

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

chairs and let his eyes roam over the room. He was extremely comfortable in this house; a little too comfortable, he was beginning to think now, considering that he paid but seven dollars and fifty cents a week towards its support. He had a desk and lamp all his own in the living-room, a table and lamp in his bedroom, ease and independence over two floors. An old negro man looked after the two gentlemen and gave them excellent things to eat. The house was an old one, and small; it was in an unfashionable part of town, and having stood empty for some time, could be had for thirty-five dollars a month. However, Nicolovius had wiped out any economy here by spending his money freely to repair and beautify. He had had workmen in the house for a month, papering, painting, plumbing, and altering.

"Dozens of people could not get in the church," said Queed. "They stood outside in the street till the service was over."

Nicolovius was looking out of the window, and answered casually. "I daresay he was an excellent man according to his lights."

"Coming to know him very well in the past year, I found that his lights stood high."

"As high, I am sure, as the environment in which he was born and raised made possible."

"You have a low opinion, then, of ante-bellum civilization in the South?"

"Who that knows his history could have otherwise?"

"You know history, I admit," said Queed, lightly falling upon the side issue, "surprisingly, indeed, considering that you have not read it for so many years."

"A man is not likely to forget truths burned into him when he is young."

"Everything depends," said Queed, returning to his muttons, "upon how you are going to appraise a civilization. If the only true measure is economic efficiency, no one can question that the old Southern system was one of the worst ever conceived."

"Can you, expert upon organized society as you are, admit any doubts upon that point?"

"I am admitting doubts upon a good many points these days."

Nicolovius resumed his cigarette. Talk languished. Both men enjoyed a good silence. Many a supper they ate through without a word. The old man's attitude toward the young one was charming. He had sloughed off some of the too polished blandness of his manner, and now offered a simpler meeting ground of naturalness and kindliness. They had shared the Duke of Gloucester Street roof-tree for a month, but Queed did not yet accept it as a matter of course. He was decidedly more prone to be analytical than he had been a year ago. Yet whatever could be urged against it, the little house was in one way making a subtle tug upon his regard: it was the nearest thing to a home that he had ever had in his life, or was ever likely to have.

"And when will the *Post* directors meet to choose his successor?"

"I have n't heard. Very soon, I should think."

"It is certain, I suppose," said Nicolovius, "that they will name you?"

"Oh, not at all — by no means! I am merely receptive, that is all."

Queed glanced at his watch and rose. "There is half an hour before supper, I see. I think I must turn it to account."

Nicolovius looked regretful. "Why not allow yourself this minute's rest, and me the pleasure of your society?"

Queed hesitated. "No — I think my duty is to my work."

He passed into the adjoining room, which was his bedroom, and shut the door. Here at his table, he passed all of the hours that he spent in the house, except after supper, when he did his work in the sitting-room with Nicolovius. He felt that, in honor, he owed some companionship, of the body at least, to the old man in exchange for the run of the house, and his evenings were his conscientious concession

to his social duty. But sometimes he felt the surprising and wholly irrational impulse to concede more, to give the old man a larger measure of society than he was, so to say, paying for. He felt it now as he seated himself methodically and opened his table drawer.

From a purely selfish point of view, which was the only point of view from which such a compact need be considered, he could hardly think that his new domestic arrangement was a success. Greater comforts he had, of course, but it is not upon comforts that the world's work hangs. The important facts were that he was paying as much as he had paid at Mrs. Paynter's, and was enjoying rather less privacy. He and Nicolovius were friends of convenience only. Yet somehow the old professor managed to obtrude himself perpetually upon his consciousness. The young man began to feel an annoying sense of personal responsibility toward him, an impulse which his reason rejected utterly.

He was aware that, personally, he wished himself back at Mrs. Paynter's and the Scriptorium. A free man, in possession of this knowledge, would immediately pack up and return. But that was just the trouble. He who had always, hitherto, been the freest man in the world, appeared no longer to be free. He was aware that he would find it very difficult to walk into the sitting-room at this moment, and tell Nicolovius that he was going to leave. The old man would probably make a scene. The irritating thing about it was that Nicolovius, being as solitary in the great world as he himself, actually *minded* his isolation, and was apparently coming to depend upon *him*.

But after all, he was contented here, and his work was prospering largely. The days of his preparation for his *Post* labors were definitely over. He no longer had to read or study; he stood upon his feet, and carried his editorial qualifications under his hat. His duties as assistant editor occupied him but four or five hours a day; some three hours a day — the allotment was inexact, for the Schedule had lost its first rigid precision — to the Sciences of Physical Cul-

ture and Human Intercourse; all the rest to the Science of Sciences. Glorious mornings, and hardly less glorious nights, he gave, day after day, week after week, to the great book; and because of his astonishingly enhanced vitality, he made one hour tell now as an hour and a half had told in the period of the establishment of the Scriptorium.

And now, without warning and prematurely, the jade Fortune had pitched a bomb at this new Revised Schedule of his, leaving him to decide whether he would patch up the pieces or not. And he had decided that he would not patch them up. Colonel Cowles was dead. The directors of the *Post* might choose him to succeed the Colonel, or they might not. But if they did choose him, he had finally made up his mind that he would accept the election.

In his attitude toward the newspaper, Queed was something like those eminent fellow-scientists of his who have set out to "expose" spiritualism and "the occult," and have ended as the most gullible customers of the most dubious of "mediums." The idea of being editor for its own sake, which he had once jeered and flouted, he had gradually come to consider with large respect. The work drew him amazingly; it was applied science of a peculiarly fascinating sort. And in the six days of the Colonel's illness in May, when he had full charge of the editorial page — and again now — he had an exhilarating consciousness of personal power which lured him, oddly, more than any sensation he had ever had in his life.

No inducements of this sort, alone, could ever have drawn him from his love. However, his love was safe, in any case. If they made him editor, they would give him an assistant. He would keep his mornings for himself — four hours a day. In the long vigil last night, he had threshed the whole thing out. On a four-hour schedule he could finish his book in four years and a half more: — an unprecedentedly early age to have completed so monumental a work. And who could say that in thus making haste slowly, he would not have acquired a breadth of outlook, and closer knowledge

of the practical conditions of life, which would be advantageously reflected in the *Magnum Opus* itself?

The young man sat at his table, the sheaf of yellow sheets which made up the chapter he was now working on ready under his hand. Around him were his reference books, his note-books, his pencils and erasers, all the neat paraphernalia of his trade. Everything was in order; yet he touched none of them. Presently his eyes fell upon his open watch, and his mind went off into new channels, or rather into old channels which he thought he had abandoned for this half-hour at any rate. In five minutes more, he put away his manuscript, picked up his watch, and strolled back into the sitting-room.

Nicolovius was sitting where he had left him, except that now he was not reading but merely staring out of the window. He glanced around with a look of pleased surprise and welcome.

"Ah-h! Did genius fail to burn?" he asked, employing a bromidic phrase which Queed particularly detested.

"That is one way of putting it, I suppose."

"Or did you take pity on my solitariness? You must not let me become a drag upon you."

Queed, dropping into a chair, rather out of humor, made no reply. Nicolovius continued to look out of the window.

"I see in the *Post*," he presently began again, "that Colonel Cowles, after getting quite well, broke himself down again in preparing for the so-called Reunion. It seems rather hard to have to give one's life for such a rabble of beggars."

"That is how you regard the veterans, is it?"

"Have you ever seen the outfit?"

"Never."

"I have lived here long enough to learn something of them. Look at them for yourself next week. Mix with them. Talk with them. You will find them worth a study — and worth nothing else under the sun."

"I have been looking forward to doing something of that sort," said Queed, introspectively.

Had not Miss Weyland, the last time he had seen her — namely, one evening about two months before, — expressly invited him to come and witness the Reunion parade from her piazza?

"You will see," said Nicolovius, in his purring voice, "a lot of shabby old men, outside and in, who never did an honest day's work in their lives."

He paused, finished his cigarette and suavely resumed:

"They went to war as young men, because it promised to be more exciting than pushing a plow over a worn-out hillside. Or because there was nothing else to do. Or because they were conscripted and kicked into it. They came out of the war the most invincible grafters in history. The shiftless boor of a stable-boy found himself transformed into a shining hero, and he meant to lie back and live on it for the rest of his days. Beassured that he understood very well the cash value of his old uniform. If he had a peg-leg or an empty sleeve, so much the more impudently could he pass around his property cap. For forty years, he and his mendicant band have been a cursed albatross hung around the necks of their honest fellows. Able-bodied men, they have lolled back and eaten up millions of dollars, belonging to a State which they pretend to love and which, as they well know, has needed every penny for the desperate struggle of existence. Since the political party which dominates this State is too cowardly to tell them to go to work or go to the devil, it will be a God's mercy when the last one of them is in his grave. You may take my word for that."

But Queed, being a scientist by passion, never took anybody's word for anything. He always went to the original sources of information, and found out for himself. It was a year now since he had begun saturating himself in the annals of the State and the South, and he had scoured the field so effectually that Colonel Cowles himself had been known to appeal to him on a point of history, though the Colonel had forty years' start on him, and had himself helped to make that history.

Therefore Queed knew that Nicolovius, by taking the case of one soldier in ten, perhaps, or twenty or fifty, and offering it as typical of the whole, was bitterly caricaturing history; and he wondered why in the world the old man cared to do it.

"My own reading of the recent history of the South," said Queed, "can hardly sustain such a view."

"You have only to read further to be convinced."

"But I thought you yourself never read recent history."

Nicolovius flung him a sharp look, which the young man, staring thoughtfully at the floor, missed. The old professor laughed.

"My dear boy! I read it on the lips of Major Brooke, I read it daily in the newspapers, I read it in such articles as your Colonel Cowles wrote about this very Reunion. I cannot get away from history in the making, if I would. Ah, there is the supper bell — I'm quite ready for it, too. Let us go down."

They went down arm in arm. On the stairs Nicolovius said: "These Southern manifestations interest me because, though extreme, they are after all so absurdly typical of human nature. I have even seen the same sort of thing in my own land."

Queed, though he knew the history of Ireland very well, could not recall any parallel to the United Confederate Veterans in the annals of that country. Still, a man capable of distorting history as Nicolovius distorted it could always find a parallel to anything anywhere.

When the meal was about half over, Queed said: —

"You slept badly last night, did n't you?"

"Yes — my old enemy. The attack soon passed. However, you may be sure that it is a comfort at such times to know that I am not alone."

"If you should need any — ahem — assistance, I assume that you will call me," said Queed, after a pause.

"Thank you. You can hardly realize what your presence here, your companionship and, I hope I may say, your friendship, mean to me."

Queed glanced at him over the table, and hastily turned his glance away. He had surprised Nicolovius looking at him with a curiously tender look in his black diamond eyes.

The young man went to the office that night, worried by two highly irritating ideas. One was that Nicolovius was most unjustifiably permitting himself to become dependent upon him. The other was that it was very peculiar that a Fenian refugee should care to express slanderous views of the soldiers of a Lost Cause. Both thoughts, once introduced into the young man's mind, obstinately stuck there.