

"The Avon Strike."

BY IRVING SIDNEY DIX.

Submitted in The Tribune's Short Story Contest.

SURROUNDED by the low, ragged hills, a sluggish, winding river and amid the noise and dust of a mining district lay the village of Avon, peaceful and quiet in the stillness of an early October morning. In all directions unsightly-looking chimneys towered high above each other, and here and there odd-shaped coal breakers stood outlined with monotonous regularity against the blue, autumn sky.

Night still partially shrouded the sleeping city, when multitudes of men and boys of widely different nationalities might have been seen moving hurriedly and noisily about through the streets and byways. Many of these workers were bent towards the dingy breakers; while others, peering the city and busy world above them, went down into the wild gloom of the mines. There was a striking difference in their forms and features; some had borne the toils and labors of life more lightly than their companions. There was, however, a noticeable sameness about each brow; each showed signs of hardships and discontent; from nearly every eye youth's brightness had departed, yet each was suffering for himself—not a murmur of discontent had ever escaped their lips.

Mr. J. Warren, foreman and also owner of the mines, was through some misunderstanding, greatly disliked by nearly all his men; but there was one, Dave Hardy by name, who had a peculiar affection for the foreman, and as Dave was an old man and knew more about the city and mines than anyone else, in spite of this love for Mr. Warren, his opinion was desired in an important matter. But as much as Hardy respected Mr. Warren, Antonio Capello, a spirited leader among the miners, despised him. A few years back, unintentionally, Antonio had incurred the anger of Mr. Warren and had been discharged. Since then he had been planning right and day for revenge. He worked persistently to stir up the spirit of revolt among his companions, and he was succeeding; for of late the miners were becoming restless, and it was only too plain that they would soon come when they would rebel against what they termed "existing conditions."

Never had affairs gone well at the mines, and, though hardly noticeable, each year they grew steadily worse. And even after an agreement was made, whereby wages were more uniform, the probability of a strike grew more and more apparent; in fact, the outlook for a peaceable settlement was gloomy indeed, as about this time notices were posted to the effect that wages would be reduced ten per cent. for the ensuing three months. Before it had needed but a spark to kindle the drift-wood of rebellion that had been accumulating for years; now the spark was in sight, and Antonio saw it and fanned it to a flame.

As no reasons were given for the reduction, the miners looked upon it as a direct result, not of necessity, but of avarice and greed. Public meetings, at which Antonio always presided, were now held often. He was a fast speaker and perhaps saw this his last and best opportunity to carry out a long-hoped-for revenge.

On a night in the latter part of October, the most important meeting of the miners took place. Every mine of note was there, every well-known laborer about the mines and collieries was present, even the slate-pickers and driver boys were there in force, and regarded this night as the most critical period of their life.

After the meeting had been called to order, Antonio, with voice trembling slightly, yet with an earnestness and force that deeply moved the men, arose and addressed them, closing with the following:

"Fellow citizens: We have been too patient in the past, too careful in what we have said and done. Up to this time the miners of this valley have been and are being silently, slowly, surely deprived of their liberties and independence. Now, if ever, is the time to strike a blow for freedom that will be heard not only in this city of Avon, but throughout the length and breadth of this valley—throughout all America. Yes, I believe the sound of our struggle will be heard in heaven, and eventually victory will be ours. (Applause.) Severe cases demand severe remedies, and we must use our only effectual remedy—the strike! Citizens and miners, strike! I say and today; and may the God of

the workman give victory to whom victory is due.

As he closed, a wild deafening applause shook the old building, and like a whirlwind, the spirit of strike swept in every direction until men, women and children shouted, laughed and cried alternately. Confusion reigned everywhere. Crowds formed and dispersed. Reason took its flight and in its place, madness was enthroned. "To the Warren Breaker!" shouted some one. "Burn it down," cried another. Like a flash of lightning from an already overcharged and darkened sky, the words fell upon the excited crowd of humanity. Like a thunder-storm, the cry was scattered over the multitude, all eager to do something, they cared not what!

"To the Warren Breaker!" At the sound, unconsciously every foot bent toward the threatened colliery, that loomed up dark and grim through the gloom of the night; unconsciously every foot moved with strange, unnatural quickness toward the doomed breaker. But Antonio led them all, and, as he arrived at the building, with frenzied haste, he held something for a moment close to the ground and then dashed, with uplifted hands, back toward the on-coming crowd. "Back! Back!" he cried, with an ominous glance toward the murky colliery. The foremost of the crowd halted; the others hesitated for a moment, and then, "Go God!" cried all in a suppressed voice of horror. At that moment every part of the great structure of Warren's Breaker tottered and reeled as though in the hands of the wind. For a moment, the building, which had the flames shot up through the building when a dull booming not unlike that of heavy, distant artillery, shook the very foundation of the city, and awoke what few had dared to fall asleep on that October night.

Some windows were thrown up all over the town; faces appeared at each, questioning their neighbors. Some thought an explosion had occurred in the mines; others, that the powder mill had been blown up, and not a few declared, it was judgment day, and Gabriel was sounding his trumpet; well they might wonder, for explosion after explosion shook, with increased violence, the buildings of the city until the windows rattled as though a wind-storm had suddenly burst upon them.

At the breaker all was confusion; the men and women, by order of Antonio, now came up closer to the burning structure. And soon in mad excitement, they began to shout and dance about it, while the fierce flames leaped higher and higher and the crackling of the burnt and falling timbers grew ever more distinct. The conflagration lighted up plainly this scene of horror, and glowed with a ghastly pallor upon the excited faces of all.

Among the whole crowd, not a thoughtful face—not an eye but flashed with a gleam of eagerness or shone with a dim look of forgetfulness. One word from Antonio, and the mob would have gone quietly to their homes; one word and they would have left the whole city in ashes, but while the crowd danced and shouted, he alone was silent, gazing thoughtfully on the ground. He had had his revenge, but he was not satisfied. As he turned away from the skeleton of the half-consumed breaker, the mob dispersed; a few breaker boys remained, watching the dying embers of their work shop as they faded with the night.

Morning came. What a change soon had wrought! Now, the minds of the men and women who last night had been at the front, in the very fierceness of the maddened crowd, tottered at the thought of the destruction they had caused. Then, madness had ruled their minds; now, reason reigned in its stead. Then, one man thought for all; now, each man thought for himself, and with many bitter regrets.

At length the day dawned—the day on which the new scale of wages was to have taken effect; but on that day the men gathered about the streets, talking over and discussing the new scale of wages, and the happenings of the night before—not a miner went to work! As the afternoon waned, here and there, some wild impromptu speaker, perched upon the shoulders of his admiring companions, was excitedly haranguing the throngs that continually ebbed and flowed about the streets; here, too, some children with animated faces were arguing the all-important topic—the strike.

But suddenly forming in line, the

strikers began marching up and down the busiest streets of the city; then, without apparent reason, passing out into the suburbs, they fled down the dark slopes of the mines, leaving it to be nearly evening of that day when, with shouldered tools, like a retreating army, the multitude of rebellious miners, with measured tread, slowly tramped back through the streets of Avon. At length, weary and dust-covered, the workers came to a standstill before the well kept buildings of the foreman's home; here each and every man, without a murmur, quietly laid down his tools with which he had toiled unceasingly year after year—laid them down before the beautiful green encircling the house, and with defeated yet resolute faces moved thoughtfully to their homes—homes soon to be visited by hunger and starvation.

Mr. Warren, though a kind and benevolent man, a just and honest employer, was often accustomed to slight seemingly unimportant matters until they grew to prodigious size when necessarily forced him to do something—that quickly. As yet he had made no noticeable move; he seemed dumfounded by the recent burning of the breaker; he had seen how easily a rational being could be transformed to an ungovernable demon; how that demon ruled with destructive hand. But he had seen too late, and he knew very little could be done till the present excitement was over.

But he had a beautiful home and a devoted wife, his pretty daughter, Mildred, perhaps their lives were in danger! Thus the non-partisan inhabitants of the city thought, and hoped for some action on the part of the manager that would soon settle the strike. But Mr. Warren, so completely at sea as to what should be done, he had talked with the men publicly and had told them he was in present unable to allow an increase in wages; on the other hand he had to make a reduction. But now, they would not believe him.

And so the days passed by with affairs in an unsettled condition. During the time that followed, dressed in holiday attire, the miners paraded the city. Speeches were delivered and the topics of the hour debated in the most public places; but the time soon flew by, the poorer classes became destitute and a cry arose for food. Few of the wealthy people dared give assistance, and it would directly help the strikers, yet there was one, morning and evening, carried food into these poor districts. No one molested her and no one suspected she was the manager's daughter, Mildred Warren.

The home she most often visited and which most needed her assistance was, strangely enough, Antonio's. His family were nearly starving when she made her first visit, but so often had she gone there, and so much hope had she inspired in the children, they were becoming more like the former selves. From the first the whole family naturally took a great liking to the pretty helper, but no one so much as Antonio. Before no one had seemed to care enough for him to visit his family in their need. And in some ways these visits had touched a chord within him that had long been silent. It vibrated, it thrilled him, and he felt with each return of her visit a renewed pleasure—the felt that some one, somewhere, was thinking of him in his disgrace. He had brought it upon himself, Mildred thought he needed a friend none the less.

Yet, while Mildred was thus ministering to his suffering family, while the inhabitants of Avon were all unmindful of any wrong being done, Antonio was stealthily completing plans for the total destruction of the city. Of late, oftentimes thoughts of carnage and devastation was his chief delight; the picture of Avon enveloped in a holocaust of fire before him was that of Mildred Warren—the girl who had him a wild demon-like joy. He gloated in the noise and crash of falling buildings, and the rabid cries of a maddened multitude were music in his ears; he loved to listen to the tramp of marching feet, to the clangor of arms and uproar was fuel to his spirit of revenge. Driven on by this ungovernable passion, the plans were now nearly laid for the burning of the city. In fact, he was ready—only for a favorable evening late was waiting.

A few evenings later a darkness fell down over the sleeping wild-swept city, little did the inhabitants think that about their homes, even beneath their doors death lay in hiding; little did they think that the morrow might bring forth and had they known, no doubt many would have shut their eyes and buried their heads like the foolish ostrich of the desert with danger near at hand. On that evening, as Mr. Warren sat reading before the fire, his daughter entered, looked earnestly at him for a moment, as though she knew she might not see him again, and then, leaving the house stealthily, hastened out into the street.

It was a dark night and cold; the wind roared about with ever-increasing swiftness, while here and there great drifts of snow blocked the streets and swirled and eddied about her as though bent on some errand of death; yet through this blinding storm of snow and wind Mildred bravely made her way and entering at last the poorer part of the city, hurried toward a line of low, wood-colored houses.

Had you been upon one of the quiet back streets of Avon that night, when the storm raged most furiously, and had you known that Antonio Capello, moving slyly up the street, intended to have revenge by burning the city that night, you would have noticed him closely. Though his step was not so elastic as of late, and he was still, as he pushed up through the drifting snow, there was a noticeable quickness about his whole person.

The agony and pent-up revenge in his mind showed in the defiant flash of his eyes and his steady, purposeful movement. But suddenly he stopped, looked fixedly at something for a moment, and then went hurriedly forward. There, nearly covered by the recent snow, was a young girl grasping tightly in her hand a letter, while upon her face seemed still to linger a smile mixed with sorrow. Taking from her hand the letter, through curiosity Antonio broke it open, and by the gleam of his dark lantern, read as follows:

This letter will let you know that an attempt has been planned to burn Avon. Antonio Capello, whom you discharged a few years ago, is the leader, and not until a few hours ago did I know of his intentions. I have devised what little time I could to ferret out the supposed leaders and secure the enclosed information. But all tonight I had been unsuccessful in every at-

tempt. I requested Mildred to call at my house with the hope that even this late the plans would leak out and become known to me. I know for sure the city is to be set on fire, but I am not positive when it may be tonight. I would have let you know about this matter before, but feared I might be mistaken, thereby causing unnecessary annoyance.

Let me know at once what can be done to offset these plans. Yours,
Dave.

As Antonio finished reading, he glanced at the face before him, then again at the letter; and at the thought that she had failed, that he still could not avenge himself, for a moment his face lighted up with the wild spirit of a demon; then, like a flash of sunshine, the thought dawned upon his restless spirit: the pretty face before him was that of Mildred Warren—the girl who had him a wild demon-like joy. He gloated in the noise and crash of falling buildings, and the rabid cries of a maddened multitude were music in his ears; he loved to listen to the tramp of marching feet, to the clangor of arms and uproar was fuel to his spirit of revenge. Driven on by this ungovernable passion, the plans were now nearly laid for the burning of the city. In fact, he was ready—only for a favorable evening late was waiting.

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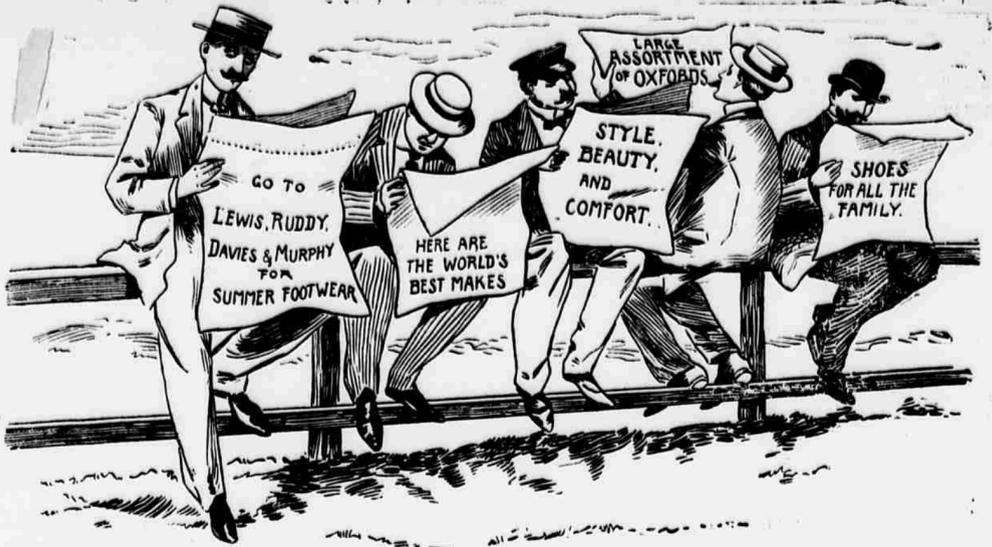
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All \$4.00 Shoes and Oxfords at.....\$3.25 and \$3.50 "Crossett" and F. B. Make.	One lot of Ladies' Fine Dongola Lace Shoes, some with cloth tops and patent tips at.....75c
All \$3.00 and \$3.50 Shoes and Oxfords at.....\$2.50 and \$3.00	One lot of Ladies' Russel Lace Shoes at.....85c
All \$2.50 and \$3.00 Shoes and Oxfords at.....\$2.00 and \$2.50	Ladies' Fine Dongola Oxford Ties at.....50c a pair
We have others at.....\$1.25, \$1.50 and \$1.75	Infants' Fine Dongola Button Shoes at.....10c a pair
Men's Russel Lace Shoes at.....85c	Child's Dongola Button Shoes, all sizes 8 to 11, at.....50c a pair
For Women.	Men's Patent Leather Shoes, all sizes, at.....\$1.90
All \$5.00 Shoes and Oxfords at.....\$4.25 (Wichert & Gardiner and H. H. Gray's Make.)	Regular price \$2.50. (There is not space enough here to tell you all—Come in.)

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voice from beneath his great coat asked: "Where am I; is this home?" And Antonio Capello knew that Mildred was still alive. "Leave her and hurry to the burning," said Antonio, the murderer. "Go with her to Mr. Warren," said Antonio, the man. He hesitated. He went forward. Never before had his conscience thus reasoned with itself; never before had passion in him been conquered; and Mildred led him within the house, within a brightly lighted room, where sat Mr. Warren deep in thought—thinking of the strike. So busily was he thus engaged and so lost was he to all about him that he did not notice Antonio as he entered. But Mildred, who had fallen in the storm, not from cold, as Antonio had supposed, but from reality from exhaustion, now became fully herself, and running to her father, put her arms about him, kissing him as he entered. But Mr. Warren, surprised at this unexpected action on the part of Mildred, looked into her face and saw at once that she had been out of doors and facing the storm. "Mildred, where have you been?" he questioned, kindly. Pointing to the amazed but silent figure of Antonio, Mildred answered, "Ask him." And then Antonio, in a bold yet simple manner, revealed the cause of the strike—his revenge; and then, recklessly, showed how the city would have been burned that night had not he found Mildred while on the way to carry out his well planned designs. Then he handed Mr. Warren Davies' letter, and waited in suspense for the manager's final words of comment and dismissal.

When Mr. Warren had read and re-read the letter, for a long time he sat in a brown study, his thoughts quickly fled back to his boyhood days—days when he, with other boys like himself, were toiling in the bowler and the mines, and step by step he traced his winding, rugged path of life up to his present end. Looking at the past and present, he saw in many of his employees the companions and co-workers of his youth. Did he not owe them something? Was not his present success due in some measure to past circumstances, could he not better present circumstances and increase his employees' future success? The questions seemed sounding in his ears for an answer, but the old thought that he was a self-made man pressed up close to the unanswered questions and almost crowded them from his mind.

Then a half-thought flitted like a vision across his troubled spirit. It sang of peace on earth, good will toward men. It was a half-thought that had been shaping itself since the burning of the colliery. Now it had assumed definite shape, and taking up the pen

that lay before him, Mr. Warren wrote as appears below:

Gentlemen: A misunderstanding about wages has caused a great deal of trouble among us, as you know. I will say nothing about past affairs, which concern not now, but will speak to you of the future, which should concern us all. As you know, the breaker was burned, and the work can be resumed, and he built up again. It will cost several hundred thousand dollars to build the new breaker, and as I have not the necessary money with which to do it, I have the proposition to make to you: I will all my men to take stock in a new company, which will be known as the "Warren & Employees." The shares will be sold at \$100 each, and if the men whom I employ will each take one share, I can see my way clear to advance the rest. These shares will draw eight per cent. interest, payable semi-annually. Kindly let me know through Antonio what you think of this proposition.

Yours for peace,
J. Warren.

The next day a public meeting was called and Antonio read Mr. Warren's letter before a thousand workmen packed in the old sink in which they had gathered. As a few words often make a great difference it so happened that later as had been the miners' hatred against Mr. Warren, their enthusiasm and respect for him was now as apparent, not in riotous demonstrations—the earthquake—but with good will and cheerfulness—the still small voice. The proposition was accepted; those who were not able to advance the money immediately, borrowed it of their more fortunate neighbors; never had there been more peace and good will among the men of the mining town of Avon, the climax of happiness was nearly reached.

A few weeks passed quietly by—weeks during which the new breaker was building—when once more the sounds of workmen filled the mines and collieries and again the miners moved up and down the streets of Avon, but instead of discontent there appeared on all a sign of deep content.

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Haver, of Avon, was visiting at the home of George Cuyler, on Albert street, on Tuesday evening.

Miss Kate Bailey, of Archbald, was visiting Mrs. Hicks, on Carmel street, Wednesday.

Mr. and Mrs. M. F. Fadden, of Scranton, were calling on friends here Sunday last.

DURYEA.

Special to the Scranton Tribune.

Duryea, June 12.—Miss Fanny Stebbins of Carbondale, is visiting at the home of Mr. Frank Morey, of Grove street.

Mrs. Henry Mark is the guest of her sister, Mrs. Gayheart, of Front street.

Mrs. William Shales visited in Pittston Tuesday.

News was received here of the death of Mrs. John Thornton's father, in Scranton. Deceased was formerly a resident of this place.

PRICEBURG.

Miss Beulah Davidson, of Jermans, was visiting at the home of Sarah Cooper, on Albert street, Tuesday.

Mr. Arthur Miller, George Baker and James

FINE DISPLAY OF Ready-to-Wear Garments AT ATTRACTIVE PRICES.

Pique Linen and Duck Skirts,
Black Mercerized and Taffeta Silk Petticoats,
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Mercerized Chambrays—Madras, Lawn and Linen, in stripes and plain shades, a room full of **White Waists**, Waists with tucks, frills, lace embroidery, all sizes and qualities.

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