

CHAPTER X

GOING SOME

There was once an editor of a paper in the Far West who was sitting at his desk, musing pleasantly of life, when a bullet crashed through the window and embedded itself in the wall at the back of his head. A happy smile lit up the editor's face. "Ah," he said complacently, "I knew that Personal column of ours was going to be a success!"

What the bullet was to the Far West editor, the visit of Mr. Francis Parker to the offices of Cosy Moments was to Billy Windsor.

It occurred in the third week of the new régime of the paper. Cosy Moments, under its new management, had bounded ahead like a motor-car when the throttle is opened. Incessant work had been the order of the day. Billy Windsor's hair had become more dishevelled than ever, and even Psmith had at moments lost a certain amount of his dignified calm. Sandwiched in between the painful case of Kid Brady and the matter of the tenements, which formed the star items of the paper's contents, was a mass of bright reading dealing with the events of the day. Billy Windsor's newspaper friends had turned in some fine, snappy stuff in their best Yellow Journal manner, relating to the more stirring happenings in the city. Psmith, who had constituted himself guardian of the literary and dramatic

interests of the paper, had employed his gift of general invective to considerable effect, as was shown by a conversation between Master Maloney and a visitor one morning, heard through the open door.

"I wish to see the editor of this paper," said the visitor.

"Editor not in," said Master Maloney, untruthfully.

"Ha! Then when he returns I wish you to give him a message."

"Sure."

"I am Aubrey Bodkin, of the National Theatre. Give him my compliments, and tell him that Mr. Bodkin does not lightly forget."

An unsolicited testimonial which caused Psmith the keenest satisfaction.

The section of the paper devoted to Kid Brady was attractive to all those with sporting blood in them. Each week there appeared in the same place on the same page a portrait of the Kid, looking moody and important, in an attitude of self-defence, and under the portrait the legend, "Jimmy Garvin must meet this boy." Jimmy was the present holder of the light-weight title. He had won it a year before, and since then had confined himself to smoking cigars as

long as walking-sticks and appearing nightly as the star in a music-hall sketch entitled "A Fight for Honour." His reminiscences were appearing weekly in a Sunday paper. It was this that gave Psmith the idea of publishing Kid Brady's autobiography in *Cosy Moments*, an idea which made the Kid his devoted adherent from then on. Like most pugilists, the Kid had a passion for bursting into print, and his life had been saddened up to the present by the refusal of the press to publish his reminiscences. To appear in print is the fighter's accolade. It signifies that he has arrived. Psmith extended the hospitality of page four of *Cosy Moments* to Kid Brady, and the latter leaped at the chance. He was grateful to Psmith for not editing his contributions. Other pugilists, contributing to other papers, groaned under the supervision of a member of the staff who cut out their best passages and altered the rest into Addisonian English. The readers of *Cosy Moments* got Kid Brady raw.

"Comrade Brady," said Psmith to Billy, "has a singularly pure and pleasing style. It is bound to appeal powerfully to the many-headed. Listen to this bit. Our hero is fighting Battling Jack Benson in that eminent artist's native town of Louisville, and the citizens have given their native son the Approving Hand, while receiving Comrade Brady with chilly silence. Here is the Kid on the subject: 'I looked around that house, and I seen I hadn't a friend in it. And then the gong goes, and I says to myself how I has one friend, my poor old mother way out in Wyoming, and I goes in and

mixes it, and then I seen Benson losing his goat, so I ups with an awful half-scissor hook to the plexus, and in the next round I seen Benson has a chunk of yellow, and I gets in with a hay-maker and I picks up another sleep-producer from the floor and hands it him, and he takes the count all right.' . . Crisp, lucid, and to the point. That is what the public wants. If this does not bring Comrade Garvin up to the scratch, nothing will."

But the feature of the paper was the "Tenement" series. It was late summer now, and there was nothing much going on in New York. The public was consequently free to take notice. The sale of *Cosy Moments* proceeded briskly. As Psmith had predicted, the change of policy had the effect of improving the sales to a marked extent. Letters of complaint from old subscribers poured into the office daily. But, as Billy Windsor complacently remarked, they had paid their subscriptions, so that the money was safe whether they read the paper or not. And, meanwhile, a large new public had sprung up and was growing every week. Advertisements came trooping in. *Cosy Moments*, in short, was passing through an era of prosperity undreamed of in its history.

"Young blood," said Psmith nonchalantly, "young blood. That is the secret. A paper must keep up to date, or it falls behind its competitors in the race. Comrade Wilberfloss's methods were possibly sound, but too limited and archaic. They lacked ginger. We of the younger generation have our fingers more firmly on the

public pulse. We read off the public's unspoken wishes as if by intuition. We know the game from A to Z."

At this moment Master Maloney entered, bearing in his hand a card.

"Francis Parker?" said Billy, taking it. "Don't know him."

"Nor I," said Psmith. "We make new friends daily."

"He's a guy with a tall-shaped hat," volunteered Master Maloney, "an' he's wearin' a dude suit an' shiny shoes."

"Comrade Parker," said Psmith approvingly, "has evidently not been blind to the importance of a visit to Cosy Moments. He has dressed himself in his best. He has felt, rightly, that this is no occasion for the old straw hat and the baggy flannels. I would not have it otherwise. It is the right spirit. Shall we give him audience, Comrade Windsor?"

"I wonder what he wants."

"That," said Psmith, "we shall ascertain more clearly after a personal interview. Comrade Maloney, show the gentleman in. We can give him three and a quarter minutes."

Pugsy withdrew.

Mr. Francis Parker proved to be a man who might have been any age between twenty-five and thirty-five. He had a smooth, clean-shaven face, and a cat-like way of moving. As Pugsy had stated in effect, he wore a tail-coat, trousers with a crease which brought a smile of kindly approval to Psmith's face, and patent-leather boots of pronounced shininess. Gloves and a tall hat, which he carried, completed an impressive picture.

He moved softly into the room.

"I wished to see the editor."

Psmith waved a hand towards Billy.

"The treat has not been denied you," he said. "Before you is Comrade Windsor, the Wyoming cracker-jack. He is our editor. I myself--I am Psmith--though but a subordinate, may also claim the title in a measure. Technically, I am but a sub-editor; but such is the mutual esteem in which Comrade Windsor and I hold each other that we may practically be said to be inseparable. We have no secrets from each other. You may address us both impartially. Will you sit for a space?"

He pushed a chair towards the visitor, who seated himself with the care inspired by a perfect trouser-crease. There was a momentary

silence while he selected a spot on the table on which to place his hat.

"The style of the paper has changed greatly, has it not, during the past few weeks?" he said. "I have never been, shall I say, a constant reader of *Cosy Moments*, and I may be wrong. But is not its interest in current affairs a recent development?"

"You are very right," responded Psmith. "Comrade Windsor, a man of alert and restless temperament, felt that a change was essential if *Cosy Moments* was to lead public thought. Comrade Wilberfloss's methods were good in their way. I have no quarrel with Comrade Wilberfloss. But he did not lead public thought. He catered exclusively for children with water on the brain, and men and women with solid ivory skulls. Comrade Windsor, with a broader view, feels that there are other and larger publics. He refuses to content himself with ladling out a weekly dole of mental predigested breakfast food. He provides meat. He--"

"Then--excuse me--" said Mr. Parker, turning to Billy, "You, I take it, are responsible for this very vigorous attack on the tenement-house owners?"

"You can take it I am," said Billy.

Psmith interposed.

"We are both responsible, Comrade Parker. If any husky guy, as I fancy Master Maloney would phrase it, is anxious to aim a swift kick at the man behind those articles, he must distribute it evenly between Comrade Windsor and myself."

"I see." Mr. Parker paused. "They are--er--very outspoken articles," he added.

"Warm stuff," agreed Psmith. "Distinctly warm stuff."

"May I speak frankly?" said Mr. Parker.

"Assuredly, Comrade Parker. There must be no secrets, no restraint between us. We would not have you go away and say to yourself, 'Did I make my meaning clear? Was I too elusive?' Say on."

"I am speaking in your best interests."

"Who would doubt it, Comrade Parker. Nothing has buoyed us up more strongly during the hours of doubt through which we have passed than the knowledge that you wish us well."

Billy Windsor suddenly became militant. There was a feline smoothness about the visitor which had been jarring upon him ever since he first spoke. Billy was of the plains, the home of blunt

speech, where you looked your man in the eye and said it quick. Mr. Parker was too bland for human consumption. He offended Billy's honest soul.

"See here," cried he, leaning forward, "what's it all about? Let's have it. If you've anything to say about those articles, say it right out. Never mind our best interests. We can look after them. Let's have what's worrying you."

Psmith waved a deprecating hand.

"Do not let us be abrupt on this happy occasion. To me it is enough simply to sit and chat with Comrade Parker, irrespective of the trend of his conversation. Still, as time is money, and this is our busy day, possibly it might be as well, sir, if you unburdened yourself as soon as convenient. Have you come to point out some flaw in those articles? Do they fall short in any way of your standard for such work?"

Mr. Parker's smooth face did not change its expression, but he came to the point.

"I should not go on with them if I were you," he said.

"Why?" demanded Billy.

"There are reasons why you should not," said Mr. Parker.

"And there are reasons why we should."

"Less powerful ones."

There proceeded from Billy a noise not describable in words. It was partly a snort, partly a growl. It resembled more than anything else the preliminary sniffing snarl a bull-dog emits before he joins battle. Billy's cow-boy blood was up. He was rapidly approaching the state of mind in which the men of the plains, finding speech unequal to the expression of their thoughts, reach for their guns.

Psmith intervened.

"We do not completely gather your meaning, Comrade Parker. I fear we must ask you to hand it to us with still more breezy frankness. Do you speak from purely friendly motives? Are you advising us to discontinue the articles merely because you fear that they will damage our literary reputation? Or are there other reasons why you feel that they should cease? Do you speak solely as a literary connoisseur? Is it the style or the subject-matter of which you disapprove?"

Mr. Parker leaned forward.

"The gentleman whom I represent--"

"Then this is no matter of your own personal taste? You are an emissary?"

"These articles are causing a certain inconvenience to the gentleman whom I represent. Or, rather, he feels that, if continued, they may do so."

"You mean," broke in Billy explosively, "that if we kick up enough fuss to make somebody start a commission to inquire into this rotten business, your friend who owns the private Hades we're trying to get improved, will have to get busy and lose some of his money by making the houses fit to live in? Is that it?"

"It is not so much the money, Mr. Windsor, though, of course, the expense would be considerable. My employer is a wealthy man."

"I bet he is," said Billy disgustedly. "I've no doubt he makes a mighty good pile out of Pleasant Street."

"It is not so much the money," repeated Mr. Parker, "as the publicity involved. I speak quite frankly. There are reasons why my employer would prefer not to come before the public just now as the owner of the Pleasant Street property. I need not go into those

reasons. It is sufficient to say that they are strong ones."

"Well, he knows what to do, I guess. The moment he starts in to make those houses decent, the articles stop. It's up to him."

Psmith nodded.

"Comrade Windsor is correct. He has hit the mark and rung the bell. No conscientious judge would withhold from Comrade Windsor a cigar or a cocoanut, according as his private preference might dictate. That is the matter in a nutshell. Remove the reason for those very scholarly articles, and they cease."

Mr. Parker shook his head.

"I fear that is not feasible. The expense of reconstructing the houses makes that impossible."

"Then there's no use in talking," said Billy. "The articles will go on."

Mr. Parker coughed. A tentative cough, suggesting that the situation was now about to enter upon a more delicate phase. Billy and Psmith waited for him to begin. From their point of view the discussion was over. If it was to be reopened on fresh lines, it was for their visitor to effect that reopening.

"Now, I'm going to be frank, gentlemen," said he, as who should say, "We are all friends here. Let us be hearty." "I'm going to put my cards on the table, and see if we can't fix something up. Now, see here: We don't want unpleasantness. You aren't in this business for your healths, eh? You've got your living to make, just like everybody else, I guess. Well, see here. This is how it stands. To a certain extent, I don't mind admitting, seeing that we're being frank with one another, you two gentlemen have got us--that's to say, my employer--in a cleft stick. Frankly, those articles are beginning to attract attention, and if they go on there's going to be a lot of inconvenience for my employer. That's clear, I reckon. Well, now, here's a square proposition. How much do you want to stop those articles? That's straight. I've been frank with you, and I want you to be frank with me. What's your figure? Name it, and, if it's not too high, I guess we needn't quarrel."

He looked expectantly at Billy. Billy's eyes were bulging. He struggled for speech. He had got as far as "Say!" when Psmith interrupted him. Psmith, gazing sadly at Mr. Parker through his monocle, spoke quietly, with the restrained dignity of some old Roman senator dealing with the enemies of the Republic.

"Comrade Parker," he said, "I fear that you have allowed constant communication with the conscienceless commercialism of this worldly city to undermine your moral sense. It is useless to dangle rich

bribes before our eyes. Cosy Moments cannot be muzzled. You doubtless mean well, according to your--if I may say so--somewhat murky lights, but we are not for sale, except at ten cents weekly. From the hills of Maine to the Everglades of Florida, from Sandy Hook to San Francisco, from Portland, Oregon, to Melonsquashville, Tennessee, one sentence is in every man's mouth. And what is that sentence? I give you three guesses. You give it up? It is this: 'Cosy Moments cannot be muzzled!'

Mr. Parker rose.

"There's nothing more to be done then," he said.

"Nothing," agreed Psmith, "except to make a noise like a hoop and roll away."

"And do it quick," yelled Billy, exploding like a fire-cracker.

Psmith bowed.

"Speed," he admitted, "would be no bad thing. Frankly--if I may borrow the expression--your square proposition has wounded us. I am a man of powerful self-restraint, one of those strong, silent men, and I can curb my emotions. But I fear that Comrade Windsor's generous temperament may at any moment prompt him to start throwing ink-pots. And in Wyoming his deadly aim with the ink-pot won him

among the admiring cowboys the sobriquet of Crack-Shot Cuthbert. As man to man, Comrade Parker, I should advise you to bound swiftly away."

"I'm going," said Mr. Parker, picking up his hat. "And I'll give you a piece of advice, too. Those articles are going to be stopped, and if you've any sense between you, you'll stop them yourselves before you get hurt. That's all I've got to say, and that goes."

He went out, closing the door behind him with a bang that added emphasis to his words.

"To men of nicely poised nervous organisation such as ourselves, Comrade Windsor," said Psmith, smoothing his waistcoat thoughtfully, "these scenes are acutely painful. We wince before them. Our ganglions quiver like cinematographs. Gradually recovering command of ourselves, we review the situation. Did our visitor's final remarks convey anything definite to you? Were they the mere casual badinage of a parting guest, or was there something solid behind them?"

Billy Windsor was looking serious.

"I guess he meant it all right. He's evidently working for somebody pretty big, and that sort of man would have a pull with all kinds of Thugs. We shall have to watch out. Now that they find we can't

be bought, they'll try the other way. They mean business sure enough. But, by George, let 'em! We're up against a big thing, and I'm going to see it through if they put every gang in New York on to us."

"Precisely, Comrade Windsor. Cosy Moments, as I have had occasion to observe before, cannot be muzzled."

"That's right," said Billy Windsor. "And," he added, with the contented look the Far West editor must have worn as the bullet came through the window, "we must have got them scared, or they wouldn't have shown their hand that way. I guess we're making a hit. Cosy Moments is going some now."