

THE TRACY RIOT.

Which Was no Riot at All, but Merely a Strike for Higher Wages.

The Governor's Guards of this City Ordered to the Disturbed District, to which they Quickly Respond.

Our city was thrown into considerable excitement about ten o'clock last Wednesday morning by the announcement that a riot was in progress at Tracy, Lyon county, and that the sheriff had telegraphed Gov. Pillsbury for military assistance. At 11 o'clock the following telegram was handed to ye editor, who also is commander of the military forces of New Ulm.

St. Paul, Minn., June 18, 1879.
 Jos. BOBLETKA, Capt. Governor's Guard.
 How soon can you have your company ready to go to Tracy? There is a riot there. Do trains run so as to accommodate or would you have to have a special? Answer at once.
 J. S. PILLSBURY, Governor.

Runners were at once sent in every direction to notify the members of the company and in twenty minutes after the telegram was handed to us every member of the company in the city at the time had appeared at the armory in uniform, and we informed the Governor that we were all ready and that the railroad company had ordered a special train down from Sleepy Eye to take us to the scene of the disturbance as soon as we should receive orders to go. When it became known that the Governor's Guards had been ordered out the excitement became intense, and a very large number of our citizens assembled at the depot to see the company off. At 11:31 the Governor telegraphed:

St. Paul, Minn., June 18, 1879.
 Jos. BOBLETKA, Capt. Governor's Guard.
 Proceed at once to Tracy with your company and give all necessary assistance to sheriff Hunter to quell riot.
 J. S. PILLSBURY, Governor.

In ten minutes after this telegram was handed to us the company was speeding towards Tracy at the rate of forty miles an hour. A short halt was made at Sleepy Eye. Here all kinds of rumors were rife but no one seemed to know the true state of affairs. After the conductor had ascertained that the track was clear to Burns Station, we again rattled off at lightning speed. At Burns we made a switch for a freight train. From Burns we made a run to Walnut Station without a stop, except for water at the Cottonwood. At Walnut Station we met the east bound express train which had been run through Tracy at full speed without stopping. Supt. Sanborn, who had come east on the express, here took our train and returned to Tracy, and from him we first learned the true state of affairs at least so far as regarded who the disturbers of the peace were. When our train came in sight the strikers all rushed to the depot expecting it to be the pay car, and when the train hauled up, and the company commenced to file out they were somewhat surprised, as they had been ignorant of our coming. We at once put ourself in communication with sheriff Hunter whom we found, with his posse, in the freight house of the depot, and from him, T. J. Nichol, engineer in charge, and others we learned the following facts: The strikers had been at work on the Chicago & Dakota railroad now being constructed from Tracy west through Lyon and Lincoln counties to the State line, and had been receiving \$1.25 per day for shovelers and \$3.00 per day for teams. Everything went as merrily as a marriage bell until Sunday, June 15th, when the strike first began to take shape and an agreement was signed in nearly all the camps to strike for \$1.50 and \$3.50 per day, and hold out until the contractors came to their terms. During Sunday night, however, very many of those that had signed the agreement relented their action and on Monday morning were quite willing and ready to go to work at the old wages; but in this they were prevented by all manner of threats made by the leaders of the strike. When the men refused to go to work Monday morning the contractors first became aware of the trouble. Monday was spent in camps, parleying. On Tuesday threats began to be made against the contractors' and railroad property and sheriff Hunter was informed of the situation and asked for protection. The sheriff at once summoned a posse of 17 men and repaired to Tracy on the first train. He warned the strikers not to molest any property and assured all those who were willing to work that they would be protected should they desire to do so. The strikers however paid but little attention to him and sneered at the protection he might offer to those willing to work. Sheriff Hunter then telegraphed Governor Pillsbury that there was a riot in progress which he was unable to quell, and asked for assistance. Towards night the strikers dispersed and went back to their camps. On Wednesday morning the strikers gathered along the line from points as far west as Lake Benton and made everybody join them. Farmers' teams were pressed to haul them to Tracy, and if anyone was met going out with a load they dumped it right onto the prairie, jumped into the wagon and made him turn back. When sheriff Hunter heard of their onward march, coupled with rumors of outbreak and violence, he again telegraphed the Governor and urgently asked for troops to assist him to keep the peace. The strikers, to the number of two hundred and fifty, appeared on a slight elevation of ground, two miles from town, about 11 o'clock. Here they encountered the track layers who were working for the company and perfectly satisfied with the wages they were receiving, but they too had to quit work and accompany the strikers to Tracy. They then ad-

vanced, fifty on horseback and the remainder in wagons, within twenty rods of the depot, where the sheriff had his men drawn up, bearing flags inscribed "Railroad Strikers, \$1.50 and \$3.50 per day," meaning an increase of wages for men and teams to the figures named. The sheriff called a halt, threatening to shoot if they advanced any farther. At the second command "halt" they stopped, and after a little delay a parley ensued. The strikers demanded either one of two things. "The money right there and then for work already performed, or else an increase in their wages as above stated;" but as the contractors could not just then comply with the first demand, and would not with the second, matters began to assume a serious aspect; the parley was broken off and the strikers gathered in groups in various parts of the town to discuss the situation.

Thus matters stood when we arrived. No depredations had been committed except along the line of the road, where some of the camps had been plundered, one or two farmers' cows killed and a boarding house keeper, named Smith, at Redwood river, was pretty roughly handled by the strikers on account of the unpopularity of his grub. Threats were made to raid the contractor's store and the only grog shop in town, but we kindly but firmly informed them that such work could not be tolerated and would be prevented at all hazards. We also informed them that they had a perfect right to demand higher wages if they thought they were entitled to it, and that they would not be molested, but they should and must allow those to work that were willing and satisfied with the wages they were receiving. After a short delay Supt. Sanborn and Mr. Perrine, the paymaster for the contractors, proceeded on the special train to Marshall where they borrowed a large sum of money to pay the strikers off. Soon after our arrival sheriff Hunter expressed his desire to arrest the ringleaders, but they had disappeared and no traces of them could be found. Being assured of protection the track layers again went out on the line and worked the balance of the afternoon without molestation. Although the strikers knew that Supt. Sanborn and Mr. Perrine had gone to Marshall for money and that they would be paid off upon their return, nearly all slowly disappeared and quietly left town before the train returned. Upon the return of Supt. Sanborn and Mr. Perrine the strikers yet remaining in town were informed that the regular pay day for work performed in the month of June would be between the 15th and 20th of July, that the contractors could not and would not pay any more than \$1.25 per day men and \$3.00 for teams, and that all those who did not care to work for those wages any longer could receive their money. He also said that work all along the line would be resumed in the morning, (Thursday) and that all who were willing and ready to work would be protected. Only about fifty of the strikers held out and the whole payment amounted to less than \$150, which shows they were not alarmed on the score of not receiving their pay. This ended matters for the day, and the strike was virtually at an end. Trouble now was only to be feared from those that had received their pay, but as they were so few in number nothing serious was apprehended and Supt. Sanborn returned to Sleepy Eye. As our public schools had been dismissed to allow two of the teachers, Sergt. Eckstein and Corpl. Oleson, to accompany the company, we ordered these two men to return on Supt. Sanborn's train, which they did. The company took up quarters in the waiting room of the depot for the night and once every hour a patrol was sent through town.

At 1 a. m. a special train arrived bearing Gov. Pillsbury, Supt. Sanborn, Capt. Macy, representatives of the St. Paul Pioneer Press and Globe and one solitary recruit, who had joined the Governor's party at New Ulm and was assigned the important duty of watching the box containing the 1,000 rounds of ammunition asked for by us and brought up by the Governor. Immediately after his arrival, Gov. Pillsbury engaged in consultation with different citizens, sheriff Hunter and ye humble commander of the military forces, and the late troubles and the situation were generally, and quietly discussed. The Governor expressed his unalterable determination to protect the humblest citizen in his honest efforts to secure daily bread without molestation from any source or cause whatever, and plainly indicated his intent to protect every citizen, fearlessly and impartially, from unlawful assaults or interference. He instructed us to move cautiously but firmly, provided more trouble occurred, and advised us to act with the utmost discretion, but in case of violence, to act promptly and place disturbers of the peace under arrest at any cost. The Governor being satisfied that the trouble was about all over, started from Tracy upon his return trip shortly after 2 o'clock.

On Thursday morning sheriff Hunter with a posse of 16 men and ye military commander with 3 men went along the line to see how things were going. As far as fifteen miles out only one camp was idle. This was on the north fork of the Des Moines river, where the employes were Scandinavians. These had heard rumors about the rioters returning, and were frightened, but were willing to work if protected. At all other points to Lake Benton, forty miles, all the contractors were at work, in cases with slightly reduced forces, presenting a scene vividly in contrast with the dullness of the three previous days. Sheriff Hunter concluded to go through to Lake Benton and we returned to Tracy and reported the state of affairs to the Governor. As some fifty of the discharged men had determined to go east on the freight Thursday

without paying their way and as Supt. Sanborn had given orders not to take them, trouble was apprehended, and when the train drew up to the platform several entered the caboose, but when we politely informed them of the instructions the conductor had received, they all got right up and went out without saying a word. Their quick compliance with our request, however, was no doubt due to the soldierly looking reinforcements which had just arrived from New Ulm. The complaint of some of the discharged men was that they had been promised by the contractors' agent in Chicago \$1.50 per day, and board for \$3.00 per week and a return pass to Chicago; while they had received only \$1.25 per day and were compelled to pay \$4.00 for board. If such promises was made to these men the railroad company could have done no less than taken them out of the country free. Several men afterwards bought tickets, and as all trouble seemed to be ended we returned with the company, and the patriotic recruits, on the afternoon train, arriving at New Ulm at 4.12 p. m.

This affair, although fortunately concluded without need for the actual employment of an armed force to restore order, has sufficed to show the almost helpless condition in which the State of Minnesota would be placed in case the ordinary execution of its laws was resisted by a few hundred desperate men. In all this great State, containing nearly a million of inhabitants—bordering upon a foreign country, having within it but without its rule ten thousand Indians, overrun every summer by tramping vagabonds and frequently gathering at different points large bodies of dissatisfied laborers upon public works—there is but one other organized militia company in the State and both together could not have turned out last Wednesday over sixty trained men. The State is shamefully weak in this respect—not because there is any lack of either loyalty, courage or martial spirit among its citizens, but because a mistaken theory of economy, with erroneous ideas regarding the duty of the State government and reckless confidence in the stability of peaceful condition, has influenced every Legislature which has at all considered the matter of providing a military establishment. We have on several occasions endeavored to secure favorable legislation for the organization and maintenance of a small militia force, but in every instance we have failed. We have kept up a militia company at an individual expense for seven years and have never received a cent from the State; yet every member of the company when called on by the Governor promptly responded. There are any number of patriotic young men willing to join the militia forces. All that is lacking is that the State shall assume its proper share of the cost and make a wise provision for the organization and training.