

### XIII

*"Taking the Little Doctor Down a Peg or Two": as performed for the First and Only Time by Sharlee Weyland.*

THE Star that fought in its course for men through Sharlee Weyland was of the leal and resolute kind. It did not swerve at a squall. Sharlee had thought the whole thing out, and made up her mind. Gentle raillery, which would do everything necessary in most cases, would be wholly futile here. She must doff all gloves and give the little Doctor the dressing-down of his life. She must explode a mine under that enormously exaggerated self-esteem which swamped the young man's personality like a goitre. Sharlee did not want to do this. She liked Mr. Queed, in a peculiar sort of way, and yet she had to make it impossible for him ever to speak to her again. Her nature was to give pleasure, and therefore she was going to do her utmost to give him pain. She wanted him to like her, and consequently she was going to insult him past forgiveness. And she was not even sure that it was going to do him any good.

When her guest walked into her little back parlor that evening, Sharlee was feeling very self-sacrificing and noble. However, she merely looked uncommonly pretty and tremendously engrossed in herself. She was in evening dress. It was Easter Monday, and at nine, as it chanced, she was to go out under the escort of Charles Gardiner West to some frolic of youth and beauty. But her costume was so perfectly suited to the little curtain-raiser called Taking the Little Doctor Down a Peg or Two, that it might have been appointed by a clever stage-manager with that alone in mind. She was the haughty beauty, the courted princess, graciously bestowing a few minutes from her crowding fêtes

upon some fourth-rate dependant. And indeed the little Doctor, with his prematurely old face and his shabby clothes, rather looked the part of the dependant. Sharlee's greeting was of the briefest.

"Ah, Mr. Queed. . . . Sit down."

Her negligent nod set him away at an immense distance; even he was aware that Charles Weyland had undergone some subtle but marked change since the morning. The colored maid who had shown him in was retained to button her mistress' long gloves. It proved to be a somewhat slow process. Over the mantel hung a gilt-framed mirror, as wide as the mantel itself. To this mirror, the gloves buttoned, Miss Weyland passed, and reviewed her appearance with slow attention, giving a pat here, making a minor readjustment there. But this survey did not suffice for details, it seemed; a more minute examination was needed; over the floor she trailed with leisurely grace, and rang the bell.

"Oh, Mary — my vanity-box, please. On the dressing-table."

Seating herself under the lamp, she produced from the contrivance the tiniest little mirror ever seen. As she raised it to let it perform its dainty function, her glance fell on Queed, sitting darkly in his rocking-chair. A look of mild surprise came into her eye: not that it was of any consequence, but plainly she had forgotten that he was there.

"Oh . . . You don't mind waiting a few minutes?"

"I do m—"

"You promised half an hour I think? Never fear that I shall take longer —"

"I did not promise half an hour for such —"

"It was left to me to decide in what way the time should be employed, I believe. What I have to say can be said briefly, but to you, at least, it should prove immensely interesting." She stifled a small yawn with the gloved fingertips of her left hand. "However, of course don't let me keep you if you are pressed for time."



The young man made no reply. Sharlee completed at her leisure her conference with the vanity-box; snapped the trinket shut; and, rising, rang the bell again. This time she required a glass of water for her good comfort. She drank it slowly, watching herself in the mantel mirror as she did so, and setting down the glass, took a new survey of her whole effect, this time in a long-distance view.

"Now, Mr. Queed!"

She sat down in a flowered arm-chair so large that it engulfed her, and fixed him with a studious, puckering gaze as much as to say: "Let's see. Now, what was *his* trouble?"

"Ah, yes! — the *Post*."

She glanced at the little clock on the mantel, appeared to gather in her thoughts from remote and brilliant places, and addressed the dingy youth briskly but not unkindly.

"Unfortunately, I have an engagement this evening and can give you very little time. You will not mind if I am brief. Here, then, is the case. A man employed in a minor position on a newspaper is notified that he is to be discharged for incompetence. He replies that, so far from being discharged, he will be promoted at the end of a month, and will eventually be made editor of the paper. Undoubtedly this is a magnificent boast, but to make it good means a complete transformation in the character of this man's work — namely, from entire incompetence to competence of an unusual sort, all within a month's time. You are the man who has made this extraordinary boast. To clear the ground before I begin to show you where your trouble is, please tell me how you propose to make it good."

Not every man feeling inside as the little Doctor felt at that moment would have answered with such admirable calm.

"I purpose," he corrected her, "to take the files of the *Post* for the past few years and read all of Colonel Cowles's amusing articles. He, I am informed, is the editorial mogul and paragon. I purpose to study those articles scientifically, to analyze them, to take them apart and see exactly how

they are put together. I purpose to destroy my own style and build up another one precisely like the Colonel's — if anything, a shade more so. In short I purpose to learn to write like an ass, of asses, for asses."

"That is your whole programme?"

"It is more than enough, I think."

"Ah?" She paused a moment, looking at him with faint, distant amusement. "Now, as my aunt's business woman, I, of course, take an interest in the finances of her boarders. Therefore I had better begin at once looking about for a new place for you after May 15th. What other kinds of work do you think yourself qualified to do, besides editorial writing and the preparation of thesauruses?"

He looked at her darkly. "You imagine that the *Post* will discharge me on May 15th?"

"There is nothing in the world that seems to me so certain."

"And why?"

"Why will the *Post* discharge you? For exactly the same reason it promises to discharge you now. Incompetence."

"You agree with Colonel Cowles, then? You consider me incompetent to write editorials for the *Post*?"

"Oh, totally. And it goes a great deal deeper than style, I assure you. Mr. Queed, you're all wrong from the beginning."

Her eyes left his face; went first to the clock; glanced around the room. Sharlee's dress was blue, and her neck was as white as a wave's foamy tooth. Her manner was intended to convey to Mr. Queed that he was the smallest midge on all her crowded horizon. It did not, of course, have that effect, but it did arrest and pique his attention most successfully. It was in his mind that Charles Weyland had been of some assistance to him in first suggesting work on the *Post*; and again about the roses for Fifi. He was still ready to believe that she might have some profitable suggestion about his new problem. Was she not that "public" and that "average reader" which he himself so despised and



detested? Yet he could not imagine where such a little pink and white chit found the hardihood to take this tone with one of the foremost scientists of modern times.

"You interest me. I am totally incompetent now; I will be totally incompetent on May 15th; this because I am all wrong from the beginning. Pray proceed."

Sharlee, her thoughts recalled, made a slight inclination of her head. "Forgive my absent-mindedness. First, then, as to why you are a failure as an editorial writer. You are quite mistaken in supposing that it is a mere question of style, though right in regarding your style as in itself a fatal handicap. However, the trouble has its root in your amusing attitude of superiority to the work. You think of editorial writing as small hack-work, entirely beneath the dignity of a man who has had one or two articles accepted by a prehistoric magazine which nobody reads. In reality, it is one of the greatest and most splendid of all professions, fit to call out the very best of a really big man. You chuckle and sneer at Colonel Cowles and think yourself vastly his superior as an editorial writer, when, in the opinion of everybody else, he is in every way your superior. I doubt if the *Post* has a single reader who would not prefer to read an article by him, on any subject, to reading an article by you. I doubt if there is a paper in the world that would not greatly prefer him as an editor to you —"

"You are absurdly mistaken," he interrupted coldly. "I might name various papers —"

"Yes, the *Political Science Quarterly* and the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*." Sharlee smiled tolerantly, and immediately resumed: "When you sit down at the office to write an article, whom do you think you are writing for? A company of scientists? An institute of gray-bearded scholars? An academy of fossilized old doctors of law? There are not a dozen people of that sort who read the *Post*. Has it never occurred to you to call up before your mind's eye the people you actually are writing for? You can see them any day as you walk along the street. Go into a street

car at six o'clock any night and look around at the faces. There is your public, the readers of the *Post* — shop-clerks, stenographers, factory-hands, office-men, plumbers, teamsters, drummers, milliners. Look at them. Have you anything to say to interest them? Think. If they were to file in here now and ask you to make a few remarks, could you, for the life of you, say one single thing that would interest them?"

"I do not pretend, or aspire," said Mr. Queed, "to dispense frothy nothings tricked out to beguile the tired bricklayer. My duty is to give forth valuable information and ripened judgment couched in language —"

"No, your duty is to get yourself read; if you fail there you fail everywhere. Is it possible that you don't begin to grasp that point yet? I fancied that your mind was quicker. You appear to think that the duty of a newspaper is to back people up against a wall and ram helpful statistics into them with a force-pump. You are grotesquely mistaken. Your ideal newspaper would not keep a dozen readers in this city: that is to say, it would be a complete failure while it lasted and would bankrupt Mr. Morgan in six months. A dead newspaper is a useless one, the world over. At the same time, every living and good newspaper is a little better, spreads a little more sweetness and light, gives out a little more valuable information, ripened judgment, et cetera, than the vast majority of its readers want or will absorb. The *Post* is that sort of newspaper. It is constantly tugging its readers a little higher than they — I mean the majority, and not the cultured few — are willing to go. But the *Post* always recognizes that its first duty is to get itself read: if it does not succeed in that, it lacks the principle of life and dies. Perhaps the tired bricklayer you speak of, the middle-class, commonplace, average people who make up nearly all of the world, ought to be interested in John Stuart Mill's attitude toward the single-tax. But the fact is that they are n't. The *Post* wisely deals with the condition, and not a theory: it means to get itself read. It is your first duty, as a writer



for it, to get yourself read. If you fail to get yourself read, you are worse than useless to the *Post*. Well, you have completely failed to do this, and that is why the *Post* is discharging you. Come, free yourself from exaggerated notions about your own importance and look at this simple point with the calm detachment of a scientist. The *Post* can save money, while preserving just the same effect, by discharging you and printing every morning a half-column from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*."

She rose quickly, as though her time was very precious, and passed over to the table, where a great bowl of violets stood. The room was pretty: it had reminded Queed, when he entered it, of Nicolovius's room, though there was a softer note in it, as the flowers, the work-bag on the table, the balled-up veil and gloves on the mantel-shelf. He had liked, too, the soft-shaded lamps; the vague resolve had come to him to install a lamp in the Scriptorium later on. But now, thinking of nothing like this, he sat in a thick silence gazing at her with unwinking sternness.

Sharlee carefully gathered the violets from the bowl, shook a small shower of water from their stems, dried them with a pocket handkerchief about the size of a silver dollar. Next she wrapped the stems with purple tinfoil, tied them with a silken cord and tassel and laid the gorgeous bunch upon a magazine back, to await her further pleasure. Then, coming back, she resumed her seat facing the shabby young man she was assisting to see himself as others saw him.

"I might," she said, "simply stop there. I might tell you that you are a failure as an editorial writer because you have nothing at all to say that is of the smallest interest to the great majority of the readers of editorials, and would not know how to say it if you had. That would be enough to satisfy most men, but I see that I must make things very plain and definite for you. Mr. Queed, you are a failure as an editorial writer because you are first a failure in a much more important direction. You're a failure as a human being — as a man."

She was watching his face lightly, but closely, and so she was on her feet as soon as he, and had her hand out before he had even thought of making this gesture.

"It is useless for this harangue to continue," he said, with a brow of storm. "Your conception of helpful advice . . ."

But Sharlee's voice, which had begun as soon as his, drowned him out. . . . "Complimented you a little too far, I see. I shall be sure to remember after this," she said with such a sweet smile, "that, after all your talk, you are just the average man, and want to hear only what flatters your little vanity. *Good-night*. So nice to have seen you."

She nodded brightly, with faint amusement, and turning away, moved off toward the door at the back. Queed, of course, had no means of knowing that she was thinking, almost jubilantly: "I *knew* that mouth meant spirit!" He only knew that, whereas he had meant to terminate the interview with a grave yet stinging rebuke to her, she had given the effect of terminating the interview with a graceful yet stinging rebuke to him. This was not what he wanted in the least. Come to think of it, he doubted if he wanted the interview to end at all.

"Miss Weyland . . ."

She turned on the threshold of the farther door. "I beg your pardon! I thought you'd gone! Your hat? — I think you left it in the hall, did n't you?"

"It is not my hat."

"Oh — what is it?"

"God knows," said the little Doctor, hoarsely.

He was standing in the middle of the floor, his hands jammed into his trousers pockets, his hair tousled over a troubled brow, his breast torn by emotions which were entirely new in his experience and which he did n't even know the names of. All the accumulation of his disruptive day was upon him. He felt both terrifically upset inside, and interested to the degree of physical pain in something or other, he had no idea what. Presently he started walking



up and down the room, nervous as a caged lion, eyes fixed on space or on something within, while Sharlee stood in the doorway watching him casually and unsurprised, as though just this sort of thing took place in her little parlor regularly, seven nights a week.

"Go ahead! Go ahead!" he broke out abruptly, coming to a halt. "Pitch into me. Do it for all you're worth. I suppose you think it's what I need."

"Certainly," said Sharlee, pleasantly.

She stood beside her chair again, flushed with a secret sense of victory, liking him more for his temper and his control than she ever could have liked him for his learning. But it was not her idea that the little Doctor had got it anywhere near hard enough as yet.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Queed?"

It appeared that Mr. Queed would.

"I am paying you the extraordinary compliment," said Sharlee, "of talking to you as others might talk about you behind your back — in fact, as everybody does talk about you behind your back. I do this on the theory that you are a serious and honest-minded man, sincerely interested in learning the truth about yourself and your failures, so that you may correct them. If you are interested only in having your vanity fed by flattering fictions, please say so right now. I have no time," she said, hardly able for her life to suppress a smile, "for butterflies and triflers."

*Butterflies and triflers!* Mr. Queed, proprietor of the famous Schedule, a butterfly and a trifle!

He said in a muffled voice: "Proceed."

"Since an editorial writer," said Sharlee, seating herself and beginning with a paragraph as neat as a public speaker's, "must be able, as his first qualification, to interest the common people, it is manifest that he must be interested in the common people. He must feel his bond of humanity with them, sympathize with them, like them, love them. This is the great secret of Colonel Cowles's success as an editor. A fine gentleman by birth, breeding, and tradition,

he is yet always a human being among human beings. All his life he has been doing things with and for the people. He went all through the war, and you might have thought the whole world depended on him, the way he went up Cemetery Ridge on the 3rd of July, 1863. He was shot all to pieces, but they patched him together, and the next year there he was back in the fighting around Petersburg. After the war he was a leader against the carpet-baggers, and if this State is peaceful and prosperous and comfortable for you to live in now, it is because of what men like him and my father did a generation ago. When he took the *Post* he went on just the same, working and thinking and fighting for men and with men, and all in the service of the people. I suppose, of course, his views through all these years have not always been sound, but they have always been honest and honorable, sensible, manly, and sweet. And they have always had a practical relation with the life of the people. The result is that he has thousands and thousands of readers who feel that their day has been wanting in something unless they have read what he has to say. There is Colonel Cowles — Does this interest you, Mr. Queed? If not, I need not weary us both by continuing."

He again requested her, in the briefest possible way, to proceed.

"Well! There is Colonel Cowles, whom you presume to despise, because you know, or think you know, more political and social science than he does. Where you got your preposterously exaggerated idea of the value of text-book science I am at a loss to understand. The people you aspire to lead — for that is what an editorial writer must do — care nothing for it. That tired bricklayer whom you dismiss with such contempt of course cares nothing for it. But that bricklayer is the People, Mr. Queed. He is the very man that Colonel Cowles goes to, and puts his hand on his shoulder, and tries to help — help him to a better home, better education for his children, more and more wholesome pleasures, a higher and happier living. Colonel



Cowles thinks of life as an opportunity to live with and serve the common, average, everyday people. You think of it as an opportunity to live by yourself and serve your own ambition. He writes to the hearts of the people. You write to the heads of scientists. Doubtless it will amaze you to be told that his paragraph on the death of Moses Page, the Byrds' old negro butler, was a far more useful article in every way than your long critique on the currency system of Germany which appeared in the same issue. Colonel Cowles is a big-hearted human being. You — you are a scientific formula. And the worst of it is that *you're proud of it!* The hopeless part of it is that you actually consider a few old fossils as bigger than the live people all around you! How can I show you your terrible mistake? . . . Why, Mr. Queed, the life and example of a little girl . . ." she stopped, rather precipitately, stared hard at her hands, which were folded in her lap, and went resolutely on: "The life and example of a little girl like Fifi are worth more than all the text-books you will ever write."

A silence fell. In the soft lamplight of the pretty room, Queed sat still and silent as a marble man; and presently Sharlee, plucking herself together, resumed:—

"Perhaps you now begin to glimpse a wider difference between yourself and Colonel Cowles than mere unlikeness of literary style. If you continue to think this difference all in your own favor, I urge you to abandon any idea of writing editorials for the *Post*. If on the other hand, you seriously wish to make good your boast of this morning, I urge you to cease sneering at men like Colonel Cowles, and humbly begin to try to imitate them. I say that you are a failure as an editorial writer because you are a failure as a man, and I say that you are a failure as a man because you have no relation at all with man's life. You aspire to teach and lead human beings, and you have not the least idea what a human being is, and not the slightest wish to find out. All around you are men, live men of flesh and blood, who are moving the world, and you, whipping out your

infinitesimal measuring-rod, dismiss them as inferior cattle who know nothing of text-book science. Here is a real and living world, and you roll through it like a billiard-ball. And all because you make the fatal error of mistaking a sorry handful of mummies for the universe."

"It is a curious coincidence," said Queed, with great but deceptive mildness, "that Fifi said much the same thing to me, though in quite a different way, this afternoon."

"She told me. But Fifi was not the first. You had the same advice from your father two months ago."

"My father?"

"You have not forgotten his letter that you showed me in your office one afternoon?"

It seemed that he had; but he had it in his pocket, as it chanced, and dug it out, soiled and frayed from long confinement. Stooping forward to introduce it into the penumbra of lamplight, he read over the detective-story message: "*Make friends: mingle with people and learn to like them. This is the earnest injunction of Your father.*"

"You complain of your father's treatment of you," said Sharlee, "but he offered you a liberal education there, and you declined to take it."

She glanced at the clock, turned about to the table and picked up her beautiful bouquet. A pair of long bodkins with lavender glass heads were waiting, it appeared; she proceeded to pin on her flowers, adjusting them with careful attention; and rising, again reviewed herself in the mantel-mirror. Then she sat down once more, and calmly said:

"As you are a failure as an editorial writer and as a man, so you are a failure as a sociologist. . . ."

It was the last straw, the crowning blasphemy. She hardly expected him to endure it, and he did not; she was glad to have it so. But the extreme mildness with which he interrupted her almost unnerved her, so confidently had she braced herself for violence.

"Do you mind if we omit that? I think I have heard enough about my failures for one night."



He had risen, but stood, for a wonder, irresolute. It was too evident that he did not know what to do next. Presently, having nowhere else to go, he walked over to the mantel-shelf and leant his elbow upon it, staring down at the floor. A considerable interval passed, broken only by the ticking of the clock before he said:—

"You may be an authority on editorial writing — even on manhood — life. But I can hardly recognize you in that capacity as regards sociology."

Sharlee made no reply. She had no idea that the young man's dismissal from the *Post* had been a crucifixion to him, an unendurable infamy upon his virginal pride of intellect. She had no conception of his powers of self-control, which happened to be far greater than her own, and she would have given worlds to know what he was thinking at that moment. For her part she was thinking of him, intensely, and in a personal way. Manners he had none, but where did he get his manner? Who had taught him to bow in that way? He had mentioned insults: where had he heard of insults, this stray who had raised himself in the house of a drunken policeman?

"Well," said Queed, with the utmost calmness, "you might tell me, in a word, why you think I am a failure as a sociologist."

"You are a failure as a sociologist," said Sharlee, immediately, "for the same reason as both your other failures: you are wholly out of relation with real life. Sociology is the science of human society. You know absolutely nothing about human society, except what other men have found out and written down in text-books. You say that you are an evolutionary sociologist. Yet a wonderful demonstration in social evolution is going on all around you, and *you don't even know it*. You are standing here directly between two civilizations. On the one side there are Colonel Cowles and my old grandmother — mother of your landlady, plucky dear! On the other there are our splendid young men, men who, with traditions of leisure and cultured idle-

ness in their blood, have pitched in with their hands and heads to make this State *hum*, and will soon be meeting and beating your Northern young men at every turn. On one side there is the old slaveholding aristocracy; on the other the finest Democracy in the world; and here and now human society is evolving from one thing to the other. A real sociologist would be absorbed in watching this marvelous process: social evolution actually surprised in her workshop. But you — I doubt if you even knew it was going on. A tremendous social drama is being acted out under your very window and you yawn and *pull down the blind*."

There was a brief silence. In the course of it the door-bell was heard to ring; soon the door opened; a masculine murmur; then the maid Mary's voice, clearly: "Yassuh, she's in. . . . Won't you rest your coat, Mr. West?"

Mary entered the little back parlor, a card upon a tray. "Please draw the folding doors," said Sharlee. "Say that I'll be in in a few minutes."

They were alone once more, she and the little Doctor; the silence enfolded them again; and she broke it by saying the last word she had to say.

"I have gone into detail because I wanted to make the unfavorable impression you produce upon your little world clear to you, for once. But I can sum up all that I have said in less than six words. If you remember anything at all that I have said, I wish you would remember this. Mr. Queed, you are afflicted with a fatal malady. Your cosmos is all Ego."

She started to rise, thought better of it, and sat still in her flowered chair full in the lamplight. The little Doctor stood at the mantel-shelf, his elbow upon it, and the silence lengthened. To do something, Sharlee pulled off her right long glove and slowly put it back again. Then she pulled off her left long glove, and about the time she was buttoning the last button he began speaking, in a curious, lifeless voice.

"I learned to read when I was four years old out of a copy



of the New York *Evening Post*. It came to the house, I remember, distinctly, wrapped around two pork chops. That seemed to be all the reading matter we had in the house for a long time — I believe Tim was in hard luck in those days — and by the time I was six I had read that paper all through from beginning to end, five times. I have wondered since if that incident did not give a bent to my whole mind. If you are familiar with the *Evening Post*, you may appreciate what I mean. . . . It came out in me exactly like a duck's yearning for water; that deep instinct for the printed word. Of course Tim saw that I was different from him. He helped me a little in the early stages, and then he stood back, awed by my learning, and let me go my own gait. When I was about eight, I learned of the existence of public libraries. I daresay it would surprise you to know the books I was reading in this period of my life — and writing too: for in my eleventh year I was the author of a one-volume history of the world, besides several treatises. And I early began to think, too. What was the fundamental principle underlying the evolution of a higher and higher human type? How could this principle be unified through all branches of science and reduced to an operable law? Questions such as these kept me awake at night while I still wore short trousers. At fourteen I was boarding alone in a kind of tenement on the East Side. Of course I was quite different from all the people around me. Different. I don't remember that they showed any affectionate interest in me, and why on earth should they? As I say, I was different. There was nothing there to suggest a conception of that brotherhood of man you speak of. I was born with this impulse for isolation and work, and everything that happened to me only emphasized it. I never had a day's schooling in my life, and never a word of advice or admonition — never a scolding in all my life till now. Here is a point on which your Christian theory of living seems to me entirely too vague: how to reconcile individual responsibility with the forces of heredity and circumstance. From my point

of view your talk would have been better rounded if you had touched on that. Still, it was striking and interesting as it was. I like to hear a clear statement of a point of view, and that your statement happens to riddle me, personally, of course does not affect the question in any way. If I regard human society and human life too much as the biologist regards his rabbit, which appears to be the gist of your criticism, I can at least cheerfully take my own turn on the operating table as occasion requires. There is, of course, a great deal that I might say in reply, but I do not understand that either of us desires a debate. I will simply assert that your fundamental conception of life, while novel and piquant, will not hold water for a moment. Your conception is, if I state it fairly, that a man's life, to be useful, to be a life of service, must be given immediately to his fellows. He must do visible and tangible things with other men. I think a little reflection will convince you that, on the contrary, much or most of the best work of the world has been done by men whose personal lives were not unlike my own. There was Palissy, to take a familiar minor instance. Of course his neighbors saw in him only a madman whose cosmos was all Ego. Yet people are grateful to Palissy to-day, and think little of the suffering of his wife and children. Newton was no genial leader of the people. Bacon could not even be loyal to his friends. The living world around Socrates put him to death. The world's great wise men, inventors, scientists, philosophers, prophets, have not usually spent their days rubbing elbows with the bricklayer. Yet these men have served their race better than all the good-fellows that ever lived. To each his gifts. If I succeed in reducing the principle of human evolution to its eternal law, I need not fear the judgment of posterity upon my life. I shall, in fact, have performed the highest service to humankind that a finite mind can hope to compass. Nevertheless, I am impressed by much that you say. I daresay a good deal of it is valuable. All of it I engage to analyze and consider dispassionately at my leisure. Meantime, I thank you for your interest in the matter. Good-evening."



"Mr. Queed."

Sharlee rose hurriedly, since hurry was so evidently necessary. She felt profoundly stirred, she hardly knew why; all her airs of a haughty princess were fled; and she intercepted him with no remnant of her pretense that she was putting a shabby inferior in his place.

"I want to tell you," she said, somewhat nervously, "that I—I—admire very much the way you've taken this. No ordinary man would have listened with such —"

"I never pretended to be an ordinary man."

He moved, but she stood unmoving in front of him, the pretty portrait of a lady in blue, and the eyes that she fastened upon him reminded him vaguely of Fifi's.

"Perhaps I—should tell you," said Sharlee, "just why I—"

"Now don't," he said, smiling faintly at her with his old air of a grandfather — "don't spoil it all by saying that you did n't mean it."

Under his smile she colored a little, and, despite herself, looked confused. He took advantage of her embarrassment to pass her with another bow and go out, leaving her struggling desperately with the feeling that he had got the best of her after all.

But the door opened again a little way, almost at once, and the trim-cut, academic face, with the lamplight falling upon the round glasses and blotting them out in a yellow smudge, appeared in the crevice.

"By the way, you were wrong in saying that I pulled down my blind on the evolutionary process now going on in the South. I give four thousand words to it in my *Historical Perspective*, volume one."

## XIV

*In which Klinker quotes Scripture, and Queed has helped Fifi with her Lessons for the Last Time.*

THE tax-articles in the *Post* had ceased after the adjournment of the Legislature, which body gave no signs of ever having heard of them. Mr. Queed's new series dealt authoritatively with "Currency Systems of the World." He polished the systems off at the rate of three a week. But he had asked and obtained permission to submit, also, voluntary contributions on topics of his own choosing, and now for a fortnight these offerings had died daily in Colonel Cowles's waste-basket.

As for his book, Queed could not bear to think of it in these days. Deliberately he had put a winding-sheet about his heart's desire, and laid it away in a drawer, until such time as he had indisputably qualified himself to be editor of the *Post*. Having qualified, he could open that drawer again, with a rushing access of stifled ardor, and await the Colonel's demise; but to do this, he figured now, would take him not less than two months and a half. Two months and a half wrenched from the Schedule! That sacred bill of rights not merely corrupted, but for a space nullified and cancelled! Yes, it was the ultimate sacrifice that outraged pride of intellect had demanded; but the young man would not flinch. And there were moments when Trainer Klinker was startled by the close-shut misery of his face.

The Scriptorium had been degraded into a sickening school of journalism. Day after day, night after night, Queed sat at his tiny table poring over back files of the *Post*, examining Colonel Cowles's editorials as a geologist examines a Silurian deposit. He analyzed, classified, tabu-