

ABNER DANIEL

By WILL N. HARBEN
Author of "Western"

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CHAPTER XXIX.

THE mass meeting at Springtown was a most important event. It was held in the courthouse in the center of the few straggling houses which made up the hamlet. The entire Bishop family, including the servants, attended. Pole Baker brought his wife and all the children in a new spring wagon. Darley society was represented, as the Springtown Gazette afterward put it, by the fairest of the fair, Miss Dolly Barclay, accompanied by her mother and father.

The courthouse yard was alive with groups of men, eagerly talking over the situation. Every individual whose land was to be touched by the proposed road was on hand to protect his rights. Pole Baker was ubiquitous, trying to ascertain the drift of matters. He was, however, rather unsuccessful. He discovered that many of the groups ceased to talk when he entered them. "Some'n's up," he told Alan and Miller in the big, bare looking courtroom. "I don't know what it is, but I smell a rat, an' it ain't no little one nuther." "Opposition," said Miller gloomily. "I saw that as soon as I came. If they really were in favor of the road, they'd be here talking it over with us."

"I'm afraid that's it," said Alan. "Joe Bartell is the most interested, and he seems to be a sort of ringleader. I don't like the way he looks. I saw him sneer at Wilson when he drove up just now. I wish Wilson hadn't put on so much style—kid gloves, plug hat and a negro driver."

"No, that won't go down with this crowd," agreed Miller. "It might in the alums of Boston, but not with these lords of the mountains. As for Bartell, I think I know what ails him. He's going to run for the legislature and thinks he can make votes by opposing us—convincing his constituency that we represent moneyed oppression. Well, he may down us, but it's tough on human progress."

At the hour appointed for the meeting to open a young man who held the office of bailiff in the county and seemed proud of his stentorian voice opened one of the windows and shouted:

"Come in to court! Come in to court!" and the motley loiterers below began to clatter up the broad stairs and fall into the seats. Joe Bartell, a short, thickest man in the neighborhood of fifty, with a florid face and a shock of reddish hair, led about twenty men up the aisle to the jury benches at the right of the stand. They were the landowners whose consent to grant the right of way was asked. Stern opposition was clearly written on the leader's brow and more or less distinctly reflected on the varying faces of his followers.

"Ef we needed it, it ud be a different matter," Miller overheard him say in a sudden lull as the big room settled down into sudden quiet, "but we kin do without it. We've got along so fur an' we kin furdur. All of us has got good teams."

Wilson in his crisp, brusque way made the opening speech. He and his capital were going to dispel darkness where it had reigned since the dawn of civilization. All that was needed, he finished, was the consent of the property owners appealed to, who, he felt confident, would not stand in their own light.

He had hardly taken his seat when Joe Bartell stood up. Alan and Miller exchanged ominous glances. They had at once recognized the inappropriateness of Wilson's speech and did not like the white, twitching sneer on Bartell's smooth shaven face. It was as if Bartell had been for a long time seeking just such an opportunity to make himself felt in the community, and there was no doubt that Wilson's almost detestable speech had made a fine opening for him.

"Fellow citizens an' ladies an' gentlemen," he began, "we are glad to welcome amongst us a sort of a second savior in our Sodom an' Gomorrah of crackerdom. What the gentleman with the plug hat an' spike toe shoes ain't a-goin' to do fer us the Lord couldn't. He looks nice an' talks nice, an', to use his words, I don't believe he deceives appearances. I'll bet one thing, an' that is 'at he won't deceive us. Accordin' to him we need 'im every hour, as the Sunday school song puts it. Yes, he's a-goin' to hep us powerful an' right off. An', fellow citizens, I'm heer to propose a vote o' thanks. He's from away up in Boston, whar, they tell me, a nigger sets an' eats at the same table with the whites. When his sort come this way durin' the war, with all the'r up to date impliments of slaughter, they laid waste to ever' thing they struck, shot us like rabbits in holes an' then went back an' said they'd had a good hunt. But they've been livin' high up thar since the war, an' the'r timber is a-playin' out, an' they want more now, an' they want it bad. So they send the'r representatives out to find it an' lay hold of it. How does he happen to come heer? As well as I kin take out, old Alf Bishop, a good man an' a southern soldier—a man that I hain't got nothin' agin, except maybe he holds his head too high—made up his mind awhile back that lumber would be in demand some day, an' he set to work buyin' all the timber land he could lay his hands on. Then, when he had more'n he could tote an' was about to go under, he give this gentleman a

option on it. Well, so fur so good; but, gentlemen, what have we got to do with this trade? Nothin' as I kin see. But we are expected to yell an' holler an' deed 'em a free right of way through our property so they kin ship the timber straight through to the north an' turn it into cold Yankee coin. We don't count in this shuffle, gentlemen. We git our pay fer our land in bein' glad an' heerin' car bells an' steam whistles in the middle o' the night when we want to sleep. The engynes will kill our hogs, cattle an' hosses an' now an' then break the neck o' some chap that wasn't hit in the war, but we mustn't forget to be glad an' bend the knee o' gratitude. Of course we all know the law kin compel us to give the right of way, but it provides fer just and sufficient payment fer the property used; an', gentlemen, I'm agin donations. I'm agin 'em tooth an' toe nail."

There was thunderous and ominous applause when Bartell sat down. Wilson sat flushed and embarrassed, twirling his gloves in his hands. He had expected anything but this personal fusillade. He stared at Miller in surprise over that gentleman's easy, half amused smile as he stood up.

"Gentlemen," he began, "and ladies," he added, with a bow to the right and left. "As many of you know, I pretend to practice law a little, and I want to say now that I'm glad Mr. Bartell ain't in the profession. A lawyer with his keen wit and eloquence could convict an innocent mother before a jury of her own children. [Laughter.] And that's the point, gentlemen. We are innocent of the charges against us. I am speaking now of my clients, the Bishops. They are deeply interested in the development of this section. The elder Bishop does hold his head high, and in this case he has held it high enough to smell coming prosperity in the air. He believed it would come, and that is why he bought timber lands extensively. As for the accused gentleman from the Hub of the universe, I must say that I have known him for several years and have never heard a word against his character. He is not a farmer, but a business man, and it would be unfair to judge him by any other standard. He is not only a business man, but a big one. He handles big things. This railroad is going to be a big thing for you and your children. Yes, Wilson is all right. He didn't fight in the late unpleasantness. He tells the women he was too young. Wilson is here to build a railroad for your good and prosperity, and he can't build one where there is nothing to haul out. If he buys up timber for his company, it is the only way to get them to back him in the enterprise. Now, gentlemen of the opposition, if there are any here today, don't let the thought of Wilson's possible profit rob you of this golden opportunity. I live at Darley, but, as many of you know, this is my father's native county, and I want to see it bloom in progress and blossom like the rose of prosperity. I want to see the vast mineral wealth buried in these mountains dug out for the benefit of mankind wherever God's sunlight falls."

Miller sat down amid much applause, a faint pat of which came even from the ranks of Bartell's faction. After this a pause ensued in which no one seemed willing to speak. Colonel Barclay rose and came to Miller.

"That was a good talk," he whispered. "You understand how to touch 'em up. You set them to laughing; that's the thing. I wonder if it would do any good for me to try my hand."

"Do they know you have any timber land over here?" asked Miller.

"Oh, yes; I guess they do," replied the colonel.

"Then I don't believe I'd chip in," advised Miller. "Bartell would throw it up to you."

"I reckon you are right," said Barclay, "but for the Lord's sake do something. It never will do to let this thing fall through."

"I've done all I can," said Miller dejectedly. "Bartell's got the whole gang hoodooed, the blasted blockhead! Wouldn't he make a fine representative in the legislature?"

The colonel went back to his seat, and Wilson came to Miller just as Alan approached.

"It's going to fall faster than a pancake," said Wilson. "My company simply cannot afford to buy the right of way. Can't you choke that illiterate fellow over there or—buy him off?"

"He ain't that sort," said Miller disconsolately. Alan glanced at his father and mother. On their wrinkled faces lay ample evidences of dejection. The old man seemed scarcely to breathe. Up to Bartell's speech he had seemed buoyantly hopeful, but his horizon had changed. He looked as if he were wondering why he had treated himself to such a bright view of a thing which had no foundation at all.

At this juncture Abner Daniel rose from his seat near the stove and slowly walked forward till he stood facing the audience. Immediately quiet reigned, for he was a man who was invariably listened to.

"Gentlemen an' ladies," he began, clearing his throat and wiping his mouth with his long hand. "This ain't no put in o' mine, gracious knows. I hain't got nothin', an' I don't expect to lose or gain by what is done in this matter, but I want to do what I kin fer what I think is right an' proper. Fer my part, I don't think we kin do without a railroad much longer. Folks is a-pokin' fun at us, I tell you. It's God's truth. 'Tother day I was over at Darley a-walkin' along the railroad nigh the turnin' table, whar they flint engynes round like children on a flyin' jenny, when all at once a big strappin' feller with a red flag in his hand run up an' knocked me off'n the track ker-whallop in a ditch. It was just in time to keep me from bein' run over by a switch engyne. He was as mad as Tucker. 'Looky heer,' ses he, 'did you think that thing was playin' tag with you an' ud tap you on the shoulder an' run an' hide behind a tree? Say, ain't you from Short Pine district, this side o' the mountains? I told 'im he'd guessed right, an' he said, 'I lowed so, fer thar ain't no other spot on the whirlin' globe that produces folks as green as gourds.' Well, gentlemen, that floored me. It was bad enough to be jerked about like a rag doll, but it was tough to heer my section jeered at. 'What makes you say that?' I axed 'im as I stood thar tryin' to get a passle o' wet glass out o' my hip pocket without cuttin' my fingers. [Laughter, led by Pole Baker, who sensed the meaning of the reference.] 'Be'ca'se,' ses he, 'you mossbacks over thar don't know the war's over. A nigger from over thar come in town 'tother day an' heerd fer the first time that he was free. Two men over thar swapped wives without knowin' thar was a law agin it. Half o' you uns never laid eyes on a railroad an' wouldn't have one as a free gift.' I turned off an' left 'im an' went up on the main street. Up thar a barber ketched me by the arm an' said, ses he: 'Come in an' let me cut that hair. You are from Short Pine, ain't you?' I axed him why he thought so, an' he said, ses he, 'Be'ca'se you got a Short Pine hair cut.' 'What's that?' ses I. An' he laughed at a feller cocked up in a cheer an' said: 'It's a cut that is made by the women out yore way. They jest turn a saucer upside down on the men's heads an' trim around the edges. I could tell one a mile. They make a man look like a bottailed mule.' [Laughter, loud and prolonged.]

"Yes, as I said, they are a-pokin' all manner o' fun at us, an' it's chiefly be'ca'se we hain't got no railroad. The maddest I ever got on this line was down at Filmore's store one day. A little, slick chap come along sellin' maps of the United States of America. They was purty things on black sticks, an' I wanted one fer the wall o' my room. I was about to buy one, but I thought I'd fust make shore that our county was on it, so I axed the peddler to p'int it out to me. Well, after some s'arch he put his knife blade on what he called this county, but, lo and behold, it was mighty nigh kivered with round dots about the size of flyspecks. 'What's the matter with it?' I axed 'im. 'Oh, you mean them dots,' ses he, an' he turned to a lot of reference words in the corner of the map. 'Them,' ses he, 'them's put thar to indicate the amount o' ignorance in a locality. You'll find 'em in all places away from the railroads. A body kin say what they fetch agin railroads, but they fetch schools an' books an' enlightenment. You've got a good many specks,' ses he, kinder comfortin' like, 'but some o' these days a railroad will shoot out this away, an' them brainy men amongst you will git the chance God intends to give 'em.' Gentlemen, I didn't buy no map. I wouldn't 'a' had the thing on my wall with the specks a-starin' me in the face. It wouldn't 'a' done any good to scrape 'em off, fer the'r traces would 'a' been left. No, friends, citizens an' wellwishers, thar ain't but one scraper that will ever rake our specks off, an' that's the cow-catcher of a steam engyne. I say let 'er come. Some objection has been raised on the score o' killin' cattle. That reminds me of a story they tell on old Burt Preston, who has a farm on the main line beyant Darley. He was always a-gittin' his stock killed so fast an' a-puttin' in heavy claims fer damages, until folks begun to say he made his livin' by buyin' scrub cattle an' sellin' mashed beef to the corporation. One day the road sent out a detective to watch 'im, an' he seed Burt drive a spindlin' yeerlin' out o' the thicket on the track jest in time to get it knocked off by a through freight. The detective went back an' reported, an' they waited to see what Preston ud do. By the next mail they got a claim in which Preston said the yeerlin' weighed 800 pound an' was a fine four gallon milk cow. They threatened to jail 'im, an' Preston agreed to withdraw his claim. But he got downhearted an' traded his place fer a farm on 'tother railroad, an' the last I heerd o' him he was at his old trade agin. I reckon that's about the way we'll be damaged by gettin' our stock killed. That's all I got to say, gentlemen. Let's git this road an' scrape our flyspecks off."

The house shook with the applause

that greeted this speech. Even the opposition seemed to be wavering. Only Bartell kept a rigid countenance. He rose and in a low voice invited his group to repair with him to one of the jury rooms. They got up and followed him out. As he was about to close the door after them he nodded to Miller. "We'll take a vote on it an' let you know," he said coldly.

"He's going to talk to them," said Miller aloud to Wilson. "Mr. Daniel's speech almost shook them out of their boots, and he saw he was losing ground. It looks squally."

To be continued in next Saturday's edition.

It is impossible to tell what is for our welfare. I knew a young man who wrote a hand so illegible and spelled so incorrectly that the firm with which he was a clerk put him on outside work. In this he did so well that he eventually became managing partner. Had he written well he would never have been more than an accountant.

A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

(Original.)

When I was young I was the pet of an aunt who was devoted to fashion. I was fond of society myself, and, being popular, my aunt was so pleased with me that she made a will in my favor, bequeathing me at her death a considerable fortune. I fell in love with a young lady who, like myself, was "in the swim," but unfortunately poor. My aunt, who was very romantic, was not at all displeased with my marriage, declaring that she had quite enough for both of us. Indeed she gave me an allowance which enabled me to support a wife and live a life of ease.

During the winter at the end of which our first child was born I was obliged to go into society without my wife. She was very notional in what she ate and craved things usually unobtainable. One evening she was seized with a desire for some strawberries. It was in February, and even if the berries were to be had the markets were closed. I was going to a ball and was obliged to leave my wife pining for the fruit while I danced. It seemed like "fiddling while Rome was burning."

What was my surprise to see on the supper table at the house where the ball took place a splendid dish of strawberries. They had been brought from the south, but instead of being tasteless, as such berries usually are, were sweet and juicy. I ate a plateful of them and at the same time was planning to purloin some of them to take home to my wife. I loitered in the supper room till every guest had gone, all the while fearful that the strawberries would be gone as well. Fortunately a waiter brought in a fresh dish just as the room was left vacant. Seeing on the floor under a side table some paper boxes in which bonbons had been sent to the house, I selected one about the size of a quart strawberry box and, hastily filling it, slipped it unseen into a pocket in the swallow-tail of my coat. Then I went to the hostess to bid her good night in order that I might at once carry the precious strawberries to my wife.

"Surely you are not going so early?" said the lady. "You can't go now. I need you to lead the cotillon."

I was terrified. Lead the cotillon with my pocket full of strawberries! "Can you not excuse me?" I asked. "I am not feeling well."

"You are looking splendid. However, Mr. Vincent will arrive soon. I will relieve you when he comes."

"But I have no partner."

"I will dance the figure with you. Come, the music has begun."

Fancy my feelings at sailing away in a waltz with my cotillions full of strawberries. Never did I guide a partner with such dexterity, gliding over the waxed floor, dreading especially that I might slip, now extricating her from between couples closing in upon us, barely saving my cotillions from being crushed, now backing and stopping within a few steps to save the precious berries from being mashed by some lumbering dancer who was in everybody's way. Nevertheless there was an excitement in exercising my skill that was by no means displeasing to me. I was devoted to dancing, and, whirling about on the slippery floor, passing and repassing beautiful women in artistic costumes, I gradually forgot my burden and at the end of the figure, when every one was sounding my praises for its originality and the skill with which I had handled it, I threw myself on to a pale blue damask sofa for a rest.

There was a hum of conversation while preparations were being made for the next figure, and I was thinking of some new features I would introduce with it when I felt that I was sitting on something wet. In an instant the presence of the strawberries in my coat pocket and the fact that I was sitting on them flashed upon me. I sprang to my feet, and there on the robin's egg damask of the sofa was a strawberry blotch not unlike the map of North America, with the isthmus of Panama trickling on to the floor. At the moment the music began, and the hostess, seizing me, whirled me away again in the dance. Presently I noticed that the couples were avoiding me, at the same time regarding me curiously. As I spun round drops of the juice were scattered from my cotillion like drops from a carriage wheel, damaging the costumes of those who came near me.

My social career was ended. The hostess reported to my aunt that I had stolen her berries, had made myself a laughing stock and had offended a dozen of her guests whose costumes I had ruined. I attended one more ball that season, but as I excited either the

THE RAVEN AND THE SERPENT.



Find Another Raven.

A hungry Raven, searching for prey, came across a Snake lying at full length on a sunny bank. He seized him in his horny beak without delay, and would have devoured him, but the Snake, angry at being awakened from his slumbers, and unwilling to become a meal for another, twisted and turned about and bit the Raven with his venomous fangs, so that he died in great pain. With his dying breath the avicious Raven confessed that he was justly served for seeking to satisfy his appetite at the expense of another's welfare.

MORAL.—They who are of a ravenous and greedy temper, and are for swallowing all that comes into their way, may chance to meet with a sting in the end.

laughter or the contempt of every one I never went to another. My aunt disinherited me, cut off my allowance, and I was obliged to make my own living. Now comes the sequel. I took up art, which I had dropped when my aunt took me up. I am a born artist and soon secured a hanging at an exposition that made a permanent demand for my pictures. About this time my aunt died, and it was discovered that the manager of her estate had sunk every dollar of it. The strawberry episode had not only led me to take up a delightful occupation, but to provide myself with a competency.

ELLISON PORTER.

You Never Can Tell. You never can tell when you send a word, Like an arrow shot from a bow By an archer blind, be it cruel or kind, Just where it may chance to go. It may pierce the breast of your dearest friend, Tipped with its poison or balm; To a stranger's heart in life's great mart It may carry its pain or its calm. You can never tell when you do an act Just what the result will be. But with every deed you are sowing a seed.

Though the harvest you may not see, Each kindly act is an acorn dropped In God's productive soil; You may not know, but the tree shall grow With shelter for those who toil. You never can tell what your thoughts will do In bringing you hate or love, For thoughts are things, and their airy wings Are swifter than carrier dove. They follow the law of the universe— Each thing must create its kind— And they speed o'er the track to bring you back Whatever went out from your mind. —Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

On to His Specialty. Old Silverspoon—What's that young pelican coming to see Jennie so often for? Mrs. Silverspoon—Oh, he says he is a geological enthusiast, and he understands you have a fine collection of rocks.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Quite Different.



George—Do you know, Miss Sweetly, you remind me of a successful gambler. Miss Sweetly (indignantly)—Sir! George—Yes. You have such winning ways.

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