

The Manager Of the B. & A.

By VAUGHAN KESTER

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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 def-



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ness he swung himself up into an empty flat 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 excused from making an apology if it's all the same to Milt," said Bentick less civilly than before, and there was a ripple of smothered laughter from the crowd.

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. "And a murmur of approval came from the men."

Dan looked out over the crowd. Why couldn't he 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."

He jumped down from the car and would have left them then and there, but Bentick stepped in front of him.

"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 lasting 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 inertness. 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 scoured 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 discomfiture and to the joy of the men. A sullen sadness rested on the town. 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. Job 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.

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. Job 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 leggedurchins.

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 had a certain significance, too, if it were meant to indicate that Kenyon couldn't keep straight unless he was propped.

A wave of fitful 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.

Mr. Kenyon, smiling his unweary, mirthless smile, seated himself in his carriage. Mr. Ryder, slightly bored and wholly cynical, followed his example. Mr. Stokes and Mr. Bentick, perspiring and abject and looking for all the world like two criminals, dropped dejectedly into the places assigned them. Only Cap Roberts and the Hon. Job Barrows seemed entirely at ease. They were campaign fixtures. The band emitted a harmony destroying crash, while Mr. Jimmy Smith, the drum major, performed sundry bewildering passes with his gilt staff. The Young Men's Kenyon club fell over its own feet into line, and the procession started for the rink. It was a truly inspiring moment.

Since an early hour of the evening the people had been gathering at the rink. It was also the opera house, where during the winter months an occasional repertory company appeared in "East Lynne," "The New Magdalen" or Tom Robertson's "Caste."

The place was two-thirds full at a quarter to 8, when a fleet courier arrived with the gratifying news that the procession was just leaving the square and that Kenyon was riding with his hat off and in familiar discourse with Stokes and Bentick.

Presently out of the distance drifted the first strains of the band. A little later Cap Roberts and the Hon. Job Barrows appeared on the makeshift stage from the wings. There was an applause murmur, for the Hon. Job was a popular character. It was said of him that he always carried a map of the United States in tobacco juice on his shirt front. He was bottle nosed and red faced. No man could truthfully say he had ever seen him drunk, nor had any one ever seen him sober. He shunned extremes. Next the band filed into the balcony and was laboriously sweating its way through the national anthem when Kenyon and Ryder appeared, followed by the wretched Stokes and Bentick. A burst of applause shook the house. When it subsided the editor stepped to the front of the stage. With words that halted for the experience was a new one, he introduced the guest of the evening.

It was generally agreed afterward that it had been a great privilege to hear Kenyon. No one knew exactly what it was all about, but that was a minor consideration. The congressman was well on toward the end of his speech and had reached the local situation, which he was handling in what the Herald subsequently described as "a masterly fashion, cool, logical and convincing," when Oakley wandered in and, unobserved, took a seat near the door. He glanced about him glumly. There had been a time when these people had been, in their way, his friends. Now those nearest him even avoided looking in his direction. At last he became conscious that some one far down near the stage and at the other side of the building was nodding and smiling at him. It was Dr. Emory. Mrs. Emory and Constance were with him. Dan caught the fine outline of the latter's profile. She was smiling an amused smile. It was her first political meeting, and she was finding it quite as funny as Ryder had said it would be.

Dan listened idly, hearing only a word now and then. At length a sentence roused him. The speaker was advising the men to stand for their rights. He rose hastily and turned to leave. He had heard enough, but some one cried out, "Here's Oakley!" and instantly every one in the place was staring at him.

Kenyon took a step nearer the footlights. Either he misunderstood or else he wished to provoke an argument, for he said, with slippery civility: "I shall be pleased to listen to Mr. Oakley's side of the question. This is a free country, and I don't deny him or any man the right to express his views. The fact that I am unalterably opposed to the power he represents is no bar to the expression here of his opinion."

Oakley's face was crimson. He paused irresolutely. He saw the jeer on Ryder's lips, and the desire possessed him to tell these people what fools they were to listen to the cheap, lungy patriotism of the demagogue on the stage.

Continued on page four.

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Dated this 11th day of July, 1906.

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