

IV

Relating how Two Stars in their Courses fought for Mr. Queed; and how he accepted Remunerative Employment under Colonel Cowles, the Military Political Economist.

THE stars in their courses fought for Mr. Queed in those days. Somebody had to fight for him, it seemed, since he was so little equipped to fight for himself, and the stars kindly undertook the assignment. Not merely had he attracted the militant services of the bright little celestial body whose earthly agent was Miss Charlotte Lee Weyland; but this little body chanced to be one of a system or galaxy, associated with and exercising a certain power, akin to gravitation, over that strong and steady planet known among men as Charles Gardiner West. And the very next day, the back of the morning's mail being broken, the little star used some of its power to draw the great planet to the telephone, while feeling, in a most unstellar way, that it was a decidedly cheeky thing to do. However, nothing could have exceeded the charming radiance of Planet West, and it was he himself who introduced the topic of Mr. Queed, by inquiring, in mundane language, whether or not he had been fired.

"No!" laughed the star. "Instead of firing him, I'm now bent on *hiring* him. Oh, you'd better not laugh! It's to you I want to hire him!"

But at that the shining Planet laughed the more.

"What have I done to be worthy of this distinction? Also, what can I do with him? To paraphrase his own inimitable remark about your dog, what is the object of a man like that? What is he for?"

Sharlee dilated on the renown of Mr. Queed as a writer upon abstruse themes. Mr. West was not merely agreeable;

he was interested. It seemed that at the very last meeting of the *Post* directors — to which body Mr. West had been elected at the stockholders' meeting last June — it had been decided that Colonel Cowles should have a little help in the editorial department. The work was growing; the Colonel was ageing. The point had been to find the help. Who knew but what this little highbrow was the very man they were looking for?

"I'll call on him — at your aunt's, shall I? — to-day if I can. Why, not a bit of it! The thanks are quite the other way. He may turn out another Charles A. Dana, cleverly disguised. When are you going to have another half-holiday up there?"

Sharlee left the telephone thinking that Mr. West was quite the nicest man she knew. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred, in his position, would have said, "Send him to see me." Mr. West had said, "I'll call on him at your aunt's," and had absolutely refused to pose as the gracious dispenser of patronage. However, a great many people shared Sharlee's opinion of Charles Gardiner West. One of them walked into his office at that very moment, also petitioning for something, and West received him with just that same unaffected pleasantness of manner which everybody found so agreeable. But this one's business, as it happened, completely knocked from Mr. West's head the matter of Mr. Queed. In fact, he never gave it another thought. The following night he went to New York with a little party of friends, chiefly on pleasure bent; and, having no particularly frugal mind, permitted himself a very happy day or so in the metropolis. Hence it happened that Sharlee, learning from her aunt that no *Post* directors had called forcing remunerative work on Mr. Queed, made it convenient, about five days after the telephone conversation, to meet Mr. West upon the street, quite by accident. Any girl can tell you how it is done.

"Oh, by the way," she said in the most casual way, "shall I send my little Doctor Queed to call upon you some day?"

West was agreeably contrite; abused himself for a shiftless

lackwit who was slated for an unwept grave; promised to call that very day; and, making a memorandum the instant he got back to the office, this time did not fail to keep his word.

Not that Mr. Queed had been inconvenienced by the little delay. The minute after his landlady's agent left him, he had become immersed in that great work of his, and there by day and night, he had remained. Having turned over to the agent the full responsibility for finding work for him, he no longer had to bother his head about it. The whole matter dropped gloriously from his mind; he read, wrote, and avoided practicing sociology with tremendous industry; and thus he might have gone on for no one knows how long had there not, at five o'clock on the fifth day, come a knock upon his door.

"Well?" he called, annoyed.

Emma came in with a card. The name, at which the young man barely glanced, conveyed nothing to him.

"Well? What does he want?"

Emma did not know.

"Oh!" said Mr. Queed, irritably—"tell him to come up, if he must."

The *Post* director came up — two flights; he knocked; was curtly bidden to enter; did so.

He stepped into one of the smallest rooms he had ever seen in his life; about nine by five-and-a-half, he thought. A tiny single bed ran along one side of it; jammed against the foot of the bed was a tiny table. A tiny chair stood at the table; behind the chair stood a tiny bureau; beside the bureau, the tiniest little iron wash-stand in the world. In the chair sat a man, not tiny, indeed, but certainly nobody's prize giant. He sat in a kind of whirling tempest of books and papers, and he rode absorbedly in the whirlwind and majestically directed the storm.

West was intensely interested. "Mr. Queed?" he asked, from just inside the door.

"Yes," said the other, not looking up. "What can I do for you?"

West burst out laughing; he could n't help it.

"Maybe you can do a great deal, Mr. Queed. On the other hand maybe I can do some little trifle for you. Which leg the boot is on nobody on earth can say at this juncture. I have ventured to call," said he, "as an ambassador from the morning *Post* of this city."

"The *Post*?"

The name instantly started Queed's memory to working; he recalled something about the *Post* — as yet, so it happened, only the copy of it he had read; and he turned and looked around with slow professorial amusement kindling in his eyes.

"Ah!" said he. "Possibly you are Colonel Cowles, the military political economist?"

West was more amused than ever. "No," said he, "on the contrary, West is the name, C. G. West — to correspond, you know, with the one on that card you have in your hand. I'll sit down here on the bed — shall I? — so that we can talk more comfortably. Sitting does help the flow of ideas so remarkably, don't you find? I am trespassing on your time," said he, "at the suggestion of — an acquaintance of yours, who has been telling me great things about your work."

Queed looked completely puzzled.

"The *Post*, Mr. Queed," went on West agreeably, "is always looking for men who can do exceptional work. Therefore, I have come to consider with you whether we might not make an arrangement to our mutual advantage."

At that the whole thing came back to the young man. He had agreed to take light remunerative work to pay his board, and now the day of reckoning was at hand. His heart grew heavy within him.

"Well," said he, exactly as he had said to the agent, "what have you to propose?"

"I thought of proposing, first, that you give me some idea of what you have done and can do on lines useful for a daily newspaper. How does that method of procedure strike you?"

Queed produced his celebrated envelope of clippings. Also he hunted up one or two stray cuttings which proved to be editorials he had written on assignment, for a New York newspaper. West ran through them with intelligent quickness.

"I say! These are rather fine, you know. This article on the income tax now — just right! — just the sort of thing!"

Queed sat with his hand clamped on his head, which was aching rather badly, as indeed it did about three fourths of the time.

"Oh, yes," he said wearily.

"I take off my hat to you!" added West presently. "You're rather out of my depth here, but at least I know enough political economy to know what is good."

He looked at Queed, smiling, very good-humored and gay, and Queed looked back at him, not very good-humored and anything but gay. Doubtless it would have surprised the young Doctor very much to know that West was feeling sorry for him just then, for at that moment he was feeling sorry for West.

"Now look here," said West.

He explained how the *Post* desired a man to write sleep-inducing fillers — "occasional articles of weight and authority" was the way he put it — and wanted to know if such an opening would interest Mr. Queed. Queed said he supposed so, provided the *Post* took little of his time and paid his board in return for it. West had no doubt that everything could be satisfactorily arranged.

"Colonel Cowles is the man who hires and fires," he explained. "Go to see him in a day or two, will you? Meantime, I'll tell him all about you."

Presently West smiled himself out, leaving Queed decidedly relieved at the brief reprieve. He had been harried by the fear that his visitor would insist on his stopping to produce an article or so while he waited. However, the time had come when the inevitable had to be faced. His golden pri-

vacy must be ravished for the grim god of bread and meat. The next afternoon he put on his hat with a bad grace, and went forth to seek Colonel Cowles, editor-in-chief of the leading paper in the State.

The morning *Post* was an old paper, which had been in the hands of a single family from A. D. 1846 till only the other day. It had been a power during the war, a favorite mouthpiece of President Davis. It had stood like a wall during the cruelties of Reconstruction; had fought the good fight for white man's rule; had crucified carpet-baggism and scalawaggery upon a cross of burning adjective. Later it had labored gallantly for Tilden; denounced Hayes as a robber; idolized Cleveland; preached free trade with pure passion; swallowed free silver; stood "regular," though not without grimaces, through Bryanism. The *Post* was, in short, a paper with an honorable history, and everybody felt a kind of affection for it. The plain fact remained, however, that within recent years a great many worthy persons had acquired the habit of reading the more hustling *State*.

The *Post*, not to put too fine a point upon it, had for a time run fast to seed. The third generation of its owners had lost their money, mostly in land speculations in the suburbs of New York City, and in the State of Oregon. You could have thrown a brick from their office windows and hit far better land speculations, but they had the common fault of believing that things far away from home are necessarily and always the best. The demand rose for bigger, fatter newspapers, with comic sections and plenty of purple ink, and the *Post's* owners found themselves unable to supply it. In fact they had to retort by mortgaging their property to the hilt and cutting expenses to rock-bottom. These were dark days for the *Post*. That it managed to survive them at all was due chiefly to the personality of Colonel Cowles, who, though doubtless laughable as a political economist, was yet considered to have his good points. But the Hercules-labor grew too

heavy even for him, and the paper was headed straight for the auctioneer's block when new interests suddenly stepped in and bought it. These interests, consisting largely of progressive men of the younger generation, thoroughly overhauled and reorganized the property, laid in the needed purple ink, and were now gradually driving the old paper back to the dividend-paying point again.

Colonel Cowles, whose services had, of course, been retained, was of the old school of journalism, editor and manager, too. Very little went into the *Post* that he had not personally viséd in the proof: forty galleys a night were child's play to him. Managing editor there was none but himself; the city editor was his mere office-boy and mouth-piece; even the august business manager, who mingled with great advertisers on equal terms, was known to take orders from him. In addition the Colonel wrote three columns of editorials every day. Of these editorials it is enough to say at this point that there were people who liked them.

Toward this dominant personality, the reluctant applicant for work now made his way. He cut an absent-minded figure upon the street, did Mr. Queed, but this time he made his crossings without mishap. Undisturbed by dogs, he landed at the *Post* building, and in time blundered into a room described as "Editorial" on the glass-door. A friendly young girl sitting there, pounding away on a typewriter, referred him to the next office, and the young man, opening the connecting door without knocking, passed inside.

A full-bodied, gray-headed, gray-mustached man sat in his shirt-sleeves behind a great table, writing with a very black pencil in a large sprawling hand. He glanced up as the door opened.

"Colonel Cowles?"

"I am the man, sir. How may I serve you?"

Queed laid on the table the card West had given him with a pencilled line of introduction.

"Oh — Mr. Queed! Certainly — certainly. Sit down,

sir. I have been expecting you. — Let me get those papers out of your way."

Colonel Cowles had a heavy jaw and rather too rubicund a complexion. He looked as if apoplexy would get him some day. However, his head was like a lion's of the tribe of Judah; his eye was kindly; his manner dignified, courteous, and charming. Queed had decided not to set the Colonel right in his views on taxation; it would mean only a useless discussion which would take time. To the older gentleman's polite inquiries relative to his impressions of the city and so forth, he for the same reason gave the briefest possible replies. But the Colonel, no apostle of the doctrine that time is far more than money, went off into a long monologue, kindly designed to give the young stranger some idea of his new surroundings and atmosphere.

" . . . Look out there, sir. It is like that all day long — a double stream of people always pouring by. I have looked out of these windows for twenty-five years, and it was very different in the old days. I remember when the cows used to come tinkling down around that corner at milking-time. A twelve-story office building will rise there before another year. We have here the finest city and the finest State in the Union. You come to them, sir, at a time of exceptional interest. We are changing fast, leaping forward very fast. I do not hold with those who take all change to be progress, but God grant that our feet are set in the right path. No section of the country is moving more rapidly, or, as I believe, with all our faults, to better ends than this. My own eyes have seen from these windows a broken town, stagnant in trade and population and rich only in memories, transform itself into the splendid thriving city you see before you. Our faces, too long turned backward, are set at last toward the future. From one end of the State to another the spirit of honorable progress is throbbing through our people. We have revolutionized and vastly improved our school system. We have wearied of mud-holes and are laying the foundations of a network of splendid roads. We

are doing wonders for the public health. Our farmers are learning to practice the new agriculture — with plenty of lime, sir, plenty of lime. They grasp the fact that corn at a hundred bushels to the acre is no dream, but the most vital of realities. Our young men who a generation ago left us for the irrigated lands of your Northwest, are at last understanding that the finest farmlands in the country are at their doors for half the price. With all these changes has come a growing independence in political thought. The old catchwords and bogies have lost their power. We no longer think that whatever wears the Democratic tag is necessarily right. We no longer measure every Republican by Henry G. Surface. We no longer . . .”

Queed, somewhat interested in spite of himself, and tolerably familiar with history, interrupted to ask who Henry G. Surface might be. The question brought the Colonel up with a jolt.

“Ah, well,” said he presently, with a wave of his hand, “you will hear that story soon enough.” He was silent a moment, and then added, sadly and somewhat sternly: “Young man, I have reserved one count in the total, the biggest and best, for the last. Keep your ear and eye open — and I mean the inner ear and eye as well as the outer — keep your mind open, above all keep your heart open, and it will be given you to understand that we have here the bravest, the sweetest, and the kindest people in the world. The Lord has been good to you to send you among them. This is the word of a man in the late evening of life to one in the hopeful morning. You will take it, I hope, without offense. Are you a Democrat, sir?”

“I am a political economist.”

The Colonel smiled. “Well said, sir. Science knows no party lines. Your chosen subject rises above the valley of partisanry where we old wheel-horses plod — stinging each other in the dust, as the poet finely says. Mr. West has told me of your laurels.”

He went on to outline the business side of what the *Post*

had to offer. Queed found himself invited to write a certain number of editorial articles, not to exceed six a week, under the Colonel's direction. He had his choice of working on space, at the rate of five dollars per column, payment dependent upon publication; or of drawing a fixed honorarium of ten dollars per week, whether called on for the stipulated six articles or for no articles at all. Queed decided to accept the fixed honorarium, hoping that there would be many weeks when he would be called on for no articles at all. A provisional arrangement to run a month was agreed upon.

“I have,” said the Colonel, “already sketched out some work for you to begin on. The legislature meets here in January. It is important to the State that our whole tax-system should be overhauled and reformed. The present system is a mere crazy-quilt, unsatisfactory in a thousand ways. I suggest that you begin with a careful study of the law, making yourself familiar with —”

“I am already familiar with it.”

“Ah! And what do you think of it?”

“It is grotesque.”

“Good! I like a clean-cut expression of opinion such as that, sir. Now tell me your criticisms on the law as it stands, and what you suggest as remedies.”

Queed did so briefly, expertly. The Colonel was considerably impressed by his swift, searching summaries.

“We may go right ahead,” said he. “I wish you would block out a series of articles — eight, ten, or twelve, as you think best — designed to prepare the public mind for a thorough-going reform and point the way that the reform should take. Bring this schedule to me to-morrow, if you will be so good, and we will go over it together.”

Queed, privately amused at the thought of Colonel Cowles's revising his views on taxation, rose to go.

“By the bye,” said the Colonel, unluckily struck by a thought, “I myself wrote a preliminary article on tax reform a week or so ago, meaning to follow it up with others later on. Perhaps you had best read that before —”

"I have already read it."

"Ah! How did it strike you?"

"You ask me that?"

"Certainly," said Colonel Cowles, a little surprised.

"Well, since you ask me, I will say that I thought it rather amusing."

The Colonel looked nettled. He was by nature a choleric man, but in his age he had learned the futility of disputation and affray, and nowadays kept a tight rein upon himself.

"You are frank sir — 'tis a commendable quality. Doubtless your work will put my own poor efforts to the blush."

"I shall leave you to judge of that, Colonel Cowles."

The Colonel, abandoning his hospitable plan of inviting his new assistant to sup with him at the club, bowed with dignity, and Queed eagerly left him. Glancing at his watch in the elevator, the young man figured that the interview, including going and coming, would stand him in an hour's time, which was ten minutes more than he had allowed for it.

V

Selections from Contemporary Opinions of Mr. Queed; also concerning Henry G. Surface, his Life and Deeds; of Fifi, the Landlady's Daughter, and how she happened to look up Altruism in the Dictionary.

A MONTH later, one icy afternoon, Charles Gardiner West ran into Colonel Cowles at the club, where the Colonel, a lone widower, repaired each day at six P. M., there to talk over the state of the Union till nine-thirty.

"Colonel," said West, dropping into a chair, "man to man, what is your opinion of Doctor Queed's editorials?"

"They are unanswerable," said the Colonel, and consulted his favorite ante-prandial refreshment.

West laughed. "Yes, but from the standpoint of the general public, Constant Reader, Pro Bono Publico, and all that?"

"No subscriber will ever be angered by them."

"Would you say that they helped the editorial page or not?"

"They lend to it an academic elegance, a scientific stateliness, a certain grand and austere majesty —"

"Colonel, I asked you for your opinion of those articles."

"Damn it, sir," roared the Colonel, "I've never read one."

Later West repeated the gist of this conversation to Miss Weyland, who ornamented with him a tiny dinner given that evening at the home of their very good friends, Mr. and Mrs. Stewart Byrd.

It was a beautiful little dinner, as befitted the hospitable distinction of the givers. The Stewart Byrds were hosts among a thousand. In him, as it further happens, West (himself the beau ideal of so many) had from long ago recognized