

THE MUTABLE MANY.

BY ROBERT BARR.

The Story of a Labor Union. A Tale of Present Day Problems. With Episodes from Real Life.

CHAPTER VIII.

Brant and Marsten passed from the dimness of the street into the brilliant light of the hall, which was certain nights in the week was like an open-air fair, each side being lined with booths-upon-booths, radiating with flags, gasolines, luminous being burned—evil-smelling incense to the God of Cheesemans. Hordes of women, down at the head, were bargaining with equally impetuous vendors—meeting and chattering on the common level of poverty.

Turning into a side street and then into a narrow lane, the two men came to a huge building where the Salvation Army held its services—a building left temporarily to the employ of Monkton & Hope for the discussion of their grievances. The place was crowded to the doors, and the latest comers had some difficulty in making their way along one side of the walls, nearer the front platform, where they at last found room half way between the doors and the speakers.

Scimmias was in the chair, looking very uneasy and out of place, not knowing exactly what was expected of him, smiling a wan expression, and occasionally as some of his pals in the crowd made audacious remarks about his elevation, and the native dignity he brought to bear on his office. One gave it as his opinion ("if you asked him") that Scimmias would have looked more natural with a pint pot in his right hand instead of the mallet with which he was supposed to keep order.

On a row of chairs at the back of the platform sat the committee, and the speaker, looking most of them, quite as uncomfortable as the chairman. Several reporters were writing, at a table provided for them. Sometimes one would get up and address the chairman or a member of the committee, and received the almost invariable answer, "Most if I know any one."

Gibbons was quite palpably the man of the hour. He was on his feet by virtue of his position as chairman of the committee and secretary of the union, and was naturally rather proud of the wording, and he hoped to see it printed in the newspapers. He turned to his audience, after saluting the chairman.

"Now, gentlemen, you have heard the report. The committee appointed by you, empowered by you, acting for you, vested in your authority, has done its duty, and I bring to you this report, and I trust you will bring to me a favorable conclusion. It has left no stone unturned, shrunk from no honorable means, spared no trouble, to bring about an understanding fair alike to employer and employe. But, gentlemen, your committee has been met at the very threshold with a difficulty which it could not surmount; a difficulty which has rendered all its efforts abortive. The firm of Monkton & Hope refuses the committee to Mr. Sartwell, the manager, and Mr. Sartwell absolutely refuses to see the committee and discuss anything with it. This man, who was once a workman himself, now arrogates—"

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like a man, and not stand barking there like a dog. Let's have a look at you."

"It was a risky thing to do with such a crowd as this. Marsten was on his feet, and he made up his mind that he would not be angry, when he would likely, in his violence, lose all the ground he had gained. So Gibbons quietly with his eye gathered up his trusty henchmen, who were scattered in different parts of the hall to give an appearance of unity to the shouting. What's the proper time, and these men had gradually edged to the front during the speaking. One or two had already taken up their positions and held a whispered conference with the secretary, after which they and some others took their places behind the seated committee. When Sartwell was allotted to Gibbons arose.

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"Order, order!" said the chairman, faintly.

"Yes, an' you atop o' him!" shouted the infuriated man. "I've done it before."

"Respect the meeting, if you have no regard for the chair," said Gibbons, calmly. "You talk to 'em as if we were a parcel of fools," cried a man in front. Brant, like a baited bull, not knowing in which direction to rush, uttered a hoarse, blaring cry, and then, without a word, he took his place behind the speaker. He shook his clenched fist and bared arm at the audience.

"What else are you?" he roared, at the top of his voice. "A parcel o' damned fools, all of ye. Led by the nose by a still bigger fool than I am, ye are a set o' chattering liars, that's what ye are, with your noses to the wall."

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chook open a job than to get a new one these times. I know, because I've tried it. So have most of you. Take my advice and go no further with the nonsense. If Sartwell, as Marsten says, is willing to talk over our grievances, then I say let us send him a deputation of our own men, with no assistants, among whom I would place the one I call a strong man like Sartwell."

Marsten had sat down on the edge of the platform. We are always quicker to perceive the mistake of an opponent than he is. Gibbons was in his chair, and he had rapidly taken the measure of the speaker. He saw that the address was having its effect, and that the crowd was slipping away from his control. It was a risky thing to do with such a crowd as this. Marsten was on his feet, and he made up his mind that he would not be angry, when he would likely, in his violence, lose all the ground he had gained. So Gibbons quietly with his eye gathered up his trusty henchmen, who were scattered in different parts of the hall to give an appearance of unity to the shouting. What's the proper time, and these men had gradually edged to the front during the speaking. One or two had already taken up their positions and held a whispered conference with the secretary, after which they and some others took their places behind the seated committee. When Sartwell was allotted to Gibbons arose.

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"What else are you?" he roared, at the top of his voice. "A parcel o' damned fools, all of ye. Led by the nose by a still bigger fool than I am, ye are a set o' chattering liars, that's what ye are, with your noses to the wall."

rather disconcerting to a different man, but he was relieved to notice, after a moment's breathless pause beyond the threshold, that nobody paid the slightest attention to him.

The large room seemed bowdleringly full of people, and a row of men were standing with their backs against the wall, as if they were part of the mural decoration. Many of them held tea cups in their hands, and all of them looked more or less bored. The divans and chairs had been arranged in rows, as the viewing of some spectacle, and every seat was taken, most of the occupants being women. Two men servants were handing around tea and cake, while Barney himself fitted hither and thither like a gigantic butterfly in a rose garden, scattering geniality and good humor wherever he went. The steady hum of conversation was brightened constantly by silvery laughter. It was evident that the gathering, with the possible exception of that part of it standing idly around the walls, was enjoying itself.

As the three slowly receded, a young man in a blue suit and a white shirt, who had been sitting on the edge of the platform, rose and came forward, and then went on again at increased speed, as he recognized Eliza Sartwell sitting on one of the front chairs, smiling at some humorous remark which Barney, leaning over her, was making. At that moment before Marsten had been comparing an impetus to retreat by telling himself that all these idle persons were nothing to him, but now when he had recognized one person who was everything to him, he had to quit his rising panic with a new formula. Although out of his depth the fit at that moment before Marsten had set himself was even begun. At the back of his nature there was a certain bold dog obstinacy, the limitations of which had never yet been tested, although his unexpected meeting with a number of his fellow creatures in an evidently higher social status than his own, and a severe strain upon his moral courage. In vain he told himself that he was as good as any of them, for in his heart he did not believe that he was, and the assurance was of little value to him. Finally, he took his courage in his hand