



*Adjutant-General Sherman M. Bell.*

## THE MILITARY DICTATOR OF COLORADO

By William MacLeod Raine

Special Correspondent of LESLIE'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

IF one were to harrow the country with a fine-tooth comb he would find no man more fitted for the hero of a soldier-of-fortune novel than Sherman Bell, sometime trooper in Roosevelt's Rough Riders, now adjutant-general of the State of Colorado. Nor would the author remain long in doubt about the title of his novel. He would naturally call it "The Dictator." Because Governor Peabody's hammer is vain, fearless, obstinate, theatrical, and an untrammelled leader of men by grace of natural fitness, Mr. Richard Harding Davis should put him into immediate requisition.

The outcropping stratum of General Bell's mental make-up which first catches the observer's attention is his cocksureness. He never showed doubt in his gusty lifetime. That quick, lop-sided brain of his sums up the matter, largely regardless of the evidence, and comes to an immediate decision. He is one of the most unfettered of men. It is a safe guess that deep down in his heart he does not care one jackstraw for abstract law. He decides what course is best to follow and the legality of it does not trouble him at all.

A case in point occurred during the

recent stormy times of the Telluride and Cripple Creek strikes. President Moyer, of the Western Federation of Miners, had been arrested on the rather flimsy excuse of having desecrated the American flag. The real reason for his detention was the fact that his speeches and his presence were believed to have an inflammatory effect on the heated strikers. The courts ordered the release of Moyer, but though it fairly rained writs of *habeas corpus*, General Bell shed them as a duck does water. The Supreme Court of the State demanded that his prisoner be produced at Denver. The adjutant-general complied with the mandate of the court, but he announced his intentions to anybody that cared to know: if the Supreme Court sustained him, well and good; if not—he regretted to say that he would then probably be in contempt of court. Mr. Moyer was being held as a military necessity, and he proposed to continue holding him so long as that necessity existed.

Sherman Bell is a frank egotist. In his talk the first personal pronoun singular flashes frequent as the telegraph poles on a railway journey. The gentle art of conversation is unknown to him, but he is a first rate monologist. Not in the least open-minded, his opinion is unchangeable as the laws of the Medes. Furthermore, he does not value criticism in the least. The journalist may say what he likes of him without at all disturbing his poise. He reads the reporter's screed and meets him next day with the same cold, level glance that is as far from hostility as it is from friendliness. The way to his heart or his hatred is neither through flattery nor abuse.

Sherman Bell has not an ounce of tact or conciliation in his long, lithe body. Recently three prominent local politicians of the Republican party called on General Bell to remonstrate with him about the course he was pursuing in deporting the miners whose records were not savory.

"It will hurt the party," explained one of them.

"To H—l with the party. I'm not breaking up this lawlessness in the interests of any party."

"But—"

Sherman Bell walked to the door and flung it open. "I'll not discuss this matter on the basis of what will serve the interests of the Republican party. You

have got to take broader ground before I'll talk with you about it, gentlemen."

Outside of the commander of the regiment, the two most picturesque figures among the Rough Riders were Bucky O'Neill and Sherman Bell. The two men were not alike, save in one respect that they were both devoid of fear. Captain O'Neill, standing carelessly on the trenches two minutes before his death and laughing at the futility of the Mauser bullets as they spattered about him, made no more dramatic figure than Trooper Bell staggering blindly with his hampering wound through the sweltering sunbeat in complete defiance of the orders of both officers and doctors. Those big, brown eyes of his had been blazing all morning with the joy of coming combat. Not one man in that army of invasion had been more alertly eager than Sherman Bell. In lending a hand to help forward a mule train that had stuck in the mud an old wound broke open. He quietly fainted by the wayside and his comrades were forced to go on without him. Hours after night had fallen Trooper Bell staggered into camp and sank to the ground. He had dragged himself, foot by foot, through the fierce heat to the front where his company was camped.

It was decided to send him back to the States. The ambulance came for him and he was not to be found. The indomitable fellow had crawled into the tropical jungle and hidden himself. He pleaded so hard to be allowed to stay that they gave him his way. He would not be sent home, but he must remain in the rear and nurse his wound.

"It doesn't matter. He'll die anyway," they said.

Nevertheless on that fateful morning when San Juan Hill was taken there was Trooper Bell in his place very much alive, pale as a sheet, but gay and debonair as a schoolboy on a holiday. Colonel Roosevelt ran across him just before they went up the hill, while the regiment was waiting in a storm of screaming shells and zipping bullets.

"What are you doing here?" he wanted to know brusquely.

Trooper Bell saluted. "Oh, I just came along to see what was doing, colonel," he said apologetically.

"Why don't you stay in the rear where you are ordered?"

"I got so lonesome, colonel."

Next time Colonel Roosevelt caught sight of Trooper Bell he was trying to establish a Cuban record for the half mile run up hill. Possibly this is why the colonel refers to him fondly as "the gamest man of a game regiment."

His reckless irresponsibility is a continual thorn in the side of his superiors. When Mr. Roosevelt stumped Colorado in the last national campaign Sherman Bell enrolled himself promptly as his bodyguard. A crowd of these same Western Federation miners mobbed him at Victor. They followed him to his special train, flinging stones at the party. Bell, on the rear platform, faced the drunken mob. The end of the car was fast being dented with stones and bricks.

"I'm going to kill somebody soon," Bell announced in that low, gentle voice of his.

Mr. Roosevelt came out from the car and Sherman Bell pushed him back into shelter.

"As your superior officer, Lieutenant Bell, I order you inside," commanded Mr. Roosevelt sharply.

The young Rough Rider saluted promptly and retired, but he organized at once a protective guard of those inside the train. His instructions were to shoot if any of the mob threw stones or struck at them with clubs. It was suggested by somebody present that it would produce a bad effect on the campaign if blood were shed.

"I'm not running the campaign. I'm maintaining order just now in Victor," retorted Bell curtly.

That answer explains General Bell's attitude toward the striking miners. There is no doubt that the Western Federation is a lawless aggregation with an appalling record of crime stretching from Cœur d'Alene days to the present time. That fact wiped out all their legal rights, according to the simple primordial view of Sherman Bell. There is, besides, this of the soldier about him, that a cause immediately becomes right when it becomes his. Then, too, the dictator in him leaps to life.

I have it on his own authority that not long ago, as he was leaving the train at Telluride, he saw a strike leader glowering at him from across the street. The

man had been given to the making of threats in regard to Bell. The General stepped swiftly across and touched him on the shoulder.

"What are you thinking about, my man?"

The man looked at him in amazement. "Why—nothing, General."

"That's right, don't think. It's much safer not to," and the adjutant-general turned on his heel.

Bell is rather tall, very straight, slender, and lithe as a tiger. Strength is chisled all over the sardonic face, from the resolute jaw to the inflexible eyes.

His vanity does not extend to personal adornment. He was wearing on that occasion an old battered campaign hat, a black shirt, and a rag of a tie. But his nondescript get up could not make him look otherwise than distinguished. He is hedged about by a personal dignity quite unusual. This, I take it, is due to the fact that he is entirely devoid of humor and the sense of the ridiculous. He does not know that his excessive dignity makes him laughable. His idea of a joke is like a child's, and consists of the discomfiture of his opponent. I have never seen him smile except when he was telling how he had hammered the Western Federation.

General Bell has to an unusual degree the capacity for practical organization. When he took charge of the State militia less than two years ago there were about three hundred and fifty men ready for service. All were poorly armed with antiquated rifles and many of them were not uniformed. Within six months he had increased the working force of the National Guard to two thousand nine hundred members. It was no longer an organized mob, but an efficient army, thoroughly equipped and splendidly disciplined. From the government he secured by his personal exertions three thousand uniforms and two thousand five hundred Krag-Jorgensen rifles, as well as a thousand Colt's army revolvers. But the greatest change was in the morale of the troops. The soldier spirit was somehow infused into them by their magnetic commander, for whatever else he may be, Sherman Bell is a magnificent type of the dashing soldier. He has lived for over a year in danger of the rifles and the bombs of a dozen lawless

murderers who hunger for his death. But he carries himself as serenely poised as if he were the most popular man in the State.

To me General Bell has been most kind and courteous. He is one of the few men

of whom one can tell the simple truth as one sees it, with the certainty that its object will not be affronted. I have paid him the high compliment of speaking frankly of his weaknesses, as I see them, no less than of his strength.

*General Bell's military policy has subjected him to such widespread criticism that LESLIE'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE has endeavored to give its readers an absolutely impartial picture of the man himself. Mr. Raine has been at pains to carry out this editorial idea.—*  
THE EDITORS.