

XXV

Recording a Discussion about the Reformatory between Editor West and his Dog-like Admirer, the City Boss; and a Briefer Conversation between West and Prof. Nicolovius's Boarder.

ABOUT one o'clock the telephone rang sharply, and Queed, just arrived for the afternoon work and alone in the office, answered it. It was the Rev. Mr. Dayne, Secretary of the Department of Charities; he had learned that the reformatory bill was to be called up in the house next day. The double-faced politicians of the machine, said Mr. Dayne, with their pretended zeal for economy, were desperately afraid of the *Post*. Would Mr. Queed be kind enough to hit a final ringing blow for the right in to-morrow's paper?

"That our position to-day is as strong as it is," said the kind, firm voice, "is due largely to your splendid work, Mr. Queed. I say this gladly, and advisedly. If you will put your shoulder to the wheel just once more, I am confident that you will push us through. I shall be eternally grateful, and so will the State. For it is a question of genuine moral importance to us all."

Mr. Dayne received assurance that Mr. Queed would do all that he could for him. He left the telephone rather wishing that the assistant editor could sometimes be inspired into verbal enthusiasm. But of his abilities the Secretary did not entertain the smallest doubt, and he felt that day that his long fight for the reformatory was as good as won.

Hanging up the receiver, Queed leaned back in his swivel chair and thoughtfully filled a pipe, which he smoked nowadays with an experienced and ripened pleasure. At once he relapsed into absorbed thought. Though he answered Mr. Dayne calmly and briefly according to his wont, the young

man's heart was beating faster with the knowledge that he stood at the crisis of his longest and dearest editorial fight. He expected to win it. The whole subject, from every conceivable point of view, was at his fingers' ends. He knew exactly what to say; his one problem was how to say it in the most irresistible way possible.

Yet Queed, tilted back in his chair, and staring out over the wet roofs, was not thinking of the reformatory. He was thinking, not of public matters at all, but of the circumstances of his curious life with Henry G. Surface; and his thoughts were not agreeable in the least.

Not that he and the "old professor" did not get along well together. It was really surprising how well they did get along. Their dynamic interview of last June had at once been buried out of sight, and since then their days had flowed along with unbroken smoothness. If there had been times when the young man's thought recoiled from the compact and the intimacy, his manner never betrayed any sign of it. On the contrary, he found himself mysteriously answering the growing dependence of the old man with a growing sense of responsibility toward him, and discovering in the process a curious and subtle kind of compensation.

What troubled Queed about Nicolovius — as the world called him — was his money. He, Queed, was in part living on this money, eating it, drinking it, sleeping on it. Of late the old man had been spending it with increasing freedom, constantly enlarging the comforts of the joint ménage. He had reached, in fact, a scale of living which continually thrust itself on Queed's consciousness as quite beyond the savings of a poor old school teacher. And if this appearance were true, where did the surplus come from?

The question had knocked unpleasantly at the young man's mind before now. This morning he faced it, and pondered deeply. A way occurred to him by which, possibly, he might turn a little light upon this problem. He did not care to take it; he shrank from doing anything that might seem like spying upon the man whose bread he broke

thrice daily. Yet it seemed to him that a point had now been reached where he owed his first duty to himself.

"Come in," he said, looking around in response to a brisk knock upon his shut door; and there entered Plonny Neal, whom Queed, through the Mercury, knew very well now.

"Hi there, Doc! Playin' you was Horace Greeley?"

Mr. Neal opened the connecting door into West's office, glanced through, found it empty, and shut the door again. Whether he was pleased or the reverse over this discovery, his immobile countenance gave no hint; but the fact was that he had called particularly to see West on a matter of urgent private business.

"I was on the floor and thought I'd say howdy," he remarked pleasantly. "Say, Doc, I been readin' them reformatory drools of yours. Me and all the boys."

"I'm glad to hear it. They are certain to do you good."

Queed smiled. He had a genuine liking for Mr. Neal, which was not affected by the fact that their views differed diametrically on almost every subject under the sun.

Mr. Neal smiled, too, more enigmatically, and made a large gesture with his unlighted cigar.

"I ain't had such good laughs since Tommy Walker, him that was going to chase me out of the city f'r the tall timber, up and died. But all the same, I hate to see a likely young feller sittin' up nights tryin' to make a laughin' stock of himself."

"The last laughs are always the best, Mr. Neal. Did you ever try any of them?"

"You're beat to a pappyer mash, and whistlin' to keep your courage."

"Listen to my whistle day after to-morrow —"

But the door had shut on Mr. Neal, who had doubtless read somewhere that the proper moment to terminate a call is on some telling speech of one's own.

"I wonder what he's up to," mused Queed.

He brought his chair to horizontal and addressed himself to his reformatory article. He sharpened his pencil; tangled

his great hand into his hair; and presently put down an opening sentence that fully satisfied him, his own sternest critic. Then a memory of his visitor returned to his mind, and he thought pleasurably:

"Plonny knows he is beaten. That's what's the matter with him."

Close observers had often noted, however, that that was very seldom the matter with Plonny, and bets as to his being beaten were always to be placed with diffidence and at very long odds. Plonny had no idea whatever of being beaten on the reformatory measure: on the contrary, it was the reformatory measure which was to be beaten. Possibly Mr. Neal was a white-souled patriot chafing under threatened extravagance in an economy year. Possibly he was impelled by more machine-like exigencies, such as the need of just that hundred thousand dollars to create a few nice new berths for the "organization." The man's motives are an immaterial detail. The sole point worth remembering is that Plonny Neal had got it firmly in his head that there should be no reformatory legislation that year.

It was Mr. Neal's business to know men, and he was esteemed a fine business man. Leaving the assistant editor, he sallied forth to find the editor. It might have taken Queed an hour to put his hand on West just then. Plonny did it in less than six minutes.

West was at Semple's (formerly Semple & West's), where he looked in once a day just to see what the market was doing. This was necessary, as he sometimes explained, in order that the *Post's* financial articles might have that authoritativeness which the paper's position demanded. West enjoyed the good man-talk at Semple's; the atmosphere of frank, cheery commercialism made a pleasant relief from the rarer altitudes of the uplift. He stood chatting gayly with a group of habitués, including some of the best known men of the town. All greeted Plonny pleasantly, West cordially. None of our foreign critics can write that the American man is a moral prude. On two occasions, Plonny had been vin-

licated before the grand jury by the narrow margin of one vote. Yet he was much liked as a human sinner who had no pretenses about him, and who told a good story surpassingly well.

Ten minutes later Mr. Neal and Mr. West met in a private room at Berringer's, having arrived thither by different routes. Over a table, the door shut against all-comers, Mr. Neal went at once to the point, apologizing diffidently for a "butting in" which Mr. West might resent, but which he, Mr. West's friend, could no longer be restrained from. The *Post*, he continued, had been going along splendidly — "better'n under Cowles even — everybody says so —" and then, to the sorrow and disappointment of the new editor's admirers, up had come this dashed old reformatory business and spoiled everything.

West, whose thoughts had unconsciously run back to his last private talk with Plonny — the talk about getting in line — good-naturedly asked his friend if he was really lined up with the wire-pulling moss-backs who were fighting the reformatory bill.

"You just watch me and see," said Plonny, with humorous reproachfulness. "No charge f'r lookin', and rain checks given in case of wet grounds."

"Then for once in your life, anyhow, you've called the turn wrong, Plonny. This institution is absolutely necessary for the moral and social upbuilding of the State. It would be necessary if it cost five times one hundred thousand dollars, and it's as sure to come as judgment day."

"Ain't it funny!" mused Plonny. "Take a man like you, with fine high ideas and all, and let anything come up and pass itself off f'r a maw'l question and he'll go off half-cocked ten times out of ten."

"Half-cocked!" laughed West. "We've been studying this question three years."

"Yes, and began your studies with your minds all made up."

Plonny fastened upon the young man a gaze in which

superior wisdom struggled unsuccessfully with overwhelming affection. "You know what it is, Mr. West? You've been took in. You've bit on a con game like a hungry pike. Excuse my speaking so plain, but I told you a long time ago I was mightily interested in you."

"Speak as plain as you like, Plonny. In fact, my only request at the moment is that you will speak plainer still. Who is it that has taken me in, and who is working this little con game you mention?"

"Rev. George Dayne of the Charities," said Plonny at once. "You mentioned wire-pulling just now. Lemme tell you that in the Rev. George you got the champeen wire-puller of the lot, the king politician of them all — the only one in this town, I do believe, could have thrown a bag as neat over *your* head, Mr. West."

"Why, Plonny! Much learning has made you mad! I know Dayne like a book, and he's as straightforward a fellow as ever lived."

Mr. Neal let his eyes fall to the table-top and indulged in a slow smile, which he appeared to be struggling courteously, but without hope, to suppress.

"O' course you got a right to your opinion, Mr. West."

A brief silence ensued, during which a tiny imp of memory whispered into West's ear that Miss Weyland herself had commented on the Rev. Mr. Dayne's marvelous gifts as a lobbyist.

"I'm a older man than you," resumed Neal, with precarious smilelessness, "and mebbe I've seen more of practical poltix. It would be a strange thing, you might say, if at my time of life, I did n't know a politician when I passed him in the road. Still, don't you take my word for it. I'm only repeating what others say when I tell you that Parson Dayne wants to be Governor of this State some day. That surprises you a little, hey? You was kind of thinking that 'Rev.' changed the nature of a man, and that ambition never thought of keeping open f'r business under a high-cut vest, now was n't you? Well, I've seen funny things in

my time. I'd say that the parson wants this reformatory some f'r the good of the State, and mostly f'r the good of Mr. Dayne. Give it to him, with the power of appointing employees — add this to what he's already got — and in a year he'll have the prettiest little private machine ever you did see. I don't ask you to believe me. All I ask is f'r you to stick a pin in what I say, and see 'f it don't come true."

West mused, impressed against his will. "You're wrong, Plonny, in my opinion, and if you were ten times right, what of it? You seem to think that the *Post* is advocating this reformatory because Dayne has asked for it. The *Post* is doing nothing of the sort. It is advocating the reformatory because it has studied this question to the bottom for itself, because it knows —"

"Right! Good f'r you!" exclaimed Mr. Neal, much gratified. "That's just what I tell the boys when they say you're playin' poltix with the little dominie. And that," said he, briskly, "is just why I'm *for* the reformatory, in spite of Rev. Dayne's little games."

"You're for-it! You said just now that you were opposed to it."

"Not to the reformatory, Mr. West. Not at all. I'm only opposed to spending a hundred thousand dollars for it in a poverty year."

"Oh! You want the reformatory, but you don't want it now. That's where you stand, is it?"

"Yes, and everybody else that understands just what the situation is. I believe in this reformatory — the *Post* converted me, that's a fact — and if you'll only let her stand two years, take my word for it, she'll go through with a whoop. But if you're going to hurry the thing —"

"What's your idea of hurry exactly? The war has been over forty years —"

"And look how splendid we've got along these forty years without the reformatory! Will you care to say, Mr. West, that we could n't make it forty-two without bringing great danger to the State?"

"No, certainly not. But the point is —"

"The point is that if we spend all this money now, the people will kick the party out at the next election. I would n't admit this to many, 'cause I'm ashamed of it, but it's gospel truth. Mr. West," said Plonny, earnestly, "I *know* you want the *Post* to stand for the welfare of the party —"

"Certainly. And it has been my idea that evidence of sane interest in public morals was a pretty good card for —"

"So it would be at any ordinary time. But it's mighty different when the people from one end of the State to the other are howling economy and saying that all expenses must go to bed-rock or they'll know the reason why. There's the practical side of it — look at it f'r a minute. The legislature was elected by these people on a platform promising strictest economy. They're tryin' to carry out their promise faithfully. They turn down and postpone some mighty good plans to advance the progress of the State. They rejuice salaries in various departments" — (one was the exact number) — "heelers come up lookin' f'r jobs, and they send 'em away empty-handed and sore. Old-established institutions, that have been doin' grand work upbuildin' the State f'r years, are told that they must do with a half or three quarters of their appropriations f'r the next two years. You've seen all this happen, Mr. West?"

West admitted that he had.

"Well, now when everything is goin' smooth and promisin', you come along and tell 'em they got to shell out a *hundred thousand dollars* right away f'r a brand-new institution, with an annual appropriation to keep it up. Now s'pose they do what you tell 'em. What happens? You think there's no poltix at all in this reformatory business, but I can tell you the Republicans won't take such a view as that. They'll say that the party spent a hundred thousand dollars of the people's money in a hard times year, just to make a few more jobs f'r favorites. They'll throw that up at us from every stump in the State. And when our leaders explain that it was

done for the maw'l good of the State, they'll give us the laugh — same as they did when we established the Foundling Hospital in '98. Now I tell you the party can't stand any talk of that kind this year. We're on shaky ground right now f'r the same reason that we're all so proud of — spendin' money f'r the maw'l uplift of the State. We either got to slow up f'r awhile or take a licking. That's what all the talk comes down to — one simple question: Will we hold off this big expense f'r just two years, or will we send the old party down to defeat?"

West laughed, not quite comfortably.

In all this dialogue, Mr. Neal had over him the enormous advantage of exact and superior knowledge. To tell the truth, West knew very little about the reformatory situation, and considered it, among the dozens of matters in which he was interested, rather a small issue. Having turned the campaign over to his assistant, he had dismissed it from his mind; and beyond his general conviction that the reformatory would be a good thing for the State, he had only the sketchiest acquaintance with the arguments that were being used pro and con. Therefore Plonny Neal's passionate earnestness surprised him, and Plonny's reasoning, which he knew to be the reasoning of the thoroughly informed State leaders, impressed him very decidedly. Of the boss's sincerity he never entertained a doubt; to question that candid eye was impossible. That Plonny had long been watching him with interest and admiration, West knew very well. It began to look to him very much as though Queed, through excess of sociological zeal, had allowed himself to be misled, and that the paper's advanced position was founded on theory without reference to existing practical conditions.

West keenly felt the responsibility of his post. To safeguard and promote the welfare of the Democratic party had long been a cardinal principle of the paper whose utterances he now controlled. Still, it must be true that Neal was painting the situation in colors altogether too black.

"You're a pretty good stump performer yourself, Plonny.

Don't you know that exactly the same argument will be urged two years from now?"

"I know it won't," said Plonny with the calmness of absolute conviction. "A fat legislature *always* follows a lean one. They come in strips, same as a shoulder of bacon."

"Well! I would n't think much of a party whose legs were so weak that a little step forward — everybody knows it's forward — would tumble it over in a heap."

"The party! I ain't thinking of the *party*, Mr. West. I'm thinking," said Neal, the indignation in his voice giving way to a sudden apologetic softness, "of you."

"Me? What on earth have I got to do with it?" asked West, rather touched by the look of dog-like affection in the other's eyes.

"Everything. If the party gets let in for this extravaganza, you'il be the man who did it."

There was a silence, and then West said, rather nobly:

"Well, I suppose I will have to stand that. I must do what I think is right, you know, and take the consequences."

"Two years from now," said Mr. Neal, gently, "there would n't be no consequences."

"Possibly not," said West, in a firm voice.

"While the consequences now," continued Mr. Neal, still more gently, "would be to put you in very bad with the party leaders. Fine men they are, but they never forgive a man who puts a crimp into the party. You'd be a marked man to the longest day you lived!"

"Well, Plonny! I'm not asking anything of the party leaders —"

"But suppose some of your friends wanted to ask something *for you*?"

Suddenly Plonny leaned over the table, and began speaking rapidly and earnestly.

"Listen here, Mr. West. I understand your feelings and your position just like they was print, and I was reading them over your shoulder. You're walking with y'r eyes on the skies, and you don't like to look at the ground to see that

you don't break nothing as you go forward. Your mind's full of the maw'l idea and desire to uplift the people, and it's kind of painful to you to stop and look at the plain practical way by which things get done. But I tell you that everybody who ever got anything big done in this world, got it done in a practical way. All the big men that you and I admire—all the public leaders and governors and reform mayors and so on—got where they have by doing practical good in a practical way. Now, you don't like me to say that if you do so-and-so, you'll be in bad with the State leaders, f'r that looks to you as if I thought you could be inflooned by what would be your personal advantage. And I honor you f'r them feelin's which is just what I knew you'd have, or I would n't be here talkin' to you now. But you must n't blame others if they ain't as partic'lar, mebbe, as to how things might *look*. You must n't blame y'r friends—and you've got a sight more of them than you have any idea of—if they feel all broke up to see you get in bad, both for your own sake and f'r the sake of the party."

Plonny's voice trembled with earnestness; West had had no idea that the man admired him so much.

"You want to serve the people, Mr. West? How could you do it better than in public orf'ce. Lemme talk to you straight f'r once—will you? Or am I only offendin' you by buttin' in this way, without having ever been asked?"

West gave his admirer the needed assurance.

"I'm glad of it, f'r I can hardly keep it in my system any longer. Listen here, Mr. West. As you may have heard, there's to be a primary f'r city orf'cers in June. Secret ballot or no secret ballot, the organization's going to win. You know that. Now, who'll the organization put up f'r Mayor? From what I hear, they dassen't put up any old machine hack, same's they been doin' f'r years. They might want to do it, but they're a-scared the people won't stand f'r it. From what little I hear, the feelin's strong that they *got* to put up some young progressive public-spirited man of the reformer

type. Now s'posin' the friends of a certain fine young man, sittin' not a hundred miles from this table, had it in their minds to bring *him* forward f'r the nomination. This young man might say he was n't seekin' the orf'ce and did n't want it, but *I* say public orf'ce is a duty, and no man that wants to serve the people can refuse it, partic'larly when he may be needed to save the party. And now I ask you this, Mr. West: What show would the friends of this young man have, if he had a bad spot on his record? What chance'd there be of namin' to lead the party in the city the *man who had knifed the party in the State?*"

West's chin rested upon his hand; his gaze fell dreamily upon the table-top. Before his mind's eye there had unrolled a favorite vision—a white meadow of faces focussed breathlessly upon a great orator. He recalled himself with a start, a stretch, and a laugh.

"Are n't you wandering rather carelessly into the future, Plonny?"

"If I am," said Mr. Neal, solemnly, "it's because you stand at the crossroads to-day."

West found the office deserted, his assistant being gone for lunch. He finished two short articles begun earlier in the day, and himself departed with an eye to food. Later, he had to attend a couple of board meetings, which ran off into protracted by-talk, and the rainy twilight had fallen before his office knew him again.

Not long after, Queed, already hatted and overcoated to go, pushed open the connecting door and entered. The two chatted a moment of the make-up of next day's "page." Presently West said: "By the bye, written anything about the reformatory?"

"Anything!" echoed Queed, with a faint smile. "You might say that I've written everything about it—the best article I ever wrote, I should say. It's our last chance, you know."

Queed thought of Eva Bernheimer, and a light crept into

his ordinarily impassive eye. At the same time, West's ordinarily buoyant face fell a little.

"That so? Let me see how you've handled it, will you?"

"Certainly," said Queed, showing no surprise, though it was many a day since any composition of his had undergone supervision in that office.

It was on the tip of West's tongue to add, "I rather think we've been pressing that matter too hard," but he checked himself. Why should he make any explanation to his assistant? Was it not the fact that he had trusted the young man too far already?

Queed brought his article and laid it on West's desk, his face very thoughtful now. "If there is any information I can give you about the subject, I'll wait."

West hardly repressed a smile. "Thank you, I think I understand the situation pretty well."

Still Queed lingered and hesitated, most unlike himself. Presently he strolled over to the window and looked down unseeingly into the lamplit wetness of Centre Street. In fact, he was the poorest actor in the world, and never pretended anything, actively or passively, without being unhappy.

"It's raining like the mischief," he offered uncomfortably.

"Cats and dogs," said West, his fingers twiddling with Queed's copy.

"By the way," said Queed, turning with a poorly done air of casualness, "what is commonly supposed to have become of Henry G. Surface? Do people generally believe that he is dead?"

"Bless your heart, no!" said West, looking up in some surprise at the question. "That kind never die. They invariably live to a green old age — green like the bay-tree."

"I — have gotten very much interested in his story," said Queed, which was certainly true enough. "Where do people think that he is now?"

"Oh, in the West somewhere, living like a fat hog off Miss Weyland's money."

Queed's heart lost a beat. An instinct, swift as a reflex,

turned him to the window again; he feared that his face might commit treason. A curious contraction and hardening seemed to be going on inside of him, a chilling petrification, and this sensation remained; but in the next instant he felt himself under perfect control, and was calmly saying:—

"Why, I thought the courts took all the money he had."

"They took all they could find. If you've studied high finance you'll appreciate the distinction." Amiably West tapped the table-top with the long point of his pencil, and wished that Queed would restore him his privacy. "Everybody thought at the time, you know, that he had a hundred thousand or so put away where the courts never got hold of it. The general impression was that he'd somehow smuggled it over to the woman he'd been living with — his wife, he said. She died, I believe, but probably our friend Surface, when he got out, had n't the slightest trouble in putting his hands on the money."

"No, I suppose not. An interesting story, is n't it? You'll telephone if you need anything to-night?"

"Oh, I shan't need anything. The page is shaping up very satisfactorily, I think. Good-night, my dear fellow."

Left alone, West picked up Queed's closely-written sheets, and leaning back in his chair read them with the closest attention. Involuntarily, his intellect paid a tribute to the writer as he read. The article was masterly. The argument was close and swift, the language impassioned, the style piquant. "Where did he learn to write like that!" wondered West. Here was the whole subject compressed into half a column, and so luminous a half column that the dullest could not fail to understand and admire. Two sarcastic little paragraphs were devoted to stripping the tatters from the nakedness of the economy argument, and these Mr. Queed's chief perused twice.

"The talk of a doctrinaire," mused he presently. "The closet philosopher's ideas. How far afield from the real situation. . . ."

It was a most fortunate thing, he reflected, that he him-

self had means of getting exact and accurate information at first hand. Suppose that he had not, that, like some editors, he had simply passed this article in without examination and correction. It would have made the *Post* ridiculous, and decidedly impaired its reputation for common sense and fair play. Whatever should or should not be said, this was certainly no way to talk of honest men, who were trying to conserve the party and who differed from the *Post* only on an unimportant question of detail.

West leaned back in his chair and stared at the farther wall. . . . For that was exactly what it was — an unimportant detail. The important thing, the one thing that he himself had insisted on, was that the State should have a reformatory. Whether the State had it now or two years from now, made relatively little difference, except to those who, like his editorial assistant, had sunk themselves in the question till their sense of proportion had deserted them. Was not that a fair statement of the case? Whatever he did, he must not let his views be colored by probable effects upon his own future. . . . Surely, to wait two brief years for the institution, with the positive assurance of it then, could be no hardship to a State which had got along very well without it for all the years of its lifetime. Surely not. Plonny Neal, whose sharp horse sense he would back against any man in the State, was absolutely sound there.

He tried to consider the question with chill judiciality, and believed that he was doing so. But the fervor which Plonny had imparted to it, and the respect which he had for Plonny's knowledge of practical conditions, stood by him, unconsciously guiding his thoughts along the line of least resistance. . . . Though nobody dared admit it publicly, the party was facing a great crisis; and it was in his hand to save or to wreck it. All eyes were anxiously on the *Post*, which wielded the decisive power. The people had risen with the unreasonable demand that progress be checked for a time, because of the cost of it. The leaders had responded to the best of their ability, but necessary expenses were so great

that it was going to be a narrow shave at best — so narrow that another hundred thousand spent would land the whole kettle of fish in the fire. The grand old party would go crashing down the precipice. Was not that a criminal price to pay for getting a reformatory institution two years before the people were ready to pay for it? There was the whole question in a nutshell.

The one unpleasant aspect of this view was Sharlee Weyland, the dearest girl in the world. She would be much disappointed, and, for the first moment, would possibly be somewhat piqued with him personally. He knew that women were extremely unreasonable about these things; they looked at affairs from the emotional point of view, from the point of view of the loose, large "effect." But Sharlee Weyland was highly intelligent and sensible, and he had not the smallest doubt of his ability to make her understand what the unfortunate situation was. He could not tell her everything — Plonny had cautioned secrecy about the real gravity of the crisis — but he would tell her enough to show her how he had acted, with keen regrets, from his sternest sense of public duty. It was a cruel stroke of fate's that his must be the hand to bring disappointment to the girl he loved, but after all, would she not be the first to say that he must never put his regard for her preferences above the larger good of City and State? He could not love her, dear, so well, loved he not honor more.

He picked up Queed's article and glanced again at the astonishing words, words which, invested with the *Post's* enormous prestige, simply kicked and cuffed the party to its ruin. A wave of resentment against his assistant swept through the editor's mind. This was what came of trusting anything to anybody else. If you wanted to be sure that things were done right, do them yourself. Because he had allowed Queed a little rope, that young man had industriously gathered in almost enough to hang, not himself, for he was nothing, but the *Post* and its editor. However, there was no use crying over spilt milk. What was done was done. For-

tunately, the *Post's* general position was sound; had not the editor himself dictated it? If the expression of that position in cold type had been gradually carried by a subordinate to a more and more violent extreme, to an intemperance of utterance which closely approached insanity, what was it the editor's duty to do? Obviously to take charge himself and swing the position back to a safe and sane mean, exactly where he had placed it to begin with. That was all that was asked of him — to shift back the paper's position to where he had placed it in the beginning, and by so doing to save the party from wreck. Could a sensible man hesitate an instant? And in return. . . .

West's gaze wandered out of the window, and far on into the beyond. . . . His friends were watching him, silently but fearfully. Who and what these friends were his swift thought did not stay to ask. His glamorous fancy saw them as a great anxious throng, dominant men, yet respectful, who were trembling lest he should make a fatal step — to answer for it with his political life. Public life — he rejected the term political life — was of all things what he was pre-eminently fitted for. How else could a man so fully serve his fellows? — how so surely and strongly promote the uplift? And Plonny Neal had served notice on him that he stood to-day on the crossroads to large public usefulness. The czar of them all, the great Warwick who made and unmade kings by the lifting of his finger, had told him, as plain as language could speak, that he, West, was his imperial choice for the mayoralty, with all that that foreshadowed. . . . Truly, he had served his apprenticeship, and was meet for his opportunity. For eight long months he had stood in line, doing his duty quietly and well, asking no favor of anybody. And now at last Warwick had beckoned him and set the mystic star upon his forehead. . . .

Iridescent visionry enwrapped the young man, and he swam in it goldenly. In time his spirit returned to his body, and he found himself leaning back in a very matter-of-fact chair, facing a very plain question. How could the shift-

ing back, the rationalizing, of the paper's position be accomplished with the minimum of shock? How could he rescue the party with the least possible damage to the *Post's* consistency?

West went to a filing cabinet in the corner of the room, pulled out a large folder marked, *Reformatory*, and, returning to his seat, ran hurriedly through the *Post's* editorials on this subject during the past twelvemonth. Over some of the phrases he ground his teeth. They floated irritatingly in his head as he once more leaned back in his chair and frowned at the opposite wall.

Gradually there took form in his mind a line of reasoning which would appear to grow with some degree of naturalness out of what had gone before, harmonizing the basic continuity of the *Post's* attitude, and minimizing the change in present angle or point of view. His fertile mind played about it, strengthening it, building it up, polishing and perfecting; and in time he began to write, at first slowly, but soon with fluent ease.