte. Nathan said that it was true he might have earlier reached the Red Water valley, but he conceived that his first duty was to protect the lives of his devoted men and prevent the possibility of an ambush or pitfall. To this end every dangerous bridge was examined, certain deep cuts were explored, etc., before he deemed it safe to proceed. He admitted long delay at the junction, but declared it necessary because of the alarming reports brought him by "reliable railway officials" to the effect that the tracks were under mined, the crossing "sawed" and every mile of the Seattle from the junction to Brentwood a threat of mines and mantraps. It was true, he said, that the train bearing some militia companies had passed him at Gunnison and gone forward by the Big Horn road, but the way was cleared for them by the sheriff and other officials, whereas on the south bank no friends were to be hoped for.

And so it had resulted, to the unspoken disgust of the few officers of the militia, under fearless and energetic leadership, had forced their way, despite mobs and obstructions, to the seat of action and rescued the property of the Big Horn road, while the regulars, hampered by their numerous loads, were held back for hours in front of purely imaginary obstacles and only reached the yards at Brentwood in time to find the buildings a mass of flame. Even that calamity might not have happened but that at 11 in the forenoon Major Melville, learning that the mob was drifting away from the Big Horn and gathering in threatening force about the Seattle yards down on the south side, had hurried in from the suburbs, whither he had gone to station the recently evacuated battalion, and while standing on the platform of the freight-house, calm and unmoved in the presence of a jeering, howling pack of intermeddlers and writing an order summoning certain companies to



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