

shown signs for some time past of asking for it in the neck. It was an error on Jack's part, he gave his hearers to understand, to assume that the lid was completely off the great city of New York.

"Too blamed fresh he's gettin'," the trio agreed. They could not have been more disapproving if they had been prefects at Haileybury and Mr. Repetto a first-termer who had been detected in the act of wearing his cap on the back of his head.

They seemed to think it was too bad of Jack.

"The wrath of the Law," said Psmith, "is very terrible. We will leave the matter, then, in your hands. In the meantime, we should be glad if you would direct us to the nearest Subway station. Just at the moment, the cheerful lights of the Great White Way are what I seem to chiefly need."

CHAPTER XVII

GUERRILLA WARFARE

Thus ended the opening engagement of the campaign, seemingly in a victory for the Cosy Moments army. Billy Windsor, however, shook his head.

"We've got mighty little out of it," he said.

"The victory," said Psmith, "was not bloodless. Comrade Brady's ear, my hat--these are not slight casualties. On the other hand, surely we are one up? Surely we have gained ground? The elimination of Comrade Repetto from the scheme of things in itself is something. I know few men I would not rather meet in a lonely road than Comrade Repetto. He is one of Nature's sand-baggers. Probably the thing crept upon him slowly. He started, possibly, in a merely tentative way by slugging one of the family circle. His nurse, let us say, or his young brother. But, once started, he is unable to resist the craving. The thing grips him like dram-drinking. He sandbags now not because he really wants to, but because he cannot help himself. To me there is something consoling in the thought that Comrade Repetto will no longer be among those present."

"What makes you think that?"

"I should imagine that a benevolent Law will put him away in his little cell for at least a brief spell."

"Not on your life," said Billy. "He'll prove an alibi."

Psmith's eyeglass dropped out of his eye. He replaced it, and gazed, astonished, at Billy.

"An alibi? When three keen-eyed men actually caught him at it?"

"He can find thirty toughs to swear he was five miles away."

"And get the court to believe it?" said Psmith.

"Sure," said Billy disgustedly. "You don't catch them hurting a gangster unless they're pushed against the wall. The politicians don't want the gangs in gaol, especially as the Aldermanic elections will be on in a few weeks. Did you ever hear of Monk Eastman?"

"I fancy not, Comrade Windsor. If I did, the name has escaped me. Who was this cleric?"

"He was the first boss of the East Side gang, before Kid Twist took it on."

"Yes?"

"He was arrested dozens of times, but he always got off. Do you know what he said once, when they pulled him for thugging a fellow out in New Jersey?"

"I fear not, Comrade Windsor. Tell me all."

"He said, 'You're arresting me, huh? Say, you want to look where you're goin'; I cut some ice in this town. I made half the big politicians in New York!' That was what he said."

"His small-talk," said Psmith, "seems to have been bright and well-expressed. What happened then? Was he restored to his friends and his relations?"

"Sure, he was. What do you think? Well, Jack Repetto isn't Monk Eastman, but he's in with Spider Reilly, and the Spider's in with the men behind. Jack'll get off."

"It looks to me, Comrade Windsor," said Psmith thoughtfully, "as if my stay in this great city were going to cost me a small fortune in hats."

Billy's prophecy proved absolutely correct. The police were as good as their word. In due season they rounded up the impulsive Mr. Repetto, and he was haled before a magistrate. And then, what a beautiful exhibition of brotherly love and auld-lang-syne camaraderie was witnessed! One by one, smirking sheepishly, but giving out their evidence with unshaken earnestness, eleven greasy, wandering-eyed youths mounted the witness-stand and affirmed on oath that at the time mentioned dear old Jack had been making merry in their company in a genial and law-abiding fashion, many, many blocks below the scene of the regrettable assault. The

magistrate discharged the prisoner, and the prisoner, meeting Billy and Psmith in the street outside, leered triumphantly at them.

Billy stepped up to him. "You may have wriggled out of this," he said furiously, "but if you don't get a move on and quit looking at me like that, I'll knock you over the Singer Building. Hump yourself."

Mr. Repetto humped himself.

So was victory turned into defeat, and Billy's jaw became squarer and his eye more full of the light of battle than ever. And there was need of a square jaw and a battle-lit eye, for now began a period of guerilla warfare such as no New York paper had ever had to fight against.

It was Wheeler, the gaunt manager of the business side of the journal, who first brought it to the notice of the editorial staff.

Wheeler was a man for whom in business hours nothing existed but his job; and his job was to look after the distribution of the paper. As to the contents of the paper he was absolutely ignorant.

He had been with Cosy Moments from its start, but he had never read a line of it. He handled it as if it were so much soap. The scholarly writings of Mr. Wilberfloss, the mirth-provoking sallies of Mr. B. Henderson Asher, the tender outpourings of Louella Granville Waterman--all these were things outside his ken. He was a

distributor, and he distributed.

A few days after the restoration of Mr. Repetto to East Side Society, Mr. Wheeler came into the editorial room with information and desire for information.

He endeavoured to satisfy the latter first.

"What's doing, anyway?" he asked. He then proceeded to his information. "Some one's got it in against the paper, sure," he said. "I don't know what it's all about. I ha'n't never read the thing. Don't see what any one could have against a paper with a name like Cosy Moments, anyway. The way things have been going last few days, seems it might be the organ of a blamed mining-camp what the boys have took a dislike to."

"What's been happening?" asked Billy with gleaming eyes.

"Why, nothing in the world to fuss about, only our carriers can't go out without being beaten up by gangs of toughs. Pat Harrigan's in the hospital now. Just been looking in on him. Pat's a feller who likes to fight. Rather fight he would than see a ball-game. But this was too much for him. Know what happened? Why, see here, just like this it was. Pat goes out with his cart. Passing through a low-down street on his way up-town he's held up by a bunch of toughs. He shows fight. Half a dozen of them attend to him, while

the rest gets clean away with every copy of the paper there was in the cart. When the cop comes along, there's Pat in pieces on the ground and nobody in sight but a Dago chewing gum. Cop asks the Dago what's been doing, and the Dago says he's only just come round the corner and ha'n't seen nothing of anybody. What I want to know is, what's it all about? Who's got it in for us and why?"

Mr. Wheeler leaned back in his chair, while Billy, his hair rumped more than ever and his eyes glowing, explained the situation. Mr. Wheeler listened absolutely unmoved, and, when the narrative had come to an end, gave it as his opinion that the editorial staff had sand. That was his sole comment. "It's up to you," he said, rising. "You know your business. Say, though, some one had better get busy right quick and do something to stop these guys rough-housing like this. If we get a few more carriers beat up the way Pat was, there'll be a strike. It's not as if they were all Irishmen. The most of them are Dagoes and such, and they don't want any more fight than they can get by beating their wives and kicking kids off the sidewalk. I'll do my best to get this paper distributed right and it's a shame if it ain't, because it's going big just now--but it's up to you. Good day, gents."

He went out. Psmith looked at Billy.

"As Comrade Wheeler remarks," he said, "it is up to us. What do you propose to do about it? This is a move of the enemy which I have

not anticipated. I had fancied that their operations would be confined exclusively to our two selves. If they are going to strew the street with our carriers, we are somewhat in the soup."

Billy said nothing. He was chewing the stem of an unlighted pipe. Psmith went on.

"It means, of course, that we must buck up to a certain extent. If the campaign is to be a long one, they have us where the hair is crisp. We cannot stand the strain. Cosy Moments cannot be muzzled, but it can undoubtedly be choked. What we want to do is to find out the name of the man behind the tenements as soon as ever we can and publish it; and, then, if we perish, fall yelling the name."

Billy admitted the soundness of this scheme, but wished to know how it was to be done.

"Comrade Windsor," said Psmith. "I have been thinking this thing over, and it seems to me that we are on the wrong track, or rather we aren't on any track at all; we are simply marking time. What we want to do is to go out and hustle round till we stir up something. Our line up to the present has been to sit at home and scream vigorously in the hope of some stout fellow hearing and rushing to help. In other words, we've been saying in the paper what an out-size in scugs the merchant must be who owns those tenements, in the hope that somebody else will agree with us and be sufficiently

interested to get to work and find out who the blighter is. That's all wrong. What we must do now, Comrade Windsor, is put on our hats, such hats as Comrade Repetto has left us, and sally forth as sleuth-hounds on our own account."

"Yes, but how?" demanded Billy. "That's all right in theory, but how's it going to work in practice? The only thing that can corner the man is a commission."

"Far from it, Comrade Windsor. The job may be worked more simply. I don't know how often the rents are collected in these places, but I should say at a venture once a week. My idea is to hang negligently round till the rent-collector arrives, and when he has loomed up on the horizon, buttonhole him and ask him quite politely, as man to man, whether he is collecting those rents for himself or for somebody else, and if somebody else, who that somebody else is. Simple, I fancy? Yet brainy. Do you take me, Comrade Windsor?"

Billy sat up, excited. "I believe you've hit it."

Psmith shot his cuffs modestly.