CAREER OF MARTIN IRONS

THE LEADER OF THE GREAT SOUTHWESTERN STRIKE.

STORY OF HIS BRUTAL LIFE AS TOLD BY HIS WIFE—THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROFESSIONAL AGITATOR.

ST. LOUIS, May 9.—The central figure in the great railroad strike on the Gould Southwestern system was Martin Irons. To those who know anything of the man this circumstance proves conclusively that the strike was not inaugurated at the request of the best element in the Knights of Labor of the Southwest, but at the demand of the worst characters in the order. Irons is Master Workman of the Assembly at Sedalia. His election was not procured by the conservative element. His predecessors were comparatively fair-minded men. They objected to arbitrary measures. They were in favor of giving the railroad company a chance to settle a difficulty before precipitating a strike. This did not suit the policy of the minority. It wanted a man of its own stamp. It was in favor of terrorizing the company. It succeeded in cowing the majority, and finally selected Irons as the head of the assembly at Sedalia and the Secretary of District Assembly No. 101. A few days before the Knights' convention was held at Marshall, Texas, Irons called at the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company's office and asked for return passes for himself and associates. His request was granted. It was for neglecting his business in attending this convention and piloting the visiting Knights about the town, after the convention had adjourned, that Foreman Hall was discharged by the Receivers of the Texas Pacific Railroad Company.

When Irons determined to begin a general strike on the Missouri Pacific Railroad he was traveling on a free pass furnished to him by the company. He did not take counsel with the conservative men of the order. His cronies were the desperate spirits. He simply did their bidding. Had he refused to do so he would have been entirely without influences. Having begun the strike, he determined to maintain it, as his supporters were those who committed outrages at the outset. They, as well as Irons, knew that unless the company was beaten at all points they had little chance of obtaining employment on the Southwestern system. Although perhaps in the minority, the battlement was in control. Their ferocious threats deterred those Knights who considered the strike uncalled for from asserting their manhood and finally from even expressing their opinions.

Powderly saw at a glance, upon visiting the section, that the strike was unjustifiable. He backed the telephone to the Irons and his associates so, and contented himself with issuing his secret circular on his return to Pennsylvania. Though this circular saw the light, and its publication did Powderly a world of good, it was intended it only for Knights of Labor. It had no effect upon Irons or his supporters, except to disgust them. If Powderly, upon discovering the effect of his circular upon decent people, had ordered the strike off and demanded that his order should be obeyed, Irons and his adherents would likely have found themselves out in the cold. But Powderly was afraid that such action on his part would cause a split, though he was aware that a split between the decent and desperate factions in the order in the Southwest would be to the ultimate benefit of the Knights. By dilly-dallying he missed the tide, and was weak enough to indulge in letter writing, which strengthened his opponents, while it showed his innate honesty and sense of justice as well as a woeful lack of decision.

The result of the strike is a matter of small consequence to the men who ordered it. The Knights of Labor may have received a severe blow; the strikers may have been impoverished; many of them may have been rendered homeless, but Irons, and Coughlin, and Sullivan, the heads of the Joint Executive Committee of District Assemblies Nos. 101, 93, and 17, have lost nothing. Many think they are much richer today than they were eight weeks ago. Coughlin is a school teacher at East St. Louis. He may be *a poor one*; he looks it, a big, burly, coarse-grained, red-haired, and red-bearded knownothing; but he has a good one and he retained it all through the strike. Coughlin is an *ex-Methodist* parson. He had seeing with odd ideas, to which he gives tongue in ridiculously sensational language. Irons is an agitator. He calls himself a machinist, but he never served a full apprenticeship. In appearance he is stolid and significant. He is about 5 feet 6 inches in height and is compactly built. He walks with a slight stoop. He has a head of dark reddish hair and a heavy, blonde-of-a-tint mustache of the same color. His complexion is of the muddy, freckly order. He seldom looks a questioner in the eye, and his face generally wears a dull, lowering expression. He has very little gray matter in his skull and he requires a deal of time in which to answer the simplest question. During a consultation with others he will sit for an hour without opening his mouth, then give expression to some thought that has been giving him a headache, and no matter how foolish it may be he will stick to it. This he considers determination. The woman with whom he had been living for some years died at Sedalia a few days after the strike was ordered. She died of exposure. She was compelled to obtain the coal supply for the house and did so by picking it up on the railroad. A Mrs. Hamilton, of Sedalia said "That brute, Irons, hardly provided enough food for his family."

The person who is best qualified to speak of Irons is his wife. She lives about five miles southwest of Richmond, Mo., and is a decent body. The following interview was held with her a few days ago. She said:

"I was born in Kelkeith, Scotland, June 21, 1823. My maiden name was Mary Brown. My father was Robert Brown. My mother's maiden name was Jeanette Jeffries. I was married to Martin Irons in Lexington, Ky., by J. K. Lyle, D. D., in the presence of Amelia Brown, on July 28, 1852. The name of Martin Irons's father was Martin Irons. His mother's Christian name was Beanie. Martin had two brothers—one named William, who died at sea, and James, now living. He also had two sisters—Jessie and Beanie. Beanie married John Brown, who is in the lime business at Richmond, Mo. Amelia Brown is my stepmother. I have brothers—Robert, born in Dalkeith, June 10, 1821; John, born at Tevert Mill, parish of Teres, Fife, Jan. 22, 1823: Heredith, born at same place, Oct. 10, 1825; William, born at same place, Nov. 10, 1829, and Scotland, who was born at Kerklow Mill, parish of Maines, Feb. 22, 1832.

"After I married Martin Irons we resided in Lexington, Ky., about three weeks and then we started for New-Orleans, stopping at Cincinnati, where my brother and Mr. Irons went into the saloon and restaurant business. We returned to Lexington in three months. Irons went to work for Mr. Heminway in the hemp factory, looking after machinery under Robert Brown, my husband working for Robert and John Brown, a machinist. Shortly afterward he went to work in a sewing machine shop. From there we went to Newport, Ky., where we remained several weeks. Mr. Irons still working in the sewing machine shops. We went from there to Jamestown, Ky., where he worked in the hemp factory. We remained there till the Fall of 1854, when we returned to Lexington, Ky., and my husband worked in the machine shops. In 1856 we went to Hannibal, Mo. Irons could not get any work there, so he went to St. Louis, where I think he worked as a machinist. In the same year he went to work for McGrew & Morrison in the foundry at Lexington, Mo. We left Lexington for Liberty in 1859. I lived at Liberty, Mo., during the war. In the Fall of 1865 we returned to Lexington, Mo. In 1867 we went to Knoxville, Mo., where Mr. Irons went to work in a saw mill. In 1870 we removed to where I now live, five miles southwest of Richmond, Mo.

"I separated from my husband in 1876. We were then living at a place known as Lime John Brown's, which joins the place where I now live."

"Did you leave Mr. Irons or did he leave you?"

"I left him. I haven't seen him since we separated. He has sent me some money since we separated, but not enough to support me and my family."

"Have you ever been divorced from Irons?"

"No. I received a letter from him stating that if I wanted a divorce he would not appear against me. Since then I have learned that he has married again. I do not know the woman he married."

"Was he a kind parent and husband?"

"No; he was very cruel."

"Is there anything in the report that he once brought an improper character to his house before your separation?"

"I do not know who the woman was. I took my children and we went into another room, leaving Mr. Irons and the woman to themselves. I learned the next day that the woman was one of bad character."

"Have you your marriage certificate?"

"Yes, here it is: 'This is to certify that Martin Irons and Mary Brown were, with their own consent, this date lawfully joined together in holy bonds of matrimony, which was solemnized by me, a minister of the Gospel, licensed to solemnize marriage, in the presence of a creditable witness. Given under my hand this 28th day of July in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and fifty-two. J. K. Lyle, D. D.'"

"Was there any complaint made against your husband for assaulting you?"

"Yes: Robert, my son, made a complaint against him charging him with assault to kill. A warrant was issued and served by John Brown, who was then Sheriff of Ray County."

"What was done in the matter?"

"It was compromised. Since our separation I have known very little of Mr. Irons except through the newspaper reports. Martin Irons was born at Dundee, Scotland, in 1832."

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