

New Union at Caruthers

By Arthur F. Bloomer.

The rapidity with which our villages grow into flourishing, populous cities and industrial centers is one of the wonders of our American enterprise. Where a generation ago was a struggling village of a thousand or fifteen hundred inhabitants may now exist a city of 20,000, composed principally of those dependent for employment on the factories and workshops that have grown up with the city, or, rather, have caused the city to grow, the products of which may reach the furthestmost ends of the earth. Such a city was Caruthers, in one of the middle Western States. Fourteen years before this story opens Caruthers had a population of less than 2,000. Now it has 18,000, a mayor and city council, streets, railways, and electric lights and power—all that goes to make up a bustling industrial city.

John Strong had gone to Caruthers when it was a village, with little more capital than his two hands and his skill as a machinist, from an eastern city, where he had, while still young, grown tired of working for a wage that scarcely more than provided him the strength from day to day to continue at work. From his little beginning in Caruthers had grown a great manufacturing establishment, which helped the city to grow as the city helped it to grow, and his workmen now numbered almost a hundred.

There had been few, if any, labor organizations in Caruthers, and, as a necessary attendant, wages were low as compared with the great cities, though, of course, the cost of living was less. But with the growth of the city the latter advanced, as is usual, and wages, too, had slowly advanced—slower than living expenses, as is also usual.

Finally the organizer appeared, and it was but a little time until a committee waited on Mr. Strong, as president of the Caruthers Manufacturing Company, and he was informed that his workmen had enrolled themselves as members of a union.

"I am very glad to hear it, gentlemen," said Mr. Strong, smilingly. "I was a union man from the day when I completed my apprenticeship until I established this business, and I am a firm believer in trade unionism."

"Then," said the spokesman of the committee, "I am sure we will be able to get along amicably."

"I have no doubt of it," said Mr. Strong, "especially if you prove yourselves true union men in all that the term means. There has been great progress in trade unionism in the last few years."

"Very great, indeed, sir," said the spokesman.

"Yes," said Mr. Strong, "and I have tried to keep abreast of the movement by reading trade union literature. It may surprise you to know that I am a subscriber for a number of labor publications."

"Well, that is rather unusual for employers, I am afraid," said the committee chairman. "It is gratifying to meet so liberal-minded an employer as we find you, Mr. Strong. We do not contemplate any violent changes in the wage scale now, nor perhaps soon, and we do not anticipate any great opposition from you if we shall claim a reasonable increase."

"I hope you will always find me reasonable," said Mr. Strong, "and if your members prove union men to the core—for I hold that the employer has as much to gain from unionism as the employed; that each owes a duty to the other—I am sure our relations will always be pleasant. Perhaps I may go further than you do in my belief in unionism and all that it entails, and may have some criticisms to offer later."

Within a few weeks the union presented a scale of prices to the president of the company, making some slight advances in wages, which he signed, after inspecting it carefully.

"Gentlemen," he said to the committee, "I have signed your scale cheerfully, for it is quite reasonable; but I do it with the reservation that if I find the

members are not true to the principles of unionism, as to which I will conduct an investigation, I am free to withdraw from it."

"We are willing to abide by that, sir," said the president of the union, who was chairman of the committee. "If at any time you find that we are not keeping to the true principles of unionism, we will be glad to have you point it out to us and to rectify our error or absolve you from your agreement."

Within six months the organizers had formed unions in all the principal occupations, and although all proprietors had not proved as tractable and reasonable as Mr. Strong, and there had been a few strikes and lockouts, at the end of that time the town was pretty thoroughly organized into unions. Everything had gone along peaceably and quietly in the Caruthers Manufacturing Company's great establishment. Every member of the mechanical force was in the union. A few—there are always some black sheep—had demurred to joining, but were at once given to understand that they had no sympathy from the company in their resistance and they speedily surrendered.

It was with some surprise that the president of the union received a message from Mr. Strong that he would like to see him, but he went at once—this some months after organization.

"You will remember the verbal clause that I added to our agreement when I signed the scale of prices," said Mr. Strong, "and that I might claim to be released from it under certain circumstances."

"Very well indeed, sir," said the president, "but I am at a loss to know how we have given offense."

"I should like to have permission to address your union at its next meeting," said Mr. Strong, "at which I will show that you have not kept faith with me and are not true to the principles of unionism. Your committee asked me to point out wherein you might be lacking, and I want to do it in the presence of the entire union, so that the members will not get it at second hand. I am very much in earnest in this matter. If I am to live up to the principles of unionism the members must do so, too."

"We will be very glad to have you address the meeting," said President Phelps, "and I will cause such notice to be sent out that every member will be there. I am totally in the dark as to our shortcomings; but the union will hear you with pleasure."

The news that Mr. Strong had something to say to the union brought every member out, and after the routine business was transacted he was invited in from the anteroom, where he had been waiting.

"Gentlemen," said President Phelps, "you are all aware that Mr. Strong has stated his desire to address our union. I have no need to introduce him. You all know him, and such has been his interest in our movement that I believe he knows every one of you. We will now hear him."

"Mr. President and gentlemen of the union," began Mr. Strong, "I will not tire you with long introductory words. I was gratified when you formed your union, for I am a believer in trade unions. I was a member of a union before many of you ever saw the inside of a workshop. When you presented your scale of wages to me, as the president of the company, I cheerfully signed it. But I signed it with the announced reservation that I would not feel bound by it unless you comported yourselves as true union men. You have not done so."

A sensational buzz ran around the room.

"Among the requirements of your union is one that we shall not employ any but union men. Is it not so?"

"Yes, yes!" came from all parts of the room.

"You refuse to handle material that comes from non-union shops. Am I right?"

"Yes, yes!" again came from the assembled men.

"You will neither work with non-union

men nor use the product of non-union men in working for my company."

"No, no!"

"Mr. President," will you step here a moment?"

Mr. Phelps, wondering, walked to the open space in which Mr. Strong stood.

"Mr. President," said Mr. Strong, as he turned back Mr. Phelps' coat and examined the inside pocket, "I do not find the union label. Was that suit of clothes made by a union tailor?"

Mr. Phelps reddened and returned to his seat.

"Mr. Secretary, that is a handsome pair of shoes you have, but, looking closely, they have no union label."

The Secretary's feet were hastily taken from the top of the desk, where their position had added much to his comfort.

"While waiting in the anteroom I examined many of the hats that I saw hanging there, and though I found a few with union labels, I feel sure they are there without the owners' knowledge. Who among you has a hat with the union label in it?"

A young man rose. "I think my hat has the union label," he said.

"You think!" The sarcasm in Mr. Strong's voice caused the hopeful young man to seat himself suddenly.

"Most of you use tobacco in some form," continued the speaker. "I did as a workman and do as an employer, and so am not here to condemn the practice. Which of you can show me a piece of union made tobacco? Who of you smoke blue-label cigars?"

Guessing was too hazardous. Nobody rose.

"I have looked into the matter at the stores patronized by most of you, and I have found no indication that any of you ever asked for union made goods of any kind. Is it not so?"

There was able debaters in the union, but none rose to combat him.

"Some of the bakeries in this city are union and some are not. Have you supported your fellow unionists and withheld support from the non-unionists? You have not!"

The general uneasiness was distinctly noticeable.

"Gentlemen, I have given you a fair trial. You are unionists only so far as your own wages and conditions are concerned. I might go into this a good deal further, for I have thoroughly investigated it; but I have shown enough to convince any fair-minded man that you are not union men. You don't know the meaning of the term!"

One might have knocked the whole assemblage over with a feather.

"You demand that we shall employ union labor while you spend your union wages for the product of scabs. You will not work with a scab, but you buy what he produces on equal terms with union goods. You will not work with scab-made material, but you will wear it and eat it

and smoke it. You require the employer to boycott non-union labor while you encourage it. I must not employ a scab, but I must compete with his employer for your trade. You demand union conditions in the way of comfortable and sanitary shops, and you support the sweat shop and tenement house producers. And you call yourselves union men! Pah! I am ashamed of you! I am disgusted with you! I repudiate you and your scale of wages!"

Mr. Strong abruptly ended his speech and started for the door. The silence of the meeting was almost awful. It was a room full of dead men, so far as they showed any signs of life. He had nearly reached the door, when he stopped as though a new thought had occurred to him. He turned around and faced the meeting.

"Mr. President," he said, the anger was gone from his voice. "Mr. President, perhaps I have been too harsh. I should have taken into consideration that most of you are new unionists and have as yet little conception of what unionism means. The whole theory and scope of trade unionism is not to be grasped in six short months. You have yet to learn that it has its obligations as well as its benefits. We are all more or less afflicted with the human instinct to buy where we can the cheapest, regardless of the fact that it may be the dearest in the end. I am going to give you another probation before I become your enemy. Perhaps you have not reasoned that in demanding patronage you must concede patronage. It may not have occurred to you that the workingmen are the principal buyers of nearly all products, and that in buying of the non-union employer you are putting the union employer at a disadvantage. Theoretically you consider the interests of all unionists identical, but you set your theory at naught by your practice. I will wait another six months to see if you are union men."

The cheer that burst forth from the members of the union was the only answer Mr. Strong needed to convince him that his lesson had not fallen on barren minds. Within the specified time union signs all over Caruthers showed that the true meaning of unionism had been learned, not alone by the employees of the Caruthers Manufacturing Company, who constituted the greater number of the union of their trade, but by all the trade unionists and their sympathizers.

American Federationist.

DON'T KICK WORK

Don't kick for bigger boots
Until your own are bustin',
Don't kick for bigger work
When your tools are rustin'.

Go ahead, and never mind
Your more successful brother;
Don't drink of one cup
With your eyes on another.

If you have already Subscribed, cut this out and hand it to your friend.

1905

TRIBUNE PUBLISHERS,
106-108 Adelaide St. West

You are authorized to send "The Tribune" to my address for which you will find the sum of One Dollar enclosed being one-year's subscription.

Name _____

Street _____

Post Office _____

If you want terms apply to your Secretary.