

## XVIII

*Of President West of Old Blaines College, his Trustees and his Troubles; his Firmness in the Brown-Jones Hazing Incident so misconstrued by Malicious Asses; his Article for the Post, and why it was never printed: all ending in West's Profound Dissatisfaction with the Rewards of Patriotism.*

THE way of Blaines College was not wholly smooth that winter, and annoyances rose to fret the fine edge of President West's virgin enthusiasms. The opening had been somewhat disappointing. True, there were more students than last year, the exact increment being nine. But West had hoped for an increase of fifty, and had communicated his expectations to the trustees, who were correspondingly let down when the actual figures — total enrolment, 167 — were produced at the October meeting. The young president explained about the exasperating delays in getting out his advertising literature, but the trustees rather hemmed over the bills and said that that was a lot of money. And one of them bluntly called attention to the fact that the President had not assumed his duties till well along in September.

West, with charming humility and good humor, asked indulgence for his inexperience. His mistake, he said, in giving an excess of time to the study of the great collegiate systems of the old world, if it was a mistake, was one that could hardly be repeated. Next year . . .

"Meantime," said the blunt trustee, "you've got a ten per cent increase in expenditures and but nine more stoo-dents."

"Let us not wholly forget," said West, with his disarming smile, "my hope to add substantially to the endowment."

But he marked this trustee as one likely to give trouble in the future, and hence to be handled with care. He was

a forthright, upstanding, lantern-jawed man of the people, by the name of James E. Winter. A contractor by profession and a former member of the city council, he represented the city on the board of trustees. For the city appropriated seventy-five hundred dollars a year, for the use of the college, and in return for this munificence, reserved the right to name three members of the board.

Nor was Mr. Winter the only man of his kidney on that directorate. From his great friend among the trustees, Mr. Fyne, donator of the fifty thousand dollar endowment on which Blaines College partly subsisted, West learned that his election to the presidency had failed of being unanimous. In fact, the vote had stood seven to five, and the meeting at which he was chosen had at times approached violence. Of the five, two had voted against West because they thought that old Dr. Gilfillan's resignation did not have that purely spontaneous character so desirable under the circumstances; two because they did not think that West had the qualifications, or would have the right point of view, for a people's college; and one for all these reasons, or for any other reason, which is to say for personal reasons. This one, said Mr. Fyne, was James E. Winter.

"I know," said West. "He's never got over the poundings we used to give him in the *Post* when he trained with those grafters on the Council. He'd put poison in my tea on half a chance."

Unhappily, the sharp cleft made in the board at the time of the election survived and deepened. The trustees developed a way of dividing seven to five on almost all of West's recommendations which was anything but encouraging. An obstinate, but human, pride of opinion tended to keep the two factions facing each other intact, and matters very tiny in themselves served, as the weeks went by, to aggravate this feeling. Once, at least, before Christmas, it required all of West's tact and good-humor to restore the appearance of harmony to a meeting which was fast growing excited.



But the young president would not allow himself to become discouraged. He earnestly intended to show James E. Winter which of the two knew most about running a modern institution of the higher learning. Only the perfectest bloom of his ardor faded under the constant handling of rough fingers. The interval separating Blaines College and the University of Paris began to loom larger than it had seemed in the halcyon summer-time, and the classic group of noble piles receded further and further into the prophetic haze. But West's fine energy and optimism remained. And he continued to see in the college, unpromising though the outlook was in some respects, a real instrument for the uplift.

The president sat up late on those evenings when social diversions did not claim his time, going over and over his faculty list with a critical eye, and always with profound disapproval. There were only three Ph.D.'s among them, and as a whole the average of attainment was below, rather than above, the middle grade. They were, he was obliged to admit, a lot of cheap men for a cheap college. With such a staff, a distinguished standard was clearly not to be hoped for. But what to do about it? His general idea during the summer had been mercilessly to weed out the weak brothers in the faculty, a few at a time, and fill their places with men of the first standing. But now a great obstacle presented itself. Men of the first standing demanded salaries of the first standing. Blaines College was not at present in position to pay such salaries. Obviously one of two courses remained. Either the elevation of the faculty must proceed in a very modest form, or else Blaines College must get in position to pay larger salaries. West decided to move in both directions.

There was one man on the staff that West objected to from the first faculty meeting. This was a man named Harkly Young, a youngish, tobacco-chewing fellow of lowly origin and unlessoned manners, who was "assistant professor" of mathematics at a salary of one thousand dollars a year. Professor Young's bearing and address did anything

but meet the president's idea of scholarliness; and West had no difficulty in convincing himself of the man's incompetence. Details came to his attention from time to time during the autumn which served to strengthen his snap-shot judgment, but he made the mistake, doubtless, of failing to communicate his dissatisfaction to Professor Young, and so giving him an inkling of impending disaster. West knew of just the man for this position, a brilliant young assistant superintendent of schools in another part of the state, who could be secured for the same salary. Eager to begin his house-cleaning and mark some definite progress, West hurled his bolt from the blue. About the middle of December he dispatched a letter to the doomed man notifying him that his services would not be required after the Christmas recess.

Instead of accepting his dismissal in a quiet and gentlemanly way, and making of himself a glad thank-offering on the altar of scholarship, Professor Young had the poor taste to create an uproar. After satisfying himself in a stirring personal interview that the president's letter was final, he departed in a fury, and brought suit against the college and Charles Gardiner West personally for his year's salary. He insisted that he had been engaged for the full college year. To the court he represented that he was a married man with six children, and absolutely dependent upon his position for his livelihood.

Professor Young happened to be very unpopular with both his colleagues and the students, and probably all felt that it was a case of good riddance, particularly as West's new man rode rapidly into general popularity. These facts hampered the Winterites on the board, but nevertheless they made the most of the incident, affecting to believe that Young had been harshly treated. The issue, they intimated, was one of the classes against the masses. The *Chronicle*, the penny evening paper which found it profitable business to stand for the under-dog and "the masses," scareheaded a jaundiced account of the affair, built up around an impassioned state-



ment from Professor Young. The same issue carried an editorial entitled, "The Kid Glove College." West laughed at the editorial, but he was a sensitive man to criticism and the sarcastic gibes wounded him. When the attorneys for the college advised a settlement out of court by paying the obstreperous Young three hundred dollars in cash, James Winter was outspoken in his remarks. A resolution restraining the president from making any changes in the faculty, without the previous consent and approval of the board, was defeated, after warm discussion, by the margin of seven votes to five.

"By the Lord, gentlemen," said Mr. Fyne, indignantly, "if you cannot put any confidence in the discretion of your president, you'd better get one whose discretion you can put confidence in."

"That's just what I say," rejoined James E. Winter, with instant significance.

Other changes in his faculty West decided to defer till the beginning of a new year. All his surplus energy should be concentrated, he decided, on raising an endowment fund which should put the college on a sound financial basis before that time came. But here again he collided with the thick wall of trustee bigotry.

In the city, despite his youth, he was already well known as a speaker, and was a favorite orator on agreeable occasions of a semi-public nature. This was a sort of prestige that was well worth cultivating. In the State, and even outside of it, he had many connections through various activities, and by deft correspondence he easily put himself in line for such honors as they had to offer. Invitations to speak came rolling in in the most gratifying way. His plan was to mount upon these to invitations of an even higher class. In December he made a much admired address before the Associated Progress Boards. The next month, through much subtle wire-pulling, he got himself put on the toast list at the annual banquet of the distinguished American Society for the Promotion of the Higher Education.

There his name met on equal terms with names as yet far better known. He spoke for ten minutes and sat down with the thrill of having surpassed himself. A famous financier who sat with him at the speaker's table told him that his speech was the best of the evening, because the shortest, and asked several questions about Blaines College. The young President returned home in a fine glow, which the hostile trustees promptly subjected to a cold douche.

"I'd like to inquire," said James E. Winter, sombrely, at the January board meeting, "what is the point, if any, of the President of Blaines College trapesing all over the country to attend these here banquets."

They used unacademic as well as plain language in the Blaines board meeting by this time. West smiled at Trustee Winter's question. To him the man habitually seemed as malapropos as a spiteful old lady.

"The point is, Mr. Winter, to get in touch with the sources of endowment funds. Blaines College on its present foundation cannot hope to compete with enlightened modern colleges of from five to one hundred times its resources. If we mean to advance, we must do it by bringing Blaines favorably to the attention of philanthropists who —"

"No, *sir!*" roared Winter, bringing his contractor's fist down thuddingly upon the long table. "Such noo-fangled ideas are against the traditions of old Blaines College, I say! Old Blaines College is not asking for alms. Old Blaines College is not a whining beggar, whatever those Yankee colleges may be. I say, gentlemen, it's beneath the dignity of old Blaines College for its president to go about Noo York bowing and scraping and passing the hat to Rockyfeller, and such-like boocaneers."

To West's unfeigned surprise, this view of the matter met with solid backing. Reminiscences of the "tainted money" controversy appeared in the trustees' talk. "Subsidized education" was heard more than once. One spoke bitterly of Oil Colleges. No resolution was introduced, James E.



Winter having inadvertently come unprepared, but the majority opinion was clearly that old Blaines College (founded 1894) should draw in her traditional skirts from the yellow flood then pouring over the country, and remain, small it may be, but superbly incorruptible.

For once, West left his trustees thoroughly disgusted and out of humor.

"Why, *why* are we doomed to this invincible hostility to a new idea?" he cried, in the bitterness of his soul. "Here is the spirit of progress not merely beckoning to us, but fairly springing into our laps, and because it speaks in accents that were unfamiliar to the slave patriarchy of a hundred years ago, we drag it outside the city and crucify it. I tell you these old Bourbons whom we call leaders are millstones around our necks, and we can never move an inch until we've laid the last one of them under the sod."

Sharlee Weyland, to whom he repeated this thought, though she was all sympathy with his difficulties, did not nevertheless think that this was quite fair. "Look," she said, "at the tremendous progress we've made in the last ten years."

"Yes," he flashed back at her, "and who can say that a state like Massachusetts, with the same incomparable opportunities, would n't have made ten times as much!"

But he was the best-natured man alive, and his vexation soon faded. In a week, he was once more busy planning out ways and means. He sought funds in the metropolis no more, and the famous financier spared him the mortification of having to refuse a donation by considerately not offering one. But he continued to make addresses in the State, and in the city he was in frequent demand. However, the endowment fund remained obstinately immovable. By February there had been no additions, unless we can count five hundred dollars promised by dashing young Beverley Byrd on the somewhat whimsical condition that his brother Stewart would give an equal amount.

"Moreover," said young Mr. Byrd, "I'll increase it to seven

hundred and fifty dollars if your friend Winter will publicly denounce me as a boocaneer. It'll help me in my business to be lined up with Rockefeller and all those Ikes."

But this gift never materialized at all, for the reason that Stewart Byrd kindly but firmly refused to give anything. A rich vein of horse-sense underlay Byrd's philanthropic enthusiasms; and even the necessity for the continued existence of old Blaines College appeared to be by no means clear in his mind.

"If you had a free hand, Gardiner," said he, "that would be one thing, but you have n't. I've had my eye on Blaines for a long time, and frankly I don't think it is entitled to any assistance. You have an inferior plant and a lot of inferior men; a small college governed by small ideas and ridden by a close corporation of small trustees —"

"But heavens, man!" protested West, "your argument makes a perfect circle. You won't help Blaines because it's poorly equipped, and Blaines is poorly equipped because the yellow-rich — that's you — won't help it."

Stewart Byrd wiped his gold-rimmed glasses, laughing pleasantly. He was the oldest of the four brothers, a man of authority at forty; and West watched him with a secret admiration, not untouched by a flicker of envy.

"What's the answer? Blessed if I know! The fact is, old fellow, I think you've got an utterly hopeless job there, and if I were you, I believe I'd get ready to throw it over at the first opportunity."

West replied that it was only the hard things that were worth doing in this life. None the less, as winter drew to a close, he insensibly relaxed his efforts toward the immediate exaltation of old Blaines. As he looked more closely into the situation, he realized that his too impetuous desire for results had driven him to waste energy in hopeless directions. How could he ever do anything, with a lot of moss-backed trustees tying his hands and feet every time he tried to toddle a step forward — he and Blaines? Clearly the



first step of all was to oust the fossils who stood like rocks in the path of progress, and fill their places with men who could at least recognize a progressive idea when they were beaten across the nose with it. He studied his trustee list now more purposefully than he had ever pored over his faculty line up. By the early spring, he was ready to set subtle influences going looking to the defeat of the insurgent five, including James E. Winter, whose term happily expired on the first of January following.

But the president's lines did not all fall in gloomy and prickly places in these days. His perennial faculty for enjoyment never deserted him even in his darkest hours. His big red automobile, acquired on the crest of Semple and West's prosperity, was constantly to be seen bowling down the street of an early-vernal afternoon, or dancing down far country lanes light with a load of two. The Thursday German had known him as of old, and many were the delightful dinners where he proved, by merit alone, the life of the party. Nor were his pleasures by any means all dissociated from Blaines College. The local prestige that the president acquired from his position was decidedly agreeable to him. Never an educational point arose in the life of the city or the nation but the *Post* carried a long interview giving Mr. West's views upon it. Corner-stone laying afforded him a sincere joy. Even discussions with parents about their young hopefuls was anything but irksome to his buoyant nature.

Best and pleasantest of all was his relation with the students. His notable gift for popularity, however futile it might be with embittered asses like James E. Winter, served him in good stead here. West could not conceal from himself that the boys idolized him. With secret delight he saw them copying his walk, his taste in waistcoats, the way he brushed back his hair. He had them in relays to his home to supper, skipping only those of too hopeless an uncouthness, and sent them home enchanted. He had introduced into the collegiate programme a five-minute prayer, held every morning at nine,

at which he made brief addresses on some phase of college ideals every Tuesday and Friday. Attendance at these gatherings was optional, but it kept up in the most gratifying way, and sometimes on a Friday the little assembly-room would be quite filled with the frankly admiring lads. "Why should I mind the little annoyances," would flash into his mind as he rose to speak, "when I can look down into a lot of fine, loyal young faces like this. *Here* is what counts." His appearance at student gatherings was always attended by an ovation. He loved to hear the old Blaines cheer, with three ringing "Prexy's" tacked on the end. One Saturday in early April, Prexy took Miss Avery to a baseball game, somewhat against her will, solely that she might see how his students worshiped him. On the following Saturday, all with even-handed liberality, he took Miss Weyland to another base-ball game, with the same delightful purpose.

The spring found West stronger and more contented with his lot as president of a jerkwater college, decidedly happier for the burning out of the fires of hot ambition which had consumed his soul six months earlier. He told himself that he was reconciled to a slow advance, with fighting every inch of the way. But he saw the uselessness of fighting trustees who were doomed soon to fall, and resigned himself to a quiet, in fact a temporarily suspended, programme of progress. And then, just when everything seemed most comfortably serene, a new straw suddenly appeared in the wind, which quickly multiplied into a bundle and then a bale, and all at once the camel's back had more than it could bear. April was hardly dead before the college world was in a turmoil, by the side of which the Young affair was the mere buzzing of a gnat.

History is full of incidents of the kind: incidents which are trifling beyond mention in the beginning, but which malign circumstance distorts and magnifies till they set nations daggers-drawn at each other's throats. Two students lured a "freshman" to their room and there invited him to drink a



marvelous compound the beginnings of which were fat pork and olive oil; this while standing on his head. The freshman did not feel in a position to deny their request. But his was a delicate stomach, and the result of his accommodating spirit was that he became violently, though not seriously, ill. Thus the matter came to the attention of his parents, and so to the college authorities. The sick lad stoutly declined to tell who were his persecutors, but West managed to track one of them down and summoned him to his office. We may call this student Brown; a pleasant-mannered youth of excellent family, whose sister West sometimes danced with at the Thursday German. Brown said that he had, indeed, been present during the sad affair, that he had, in fact, to his eternal humiliation and regret, aided and abetted it; but he delicately hinted that the prime responsibility rested on the shoulders of the other student. Rather unwisely, perhaps, West pressed him to disclose the name of his collaborator. (Brown afterwards, to square himself with the students, alleged "intimidation.") A youth whom we may describe as Jones was mentioned, and later, in the august private office, was invited to tell what he knew of the disorder. Henceforward accounts vary. Jones declared to the end that the president promised a light punishment for all concerned if he would make a clean breast. West asserted — and who would doubt his statement? — that he had made no promise, or even a suggestion of a promise, of any kind. Be that as it may, Jones proceeded, though declining to mention any other name than his own. He declared positively that the idea of hazing the freshman had not originated with him, but that he had taken a culpable part in it, for which he was heartily sorry. Asked whether he considered himself or his colleague principally responsible for the injury to the freshman's health, he said that he preferred not to answer. To West this seemed a damaging admission, though perhaps not everybody would have so viewed it. He sent Jones away with no intimation of what he proposed to do.

There was the situation, plain as a barn at noonday. All that was needed was tact, judgment, and a firm hand. The young president hesitated. Ordinarily he would have taken a quiet hour in the evening to think it all over carefully, but as it happened — like Lord George Germaine and the dispatch to Burgoyne — social engagements rushed forward to occupy his time. Next morning his mail brought several letters, urging him to set his foot ruthlessly on the serpent-head of hazing. His telephone rang with the same firm counsel. The *Post*, he saw, had a long leading article insisting that discipline must be maintained at all hazards. It was observed that this article thundered in the old Colonel's best style, and this was the more noteworthy in that the article in question happened to be written by a young man of the name of Queed.

West would have preferred to let the matter stand for a day or so, but he saw that prompt and decisive action was expected of him. Denying himself to callers, he shut himself in his office, to determine what was just and fair and right. The advice of his correspondents, and of the *Post*, tallied exactly with what the trustees had told him in the beginning about the traditions of old Blaines. Hazing was not to be tolerated under any circumstances. Therefore, somebody's head would now have to fall. There could hardly be any occasion for expelling nice young Brown. For a minor consideration, it would be decidedly awkward henceforward, to have to offer salt to Mrs. Brown at dinner, as he had done only last week, with the hand that had ruined her son's career. Much more important, it seemed clear enough to West that the boy had only been weak, and had been tempted into misbehavior by his older and more wilful comrade. West had never liked young Jones. He was a rawboned, unkempt sprig of the masses, who had not been included in any of the student suppers at the president's house. Jones's refusal to speak out fully on all the details of the affair pointed strongly, so West argued, to consciousness of damning guilt. The path of administrative duty appeared plain. West, to say truth, had



not at first expected to apply the drastic penalty of expulsion at all, but it was clear that this was what the city expected of him. The universal cry was for unshrinking firmness. Well, he would show them that he was firm, and shrank from no unpleasantness where his duty was concerned. Brown he ordered before him for a severe reprimand, and Jones he summarily dismissed from old Blaines College.

These decrees went into effect at noon. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon the war-dogs broke their leashes. Four was the hour when the "night" edition of the *Evening Chronicle* came smoking hot from the presses. It appeared that young Jones was the son, not merely of a plumber, but of a plumber who was decidedly prominent in lodge circles and the smaller areas of politics. His case was therefore precisely the kind that the young men of the *Chronicle* loved to espouse. The three-column scare-head over their bitterly partisan "story" ran thus:

POOR BOY KICKED OUT  
BY PRESIDENT WEST

Close beside this, lest the reader should fail to grasp the full meaning of the boldface, was a three-column cartoon, crudely drawn but adroit enough. It represented West, unpleasantly caricatured, garbed in a swallow-tail coat and enormous white gloves, with a gardenia in his button-hole, engaged in booting a lad of singular nobility of countenance out of an open door. A tag around the lad's neck described him as "The Workingman's Son." Under the devilish drawing ran a line which said, succinctly, "His Policies." On page four was a double column, double-leaded editorial, liberal with capitals and entitled: "Justice in Silk Stockings."

But this was only a beginning. Next morning's *Post*, which West had counted on to come to his assistance with a ringing leader, so earnestly discussed rotation of crops and the approaching gubernatorial campaign, that it had not a line for the little disturbance at the college. If this was a

disappointment to West, a greater blow awaited him. Not to try to gloss over the mortifying circumstance, he was hissed when he entered the morning assembly — he, the prince, idol, and darling of his students. Though the room was full, the hissing was of small proportions, but rather too big to be ignored. West, after debating with himself whether or not he should notice it, made a graceful and manly two-minute talk which, he flattered himself, effectually abashed the lads who had so far forgotten themselves. None the less the demonstration cut him to the quick. When four o'clock came he found himself waiting for the appearance of the *Chronicle* with an anxiety which he had never conceived possible with regard to that paper. A glance at its lurid front showed that the blatherskites had pounded him harder than ever. A black headline glared with the untruth that President West had been "Hissed by Entire Student Body." Editorially, the *Chronicle* passionately inquired whether the taxpayers enjoyed having the college which they so liberally supported (exact amount seventy-five hundred dollars a year) mismanaged in so gross a way.

West put a laughing face upon these calumnies, but to himself he owned that he was deeply hurt. Dropping in at the club that night, he found a group of men, all his friends, eagerly discussing the shindig, as they called it. Joining in with that perfect good-humor and lack of false pride which was characteristic of him, he gathered that all of them thought he had made a mistake. It seemed to be considered that Brown had put himself in a bad light by trying to throw the blame on Jones. Jones, they said, should not have been bounced without Brown, and probably the best thing would have been not to bounce either. The irritating thing about this latter view was that it was exactly what West had thought in the first place, before pressure was applied to him.

In the still watches of the night the young man was harried by uncertainties and tortured by stirring suspicions. Had he been fair to Jones, after all? Was his summary action in



regard to that youth prompted in the faintest degree by personal dislike? Was he conceivably the kind of man who is capable of thinking one thing and doing another? The most afflicting of all doubts, doubt of himself, kept the young man tossing on his pillow for at least an hour.

But he woke with a clear-cut decision singing in his mind and gladdening his morning. He would take Jones back. He would generously reinstate the youth, on the ground that the public mortification already put upon him was a sufficient punishment for his sins and abundant warning for others like-minded. This would settle all difficulties at one stroke and definitely lay the ghost of a disagreeable occurrence. The solution was so simple that he marvelled that he had not thought of it before.

His morning's mail, containing one or two very unpleasant letters, only strengthened his determination. He lost no time in carrying it out. By special messenger he dispatched a carefully written and kindly letter to Jones, Senior. Jones, Senior, tore it across the middle and returned it by the same messenger. He then informed the *Chronicle* what he had done. The *Chronicle* that afternoon shrieked it under a five-column head, together with a ferocious statement from Jones, Senior, saying that he would rather see his son breaking rocks in the road than a student in such a college as Blaines was, under the present régime. The editor, instead of seeing in West's letter a spontaneous act of magnanimity in the interest of the academic uplift, maliciously twisted it into a grudging confession of error, "unrelieved by the grace of manly retraction and apology." So ran the editorial, which was offensively headed "West's Fatal Flop." Some of the State papers, it seemed from excerpts printed in another column, were foolishly following the *Chronicle's* lead; Republican cracker-box orators were trying somehow to make capital of the thing; and altogether there was a very unpleasant little mess, which showed signs of developing rapidly into what is known as an "issue."

That afternoon, when the tempest in the collegiate tea-

pot was storming at its merriest, West, being downtown on private business, chanced to drop in at the *Post* office, according to his frequent habit. He found the sanctum under the guard of the young assistant editor. The Colonel, in fact, had been sick in bed for four days, and in his absence, Queed was acting-editor and sole contributor of the leaded minion. The two young men greeted each other pleasantly.

"I'm reading you every day," said West, presently, "and, flattery and all that aside, I've been both surprised and delighted at the character of the work you're doing. It's fully up to the best traditions of the *Post*, and that strikes me as quite a feat for a man of your years."

Because he was pleased at this tribute, Queed answered briefly, and at once changed the subject. But he did it maladroitly by expressing the hope that things were going well with Mr. West.

"Well, not hardly," said West, and gave his pleasant laugh. "You may possibly have noticed from our esteemed afternoon contemporary that I'm in a very pretty little pickle. But by the way," he added, with entire good humor, "the *Post* does n't appear to have noticed it after all."

"No," said Queed, slowly, not pretending to misunderstand. He hesitated, a rare thing with him. "The fact is I could not write what you would naturally wish to have written, and therefore I have n't written anything at all."

West threw up his hands in mock horror. "Here's another one! Come on, fellers! Kick him!—he's got no friends! You know," he laughed, "I remind myself of the man who stuck his head in at the teller's window, wanting to have a check cashed. The teller did n't know him from Adam. 'Have you any friends here in the city?' asked he. 'Lord, no!' said the stranger; 'I'm the weather man.'"

Queed smiled.

"And I was only trying in my poor way," said West, mournfully, "to follow the advice that you, young man, roared at me for a column on the fatal morning."

"I've regretted that," said Queed. "Though, of course, I



never looked for any such developments as this. I was merely trying to act on Colonel Cowles's advice about always playing up local topics. You are doubtless familiar with his dictum that the people are far more interested in a cat-fight at Seventh and Centre Streets than in the greatest exploits of science."

West laughed and rose to go. Then a good-natured thought struck him. "Look here," said he, "this must be a great load, with the Colonel away—doing all of three columns a day by yourself. How on earth do you manage it?"

"Well, I start work at eight o'clock in the morning."

"And what time does that get you through?"

"Usually in time to get to press with it."

"Oh, I say! That won't do at all. You'll break yourself down, playing both ends against the middle like that. Let me help you out, won't you? Let me do something for you right now?"

"If you really feel like it," said Queed, remembering how the Colonel welcomed Mr. West's occasional contributions to his columns, "of course I shall be glad to have something from you."

"Why, my dear fellow, certainly! Hand me some copy-paper there, and go right on with your work while I unbosom my pent-up Uticas."

He meditated a moment, wrote rapidly for half an hour, and rose with a hurried glance at his watch.

"Here's a little squib about the college that may serve as a space-filler. I must fly for an engagement. I'll try to come down to-morrow afternoon anyway, and if you need anything to-night, 'phone me. Delighted to help you out."

Queed picked up the scattered sheets and read them over carefully. He found that Director West had written a very able defense, and whole-hearted endorsement, of President West's position in the Blaines College hazing affair.

The acting editor sat for some time in deep thought. Eighteen months' increasing contact with Buck Klinker and other men of action had somewhat tamed his soaring self-

sufficiency. He was not nearly so sure as he once was that he knew everything there was to know, and a little more besides. West, personally, whom he saw often, he had gradually come to admire with warmth. By slow degrees it came to him that the popular young president had many qualities of a very desirable sort which he himself lacked. West's opinion on a question of college discipline was likely to be at least as sound as his own. Moreover, West was one of the owners and managers of the *Post*.

Nevertheless, he, Queed, did not see how he could accept and print this article.

It was the old-school Colonel's fundamental axiom, drilled into and fully adopted by his assistant, that the editor must be personally responsible for every word that appeared in his columns. Those columns, to be kept pure, must represent nothing but the editor's personal views. Therefore, on more than one occasion, the Colonel had refused point-blank to prepare articles which his directors wished printed. He always accompanied these refusals with his resignation, which the directors invariably returned to him, thereby abandoning their point. Queed was for the moment editor in the Colonel's stead. Over the telephone, Colonel Cowles had instructed him, four days before, to assume full responsibility, communicating with him or with the directors if he was in doubt, but standing firmly on his own legs. As to where those legs now twitched to lead him, the young man could have no doubt. If he had a passion in his scientist's bosom, it was for exact and unflinching veracity. Even to keep the *Post* silent had been something of a strain upon his instinct for truth, for a voice within him had whispered that an honest journal *ought* to have some opinion to express on a matter so locally interesting as this. To publish this editorial would strain the instinct to the breaking point and beyond. For it would be equivalent to saying, whether anybody else but him knew it or not, that he, the present editor of the *Post* approved and endorsed West's position, when the truth was that he did nothing of the sort.



At eight o'clock that night, he succeeded, after prolonged search of the town on the part of the switchboard boy, in getting West to the telephone.

"Mr. West," said Queed, "I am very sorry, but I don't see how I can print your article."

"Oh, Lord!" came West's untroubled voice back over the wire. "And a man's enemies shall be those of his own household. What's wrong with it, Mr. Editor?"

Queed explained his reluctances. "If that is not satisfactory to you," he added, at the end, "as it hardly can be, I give you my resignation now, and you yourself can take charge immediately."

"Bless your heart, no! Put it in the waste-basket. It doesn't make a kopeck's worth of difference. Here's a thought, though. Do you approve of the tactics of those *Chronicle* fellows in the matter?"

"No, I do not."

"Well, why not show them up to-morrow?"

"I'll be glad to do it."

So Queed wrote a stinging little article of a couple of sticks' length, holding up to public scorn journalistic redshirts who curry-combed the masses, and preached class hatred for the money there was in it. It is doubtful if this article helped matters much. For the shameless *Chronicle* seized on it as showing that the *Post* had tried to defend the president, and utterly failed. "Even the West organ," so ran its brazen capitals, "does not dare endorse its darling. And no wonder, after the storm of indignation aroused by the *Chronicle's* fearless exposures."

West kept his good humor and self-control intact, but it was hardly to be expected that he enjoyed venomous misrepresentation of this sort. The solidest comfort he got in these days came from Sharlee Weyland, who did not read the *Chronicle*, and was most beautifully confident that whatever he had done was right. But after all, the counselings of Miss Avery, of whom he also saw much that spring, better suited his disgruntled humor.

"They are incapable of appreciating you," said she, a siren in the red motor. "You owe it to yourself to enter a larger field. And" — so ran the languorous voice — "to your friends."

The trustees met on Saturday, with the *Chronicle* still pounding away with deadly regularity. Its editorial of the afternoon before was entitled, "We Want A College President — Not A Class President," and had frankly urged the trustees of old Blaines to consider whether a change of administration was not advisable. This was advice which some of the trustees were only too ready to follow. James E. Winter, coming armed cap-à-pie to the meeting, suggested that Mr. West withdraw for a time, which Mr. West properly declined to do. The implacable insurgent thereupon launched into a bitter face-to-face denunciation of the president's conduct in the hazing affair, outpacing the *Chronicle* by intimating, too plainly for courtesy, that the president's conduct toward Jones was characterized by duplicity, if not wanting in consistent adherence to veracity. "I had a hard time to keep from hitting him," said West afterwards, "but I knew that would be the worst thing I could possibly do." "Maybe so," sighed Mr. Fyne, apparently not with full conviction. Winter went too far in moving that the president's continuance in office was prejudicial to the welfare of Blaines College, and was defeated 9 to 3. Nevertheless, West always looked back at this meeting as one of the most unpleasant incidents in his life. He flung out of it humiliated, angry, and thoroughly sick at heart.

West saw himself as a persecuted patriot, who had laid a costly oblation on the altar of public spirit only to see the base crowd jostle forward and spit upon it. He was poor in this world's goods. It had cost him five thousand a year to accept the presidency of Blaines College. And this was how they rewarded him. To him, as he sat long in his office brooding upon the darkness of life, there came a visitor, a tall, angular, twinkling-eyed, slow-speaking individual who perpetually chewed an unlighted cigar. He was Plonny Neal, no



other, the reputed great chieftain of city politics. Once the *Post*, in an article inspired by West, had referred to Plonny as "this notorious grafter." Plonny could hardly have considered this courteous; but he was a man who never remembered a grudge, until ready to pay it back with compound interest. West's adolescent passion for the immediate reform of politics had long since softened, and nowadays when the whirligig of affairs threw the two men together, as it did not infrequently, they met on the easiest and friendliest terms. West liked Plonny, as everybody did, and of Plonny's sincere liking for him he never had the slightest doubt.

In fact, Mr. Neal's present call was to report that the manner in which a lady brushes a midge from her summering brow was no simpler than the wiping of James E. Winter off the board of Blaines College.

That topic being disposed of, West introduced another.

"Noticed the way the *Chronicle* is jumping on me with all four feet, Plonny?" he asked, with rather a forced laugh. "Why can't those fellows forget it and leave me alone?"

By a slow facial manœuvre, Mr. Neal contrived to make his cigar look out upon the world with contemptuousness unbearable.

"Why, nobody pays no attention to them fellers' wind, Mr. West. You could buy them off for a hundred dollars, ten dollars down, and have them praising you three times a week for two hundred dollars, twenty-five dollars down. I only take the paper," said Mr. Neal, "because their Sunday is mighty convenient f'r packin' furniture f'r shipment."

The *Chronicle* was the only paper Mr. Neal ever thought of reading, and this was how he stabbed it in the back.

"I don't want to butt in, Mr. West," said he, rising, "and you can stop me if I am, but as a friend of yours — why are you botherin' yourself at all with this here kid's-size proposition?"

"What kid's-size proposition?"

"This little two-by-twice grammar school that tries to

pass itself off for a college. And you ain't even boss of it at that! You got a gang of mossbacks sitting on your head who don't get a live idea among 'em wunsta year. Why, the archangel Gabriel would n't have a show with a lot of corpses like them! Of course it ain't my business to give advice to a man like you, and I'm probably offendin' you sayin' this, but someway you don't seem to see what's so plain to everybody else. It's your modesty keeps you blind, I guess. But here's what I don't see: why don't you come out of this little hole in the ground and get in line?"

"In line?"

"You're dead and buried here. Now you mention the *Evening Windbag* that nobody pays no more attention to than kids yelling in the street. How about having a paper of your own some day, to express your own ideas and get things done, big things, the way you want 'em?"

"You mean the *Post*?"

"Well, the editor of the *Post* certainly would be in line, whereas the president of Blaines Grammar School certainly ain't."

"What do you mean by in line, Plonny?"

Mr. Neal invested his cigar with an enigmatic significance. "I might mean one thing and I might mean another. I s'pose you never give a thought to poltix, did you?"

"Well, in a general way I have thought of it sometimes."

"Think of it some more," said Mr. Neal, from the door. "I see a kind of shake-up comin'. People say I've got infloonce in poltix, and sort of help to run things. Of course it ain't so. I've got no more infloonce than what my ballot gives me, and my takin' an intelligent public interest in what's goin' on. But it looks to an amatoor like the people are gettin' tired of this ring-rule they been givin' us, and 're goin' to rise in their majesty pretty soon, and fill the offices with young progressive men who never heeled f'r the organization."

He went away, leaving the young president of Blaines vastly cheered. Certainly no language could have made



Neal's meaning any plainer. He had come to tell West that, if he would only consent to get in line, he, great Neal, desired to put him in high office — doubtless the Mayoralty, which in all human probability meant the Governorship four years later.

West sat long in rapt meditation. He marveled at himself for having ever accepted his present position. Its limitations were so narrow and so palpable, its possibilities were so restricted, its complacent provincialism so glaring, that the imaginative glories with which he had once enwrapped it seemed now simply grotesque. As long as he remained, he was an entombed nonentity. Beyond the college walls, out of the reach of the contemptible bigotry of the trustees of this world, the people were calling for him. He could be the new type of public servant, the clean, strong, fearless, idolized young Moses, predestined to lead a tired people into the promised land of political purity. Once more a white meadow of eager faces rolled out before the eye of his mind; and this time, from the buntinged hustings, he did not extol learning with classic periods, but excoriated political dishonesty in red-hot phrases which jerked the throngs to their feet, frenzied with ardor. . . .

And it was while he was still in this vein of thought, as it happened, that Colonel Cowles, at eleven o'clock on the first night of June, dropped dead in his bathroom, and left the *Post* without an editor.

## XIX

*The Little House on Duke of Gloucester Street; and the Beginning of Various Feelings, Sensibilities, and Attitudes between two Lonely Men.*

ONE instant thought the news of the Colonel's death struck from nearly everybody's mind: *He'll miss the Reunion*. For within a few days the city was to witness that yearly gathering of broken armies which, of all assemblages among men, the Colonel had loved most dearly. In thirty years, he had not missed one, till now. They buried the old warrior with pomp and circumstance, not to speak of many tears, and his young assistant in the sanctum came home from the graveside with a sense of having lost a valued counselor and friend. Only the home to which the assistant returned with this feeling was not the Third Hall Back of Mrs. Paynter's, sometimes known as the Scriptorium, but a whole suite of pleasant rooms, upstairs and down, in a nice little house on Duke of Gloucester Street. For Nicolovius had made his contemplated move on the first of May, and Queed had gone with him.

It was half-past six o'clock on a pretty summer's evening. Queed opened the house-door with a latch-key and went upstairs to the comfortable living-room, which faithfully reproduced the old professor's sitting-room at Mrs. Paynter's. Nicolovius, in his black silk cap, was sitting near the open window, reading and smoking a strong cigarette.

"Ah, here you are! I was just thinking that you were rather later than usual this evening."

"Yes, I went to Colonel Cowles's funeral. It was decidedly impressive."

"Ah!"

Queed dropped down into one of Nicolovius's agreeable