

DURING THE STRIKE

(By Morgan C. Gross.)

There is, in a Creek valley of the Rocky Mountains, a nameless little settlement called "the B. and F. Junction," from the fact that it is the terminus of a strip of mountain railroad owned by the Broadmont and Frisco mine, and working between the high level coalfields and a great shipping system. After its population was swelled, last June, by the addition of a dozen deported men, it became the centre for the disaffected coal-miners of the district. The "B. and F." on a certain summer afternoon shortly after the great mining excitement, commanded a lonely view of that Snow Creek valley, which stretches up to the heights, its precipitous banks a mass of pale green foliage, beyond which could be seen the black and bald peaks of the mining country, and the white front of the Mount of the Holy Cross. There was a thunderous noise of blasting in the hills, a blueness in the atmosphere, a fresh wind blowing from the snows. Down in the truck lands which bordered the Creek were Italian farmers, spreading their ditch-water, and caring nothing whatever for Governor or Union.

Through the little town itself ran a full ditch, with clouds of mosquitoes over it, and its surface thick with flakes of "wool" from the cottonwoods. It was the hour for the afternoon mail. A great bundle of newspapers had just been brought from the station to the post-office, and it appeared that the entire population of the Junction had poured into its one street to get the news of the day. They were Englishmen of the cockney class, large heads, wide hips and shoulders. There was a sprinkling of the paler American, and here and there, in sharp contrast with the Anglo-Saxon, a Clay or a Celtic face.

An American woman, whose red hair was well streaked with gray, had secured a paper and began to read aloud the speech of a Rocky Mountain labor leader, in a voice which swelled above the loud talking of the men and compelled them to listen. There was a passionate cadence in it, as the crowd became still and expectant; something also which showed that the woman loved an audience. She spread the damp, red-lined paper, with a flourish. "And this is the cry of men torn from their families," she read—"of men driven at the bayonet-point from the haunts of civilization—of starving women and children, martyred for the cause of their liberties."

"My, but they're smart men!" said a little English girl, with a Cornishman at her elbow. "Them Union men—I say they're mighty smart." The woman continued to read. "Yonder lies the measuring his worm-like length before the corporations." "That's the Governor," explained the Cornishman. "I see we're worse than the Sar of Russia." A flood of rhetoric presently overcame the reader; tears ran down her cheeks, and she burst into hysterical sobs.

An infant began to cry in the room above the grocery, and a young woman left the group of listeners and ran upstairs. She was one who might have been recognized by a stranger as a young mother, for her beauty was heightened by an ever-present consciousness of the child, and her head had an alert and listening poise. Her presence had lent something of distinction to the group. Her hands were rough and her dress no finer than that of the other women, but even her shapeless red calico dressing sacque had acquired a certain style and grace, in conforming to the robust outlines of her figure.

The woman read on, and the town butcher—an Irishman with a fiery face and a bloody white apron—came out to listen. The reader was a spirited, excitable woman, with a slight English accent, derived from the fact that she had been the wife of a Lannish miner, killed in the great explosion of two years before. The reading was presently interrupted by a man's voice, remarking, "There's wrong on both sides." They all turned upon the speaker, and saw the grizzled, rather stubborn-looking German who had received from the strikers, a month before, the indignity of a dozen lashes.

"There's sure wrong on the Sar's side," said the butcher. The remark was applauded, and the German went off to one side and lit his pipe. "There's a miner!" said the red-haired widow, as a seamed-looking western man appeared. "Come here, Mr. Thompson, and read the piece in the paper."

"I don't ardy think they could ha' wrote it themselves," said one of the crowd, with an Englishwoman's distrust of the ability of the laboring class. "I don't ardy think but wot they 'ad it wrote, miners like them."

The American miner turned on her with a snort of indignation. "You don't, eh?" he cried out. "I tell ye, we've got as well educated men in the mining camps as any of that lay-out down in Denver!"

"Ain't it fine, in the paper?" said the widow. "It says where the Governor's worse than the Sar ever dare be!"

"I don't care for none of that!" declared the miner. "But I'll be even with the men that took me out of the camp, Governor or soldier, either one." A groan of malediction went up at the word "soldier." "Yes, and I mean your armed deputies, such as Lafe Barrett. He's a soldier!"

"To be sure!" said the widow. The name "Lafe Barrett" had stirred a little evident feeling in the crowd. Far off among the rocks an engine whistled. "Ere's Barrett's train," said a woman.

"Because Lafe's a liar like the rest of 'em," said Thompson, hotly. The engine rounded a curve, and a huge, sinewy figure began to be visible. There was a rolling cloud of smoke, with the figure swaying through it; then, enveloped in folds of gray, it went out of sight. "You expect it of the capitalist," said Thompson, tremulously, "but when laboring men turn against each other, it's the strangest sight on God's earth."

"Yes, and 'ow does 'e know wot to do, unless 'e's someone to tell 'im?" This Englishwoman's sentiment was not palatable to the American miner. "He knows as much as the Governor or anybody else!" he declared. "The laboring man don't lack nothing but money."

"There comes Lafe!" cried the widow. "Yes, and as free as I am!" said the coal-miner. "Nobody talks of throwing him into jail for shooting!" Lafe Barrett came directly across the street. He had a swarthy, bright-eyed face, puzze nervous American, and anything but handsome, with the notable muscular swell in the upper lip, and the two tendons coming down to the jaw bone from either corner of his mouth. The railroad grime gave a dingy tinge to his black hair and dark flannel shirt. He was a magnificent muscular fellow, and he caught the eye of an observer by a kind of dash and daring expressed in his poise. The coal-miner turned his back, but a young cockney girl called out, "We're talking of you, Lafe Barrett."

"We're talking of the miner you shot, a Tuesday!" said the widow, snapping her eyes at him like a challenge. "Dey forget how many scabs got blowed to pieces, already," said the German, doggedly, as he looked the engineer.

"That ain't the point," said Lafe, shutting his lips like a trap. "This ain't no free-for-all fight." Barrett's presence was like a match to powder. At this point a dozen men began to move towards the group. The engineer looked at his somewhat excited audience, and continued, "The question is, have I got sense enough to run my own engine and boss my own job, or haven't I? I always counted myself a miner, and nobody can say I didn't pay my dues and do my part when I was a miner. But then fellows got to telling me what I had to do, and then I got mad, I tell you, and I quit!" A tremendous powder of sheer stubbornness came out of hiding in the man. He looked like a hard foe to handle. "You go your own way, and I'll do mine," he concluded "but don't you undertake to boss me because I know to boss myself!"

"All right, Barrett!" said Thompson. Barrett turned and walked toward that staircase which led to the lodging over the grocery. "Say!" whispered a man to the widow. "Wot's the row between Barrett and his wife?"

"Is there any row?" asked the widow, the snap in her eyes indicating that she was initiated, and she was determined to keep her counsel. "Barrett don't live at home does he?"

"I don't know. I never asked Mrs. Barrett, I'm sure!" Nevertheless, when the men were gone, she turned, confidentially to the woman, and said: "She shouldn't put up with him. She could get a divorce on the ground of cruelty!"

"Does 'e beat 'er?" whispered one of her hearers. "The American woman laughed out. "Dey don't beat their wives over here," she said; "but it's cruelty for a man to be forever quarrelling with a woman, and if it ain't, I want to know what it would be!"

Barrett's wife heard him climb the stairs. She had been wondering, the last three minutes, and wondering with a tumultuous heart, if he were determined enough, in his obstinate course, to pass her by. Her own lips tightened as he began to mount the stairs, and the tender motherliness with which her face had overhung that of the child in her arms gave place to something resolute and severe, yet wonderfully anxious and distressed, withal, as if his coming back was a crisis of mighty moment with her. He knocked, and she answered, "Come." Then he entered the room, set his back to the door as if he were fearful of being ordered away, and stood with his stubborn young profile outlined upon the white paint.

"Julia," said Barrett, with considerable determination, "I want to see the baby."

"No!" The word was sharply spoken, and still her eyes gave her away.

"I'm not going to touch him. I want to see him," said the engineer drawing a step nearer. She left her chair, instantly, the child began to cry, and the color came to Barrett's face, as if the voice of his first-born had startled him. She began to sway the child in her strong arms, the natural grace and staidness of her figure lending itself to the notion as if she had rocked a child all her life. She was a beautiful, sunburned woman, with a rough red hand, white throat and wrists, and wonderful gray eyes.

"I told you how it would be," she said, after a pause. "I know how to keep my word." There was so much of heart-ache in the words that Barrett thought he did not mean them. He came forward another step. "Lafe," she said. He stopped, in a momentary awe, such as a man feels of a woman with a child in her arms. A lifetime's passion and conviction had gone into that word, "Lafe," and the thing which separated them was a matter of fierce feeling still.

He stopped, and they looked at one another—he, self-willed and determined; she, pure passion for the things she believed in, and had sacrificed herself for, all her working-girl's life. "You had no right to do me the way you did," she said. "I wouldn't ha' married a scab, if 'e was the last man on earth, and you knew it."

"Julia, please let me see him." Barrett's muscles twitched so that his wife had a faint momentary hope of his breaking down. She lifted her eyes with a light in them. "You know what you got to do," she said, with a moment's return of the old joy she had felt when she first perceived that Lafe Barrett loved her—Lafe Barrett, this picturesque fellow of daring and determination!

The engineer turned stubbornly upon his heel. Presently he returned from the hall, crossed the room, and threw something into the baby's crib. "You shan't charge I didn't support you," he said, knowing perfectly well that she would not touch his money. His voice had so hard a sound that his wife grew a little paler. "I don't ask much," she said, almost pleadingly. "I only want you to do right and keep your promises to the Union." He went out without answering.

"E didn't stay noa time at all," commented a woman as he emerged. Barrett stepped into the sunlight, blinking a little, put his hand to his close-shaven chin, and looked up and down the street. A ranchman, bringing home an unsold load of berries from a market twenty miles away, was loudly declaring that the business of the State was ruined. He, for one, would let his fruit rot on the vines before he sold at sixty cents a crate.

"There's a man can afford to buy berries this year," said Thompson, with a jerk of his head toward the engineer. The slight remark stirred a wave of bitterness against the man disappearing around the corner. The widow was in her store when he passed, wrapping a loaf of bread for a miner's wife, who leaned over the counter and said—"You 'eard wot the men's going to do?"

"No," said the widow, all alert. "Don't say as I told ye, and don't ye go warning Lafe!" "Warn Lafe?" "The first night ever 'e stays in town they'll la' for 'im." A customer entered. The miner's wife picked up her bundle. "What'll they do with Lafe?" whispered the widow.

"Don't you warn him, ye hear?" "What'd I warn him for? He so stubborn, he'd stay, if you was to warn him. Mis' Ballard—what'll they do to him?" "I don't know. They won't 'arm 'im, not to speak of."

The widow's customer was coming toward her now, and she had to let her informant go, and tie up a quarter's worth of potatoes. She followed her last customer to the door and looked out. A stream of gold came through a gap in the peaks which could make one think only of the heavenly gate. Above it, the sky was tumultuous, with dull red clouds, like splashes of blood. Off in the rocks, another engine whistled, and another coal train came down with a deputy-sheriff's guard. One more train and the Junction would be left quite till morning.

Lafe Barrett suddenly appeared, crossing toward the grocery. "Have you seen the sheriff?" he asked her; and then added, with a dare-devil smile, "I want some more deputies sent up to the mine."

"You'll get no deputies out of this town!" "If I don't, I'll have to go up to the camp."

"I told the sheriff he went home," said the widow, looking toward the men who had gathered in front of the blacksmith's shop. She was all in a flutter of mingled feeling—nervous pity for Barrett, and satisfaction in the prospective triumph of her cause. She was a tender-hearted woman, and when she had gone back into the store, her feeling for her countryman won. She went to the door, and called, "Lafe!" He turned.

"Going to stay in town to-night?" "Guess so," said Barrett. "Come over here!" "Too much of a hurry," replied Barrett, turning into a side street.

"You see them men?" said the widow, turning to a passer-by. "Well, I'm scared to have 'em tackle a man like him. I'm afraid they'll end in killing him."

That was in the early twilight. She stood, all through the dusk, listening to the noise in the street, and to Barrett's baby crying upstairs. At last, when it was fully dark, his wife came down to the grocery and stood leaning upon the counter, after she had received her change, and anxiously listening to the women, who had been excitedly talking together about the door of the grocery. But a hush had fallen, at her approach, and she could hear nothing but a loud guffaw from the men who were gathered before the blacksmith's shop. She looked stately and gracious as ever, her lips smiling, but a dark shade about her eyes, and her breast quivering visibly under her calico sack.

The last train of the evening sent a foul cloud of smoke over the town, passed a moment some distance below the depot platform, and went shrieking up to the mine. A man left the group before the blacksmith's. "Where's Lafe Barrett?" he demanded, as he approached the women. "Did he go up to the camp on this train?"

"Noa, 'e didn't," said a woman in the doorway. "E's about, looking for the sheriff."

"He's a hysterical-looking girl." "He's been hunting somebody to telegraph for him."

"You know what they're after?" "Yes, I know wot they're after," said the woman in the doorway. "They'll 'ave a stop put to 'is scolding 'issel up for a deputy sheriff, a miner like 'im. If 'e don't know wot's good for 'im, 'e'll be shown. 'E's going to 'ave to give up 'is gun and get back to do as 'e's told before they're done with 'im to-night."

There was a general movement of the men, setting toward the railroad platform. A dog began to bark and the hysterical-looking girl went off into shrieks of laughter.

"You don't know nothing of such a man as Barrett!" declared the widow. "He'll fight like the devil before 'e gives in. 'E's armed, too."

"E damn't shoot," declared the other woman, triumphantly. "E'll get plenty of bullets back, if 'e do!" She paused a few minutes, and burst forth with a standing grievance of hers. "E'll be took down a bit!" she cried. "E'll be took down!" "E's no better than anybody else, for all 'e don't want 'e should call 'is wife 'Julie,' like 'er name is!"

Reaching the middle of the street, the men suddenly began to run. A shower of missiles hit the dark windows of the railroad station. The woman who had been laughing began to cry, in shrill, broken tones. The rabble of short, cockney figures reached the platform, and voices began to order the engineer to "come out o' that."

There was the rustle of a skirt on the staircase of the grocery, and Barrett's wife appeared. She came out upon the sidewalk and stood looking; then asked something in a whisper of the widow.

"The won't 'arm 'im, if 'e's peaceable, Missis Barrett," spoke up the Englishwoman standing in the doorway. "E's going to 'ave to give up 'is gun, and 'e 'ave 'imself after this, is hall!"

Barrett's wife went into the grocery and sat down. A little voice was lifted in the room above, but for the first time in his life she did not hear her baby. She groped with one hand till it came upon something firm, and clenched it; then held the other between her eyes and the light. The widow slipped to her side. "I'm afraid he—" began Barrett's wife; but could not finish.

"They'll never dare hurt him!" declared the widow, reassuringly; but she laid a very cold hand on that of the other woman, who seized and held it fast.

A noise of laughter, and reviling, of mob cries; Thompson's voice, and his figure! The girl on the sidewalk was now far gone in hysterics, swaying her body to and fro, and screaming something about a lynching she had seen at the Wild Horse Mine. "Be quiet, Bessy!" said Barrett's wife, lifting her head. Her lips were white, with a bluish line where they met. "Be still!" she repeated, sternly. "You, talk like a fool!"

Thirty seconds of silence followed. Then the immitable mob yell rose, with its crazy cheer and its whoop. Silence, again! Now, a tremendous crashing of glass. The widow tried to rise, but Barrett's wife clung to her wrist, with a grip like a strong man. The two women looked into each other's faces. Then Barrett's wife went blind, with only Lafe's face swaying before it, in a red light such as we see when we press our fingers on our eyeballs. "They've got him!" shrieked the girl outside.

Another silence—save for an inarticulate voice shouting something at the station. It was all dark now before the woman's eyes. She could not even imagine his face. The stillness was broken by the sound of a gun, and the widow sprang up and ran outside. Barrett's wife let her chin fall on the sharp edge of a piece of furniture. A spasm passed over her lip.

Now—a prolonged crackling and crashing, as of many guns! "That's nothing; nothing at all!" said Barrett's wife in a strange whisper. The other women began to run toward the station, where one could hear voices in loud interference with each other, and feet running over the wooden floor.

Suddenly the flying figure of a half-grown boy emerged from the building. It came down in a heap on the steps of the grocery. The boy could not speak, at first, for want of breath, and when he did, fairly gasped out—"No, they never got him. Must ha' went up to camp on the last car!"

"E's a bloomin' coward!" burst from a woman. Barrett's wife walked calmly in front of her, looking down from her stately height. "My husband ain't afraid of ye, Mrs. Lobb," she said, and went to her baby.

A man came over, frothing with excitement. "Wot do we care to catch Lafe Barrett?" he cried. "E can go w'ere 'e likes; but 'e runs no more engines through 'ere, and 'e's sense enough not to try!" "I'll take yer bet Lafe runs 'is engine through to-morrow," spoke up the widow. "I'll take your bet 'e's sorry for it if 'e do," said the man.

The widow paused a moment, with snapping eyes. True to our national weakness, she cried out—"He's sure to beat, is Lafe Barrett! And wot 'e's made his mind up to do, he'll do it. He's an American! There's no such people as Americans anywheres in the world, is what I say to you. Lafe had rather be hung than to give up, when 'e's set his head."

The rest of the mob returned, flinging away their sticks and stones as they came. The town grew slowly quiet; when they had all dispersed to their homes the depression of the lost cause returning heavier than before the brief respite of passion. Within an hour even the dogs had ceased to bark, and then the night was a very calm one, its stillness broken only when a drunken Italian stumbled, singing, through the streets, and fell in a heap on the station platform.

It was also a long night, for the people of the Junction were early to bed and late in rising in these idle times. They slept on, when there was a flash of red in the east, and a paler answering flush behind the Mount of the Holy Cross, when the fields at the creek's edge showed a glistering white surface, and the Italians came out of their houses; when the full sunlight broke over the young Western commonwealth, from the cities with their glittering markets, past the ranches where fruit was drying on the vines, climbing the glorious outlines of the country, and finally lighting up the entrances of the shafts in the mining camps.

Barrett's wife came back from the milkman's, in the broad light of that next morning, her stately head bare to the sun, her little pitcher covered with a fringed red napkin. Out beyond the bend an engine whistled, and she paused, straining her neck, till she saw the smoke.

"Good-morning, Missis Barrett!" said one of the neighbors, in a sharp, exultant tone. A thin wreath of smoke began to be visible above the foliage along the creek. Two men, in front of the post-office, were intent upon it, and one suddenly perceived the atmosphere of suppressed excitement with which the town had awakened that morning. Something was called across the town, and the men of the place began to pour into the street. Evidently the engine was at a standstill at the tank.

A second whistle! The men behaved as if it were a signal for which they had been listening. The rocks gave back the roaring of the train, and then appeared a sinewy young figure in sooty clothes, rocking and swaying with the sharpness of the curves. Barrett's wife recognized him, and her lips hardened with determination, then whitened with terror, as she looked. The men saw the engineer and began to run toward the railroad, lifting a mighty yell as they went. There was a great cloud of dust, of jeerings, of arms and legs, and the women followed, screaming, at their husbands' heels.

The train had reached the station now, and Barrett and a fireman became visible, trying to run their engine into a switch before the mob should reach them. A deputy sheriff who was with them dodged a brick bat and climbed into an empty coal car, pulling his feet out of reach of the crowd.

"Ead 'is off!" screamed a woman

Table with 4 columns: DAY OF MONTH, DAY OF WEEK, COLOR OF VESTMENTS, and HOLY DAYS. It lists the calendar for February 1905, including Epiphany, Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima Sundays, and various feast days like S. Ignatius, S. Agatha, and S. Valentine.

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"Come out o' that, Lafe Barrett!" was high up on his engine, displaying a gun in a manner which indicated a no-shy show of authority. He had no sheriff's right, just then, were the Governor just or no. Suddenly the engine began to move, a man sprang to one side, barely escaping the wheels, and Barrett waved his hand to the mob. He was laughing. From the crossing, where she stood signalling with her shawl, Barrett's wife had only a glimpse of his face, with a little blood on it, before a cloud of smoke rolled between them. She was anxious a moment for fear he had not understood; then the wheels began to slacken, and all the passionate feeling of the past twenty-four hours swelled up in her chest in one sob. The deputy sheriff stretched his arms and pulled her into the empty car. She sat on the grimy floor of it, coming slowly to herself, and to the consciousness of only one longing desire, one thing yearned for to the exclusion, even, of the passionate life-long convictions she was about to lay down for Lafe Barrett's sake.

The shriek of the engine woke troops of echoes in the lovely hills, and the air blew and whistled about her head. Then, the smoke slowly lifting, she saw a whole troop of red-winged blackbirds rise from the creek lands and circle above the train. Still she had not a glimpse of his face, and not a look had passed between them since she had met him away. "I want to go up on the engine when we get to the station," she told the deputy. The roaring rocks drowned her voice and the man bent his brown ear to hear. "Will you hold my baby?" said Barrett's wife. "I want to see my husband."

They were slowing, now, toward the Tank, and the man held his arms for Barrett's baby, as if he liked to do it, shouting something to the engineer who came and held out his arms to help his wife. Steam was escaping, as he lifted her into the cab, so that neither of them could speak till they found themselves alone, up there, the wheels beginning to move again. Barrett looked up, a stolen glance from his task. She was looking into his face with a kind of yearning tenderness which the bearing and tending of a child had taught her. To Lafe Barrett, who had no memory of his mother, it was a new and untried delight to be looked at like that. She laid her hand on his. "I feel I must be right by you," she said. "When I see 'em, last night, and I thought—"

The noise drowned her words. Barrett did not know up till he had brought his engine around the curve, but when he did so, his eyes were wet, and he did not try to conceal it from her. With a leap of the heart she knew some of the things he would say when he came home that night. She was well satisfied to wait for the rest. They were up in the country of the rocks, now, and caught fleeting glimpses of blue columbine and last year's scarlet hinni-kinnick. "You'll stay up at the camp, won't you?" said Barrett, with his eyes on the track.

"Yes, but I'll hate to have you down yonder, alone." She hesitated, and looked at him in a way which would have slaked any man's thirst for praise. "Because, after all that's happened, I wouldn't have you to give up your engine, for nothing." This was the first fight of the man who subsequently did run his engine, and ran it every day, receiving never a more serious hurt than the bloody scratch which was even then on his face. People of his own way of thinking out in the Rockies count him a hero; those of the other side, an example of monumental stubbornness—but they laughed over the happening themselves afterward. All his fellow westerners consider him a glorious fighter, at least, sure of gallant victory or gallant defeat.

He brought the engine into a siding, at the mine, and called the foreman. "I brought my wife and baby up on this trip," he said with a smile. "Look after 'em a little, will you?" The long arm of the law can reach around the world. You see. Young lawyers oft to maidens pay "You're all the world to me."

