Ten Years' Trial

By Gen. CHARLES KING

Continued from First Page.

police. The sheriff had discharged his extra deputies, and Eric Langdon, beginning the world over again on a modest salary, took counsel with himself in the absence of other advisers and planned his daily life. It had been Channing's expectation that he should take a room near the yards and his meals at the Brentwood, but Langdon had decided on rigid economy. It might be long months before he could hope for promotion and better pay, and it was his determination to save at least half of each month's stipend to go toward the payment of his debts and $10 more to form a fund on which he could depend in the event of ills or accident. Mine host of the Brentwood hated, he said, to have him go, but directed him to a quiet, homelike little place, where he secured a room and plain but sufficient board under the roof of a widow whose sole support had been killed in a collision on the Seattle three years before. Yet the hotel man was at heart not sorry to see him go. He liked him well, but certain of the owners did not. He begged Langdon to come round and make himself at home whenever he felt like it, but secretly hoped he might be too busy. There had been a few days immediately following the strike when the mayor, certain of the common council, the district attorney and other prominent citizens and business men had expressed themselves as delighted to meet Mr. Langdon and as grateful beyond words for his gallant conduct at a critical time. But since Murphy's banquet they met him with a certain constraint when they met him at all, for his duties kept him at the yards from early morn till after dark. There seemed to be just one set of men whose eyes lighted up at sight of him, who were eager to press his acquaintance and many of whom never passed him without some semblance of a military salute. These were the members of the Brentwood rifles, officially known as Company C of the Fourth Nebraska. One evening, hardly a week after Melville had gone, three of them came to see him. "Cap," they said, was going to quit. He had been so quizzed and criticised for letting the strikers get away with their guns that he couldn't stand the pressure. The lieutenants were green, and wouldn't Mr. Langdon come round to the armory two evenings a week and drill them? Now, Langdon had been planning a course of reading in the library of the Young Men's Christian association, but the rifles were importunate. Something might come of it, and he consented. Eighteen men appeared the first night—Tuesday—and 38 the second—Friday. One of the lieutenants was the son of the leading banker of Brentwood, the other a young lawyer. Both greeted him civilly and sat and watched his work with absorbing interest. The third night "Cap" came round and looked on. Forty-four men were in ranks—twice as many as he could ever scrape together for drill—and, though he shook hands with Langdon during a rest, and said he found his business required all his time and attention and therefore he had concluded to resign, his manner lacked cordiality. Two weeks later a committee waited on Langdon to know if he would accept the command of the company if elected, and after an exchange of letters between himself and Channing Langdon said that, if unanimously chosen and the lieutenants waived promotion, he would serve. Then it got into the papers. The members of the company, as a rule, were young clerks, bookkeepers and salesmen, highly intelligent and full of enthusiasm, but their hapless experience had made them the laughing stock of the street boys, the railway shop men and the vagabond class of the community as well as of certain envious fellow citizens. "Tin soldiers," they were called, when all that was needed to make them a force to be dreaded by lawbreakers was a captain who knew his business, could command their respect and teach them steadiness, drill and discipline. Lieutenant Perrigo was presiding at the meeting when a sergeant arose and in a caustic speech pointed out their needs and defects and, saying there was just one man in the community capable of doing them justice, proposed that the captaincy be tendered to Mr. Eric Langdon, whereat the whole meeting, barring its presiding officer, sprang to its feet and cheered. There was not a dissenting voice, and 49 members were present.

Yet within a week the Brentwood Banner began publishing insidious little paragraphs. "It is understood that the rifles contemplate a change in the captaincy. What has Brentwood done that several capable officers should be overlooked and the command tendered to a kicked out captain from the army?" was the first specimen. The Examiner asked if the rifles expected to add to their popularity by putting at their head a man who would have slaughtered a score of fellow citizens but for the prompt and merciful intervention of local officials. The Examiner was supporting the sheriff for reelection, and this official well knew the paragraph to be utterly unjust and untrue, but he couldn't quarrel with his bread and butter, and it was best to admit tacitly, now that the danger was over, that he had actually interposed in behalf of the strikers. At all events, he did nothing to cause its correction. The Brentwood Sun (Populist) said if anything was needed to add to the contempt in which the rifles were held it was the rumor that they had tendered the command to an ex-officer of the army whose drunken folly was so near to costing scores of precious lives not a fortnight since. And Langdon, who stood ready to devote valuable time and energy to the public service, with little hope of any reward whatever, read these insidious attacks with infinite pain and sense of wrong and injustice, against which he stood powerless. Other influences, too, were evidently at work. The election, which was to have taken place the first Monday in January, was postponed a fortnight. Boniface, Eric's friend of the Brentwood, took him aside and advised him to withdraw his name. The committee, on the contrary, had begged him to "stand pat." Meantime Langdon continued drilling and instructing the company, and two nights a week the armory was crowded with citizens whose interest had been aroused and who came to look on. Veteran soldiers, G. A. R. men, went away saying that fellow knew his trade up to the handle. Prominent business men looked on silently and did a good deal of thinking as they strolled homeward. Newspaper reporters, previously instructed, wrote scathing or satirical paragraphs about martinet mannerisms, imported instructors, dismissed drillmasters and the like, and Eric, proud, sad, sensitive, would gladly have given up and shut himself in his sooty den at the yards but for a letter from Melville, to whom he had sent all the papers. "Stick to it, Langdon," he said. "The time will come when the very papers that abuse you now will have to change their tune." This was what the major's letter said, but not the major's hand. His eyes still felt the force of that cruel blow, and Ethel Grahame was his amanuensis. "I have faith in your future," said he. "So have I," in tiny letters wrote the amanuensis "E. G."

And so, despite the warning of mine host of the Brentwood, Langdon stood for election the third Monday in January and was beaten 30 to 10, the second lieutenant and son of Brentwood's richest banker being the successful competitor. "A Merited Rebuke," referring to Langdon, said The Sun; "A Merited Promotion," referring to Perrigo junior, a boy of 22, said The Banner; "A Foregone Conclusion," said The Examiner. But it was noticeable that the last two named refrained from further active abuse of Langdon. The object of the magnates was accomplished in compassing the defeat of what The Sun called his "aspirations." Down in their hearts both editors and magnates realized that Langdon was a wronged and injured man. It wouldn't do to say so, of course, yet he had checked that mob at a moment when its triumph meant the birth of a reign of terror in Brentwood. He alone had stood between them and anarchy. They bowed to the behest of the Seattle because it practically owned them. The editor of The Banner met Langdon at the Brentwood two days later, stopped, stammered and held out his hand. "Mr. Langdon, my name's Armstrong," said he. "I'm managing editor of The Banner, and I thought I'd like to say to you that I—I personally don't approve of the attitude my paper has had to assume in your case. I suppose you know the papers have to carry out certain lines of policy and sometimes attack men whom the editors would much rather befriend."

Langdon turned very white. His hand naturally had been extended to accept that of the stranger—it is the American fashion—but now it was withdrawn. His lips quivered a bit, but his eyes never flinched from their gaze straight into those of the journalist.

"I have no use whatever for the friendship of a man who will privately assure me of his good will," said he, "and publicly defame me." Then he turned his back on him and walked away.

Boniface saw the whole thing and gasped. Sherwood, clerk at the desk, and Bingham, Brentwood's mayor, were also witnesses, and the story spread. Here was a man who not only wasn't afraid of a mob, but even dared the press, and the man who can do that in this land of freedom takes his life in his hands.

"You've cooked your goose," said Boniface sadly, for he had grown to like Langdon more than a little and to feel for him deeply in his loneliness. "You've made an enemy of the most powerful newspaper man west of Omaha."

But he hadn't. Armstrong was poor; he was the servant of the stockholders and they of the Seattle; he couldn't afford to throw up his job and see his wife and children suffer, but he had a conscience. He knew that Langdon was right and The Banner wrong. He was cut to the quick by Langdon's contempt, but the man in him overcame the sense of indignity, and, putting himself in Langdon's place and asking himself what he would have felt and said, he went back to his office raging, not at Langdon, but at fate. He had seen much of Melville during that official's brief stay; he knew his reputation and the story of his spotless life and soldierly career; he knew of Melville's sympathy for Langdon and had heard Melville's high encomium of Langdon as an officer and a gentleman; he was filled with admiration of Langdon's conduct at the time of the riots and had then referred to him in terms of unstinted praise; but, that danger ended, The Banner had to return to the paths of policy dictated by its owners. He actually thought that his assurance of personal liking for Langdon ought to compensate for the harsh things said of him in The Banner and was stung when it didn't. But at heart he could not but admire Langdon for his square, straightforward response. It was a revelation, an eye opener. It set him to thinking of the other side, not the paper side, of the question, and then he wished that he had that month to live over again. There should be no more abuse of Langdon in The Banner if he could help it.

And so there was a certain reaction in favor of Langdon. Some of the rifles resigned their warrants, secured their discharges and then set to work to organize another company for Langdon to drill. The men were easily found. Seventy stalwart young fellows signed the petition and brought it to Langdon to add his name. Then it went to the governor. There were vacancies in the regiment. A company was mustered in at Neosha; another, made up mainly of farmer boys, at Gunnison Junction. But some strange, occult influence seemed against the would be Brentwood Light guard. The petition hung fire. State Senator Stokes and Representative Carter said that they would see to it that the Light guard was duly admitted, but they didn't. Meantime the rifles prospered, as a social organization at least; took in a number of honorary members at $50 apiece, got a "swell" uniform, gave a series of most successful dancing parties and what they termed exhibition drills, where the clockwork precision with which some 30 of their number executed the loadings and firings in unison evoked tumultuous applause. It prompted the rifles to issue a challenge to all comers west of the Mississippi and east of the mountains to compete for a valuable prize at the Exposition building in April, the anniversary of their muster in, and the next thing the rifles knew Eric Langdon was going down to Gunnison twice a week to coach the Gunnison Grays, Company K, Fourth Nebraska, and Brentwood, which had refused to avail itself of his services, was properly scandalized that he should tender them elsewhere. The Sun couldn't say much now, because it was down on the rifles anyhow and catered to the farmers; The Banner wouldn't say much, because Armstrong was ashamed of what he had said, and this happened to be a matter that didn't bother the Seattle. But The Examiner, which had done what it could to make Langdon friendless in his new position at the yards, now duly and frequently expressed its abhorrence of the man who could turn traitor to his own people and work against the best interests of the community in whose midst he had found a home and the livelihood denied him elsewhere. Appeals were written to Channing to compel his subordinate to remain at his post. Channing answered that his post now included Gunnison. Efforts were made to stir up a cabal against him among the Grays, but he had had a two weeks' start and had won their good will; besides, there was now that $1,000 prize hanging up for all comers, and companies from Minnesota, Iowa and Kansas had entered the list. So the Grays stood firm. Then the Brentwoods strove to hedge and to limit the contest to companies that "had not received professional assistance," but that reacted upon themselves. Then The Sun was inspired to see what it could do to stir up a strike against Langdon in the yards of the Big Horn, where there must be men who rebelled against the supervision of a strict, soldier bred overseer. There were, but they were in the minority, and the three who started and circulated a paper calling for Langdon's dismissal or a strike were suddenly, by Channing's order, hauled up before the superintendent and "given the sack." Then anonymous letters began to rain in on the superintendent at Brentwood and higher officials in Chicago. Langdon was drinking again. Langdon was gambling. Langdon was speculating through a broker in Omaha, and these, investigated unbeknown to Langdon, fell flat. He had won the respect of the better class of men; he had become an expert trainhand; he minded his own business, yet was full of sympathy and interest in the affairs of the operatives and the crews of the trains. In March the superintendent of the Seattle offered him a similar berth at bigger pay provided he would move to Sioux City, and the offer was declined. In April the great drill came off. The flag of the rifles was trailed in the dust. They were not even "placed" by the judges, and the great prize was won in almost a walkover by the Gunnison Grays.

Time and again Langdon had received warnings from the police that there was a gang on the south side ever watching for a chance to "do him up" and from mine host of the Brentwood that there were influential men on the north side, potent in the councils of the Big Horn, who would hurt him if they could. One day there came a curt summons from a local lawyer to the effect that bills to the amount of $350 had been placed in his hands for collection and calling upon him to take immediate steps to meet them. Langdon called to inquire and was curtly, almost insolently, received. He learned enough, however, to convince him that two of the bills were those of dealers at Pawnee to whom he had regularly and conscientiously been paying $10 a month apiece. The inference was plain. Nathan had bought in the balance of the claims and sent them through Perrigo's bank for collection. In his trouble Langdon wrote to Channing, but no answer came. Twice the latter had written him that the president and certain directors had spoken to him about Mr. Langdon's debts. It was evident that some enemy was hounding him, but so long as Channing was "on deck," as he wrote to Langdon, he could count on his support.

But Channing was no longer on deck. The incessant brain work, the strain, the immense labor devolving on an active official of the road whose business outdid its resources, had finally told. Nervous prostration and collapse had ensued, and Channing was downed at last.

It was the first week in May and with all nature sweet and smiling about him. Eric Langdon came up from Gunnison on the early morning freight, his heart heavy as lead. He had spent the early hours of the previous night, Friday, working hard with the Grays, for their ambition was boundless now, and they had entered for a competition in an adjoining state. The night itself he had spent trying to sleep under the roof of his friend, the station agent, but sleep would not come, and twice he arose and went out and walked the platform under the glistening stars. On Monday, said the lawyer, that money must be paid. Langdon had no appetite for breakfast. He took a cup of coffee at the station restaurant on reaching Brentwood and, though it was barely 6 o'clock, went to his office. Janitor and watchmen noted his haggard face and wondered at his early hours. Early as they were, some one had been there earlier. The safe door stood open—the cash was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

There are two kinds of men who deserve to be held in abhorrence—those who are forever saying mean things about their fellows and those forever hearing them. The first are active mischief makers, the second passive. The first are generally regarded as the more dangerous and objectionable. But as the result of some 20 years' study I am constrained to believe the second the worst. The first has at least the courage of his convictions and says what he is mean enough to think. The second lacks even the degree of personal pluck and, not daring to say the slander himself, gives it birth under the cloak of "I heard." How many of you who read have failed to meet the man who draws his chair close to yours and confidentially begins: "Say, what's this about Jimmy Rush? Now, I was told last night by a man in position to know," etc. Ask him who the man is, and he shirks and becomes mysterious. "He's a— Well, I promised not to mention his name, but he's a gentleman. It was told me confidentially." The source is always intangible, but in nine cases out of ten you can safely bet your last dollar the informant never existed and your hopes of eternity that if he did he wasn't a gentleman. Gentlemen do not circulate slander.

To be continued

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