

Strife  
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Summary

The strike at the Trenartha Tin Plate Works had lasted so long without any sign of a settlement that the directors had begun to fear for their dividends. They had all gathered at the Underwood home at the request of the workers, and at first there was some talk of compromise. Facing them, however, was the stern figure of the chairman of the board, seventy-five-year-old John Anthony, who refused to consider any plan for compromise.

Anthony belonged to the old school of businessmen who refused to move with the times. For him there could be only one master at the plant, and that was John Anthony himself. He had defeated four strikes in his thirty-two years as chairman of the board, and he was certain that a little more perseverance would defeat the strikers once more.

The other directors were a little uneasy under his stern refusal. In his report Underwood, the plant manager, had made no attempt to disguise the terrible suffering of the striking workers and their families. The directors were also aware that if the strike lasted much longer their stockholders would begin to protest strongly.

Although the union had withdrawn support from the strikers because two of their conditions exceeded the prevailing standards, Simon Harness, a Trades Union official, had been sent to attempt mediation between the board and the workers. His interview with the directors accomplished nothing because of Anthony's obstinacy. The meeting between the representatives of the workers and the directors was equally unhappy. Roberts, the leader of the striking workmen, was just as unyielding on his side as Anthony was on his. Both sides faced a deadlock.

Conditions among the workers were so terrible that many of them were ready to give in, but Roberts remained adamant. Mrs. Roberts was dying; her weak heart could not stand the cold and hunger which the strike imposed upon them all. At one time she had been the maid in Underwood's home, and one afternoon Enid Underwood went to visit her. Mrs. Underwood had tried to send food to Mrs. Roberts, but the strike leader was too proud and too stubborn to accept help from the daughter of John Anthony. Mrs. Underwood tried to plead with Roberts, asking him, for his wife's sake, to give in and end the strike. But he was fanatic in his certainty that in the end the workmen could bring their employers to terms.

At a meeting of the men and Harness, the Trades Union official, it became evident that most of the strikers were willing to compromise, to accept the union suggestions. A few were willing to give in completely. When Roberts appeared at the meeting, the men did not wish to hear him speak. But Roberts was a powerful orator, and as he talked to them again about the eventual

victory which they could win if they refused to give in now, they were once more moved and convinced by his oratory. As he was speaking, a young woman approached the platform and told him that his wife had died. With this tragedy as an example of what they must expect if they continued to resist, the men decided to accept the terms of the union compromise.

The news of Mrs. Roberts' death was a blow to the directors. Edgar Anthony, in spite of the respect which he had for his father, now faced his colleagues and accused them of responsibility for the woman's condition and death. They felt uncomfortably that what he said was very close to the truth. Old Anthony, weak and unwell as he was, still insisted that the company should not yield. But the directors had decided to act in spite of him, although they knew that should they decide to accept the union terms, Anthony would resign.

That evening the meeting between the workers, Harness, and the directors was painful in the extreme. Anthony found himself outvoted by his colleagues. Wearily, with an acknowledgement of his defeat, he resigned. Roberts, who knew nothing of the action which his men had decided to take after he had left the meeting, arrived at the Underwood home in time to watch Harness complete the settlement. The terms agreed upon were those which the union had suggested to both sides before the strike began, but it had needed months of suffering to bring agreement in the dispute. The two leaders stared at each other, both deserted by their supporters, both defeated by the compromise. As they recognized the courageous battle which each had put up, their expression of hate turned to one of grudging admiration and mutual respect.