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# Their Representative

A Story for Labor Day Showing a New Way of Ending a Strike

By F. A. MITCHEL

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"I'm sorry, miss, to have to tell you that I'm going to leave you." A girl of twenty, whose red and white complexion bespoke Irish blood, stood before her mistress, fingering her apron with evident embarrassment. "Why, Maggie, what have I done?" "Nothing, miss." "Then why are you going to leave me?" "Well, miss—the truth is—why, miss—I'm going to be married." "Oh, I see. Who are you going to marry, Maggie?" "Jim Doolan, that works in the Ainsworth factory." "The Ainsworth factory?" "Yes, miss." Margaret Etheridge, the girl's mistress, was interested in the Ainsworth company as a stockholder and through its president and manager, Richard Ainsworth. "I'm sorry to lose you, Maggie," said Miss Etheridge, "but if you are going to be married, you can depend upon me to give you whatever you will need in the way of clothes, household linen and other things, to enable you to set up housekeeping." Maggie was married and went to live with her husband in a small suit of rooms. Jim's wages were not very large, but the couple made them do very well till the first child came, when they were obliged to take a backward step financially by incurring a considerable bill for medical attendance. Then Jim was taken sick, and that increased the indebtedness.

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Meanwhile Richard Ainsworth had been pressing an unsuccessful suit with Miss Etheridge. He had greatly increased the output of the Ainsworth company since he took the management, and to the book value of the stock 50 per cent had been added. In deed, Richard Ainsworth had come to be considered one of the smartest young business men in the state. But there were differences between him and Margaret Etheridge that prevented her from accepting him. Those business qualifications for which the world applauded him did not appeal to her. She did not understand the methods by which that silent partner, capital, was made to absorb the lion's share of the profits of a business. She saw the operatives—men, women and children—going to the works early in the morning and, having worked hard all day, return in the evening to their shabby homes to repeat the process day after day. The were working to pay dividends on her stock, while she, who did nothing, lived in affluence. It seemed to her that there was something wrong. She appealed to Richard Ainsworth for an explanation, but his explanations were not satisfactory. His reasons convinced her, but her heart, her sense of justice, were unmoved by them.

"Why can't you pay your operatives enough to enable them to live more comfortably?" she asked Mr. Ainsworth. "Because of competition." "Explain." "Other concerns would be able to undersell and we would be forced out of business." "Why not appropriate a portion of the dividends, which are enormous, to the operatives?" "Because of several reasons, the most pertinent of which is that the stockholders would object." "I am a stockholder. You may cut my dividends in half, giving one half to the operatives." "You are one among hundreds; the rest, instead of being willing to give up their profits, are howling for more. My dear Margaret, you don't understand such things."

"Does anybody understand them?" "Yes, one—Providence." One day Maggie Doolan sent a pitiful message to Margaret, scrawled in pencil on a bit of paper, saying that she was ill, her husband was away at his work all day, the children had no one to take care of them, and Jim's wages were pledged for debts. Besides this, there was nothing to eat in the house. Margaret immediately sallied forth with a well filled purse and, stopping at the provision shops by the way, carried comfort to the distressed. As she was coming away, Jim came in with a rueful countenance and, throwing himself into a chair, dropped his head in his arms on a table.

"What is it, Jim?" asked his wife in a frightened tone. "The strike is on," was the mournful reply. "Oh, heavens!" cried Maggie in dismay. "What are the hands striking for?" asked Margaret Etheridge. "Ten per cent advance all around."

"And do you mean that you will have no income whatever till the matter is settled?" "I do." "How much do you earn?" "Twenty-one dollars a week."

"Very well. Every weekly pay day I will send you a check for that amount." Margaret left, leaving a relieved and thankful household behind her. The strike proved to be a prolonged one. One evening while it was in progress Richard Ainsworth and Margaret Etheridge were sitting in her home discussing the matter.

"Why do you not give the men what they demand?" she asked. "For a number of reasons—first, if I do within six months they will make another demand, and so on until we pay them so much that we can't manufacture at a profit. This will drive us out of business and them out of employment."

"Why can't a compromise be effected?" "The question is a difficult one to answer. If these men were represented by one of their own number a compromise might be effected. But they are represented by one or more persons whose interest I don't consider their interest. The questions between the laborer and the capitalist are those constantly arising between partners in business. Whenever the interests of persons and peoples are intertwined there can only be loss to both in a want of harmony. When the capitalist is unjust to the laborer he in the long run injures his business. When the laborer is excessive in his demands upon the capitalist he injures the business in which he is a partner."

Ainsworth had scarcely spoken the last word when there was evidence of a commotion without. Some one cried: "Hurrah for the strike sympathizer!" Ainsworth and Margaret looked at each other wonderingly. "Where's the leddy? Come out!" There was a ring at the door bell. Margaret chose to answer the summons herself. A workman stood at

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the door, who, pulling respectfully rim of his tattered hat, said to her: "There's a lot of us here, miss, that hearin' ye have contributed to the strikers' fund by paying Jim Doolan's family his weekly wages, have come to thank ye. Would ye mind showin' yourself on the porch?" Margaret went out and saw a crowd of upturned faces, lighted only by a street lamp.

"Three cheers for the leddy strike sympathizer!" cried the man who had brought her out. The cheers were given with a will, and when quiet was restored Margaret said:

"I can't say exactly that I am a strike sympathizer, but I can say that I am a sympathizer with you and your families. I am a stockholder in the Ainsworth company, and if by throwing off all my dividends except what I need to keep body and soul together I could end this strike I would do so." "Good for you!" "Let the other stockholders do the same!" "For God's sake, end it!"

"How would you like to make me your representative to confer in your name with the management of the Ainsworth company with a view to a compromise?" "Bully!" "Go ahead!" "Do it!" Margaret's introducer held up his hand for silence and said:

"All in favor of Miss Etheridge representing us say aye." There was a wild shout of ayes. No one was called for or given. "Very well," said Margaret. "Tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock I will be ready to receive a committee of men who are workers, men who have been supporting their families by their labor in the works of the Ainsworth company. Don't send any one else. If you do I shall decline to act for you."

She withdrew, followed by wild shouts from laborers delighted with the novel plan of endeavoring to secure their demands through a stockholder and a woman. In ten minutes more the neighborhood was deserted. The next morning Richard Ainsworth was at Margaret's home some time before the appearance of the committee and was shown into a room by himself, ready to decide upon any proposition that might be made. When the committee arrived they were placed in the drawing room. Margaret entered and said:

"Make your demand." "Our only demand," replied the spokesman, "is for 10 per cent advance."

"If the raise is granted, how long before a demand will be made for another raise?" The committee conferred and finally agreed to pledge themselves that no new demand should be made within two years.

"How is the management of the company to be assured that you will keep this pledge?" After another consultation the spokesman said, "Every operative will sign a written pledge to you, and you can give your word to the management."

"Very well. Wait here." Withdrawing, Margaret went into the room occupied by the manager and made him the proposition. Now Richard Ainsworth had a shrewd head in more ways than one. He could see an opportunity when it presented itself, and he saw one now. "Margaret," he said, "the terms are accepted on one condition."

"What is it?" "That you make an additional pledge." "What pledge?" "To become my wife."

Margaret was not ready to give a definite answer. She tried to satisfy him with an evasion. All to no purpose. He stood firm as a rock. Either the stipulation must be introduced into the agreement or the strike must go on. Finally she put out her hand and turned away her face. Ainsworth took the hand and sealed the contract with a kiss.

That night there was a demonstration about Margaret Etheridge's home, and nothing would satisfy the demonstration except carrying their representatives in a chair on their shoulders around the factory and home again.

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