

THE MINORITY

By FREDERICK TREVOR HILL
Author of "The Case and Exceptions," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

Kennard spoke truly when he said he had "gone stale" with work. But that was only half the story. To be mentally and physically tired with the routine of every-day duties was no new experience. A Sunday out of doors, an evening at the Theatres, or a few hours with a book, had heretofore always restored his interest and activity. But as he journeyed away from Mamronock in the early morning, his sensations were utterly unlike the old familiar sense of weariness from overwork. His whole mental attitude was different, and he knew it. Never before had he felt petulant and irritated to the point of disgust with everything and everybody connected with his business. He had responded to the call of duty instinctively, but the thought uppermost in his mind was not to straighten out the company, whatever it might prove to be, but rather how to sweep it away and be free again at the earliest possible moment. He was in no mood to tolerate snarls; if encountered, they should be cut off at whatever cost and the ends piled together again at some convenient season.

An hour of such brooding brought him to the railroad station with his pocket-line of frantic scribbles and reamers newboys surging against the invisible barrier which the majesty of the law maintains, and behind which all that is hideous in crashes, squeals, and jangles, raises its maddening roar. Half an hour more of jerk and lunge, elbowing and scuffling, and he was before a large office building through whose doors hurrying pedestrians continually entered or escaped, and within which half-a-dozen elevators shot up and down in obedience to the orders of a horse-voiced starter.

"Factory Inspector—fifteen—940—right!"

Kennard felt himself hurried into the office as the clam of feeble iron doors behind him cut off the last word and a jerk of the lever whirled him upwards.

Room 940 was labeled

DEPARTMENT

OF PUBLIC UTILITIES.

Audits, Reports, Surveys.

Deputy Factory Inspector.

The door opened into a species of closet, with a small, brass-grated, pig-hole in the wall facing the entrance, and each of the flanking partitions contained a door marked "private."

Kennard stooped down and peered through the little window. A seedy clerk donning a cap immediately behind the grating, and another clerk stood beside him checking off the monotonous sing-song. The voice sounded against the choice of clicking typewriters behind, but both men appeared mechanically absorbed in their work, for neither of them looked up as Kennard stared through the narrow aperture. For some moments he waited for a pause, but the monotone continued steadily—"Fifty-six-two-nought-four; twenty-three-seven-six-nought-one; thirty-one-two-seven-nine—"

"Will you tell me where I can find Inspector Campbell?"

"Seven-forty-one, two-nought—door to the right—sixteen-forty-six—"

mumbled the clerk, without looking up.

"Beg pardon?"

"Forty-one-six—door to the right—door—do-o-r! Don't you understand English? Six-one, thirty-two—"

Kennard opened the right-hand door, and found himself in a passage-way railed off from a large room filled with clerks and typewriters. Men were seated at various points, writing or talking with one another. At one end of the desks the incumbents sat reading newspapers, their hats on their heads. Kennard waited for some one to address him, but as nobody appeared to take the slightest notice, he inquired of the nearest reader where he could find Inspector Campbell.

"I guess you can see him if you've got eyes," came the response from behind the newspaper, "but if you can't, he ain't there."

Kennard felt a sharp answer rising to his lips, but suppressed it as he replied gravely:

"That may be so, but I don't happen to know him when I see him."

A grunt was the only comment, but the reader shifted his cigar and without taking his eyes off the paper, yelled:

"Sam! Hi, there. Sam Campbell! Man here wants you!"

A slouchy, shifty, red-haired individual seated at a desk across the room talking with another man, rose at the shout and came to the rail where Kennard was standing.

"What do you want?" he demanded in a surly tone.

"I'm Mr. John Kennard. I called to see you about some matters in relation to our factory which I understand require attention."

The man favored his visitor with an insolent glance.

"You sit down till I get through with my friend and then I'll take up your case."

Without another word the official closed back to his desk.

Schooling himself to patience, Kennard sat down on the bench and watched the scene before him. A peculiar collection of workers but few seemed in that room.

Exceptions the men looked uninteresting and unhealthy. Most of the faces were coarse and vulgar, not a few were downright evil. No one seemed to work steadily, the pens of the writers moving stiffly and heavily, as though the fingers manipulating them were unaccustomed to their labors. A steady flow of conversation and cheap, school-boy banter passed between the desks.

chines Nos. 10 and 14 are models—dummies. Your other observations also seem to show haste. However, you are the best judge of that, but I think you might as well file your report without further consultation with me. Good-by, sir."

Outside, the sunlight was glorious, the air clear and bracing. Kennard took a deep breath of it, but the atmosphere of room 940 still clung to him as he traveled toward the factory—clung to and enveloped him, so that everything seemed to loom through its murky haze. The taint of a politician was in his nostrils—that peculiar taint which disgusts the palate of the sensitive and makes the mouths of the gross water with delight—the pungent taint which lures the eagles of ambition and the doves of civic virtue no less than all the carrion-feeding flocks which circle in its breath—the taint that deadens honor, before destroying it, that poisons high purpose and brings the brain till in a wondrous maze wrong seems right, though a whole world shake its head.

If his day had begun with more listlessness than he had ever known before, it was to finish with a burst of resistless energy. Discouraging reports met him at the station without disturbing him. A serious breakdown had occurred in the machinery? It must be repaired. Proper facilities were lacking? They must be created. A coal-barge had broken from its moorings and drifted ashore? It must be warped off and secured again. With no sign of hurry but with indomitable purpose he stood over gang after gang, directing their labors, deaf to objections, insistent, persistent, the embodiment of activity and personal effort. Now he was in the shops disposing the means at hand for the needs of the moment, inventing resources and devising expedients. Now he was on the docks superintending, encouraging, heeding of difficulties except when surrounding them. There was life and vigor in his every action, irresistible impulse in his every action, and his power of personal examination at last carried the day. From the superintendent to the office boy, the little army of John Kennard's Sons responded with enthusiasm, and the buildings fairly hummed with restless energy. Objections melted away, tangled unravelled, breaks pieced together, the impossible became practical, and the wheels were once more turning. Every man in the place felt the touch of a strong, guiding hand, relied on it, and, from very confidence, accomplished what was aimed at.

"The boss is in fine form," was the only comment in the workshops, but it permeated an unconscious ring of pride in the man who did things and knew what he did them for.

John Kennard was in good form. Never had he been more sure of himself. The consciousness of his power was strong within him, as it must be in every commanding force, and when you're caught, you make a big mistake.

Kennard's face flushed with anger, but he gazed contemptuously at the speaker and answered quietly:

"I am well aware of the law, inspector, and have no intention to evade it. If the boys are under age, I assume all responsibility and they will be laid off at once."

"Don't fret yourself, I laid 'em off all right."

"You?"

"Yes, me. See here, Kennard, don't put on any frills with me. You'll find it won't pay."

"Have you any further complaints?"

"Yes, I have; but if you don't change your tune, I'll send in my report as it is. I don't have to give you no notice."

Kennard glanced at the surly, cunning face of the man, and suppressed an inclination to defy him. He had power to cause infinite trouble and loss, and up to a certain point it was better to humor him.

"If you had not been appointed so recently, Mr. Campbell," he began, "you would know I have no desire to evade the law or insult officials. I always managed to get along pleasantly with Inspector Pollard."

"Yes, I bet you did. But he ain't inspector any more now, and I am."

"I see. And you find matters want changing at the factory. Let me hear what they are."

The man fussed over his papers for a few minutes, and spoke into them rather than at Kennard as he answered:

"I don't want nothin' except what's our right. But I wouldn't like any dude-talk. Pollard's gone, don't you get that? Pollard is mine. I'm the man now. Understand?"

Kennard nodded as his questioner glanced up.

"Well, I inspected your joint last week. You didn't know it? That's the way I do my work. Old man Pollard used to blow a horn and ring a bell for a week ahead so's you could get ready for him. I s'pose, I don't do that kind of thing."

Kennard gazed steadily at the official, and as he listened his face became perfectly calm and a cold gray light appeared in his eyes.

"Such as?"

"The question was interesting and encouraging."

"Well," Campbell thumbed his papers, and at length drew out a memorandum, "first place, there's shop 8. There's no sanitary arrangements and they'll have to be put in at once."

"Yes?"

The note of interrogation in the answer was so slight, it passed unnoticed.

"And quick, too."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, lots. You'll put guards about machines Nos. 10 and 14, have another fire-escape run up on the boiler building, and quit employin' minors. That'll do for now."

"And I am to commence with the sanitary arrangements for shop No. 8?"

"Yes; but—well, I don't care if you'd rather do the other things first. Maybe I'll give an extension on that."

"Don't you think it might be omitted altogether, inspector?"

The man gazed at Kennard between half-closed eyes for a moment.

"I guess you know how to do business, Kennard," he insinuated.

"I think I do," rejoined Kennard in a new tone of voice, and he spoke in a low, steady, and heavy, as though the fingers manipulating them were unaccustomed to their labors. A steady flow of conversation and cheap, school-boy banter passed between the desks.

CHAPTER XIV.

A cardboard clock with movable hands nailed to the door of room 8 indicated to all comers that Mr. Peter McMann's would return to No. 214 Water street at a certain hour. The truth of this legend was, however, always open to doubt, with mischievous boys who turned the hands every time they passed the door, and the irregularity of his return, since it happened to testify truly, McMann could, by turning the key in the door, invariably did. Its functions were therefore largely ornamental, although the penciled inscriptions scribbled across its patient face of which "you're the mildest—might be said to rot it out of even that name."

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John Kennard actually planning to sell out? What if a combination was forming? Something was afoot, and money might be made by working it properly. If he could get on the track of the facts, the opportunity of a lifetime lay before him. How could he learn what was going on? He must not guess, he must not prophesy prematurely or raise any false alarm. He must know what he was talking about when the time came to talk, and until then, what not to speak of.

There was nothing more to be learned from the newspaper. He knew the paragraph by heart. If Kennard was about to sell out, who would be in the secret? His confidential clerks, an outsider in a place like Kennard's Sons. If consolidation was the purpose of this incorporation, who would know of it? John Harlan, of course. McMann closed and locked his door, turned the clock-face to the oak, and hurrying to the nearest telephone pay-station, called up the office of the Milling Companies, where Mr. Harlan reigned as vice president. Central was somewhat tardy in making the necessary connection, and McMann grew impatient as he sat sweating in the sticky little cabinet. Two or three times he put the receiver to his ear, and hearing nothing but the faint humming of the wires, swore into the tube for the benefit of the operator. Eliciting no reply, he rang the bell long and angrily, until at last he was rewarded by hearing Mr. Harlan's voice. As he had merely called up the Milling Companies and had not yet asked specifically for any one, McMann was somewhat surprised to find his friend and patron already at the phone.

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"Pretty good."

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The speaker hesitated.

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"Nonsense, Ben. You've worked here long enough to know that Bennett was in these shops for ten years before I set him up in business for a good fellow. He's your neighbor and a good worker. I see no reason for changing."

"Then I'd like to leave."

Kennard stared at the speaker in astonishment.

"What you want to throw up your job simply because you can't have your own way? That's foolish. Go home, and think it over, Ben."

"I don't want to think it over. Mr. Kennard, I want to go now. Can I have my money to-night?"

The man's manner was unmistakable, and his employer simply nodded.

"Yes," he answered coldly. "Do remember this, Homans, I won't take your back."

"That's all right. I can get another job, I guess."

"Perhaps. But after some years in this place, Ben—and you know whether it's a good place or not—that's scarcely the way to speak to me. You owe it to yourself, if you don't owe it to me."

"I guess I don't owe you anything. I've earned all I got, ain't I?"

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"Mr. Barton," he said, as the super-



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private secretary, he was in no very affable mood, and the atmosphere of the sanctum sanctorum itself, when he did reach it, was not calculated to restore his geniality.

Mr. Harlan's reception of his visitor was frigidly polite, but entirely free from cordiality. Neither was his fund of information excessive. Had he heard any talk of a combination involving John Kennard's Sons? Mr. Harlan considered if his visitor had, and answered evasively. Why did McMann ask? Because he was interested in protecting the workmen there. Mr. Harlan smiled the quiet, irritating smile of which he was master, and gave other evidences of being frankly amused. It was easy to see Peter was new at his business, he observed, since his proposed waiting, and he was trying to work against John Kennard, whom everybody knew gave his workmen all they wished and would give any agitator more than he wanted. It was somewhat comic, Mr. Harlan commented, to think of Peter McMann posing as a champion of downtrodden labor, and his selection of Kennard's men as his victims completed the comedy.

The expression of McMann's face, as his patron joked and ridiculed him, was sinister in the extreme. Almost invariably did, his functions were therefore largely ornamental, although the penciled inscriptions scribbled across its patient face of which "you're the mildest—might be said to rot it out of even that name."

The delegate-at-large had not forgotten his maiden effort with John Kennard's Sons. He had promised himself the firm should receive close attention, and McMann never broke a promise made to himself. One of his earliest activities had therefore been in the factory on a wide field, but of little promise. The union labor was practically unorganized, and although many of the workers were union men, many were not. Indeed there was a regrettable apathy among the members about seeking recruits for their ranks, and a general disinterest in the cause. To remedy this McMann's object, and although he found several personalities which promised well for future leadership, most of the material was poor, and such response as he did receive was unenthusiastic. There was nothing in the factory itself upon which he could at present build. The wages were union scale or better; the work steady, and if the profits were large the employees seemed to think they received a fair share. Had it not been that every man in the union was grist to his mill, the new delegate would have postponed payment of his personal grudge, and turned his attention to more impressive matters.

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"I guess I don't owe you anything. I've earned all I got, ain't I?"

Kennard pushed his bell.

"Mr. Barton," he said, as the super-

intendent answered the summons, "Ben Homans has thrown up his job. Promote Dorson to his place and take the man to the top."

He tore a leaf from his note-book as he spoke, and handed the superintendent the name of Miss Harlan's protégé.

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CHAPTER XVII.

A cardboard clock with movable hands nailed to the door of room 8 indicated to all comers that Mr. Peter McMann's would return to No. 214 Water street at a certain hour. The truth of this legend was, however, always open to doubt, with mischievous boys who turned the hands every time they passed the door, and the irregularity of his return, since it happened to testify truly, McMann could, by turning the key in the door, invariably did. Its functions were therefore largely ornamental, although the penciled inscriptions scribbled across its patient face of which "you're the mildest—might be said to rot it out of even that name."

The delegate-at-large had not forgotten his maiden effort with John Kennard's Sons. He had promised himself the firm should receive close attention, and McMann never broke a promise made to himself. One of his earliest activities had therefore been in the factory on a wide field, but of little promise. The union labor was practically unorganized, and although many of the workers were union men, many were not. Indeed there was a regrettable apathy among the members about seeking recruits for their ranks, and a general disinterest in the cause. To remedy this McMann's object, and although he found several personalities which promised well for future leadership, most of the material was poor, and such response as he did receive was unenthusiastic. There was nothing in the factory itself upon which he could at present build. The wages were union scale or better; the work steady, and if the profits were large the employees seemed to think they received a fair share. Had it not been that every man in the union was grist to his mill, the new delegate would have postponed payment of his personal grudge, and turned his attention to more impressive matters.

Obstructions closed and locked his McMann's arrival at his office, but he had brought his newspaper, and sitting down at the small desk, he spread it out and began reading it leisurely. Under the heading, "Incorporations at Albany Yesterday," he noted a list of names in fine print. He started to read them and suddenly stopped with an exclamation of surprise. To read "The Confederated Machine Companies" authorized capital \$20,000,000.

"Machine companies? That was in Kennard's line. What did it mean?"

John Kennard actually planning to sell out? What if a combination was forming? Something was afoot, and money might be made by working it properly. If he could get on the track of the facts, the opportunity of a lifetime lay before him. How could he learn what was going on? He must not guess, he must not prophesy prematurely or raise any false alarm. He must know what he was talking about when the time came to talk, and until then, what not to speak of.

There was nothing more to be learned from the newspaper. He knew the paragraph by heart. If Kennard was about to sell out, who would be in the secret? His confidential clerks, an outsider in a place like Kennard's Sons. If consolidation was the purpose of this incorporation, who would know of it? John Harlan, of course. McMann closed and locked his door, turned the clock-face to the oak, and hurrying to the nearest telephone pay-station, called up the office of the Milling Companies, where Mr. Harlan reigned as vice president. Central was somewhat tardy in making the necessary connection, and McMann grew impatient as he sat sweating in the sticky little cabinet. Two or three times he put the receiver to his ear, and hearing nothing but the faint humming of the wires, swore into the tube for the benefit of the operator. Eliciting no reply, he rang the bell long and angrily, until at last he was rewarded by hearing Mr. Harlan's voice. As he had merely called up the Milling Companies and had not yet asked specifically for any one, McMann was somewhat surprised to find his friend and patron already at the phone.

"Hello?" sang Mr. Harlan's voice, inquiringly.

McMann opened his mouth to answer, but it remained open in astonishment as another voice answered—"Is that you, Harlan? This is Trundle."

"Why? Doesn't Bennett do good work?"

"Pretty good."

"Then why change?"

"Well, you see he's not—"

The speaker hesitated.

"He's not what?"

"Not union."

"What of it? I don't care."

"No, Mr. Kennard, but the men do."

"What men?"

"The hands—all of 'em."

"Nonsense, Ben. You've worked here long enough to know that Bennett was in these shops for ten years before I set him up in business for a good fellow. He's your neighbor and a good worker. I see no reason for changing."

"Then I'd like to leave."

Kennard stared at the speaker in astonishment.

"What you want to throw up your job simply because you can't have your own way? That's foolish. Go home, and think it over, Ben."

"I don't want to think it over. Mr. Kennard, I want to go now. Can I have my money to-night?"

The man's manner was unmistakable, and his employer simply nodded.

"Yes," he answered coldly. "Do remember this, Homans, I won't take your back."

"That's all right. I can get another job, I guess."

"Perhaps. But after some years in this place, Ben—and you know whether it's a good place or not—that's scarcely the way to speak to me. You owe it to yourself, if you don't owe it to me."

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