

XVI

Triumphal Return of Charles Gardiner West from the Old World; and of how the Other World had wagged in his Absence.

MANY pictured post-cards and an occasional brief note reminded Miss Weyland during the summer that Charles Gardiner West was pursuing his studies in the Old World with peregrinative zest. By the trail of colored photographs she followed his triumphal march. Rome knew the president-elect in early June; Naples, Florence, Milan, Venice in the same period. He investigated, presumably, the public school systems of Geneva and Berlin; the higher education drew him through the château country of France; for three weeks the headwaiters of Paris (in the pedagogical district) were familiar with the clink of his coin; and August's first youth was gone before he was in London with the lake region a tramped road behind him.

From the latter neighborhood (picture: Rydal Mount) he wrote Sharlee as follows:

Sailing on the 21st, after the most glorious trip in history. Never so full of energy and enthusiasm. Running over with the most beautiful plans.

The exact nature of these plans the writer did not indicate, but Sharlee's mother, who always got down to breakfast first and read all the postals as they came, explained that the reference was evidently to Blaines College. West, however, did not sail on the 21st, even though that date was some days behind his original intentions. The itinerary with which he had set out had him home again, in fact, on August 15. For in the stress and hurry of making ready

for the journey, together with a little preliminary rest which he felt his health required, he had to let his advertising campaign and other schemes for the good of the college go over until the fall. But collegiate methods obtaining in London were too fascinating, apparently, to be dismissed with any cursory glance. He sailed on the 25th, arrived home on the 3rd of September, and on the 4th surprised Sharlee by dropping in upon her in her office.

He was browned from his passage, appeared a little stouter, was very well dressed and good to look at, and fairly exuded vitality and pleasant humor. Sharlee was delighted and quite excited over seeing him again, though it may be noted, as shedding a side-light upon her character, that she did not greet him with "Hello, Stranger!" However, her manner of salutation appeared perfectly satisfactory to West.

They had the little office to themselves and plenty to talk about.

"Doubtless you got my postals?" he asked.

"Oh, stacks of them. I spent all one Saturday afternoon pasting them in an album as big as this table. They made a perfect fireside grand tour for me. What did you like best in all your trip?"

"I think," said West, turning his handsome blue eyes full upon her, "that I like getting back."

Sharlee laughed. "It's done you a world of good; that's plain, anyway. You look ready to remove mountains."

"Why, I can eat them — bite their heads off! I feel like a fighting-cock who's been starved a shade too long for the good of the bystanders."

He laughed and waved his arms about to signify enormous vitality. Sharlee asked if he had been able to make a start yet with his new work.

"You might say," he replied, "that I dived head-first into it from the steamer."

He launched out into eager talk about his hopes for Blaines College. In all his wide circle of friends, he knew

no one who made so sympathetic and intelligent a listener as she. He talked freely, lengthily, even egotistically it might have seemed, had they not been such good friends and he so sure of her interest. Difficulties, it seemed, had already cropped out. He was not sure of the temper of his trustees, whom he had called together for an informal meeting that morning. Starting to advertise the great improvements that had taken place in the college, he had collided with the simple fact that no improvements had taken place. Even if he privately regarded his own accession in that light, he humorously pointed out, he could hardly advertise it, with old Dr. Gilfillan, the retired president, living around the corner and reading the papers. Again, taking his pencil to make a list of the special advantages Blaines had to offer, he was rather forcibly struck with the fact that it had no special advantages. But upon these and other difficulties, he touched optimistically, as though confident that under the right treatment, namely his treatment, all would soon yield.

Sharlee, fired by his gay confidence, mused enthusiastically. "It's inspiring to think what can be done! Really, it is no empty dream that the number of students might be doubled — quadrupled — in five years."

"Do you know," said he, turning his glowing face upon her, "I'm not so eager for mere numbers now. That is one point on which my views have shifted during my studies this summer. My ideal is no longer a very large college — at least not necessarily large — but a college of the very highest standards. A distinguished faculty of recognized authorities in their several lines; an earnest student body, large if you can get them, but always made of picked men admitted on the strictest terms; degrees recognized all over the country as an unvarying badge of the highest scholarship — these are what I shall strive for. My ultimate ambition," said Charles Gardiner West, dreamily, "is to make of Blaines College an institution like the University of Paris."

He sprang up presently with great contrition, part real, part mock, over having absorbed so much of the honest tax-payer's property, the Departmental time. No, he could not be induced to appropriate a moment more; he was going to run on up the street and call on Colonel Cowles.

"How is the old gentleman, anyway?"

"His spirits," said Sharlee, "were never better, and he is working like a horse. But I'm afraid the dear is beginning to feel his years a little."

"He's nearly seventy, you know. By the bye, what ever became of that young helper you and I unloaded on him last year — the queer little man with the queer little name?"

Sharlee saw that President West had entirely forgotten their conversation six months before, when he had promised to protect this same young helper from Colonel Cowles and the *Post* directors. She smiled indulgently at this evidence of the absent-mindedness of the great.

"Became of him! Why, you're going to make him regular assistant editor at your directors' meeting next month."

"Are we, though! I had it in the back of my head that he was fired early in the summer."

"Well, you see, when he saw the axe descending, he pulled off a little revolution all by himself and all of a sudden learned to write. Make the Colonel tell you about it."

"I'm not surprised," said West. "I told you last winter, you know, that I believed in that boy. Great heavens! It's glorious to be back in this old town again!"

He went down the broad steps of the Capitol, and out the winding white walkway through the park. Nearly everybody he met stopped him with a friendly greeting and a welcome home. He walked the shady path with his light stick swinging, his eyes seeing, not an arch of tangible trees, but the shining vista which dreamers call the Future. . . . He stood upon a platform, fronting a vast white meadow of upturned faces. He was speaking to this meadow, his theme being "Education and the Rise of the Masses," and the people, displaying an enthusiasm rare at lectures upon

such topics, roared their approval as he shot at them great terse truths, the essence of wide reading and profound wisdom put up in pellets of pungent epigram. He rose at a long dinner-table, so placed that as he stood his eye swept down rows upon rows of other long tables, where the diners had all pushed back their chairs to turn and look at him. His words were honeyed, of a magic compelling power, so that as he reached his peroration, aged magnates could not be restrained from producing fountain-pen and check-book; he saw them pushing aside coffee-cups to indite rows of o's of staggering length. Blaines College now tenanted a new home on a grassy knoll outside the city. The single ramshackle barn which had housed the institution prior to the coming of President West was replaced by a cluster of noble edifices of classic marble. The president sat in his handsome office, giving an audience to a delegation of world-famous professors from the University of Paris. They had been dispatched by the French nation to study his methods on the ground.

"Why, *hello*, Colonel! Bless your heart, I *am* glad to see you, sir. . . ."

Colonel Cowles, looking up from his ancient seat, gave an exclamation of surprise and pleasure. He welcomed the young man affectionately. West sat down, and once more pen-sketches his travels and his plans for Blaines College. He was making a second, or miniature, grand tour that afternoon, regreeting all his friends, and was thus compelled to tell his story many times; but his own interest in it appeared ever fresh. For Blaines he asked and was promised the kindly offices of the *Post*.

The Colonel, in his turn, gave a brief account of his vacationless summer, of his daily work, of the progress of the *Post's* Policies.

"I hear," said West, "that that little scientist I made you a present of last year has made a ten-strike."

"Queed? An extraordinary thing," said the Colonel, relighting his cigar. "I was on the point of discharging him,

you remember, with the hearty approval of the directors. His stuff was dismal, abysmal, and hopeless. One day he turned around and began handing in stuff of a totally different kind. First-rate, some of it. I thought at first that he must be hiring somebody to do it for him. Did you see the paper while you were away?"

"Very irregularly, I'm sorry to say."

"Quite on his own hook, the boy turned up one day with an article on the Centre Street 'mashers' that was a screamer. You know what that situation was —"

"Yes, yes."

"I had for some time had it in mind to tackle it myself. The fact was that we were developing a class of boy Don Juans that were a black disgrace to the city. It was a rather unpleasant subject, but this young man handled it with much tact, as well as with surprising vigor and ability. His improvement seemed to date from right there. I encouraged him to follow up his first effort, and he wrote a strong series which attracted attention all through the State, and has already brought about decided improvement."

"Splendid! You know," said West, "the first time I ever looked at that boy, I was sure he had the stuff in him."

"Then you are a far keener observer than I. However, the nature of the man seems to be undergoing some subtle change, a curious kind of expansion — I don't remember anything like it in my experience. A more indefatigable worker I never saw, and if he goes on this way . . . Well, God moves in a mysterious way. It's a delight to see you again, Gardiner. Take supper with me at the club, won't you? I feel lonely and grown old, as the poet says."

West accepted, and presently departed on his happy round. The Colonel glanced at his watch; it was 3.30 o'clock, and he fell industriously to work again. On the stroke of four, as usual, the door of the adjoining office opened, and he heard his assistant enter and seat himself at the new desk recently provided for him. Another half-hour passed, and the Colonel, putting a double cross-mark

at the bottom of his paper—that being how you write “Finis” on the press—raised his head.

“Mr. Queed.”

“Yes.”

The connecting door opened, and the young man walked in. His chief eyed him thoughtfully.

“Young man, you have picked up a complexion like a professional beauty’s. What is your secret?”

“I daresay it is exercise. I have just walked out to Kern’s Castle and back.”

“H’m. Five miles if it’s a step.”

“And a half. I do it—twice a week—in an hour and seven minutes.”

The Colonel thought of his own over-rubicund cheek and sighed. “Well, whom or what do you wish to crucify to-morrow?”

“I am at your orders there.”

“Have you examined Deputy Clerk Folsom’s reply to Councilman Hannigan’s charge? What do you think of it?”

“I think it puts Hannigan in a very awkward position.”

“I agree with you. Suppose you seek to show that to the city in half a column.”

Queed bowed. “I may, perhaps, remind you, Colonel, of the meeting in New York to-morrow to prepare for the celebration of the Darwin centennial. If you desired I should be glad to prepare, apropos of this, a brief monograph telling in a light, popular way what Darwin did for the world.”

“And what did Darwin do for the world?”

The grave young man made a large grave gesture which indicated the immensity of Darwin’s doings for the world.

“Which topic do you prefer to handle—Folsom on Hannigan, or what Darwin did for the world?”

“I think,” said Queed, “that I should prefer to handle both.”

“Ten people will read Hannigan to one who reads Darwin.”

“Don’t you think that it is the *Post’s* business to reduce that proportion?”

“Take them both,” said the Colonel presently. “But always remember this: the great People are more interested in a cat-fight at the corner of Seventh and Centre Streets than they are in the greatest exploit of the greatest scientific theorist that ever lived.”

“I will remember what you say, Colonel.”

“I want you,” resumed Colonel Cowles, “to take supper with me at the club. Not to-night—I’m engaged. Shall we say to-morrow night, at seven?”

Queed accepted without perceptible hesitation. Some time had passed since he became aware that the Colonel had somehow insinuated himself into that list of friends which had halted so long at Tim and Murphy Queed. Besides, he had a genuine, unscientific desire to see what a real club looked like inside. So far, his knowledge of clubs was absolutely confined to the Mercury Athletic Association, B. Klinker, President.

The months of May, June, July, and August had risen and died since Queed, threshing out great questions through the still watches of the night, had resolved to give a modified scheme of life a tentative and experimental trial. He had kept this resolution, according to his wont. Probably his first liking for Colonel Cowles dated back to the very beginning of this period. It might be traced to the day when the precariously-placed assistant had submitted his initial article on the thesis his friend Buck had given him—the first article in all his life that the little Doctor had ever dipped warm out of human life. This momentous composition he had brought and laid upon the Colonel’s desk, as usual; but he did not follow his ancient custom by instantly vanishing toward the Scriptorium. Instead he stuck fast in the sanctum, not pretending to look at an encyclopedia or out of the window as another man might have done, but standing rigid on the other side of the table, gaze glued upon the perusing Colonel. Presently the old editor looked up.

"Did you write this?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"It's about as much like your usual style as my style is like Henry James's."

"You don't consider it a good editorial, then?"

"You have not necessarily drawn the correct inference from my remark. I consider it an excellent editorial. In fact — I shall make it my leader to-morrow morning. But that has nothing to do with how you happen to be using a style exactly the reverse of your own."

Queed had heaved a great sigh. The article occupied three pages of copy-paper in a close handwriting, and represented sixteen hours' work. Its author had rewritten it eleven times, incessantly referring to his text-book, the files of the *Post*, and subjecting each phrase to the most gruelling examination before finally admitting it to the perfect structure. However, it seemed no use to bore one's employer with details such as these.

"I have been doing a little studying of late —"

"Under excellent masters, it seems. Now this phrase, 'the ultimate reproach and the final infamy' — the Colonel unconsciously smacked his lips over it — "why, sir, it sounds like one of my own."

Queed started.

"If you must know, it is one of your own. You used it on October 26, 1900, during, as you will recall, the closing days of the presidential campaign."

The Colonel stared at him, bewildered.

"I decided to learn editorial-writing — as the term is understood," Queed reluctantly explained. "Therefore, I have been sitting up till two o'clock in the mornings, studying the files of the *Post*, to see exactly how you did it."

The Colonel's gaze gradually softened. "You might have been worse employed; I compliment and congratulate you," said he; and then added: "Whether you have really caught the idea and mastered the technique or not, it is too soon to say. But I'll say frankly that this article is worth more

to me than everything else that you've written for the *Post* put together."

"I am — ahem — gratified that you are pleased with it."

The Colonel, whose glance had gone out of the window, swung around in his chair and smote the table a testy blow.

"For the Lord's sake," he exploded, "get some heat in you! Squirt some color into your way of looking at things! Be kind and good-natured in your heart — just as I am at this moment — but for heaven's sake learn to write as if you were mad, and only kept from yelling by phenomenal will-power."

This was in early May. Many other talks upon the art of editorial writing did the two have, as the days went. The Colonel, mystified but pleased by revelations of actuality and life in his heretofore too-embalmed assistant, found an increasing interest in developing him. Here was a youth, with the qualities of potential great valuableness, and the wise editor, as soon as this appeared, gave him his chance by calling him off the fields of taxation and currency and assigning him to topics plucked alive from the day's news.

On the fatal 15th of May, the Colonel told Queed merely that the *Post* desired his work as long as it showed such promise as it now showed. That was all the talk about the dismissal that ever took place between them. The Colonel was no believer in fulsome praise for the young. But to others he talked more freely, and this was how it happened that the daughter of his old friend John Randolph Weyland knew that Mr. Queed was slated for an early march upstairs.

For Queed the summer had been a swift and immensely busy one. To write editorials that have a relation with everyday life, it gradually became clear to him that the writer must himself have some such relation. In June the Mercury Athletic Association had been thoroughly reorganized and rejuvenated, and regular meets were held every Saturday night. At Trainer Klinker's command, Queed had resolutely permitted himself to be inducted into

the Mercury; moreover, he made it a point of honor to attend the Saturday night functions, where he had the ideal chance to match his physical competence against that of other men. Early in the sessions at the gymnasium, Buck had introduced his pupil to boxing-glove and punching-bag, his own special passions, and now his orders ran that the Doc should put on the gloves with any of the Mercuries that were willing. Most of the Mercuries were willing, and on these early Saturday nights, Stark's rocked with the falls of Dr. Queed. But under Klinker's stern discipline, he was already acquiring something like a form. By midsummer he had gained a small reputation for scientific precision buttressed by invincible inability to learn when he was licked, and autumn found many of the Mercuries decidedly less Barkis-like than of old.

Queed lived now in the glow of perfect physical health, a very different thing, as Fifi had once pointed out, from merely not feeling sick. In the remarkable development that his body was undergoing, he had found an unexpected pride. But the Mercury, though he hardly realized it at the time, was useful to him in a bigger way than bodily improvement.

Here he met young men who were most emphatically in touch with life. They treated him as an equal with reference to his waxing muscular efficiency, and with some respect as regards his journalistic connection. "Want you to shake hands with the editor of the *Post*," so kindly Buck would introduce him. After the bouts or the "exhibition" of a Saturday, there was always a smoker, and in the highly instructed and expert talk of his club-mates the Doctor learned many things that were to be of value to him later on. Some of the Mercuries, besides their picturesque general knowledge, knew much more about city politics than ever got into the papers. There was Jimmy Wattrous, for example, already rising into fame as Plonny Neal's most promising lieutenant. Jimmy bared his heart with the Mercuries, and was particularly friendly with the representa-

tive of the great power which moulds public opinion. Now and then, Neal himself looked in, Plonny, the great boss, who was said to hold the city in the hollow of his hand. Many an editorial that surprised and pleased Colonel Cowles was born in that square room back of Stark's.

And all these things took time . . . took time . . . And there were nights when Queed woke wide-eyed with cold sweat on his brow and the cold fear in his heart that he and posterity were being cheated, that he was making an irretrievable and ghastly blunder.

Desperate months were May, June, and July for the little Doctor. In all this time he never once put his own pencil to his own paper. Manuscript and Schedule lay locked together in a drawer, toward which he could never bear to glance. Thirteen hours a day he gave to the science of editorial writing; two hours a day to the science of physical culture; one hour a day (computed average) to the science of Human Intercourse; but to the Science of Sciences never an hour on never a day. The rest was food and sleep. Such was his life for three months; a life that would have been too horrible to contemplate, had it not been that in all of his new sciences he uncovered a growing personal interest which kept him constantly astonished at himself.

By the end of June he found it safe to give less and less time to the study of editorial paradigms, for he had the technique at his fingers' ends; and so he gave more and more time to the amassment of material. For he had made a magnificent boast, and he never had much idea of permitting it to turn out empty, for all his nights of torturing misgivings. He read enormously with expert facility and a beautifully trained memory; read history, biography, memoirs, war records, old newspapers, old speeches, councilmanic proceedings, departmental reports — everything he could lay his hands on that promised capital for an editorial writer in that city and that State. By the end of July he felt that he could slacken up here, too, having pretty well exhausted the field, and the first day of August — red-letter day in

the annals of science — saw him unlock the sacred drawer with a close-set face. And now the Schedule, so long lapsed, was reinstated, with Four Hours a Day segregated to *Magnum Opus*. A pitiful little step at reconstruction, perhaps, but still a step. And henceforth every evening, between 9.30 and 1.30, Dr. Queed sat alone in his Scriptorium and embraced his love.

Insensibly summer faded into autumn, and still the science of Human Intercourse was faithfully practiced. The Paynter parlor knew Queed not infrequently in these days, where he could sometimes be discovered not merely suffering, but encouraging, Major Brooke to talk to him of his victories over the Republicans in 1870-75. Nor was he a stranger to Nicolovius's sitting-room, having made it an iron-clad rule with himself to accept one out of every two invitations to that charming cloister. After all, there might be something to learn from both the Major's fiery reminiscences and the old professor's cultured talk. He himself, he found, tended naturally toward silence. Listeners appeared to be needed in a world where the supply of talkers exceeded the demand. The telling of humorous anecdote he had definitely excided from his creed. It did not appear needed of him; and he was sure that the author of his creed would herself have authorized him to drop it. He never missed Fifi now, according to the way of this world, but he thought of her sometimes, which is all that anybody has a right to expect. Miss Weyland he had not seen since the day Fifi died. Mrs. Paynter had been away all summer, a firm spinster cousin coming in from the country to run the boarders, and the landlady's agent came to the house no more. Buck Klinker he saw incessantly; he was the first person in the world, probably, that the little Doctor had ever really liked. It was Buck who suggested to his pupil, in October, a particularly novel experience for his soul's unfolding, which Queed, though failing to adopt it, sometimes dandled before his mind's eye with a kind of horrified fascination, viz: the taking of Miss Miller to the picture shows.

But the bulk of his time this autumn was still going to his work on the *Post*. With ever fresh wonderment, he faced the fact that this work, first taken up solely to finance the Scriptorium, and next enlarged to satisfy a most irrational instinct, was growing slowly but surely upon his personal interest. Certainly the application of a new science to a new set of practical conditions was stimulating to his intellect; the panorama of problems whipped out daily by the telegraph had a warmth and immediateness wanting to the abstractions of closet philosophy. Queed's articles lacked the Colonel's expert fluency, his loose but telling vividness, his faculty for broad satire which occasionally set the whole city laughing. On the other hand, they displayed an exact knowledge of fact, a breadth of study and outlook, and a habit of plumbing bottom on any and all subjects which critical minds found wanting in the Colonel's delightful discourses. And nowadays the young man's articles were constantly reaching a higher and higher level of readability. Not infrequently they attracted public comment, not only, indeed not oftenest, inside the State. Queed knew what it was to be quoted in that identical New York newspaper from whose pages, so popular for wrapping around pork chops, he had first picked out his letters.

Of these things the honorable *Post* directors were not unmindful. They met on October 10, and upon Colonel Cowles's cordial recommendation, named Mr. Queed assistant editor of the *Post* at a salary of fifteen hundred dollars per annum. And Mr. Queed accepted the appointment without a moment's hesitation.

So far, then, the magnificent boast had been made good. The event fell on a Saturday. The Sunday was sunny, windy, and crisp. Free for the day and regardful of the advantages of open-air pedestrianism, the new assistant editor put on his hat from the dinner-table and struck for the open country. He rambled far, over trails strange to him, and came up short, about 4.30 in the afternoon, in a grove of immemorial pines which he instantly remembered to have seen before.