

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TENEMENTS

To alter the scheme of a weekly from cover to cover is not a task that is completed without work. The dismissal of Cosy Moments' entire staff of contributors left a gap in the paper which had to be filled, and owing to the nearness of press day there was no time to fill it before the issue of the next number. The editorial staff had to be satisfied with heading every page with the words "Look out! Look out!! Look out!!! See foot of page!!!!" printing in the space at the bottom the legend, "Next Week! See Editorial!" and compiling in conjunction a snappy editorial, setting forth the proposed changes. This was largely the work of Psmith.

"Comrade Jackson," he said to Mike, as they set forth one evening in search of their new flat, "I fancy I have found my metier. Commerce, many considered, was the line I should take; and doubtless, had I stuck to that walk in life, I should soon have become a financial magnate. But something seemed to whisper to me, even in the midst of my triumphs in the New Asiatic Bank, that there were other fields. For the moment it seems to me that I have found the job for which nature specially designed me. At last I have Scope. And without Scope, where are we? Wedged tightly in among the ribstons. There are some very fine passages in that editorial. The last paragraph, beginning 'Cosy Moments cannot be

muzzled,' in particular. I like it. It strikes the right note. It should stir the blood of a free and independent people till they sit in platoons on the doorstep of our office, waiting for the next number to appear."

"How about that next number?" asked Mike. "Are you and Windsor going to fill the whole paper yourselves?"

"By no means. It seems that Comrade Windsor knows certain stout fellows, reporters on other papers, who will be delighted to weigh in with stuff for a moderate fee."

"How about Luella What's-her-name and the others? How have they taken it?"

"Up to the present we have no means of ascertaining. The letters giving them the miss-in-baulk in no uncertain voice were only despatched yesterday. But it cannot affect us how they writhe beneath the blow. There is no reprieve."

Mike roared with laughter.

"It's the rummiest business I ever struck," he said. "I'm jolly glad it's not my paper. It's pretty lucky for you two lunatics that the proprietor's in Europe."

Psmith regarded him with pained surprise.

"I do not understand you, Comrade Jackson. Do you insinuate that we are not acting in the proprietor's best interests? When he sees the receipts, after we have handled the paper for a while, he will go singing about his hotel. His beaming smile will be a by-word in Carlsbad. Visitors will be shown it as one of the sights. His only doubt will be whether to send his money to the bank or keep it in tubs and roll in it. We are on to a big thing, Comrade Jackson. Wait till you see our first number."

"And how about the editor? I should think that first number would bring him back foaming at the mouth."

"I have ascertained from Comrade Windsor that there is nothing to fear from that quarter. By a singular stroke of good fortune Comrade Wilberfloss--his name is Wilberfloss--has been ordered complete rest during his holiday. The kindly medico, realising the fearful strain inflicted by reading *Cosy Moments* in its old form, specifically mentioned that the paper was to be withheld from him until he returned."

"And when he does return, what are you going to do?"

"By that time, doubtless, the paper will be in so flourishing a state that he will confess how wrong his own methods were and adopt

ours without a murmur. In the meantime, Comrade Jackson, I would call your attention to the fact that we seem to have lost our way.

In the exhilaration of this little chat, our footsteps have wandered. Where we are, goodness only knows. I can only say that I shouldn't care to have to live here."

"There's a name up on the other side of that lamp-post."

"Let us wend in that direction. Ah, Pleasant Street? I fancy that the master-mind who chose that name must have had the rudiments of a sense of humour."

It was indeed a repellent neighbourhood in which they had arrived. The New York slum stands in a class of its own. It is unique. The height of the houses and the narrowness of the streets seem to condense its unpleasantness. All the smells and noises, which are many and varied, are penned up in a sort of canyon, and gain in vehemence from the fact. The masses of dirty clothes hanging from the fire-escapes increase the depression. Nowhere in the city does one realise so fully the disadvantages of a lack of space. New York, being an island, has had no room to spread. It is a town of human sardines. In the poorer quarters the congestion is unbelievable.

Psmith and Mike picked their way through the groups of ragged children who covered the roadway. There seemed to be thousands of

them.

"Poor kids!" said Mike. "It must be awful living in a hole like this."

Psmith said nothing. He was looking thoughtful. He glanced up at the grimy buildings on each side. On the lower floors one could see into dark, bare rooms. These were the star apartments of the tenement-houses, for they opened on to the street, and so got a little light and air. The imagination jibbed at the thought of the back rooms.

"I wonder who owns these places," said Psmith. "It seems to me that there's what you might call room for improvement. It wouldn't be a scaly idea to turn that Cosy Moments search-light we were talking about on to them."

They walked on a few steps.

"Look here," said Psmith, stopping. "This place makes me sick. I'm going in to have a look round. I expect some muscular householder will resent the intrusion and boot us out, but we'll risk it."

Followed by Mike, he turned in at one of the doors. A group of men leaning against the opposite wall looked at them without curiosity. Probably they took them for reporters hunting for a story.

Reporters were the only tolerably well-dressed visitors Pleasant Street ever entertained.

It was almost pitch dark on the stairs. They had to feel their way up. Most of the doors were shut but one on the second floor was ajar. Through the opening they had a glimpse of a number of women sitting round on boxes. The floor was covered with little heaps of linen. All the women were sewing. Mike, stumbling in the darkness, almost fell against the door. None of the women looked up at the noise. Time was evidently money in Pleasant Street.

On the fourth floor there was an open door. The room was empty. It was a good representative Pleasant Street back room. The architect in this case had given rein to a passion for originality. He had constructed the room without a window of any sort whatsoever. There was a square opening in the door. Through this, it was to be presumed, the entire stock of air used by the occupants was supposed to come.

They stumbled downstairs again and out into the street. By contrast with the conditions indoors the street seemed spacious and breezy.

"This," said Psmith, as they walked on, "is where Cosy Moments gets busy at a singularly early date."

"What are you going to do?" asked Mike.

"I propose, Comrade Jackson," said Psmith, "if Comrade Windsor is agreeable, to make things as warm for the owner of this place as I jolly well know how. What he wants, of course," he proceeded in the tone of a family doctor prescribing for a patient, "is disembowelling. I fancy, however, that a mawkishly sentimental legislature will prevent our performing that national service. We must endeavour to do what we can by means of kindly criticism in the paper. And now, having settled that important point, let us try and get out of this place of wrath, and find Fourth Avenue."