

In an American Newspaper Office

By Charles Miner Thompson

I

HUNT was the night-editor of the respectable *Dawn*. This knowing journal declared that "business men desire a newspaper which they can take home to their families," and, with the immodest confidence of virtue, asserted that it "filled this long-felt want." Its columns were carefully kept unspotted from sensational crime. It was edited with the most solicitous regard for the proprieties. Its proofs were reported to be read by Mrs. Grundy herself. "The duty of the press," said the *Dawn*, "is to conserve the public morals. The editor, with a high ideal of the function of journalism, will not follow the almost universal and highly regrettable fashion of the times, and sacrifice decency to dollars." This truly disinterested paper sacrificed indecency on the same altar, without a blush, and, with a pride that aped humility, posed as the Dawn of a Better Day. By the same token, Hunt occupied a position of eminence.

When he reached the editorial rooms in the evening he usually found Master, his assistant, already seated at the big night-desk hard at work. Hunt had not been so many years in existence, as Master had been in journalism; and his superiority in rank made his

his

his senior sulky. A grumpy "hello" was all the greeting he ever got. That so old a man should "play baby" struck Hunt as comic, and his subordinate's grudging welcome was become an enjoyment which through force of indulgence he unconsciously demanded. Therefore, to-night, when on coming into the office he found Master's chair empty he felt vaguely aggrieved. He thought of himself, charitably, as missing the elder man: what he did actually miss was the agreeable fillip which the spectacle of the old man's glumness always gave his sense of humour.

Perhaps, however, his indefinite feeling of discomfort was due in part to the cheerless aspect of the room. Usually when he entered the place it was lighted and occupied; to-night no one was about, and the one gas jet that was burning showed a mere tooth of flame within its wire muzzle. The little closets of the reporters, each with a desk and a chair in it, which were ranged like so many doorless state-rooms against the sides of the apartment, appeared dimly in the gloom as black, uncanny holes. On the fourth side, under the gaslight and covered with a disorderly array of shears, pencils, bottles of mucilage, and of ink, pens and paper, was the big and battered night-desk. Recognisable above it by persons unhappily familiar with such objects, were the electric messenger call and fire alarm. Higher still, there perched in solitary state upon a shelf a dusty and dented gas-meter. The dirty floor was littered with crumpled and torn newspapers, spotted with tobacco juice, and strewn with the ends of cigars and cigarettes. Nauseating black beetles scampered everywhere, lurked in corners and cracks, and rustled in the papers. Five were drinking from the inkstand. The atmosphere was heavy with the odours of damp paper, printer's ink, and stale tobacco. "Such," reflected Hunt with grim humour, "is the golden East from which appears the worshipped *Dawn*."

Hunt,

Hunt, however, was too thoroughly accustomed to the rooms and too indifferent to dirt to be much or long depressed by them. Having turned up the gas, he took off both his coat and his waistcoat, for the close office was already uncomfortably warm. Yet it was bitterly cold without, as became the last night of a March most lion-like in its departure. Then from his soiled shirt he removed the perfectly clean and highly polished collar and cuffs. For neat keeping he placed these in the same drawer in which he stored his tobacco. Thence he drew forth the next moment a big briar-wood pipe. Having first regarded this companion of his nights with much affection, and rubbed the bowl against his nose to bring out the colour, he proceeded to fill it with tobacco, which he pressed down with a finely solicitous little finger, and lighted with deep satisfaction. As the first great puffs of smoke made vague his features, he threw away the match with a superb disregard of the inflammable piles of paper on the floor, and settled himself with some show of heartiness to his work.

He was a small fellow, and young. His black hair, cut in the style termed "pompadour," stood up over his forehead like the bristles of a blacking-brush. His small black eyes darted alertly everywhere and were full of humour. His tip-tilted nose seemed at some time to have been used as a handle for raising his upper lip, which was short and showed his teeth. His whole appearance was odd and saucy; you judged him knowing, cynical, and amusing, and smiled upon him at once with amusement and expectation. His nervous strength, which you saw at once was immense, was as yet unexhausted by a life divided between severe mental toil and vicious pleasure. From half-past seven in the evening until four in the morning he was at the office of the *Dawn*. Then he went to his lodging-house, there to sleep until twelve o'clock. The afternoon he passed at the Press Club—
smoking,

smoking, drinking, playing cards or billiards—and after dinner repaired again to the office. His Sundays were spent partly in sleep, partly in dissipation. He had taken a degree at one of the smaller American colleges, had a considerable knowledge of English literature, and was ambitious to write for the stage. He was the son of a country deacon.

He was looking through the foreign news in the evening paper with a view to the fabrication of "special cablegrams" to the morrow's *Dawn*, when Burress, a reporter, entered.

"Hello," he said, "where's the old man?"

"Dunno," answered Hunt without looking up from his work; "drunk probably."

"I thought he'd kept pretty straight since he came here," said Burress.

"He has," retorted Hunt. "That's why I think he's drunk."

Burress laughed. He stepped to the desk for light by which to read the letter and the assignment he had found in his box. Gloom overspread his vacuous face when he found that his assignment was to a meeting of some scientific club or other, and required a long, disagreeable journey to the opposite end of the town. Having shoved the clipping into his pocket in disgust, he cocked his cigar in the corner of his mouth, half closed his eyes to keep the smoke out of them, and began opening his letter with the assistant night-editor's shears. His unbuttoned ulster hanging open in front, revealed the shabby clothes beneath. The overcoat itself, however, was comparatively new, and together with the loud "puff" tie, the high silk hat, and the shoes of patent leather which he wore, enabled him to present upon the street a delusive appearance of smartness. The few inches of trouser-leg which were visible beneath the long coat, were the Achilles' heel of this dandy, and worried him at times.

Master's

"Master's got a letter from the boss in his box," said he, significantly. As he spoke he tore up his own letter (which was a bill) and threw the pieces on the floor.

Hunt glanced at him keenly. "Has he?" he asked with interest.

"Yes," said Burress, and the two exchanged understanding glances.

"Well," said Hunt crossly, "I expected it. What else was that kid Wilson put on the day-desk for?"

"He'll succeed him, will he?"

"Of course," replied Hunt. "And a pretty time I'll have breaking him in, too. As if I hadn't got enough to do as it is!"

"Pretty tough on the old man, I call it," remarked Burress, idly sympathetic.

"What do you expect in this office?" asked Hunt sarcastically. "Life tenure, high wages, and service pensions? Do you take the boss for an angel? There isn't any angel in journalism—except possibly the one that does the recording. The old man gets precious little; but Wilson'll get less, see? 'The golden exhalations' of this dawn ain't used up in salaries—not to any great extent."

"D——n him," said Burress. This seemingly irrelevant curse was directed against the proprietor. As becomes a conventional expression of an emotion the edge of which habit has dulled, it was delivered without animation. Hunt paid no attention to it, and the reporter, even as he gave it forth, picked up the shears again and began idly to clean his nails. "How'll the old man take it, I wonder," he said at length meditatively.

"Oh, he'll get drunk now, sure."

"Fearful wreck, ain't he," said Burress appreciatively.

"Yes, and he's cracked too," growled the night editor, bending himself over some copy.

"I was talking to old Symonds the other day about him," continued the reporter. "He said he used to be the best newspaper man in the city—managing editor of the *Atlas* once, you know. Guess he was pretty lively too—great on practical jokes, Symonds said."

"Humph," grunted Hunt, "a cab-horse is merry beside him now. But he knows his business just the same," he added, thinking ruefully of Wilson.

"He played a great joke on Fox once—Fox of the *Atlas*," continued Burress, snapping the shears together definitively, and taking on the air of one about to tell a long tale which he thinks amusing. "Symonds told me about it. It's a devilish good story. He said he——"

But here the large form of the old man himself appearing in the doorway, caused Burress to stop in the middle of his phrase. "Hello, Master," said he, in some confusion. Hunt also looked up, noted that his fat and elderly assistant had not been drinking, and nodded briefly. Master, avoiding the younger men's eyes, in which he perceived and resented the curiosity, growled an answering "hello." He hung up his shabby overcoat, coat and waistcoat, and for his greater comfort let his braces fall about his vast hips. Then standing by the desk he opened and read the note he had found in his box. The two young men watched him furtively.

Master was large and grossly fat. His face, which looked as it moulded from damp newspaper, was deeply wrinkled; his eyes were dull and heavily ringed with dark circles; and his flaccid cheeks hung about his jaws like dewlaps. What little hair there was about the sides of his head was unkempt and dirty. His crown was completely bald. This condition Hunt made the topic of endless jokes. "What I like about you, Master," he would say, "is that you have the courage of your baldness. *You* don't

don't cultivate an isthmus of hair to adorn a forehead and define a brow. You leave everything frank and open. But never you mind, old man, always remember that 'beauty draws us by a single hair.'" Another time the nearness of Master's oily pate and tallow-like face to the gas jet led Hunt with unkind whimsicality to congratulate him on not having a wick in the top of his head. "If you had," he said, "you'd burn out like a candle, sure." The old man's whole body, moreover, looked weak, as if force of habit rather than a solid framework of bone held its flabby mass in place. He was at the same time repugnant and pathetic.

As he ended his reading, he turned for a moment an expressionless gaze upon the young men. Then, crumpling the letter and setting it aflame at the gas jet, he lit his pipe with it, let it burn almost to his fingers, dropped it at just the right moment, and carefully stamped out the blaze upon the floor. "I got a letter to-day," he said apathetically, "saying my old mother is dead, and to-night I get the G. B. [Grand Bounce; *Anglice*, the sack] here. What's the news with you fellows?"

"Nothing much," answered Hunt, startled and uncertain.

"That's pretty tough," said Burress weakly. Master grunted, and the reporter, much embarrassed, made a clumsy escape: "Well," said he, "I've got to be going. By-bye. See you later."

The old man seated himself opposite Hunt at the night-desk. He spread his big thighs wide apart and his great stomach settled between them like a half-filled sack in a corner. His sometime clean shirt exhaled a faint odour of perspiration, had tobacco-spots upon its rumpled bosom, and clung about his shoulders in a multitude of fine wrinkles. A greasy "string-tie" of rusty black hung disconsolate ends from under a soiled collar. His pear-shaped

shaped face, looking more than usually battered and worn, fairly exuded melancholy. He mopped his bald head mechanically, and then stared a moment with dull eyes at the crumpled handkerchief in his pudgy fist. Finally pulling himself together, he began to work—well and rapidly, but with entire unconsciousness.

The office grew livelier. Reporters came in, chatted among themselves a while, or wrote busily in their closets, and departed again into the night. The regular procession of disreputable-looking boys began to file into the room with telegraphic despatches from the Associated Press. "Copy" in ever-increasing volume was flung upon the night-desk. Hunt, with a calculating eye upon the space of the paper gave the order sharply to "carve hell out of everything." Thereupon some one began to chant a rhyme current in the office :

"O'er the films Associated,
In a tone by no means bated,
Comes the cry reiterated,
Carve, Master, carve !"

The managing editor, emerging every now and then from his den, like a bulldog from his kennel, swore viciously at Hunt, at Master, at whatever reporters happened to be there. On all sides rose the mingled noise of laughter, oaths, whistling, sharp question and sharper answer, striking matches, scratching pens, grating chairs, scuffling feet, the sharp snipping of shears through copy, and their clatter when thrown down, the ringing of the bell of the copy-box, the rattle of the box itself as it moved up and down in its narrow passage-way to the composing-room, the tearing of paper, the devil's tattoo of a typewriter ; but though he heard it Master was conscious of none of it. To the general hubbub, the fire alarm added its deliberate strokes, like a clock. As it ceased,

ceased, the inattentive, "night locals" asked what box it was. Master answered him—correctly. Yet he was unconscious of the striking bell, of the question, of his own answer, and in this curious state, known to all who have been stunned by sudden misfortune, in which the mind, though it seems occupied wholly with its sense of leaden sorrow, still does its usual, familiar task, Master worked on through the evening.

What he was conscious of was his misery. Its dull ache was in his brain, which it numbed, and in his body, which felt heavy and weak. His future was black. The metaphor is outworn; but the darkness which it has ceased to make visible to our accustomed imagination was palpable to him. In the night you see dimly, perhaps not at all; but you know where your path is leading, you know that familiar and well-loved objects—trees, hills, the houses of men—are about you, that your home is before you, that the ground is firm under your feet. Not more dark than this is the future of most of us. But imagine yourself set down in a spacious blackness of which you know nothing, where the first step may hurl you into an infinite abyss or bring you full against some slimy wall, the horrid breadth and height of which are illimitable; where, finally, what you stand upon is neither turf nor stone, hillside nor plain, private path nor public way, but mysterious unnameable ooze. In such a place Master was now set down.

Hard as his lot had been before, now it was harder. While his old mother lived—a withered yet active dame, to think prim, small thoughts in a prim, small house, far away from him, in the pure country—his life, wrecked as he knew it to be, had still its worthy use. By an arrangement with the cashier a part of his pay each Saturday was safely sent to her: with the lesser remaining portion he began his weekly ruinous carouse. Now that she was dead—and he had a vision of her still face, with its air of demanding
nothing,

nothing, which, to the living, with love still to bestow, is the most painful sight in the faces of the dead—what had he for which to live? With what, indeed, was he to live? He was discharged—abruptly, cruelly, without notice. And he knew too well he could not obtain work elsewhere. The thrifty proprietor of the *Dawn*, who had hired him simply because, no one else wanting him, he was cheap, might indeed find him useful for a time; but no editor willing to pay the honest price of capable and faithful service would for a moment consider any request for employment from him.

In one direction only was there light. Tunnelled through the darkness as through black stone, and lighted with cruel distinctness, there stretched a pathway. He saw himself going down this way—first, a worn-out journalist doing odds and ends of “space work” for a scanty and intermittent wage; next, a drunken sot spending his days partly in public parks, partly in shrinking visits to public-houses, his nights in police stations; and finally, when dead, tossed into the earth so sodden and diseased a corpse that even the gorge of grave-worms would rise at him. And though the darkness was heartening in comparison with this hideous, inevitable path, the eyes of his inward vision fixed themselves upon it, fascinated. His bodily eyes meanwhile read “copy”—drunks, petty larcenies, fires, aldermanic doings, a ball, a dinner in fashionable society—and his blue pencil marked this copy with paragraph-marks, struck out superfluous passages, and wrote appropriate “heads.”

At this moment Burress entered, flushed and excited. “There, by George!” he exclaimed, throwing a bundle of copy down before Master, “here’s news for you. That’s better than your scientific meeting, I guess!”

“What is it?” said Hunt.

“A column suicide!” exclaimed Burress with pride. “I
stumbled

stumbled upon it in the luckiest manner. I was at the hotel when——”

The word “suicide” pierced Master’s unconsciousness like a bright sword. He was oblivious to the rest. Burrese’s copy was the first to which he gave his whole mind. It was an account of the suicide of a man who seemed to have everything needful to make him happy—reputation, namely, and wealth, a handsome, accomplished wife and promising children. “No cause,” ran the reporter’s conventional phrase, “can be assigned for the rash act.” If this man had found life a vain thing, what, he asked, could it hold of good for him? And the idea of suicide, once suggested to him, grew and waxed strong and became a resolve. Then, suddenly, self-disgust seized him. What good resolution, he asked himself savagely, had ever been kept by him? He was weak, he was a coward, he would never have the nerve——

As he pondered this other man’s obituary, he wondered in bitterness of spirit what the account of his own death would be—brief, he knew, and good-natured, but in every line, he foresaw, breathing contempt. And he rebelled against this imaginary notice with the rebellion of a man who, though he has failed, knows himself better than many who succeed. There is no hatred like that of the unjustly blamed for the unjustly praised. He cursed the editor and proprietor of the *Dawn*, who, though he was cruel and unscrupulous, yet prospered through the canny virtue of sobriety. That the man had any virtue whatever was perhaps, after all, where lay the sting. A passion of hate against this cool calculator of the value of respectability blazed in him. With the intensity of a strong fire swept by wind, he wished that he might show this man to the world as he was, avenge his own wrongs, drive a poisoned javelin at his enemy’s heart even from the door-sill of death, and leave behind him as he stepped across it at least a
revenge

revenge accomplished. Upon the problem how to effect this his mind fixed itself like a burning glass. Suddenly before his imagination the solution sprung up like the flame. He gave a short, curious laugh, darted at Hunt (at that moment wrathfully crumpling in his fist several sheets of "flimsy") the cunning glance of one insane, then rose and left the office. He returned shortly, but in the interval he had drunk two glasses of neat brandy.

The night passed. The reporters one by one finished their tasks and departed. Their cells once more became the homes exclusively of darkness and black beetles. Only "the night locals man" now remained. In his gas-lit cubby-hole, ornamented with coloured lithographs of actresses in tights and cheap likenesses of sporting and political celebrities, he sat contentedly smoking and writing out with painful scratching pen his little chronicle of minor crime. Old Master had toiled on doggedly. In the intervals of the regular work of the desk he had busied himself with some writing of his own. Hunt, noting this detail, had inferred that he was occupied with some "special" to an "outside" newspaper, and had had the careless and easy charity to hope that the work would bring him a dollar or so. At three, Master went home, and Hunt made his way to the composing-room to attend to the "make-up." The "night locals" man loafed about until half-past three, the hour when the paper went to press, and then he too departed.

Shortly afterwards, Hunt re-entered the now deserted editorial room, and began to make ready for the street. As he finished, the bell of the copy-box rang, and the fresh, damp newspaper—the first from the press—was sent down. He glanced at one or two of the heads about which he had certain doubts, found them as they should be, and stepped at once into the elevator. There the thought of the suicide occurring to him, he had curiosity
enough

enough to look for the account. At what he saw he uttered a startled oath.

"Here," he shouted to the sleepy elevator boy, "carry me back upstairs—quick."

But why, after all, take it from the paper? No—it was straight, Master had done it, he knew. Anyway, it was only a couple of "sticks." Possibly, if he didn't delay, there might yet be time—

"No," he cried to the boy; "I've changed my mind. Get me downstairs like lightning, d'ye hear? Come, get a move on you—quick, now."

"What's the matter with you, anyway," growled the boy, between wonder and wrath.

"Never you mind, but hustle—hustle, can't you?" cried Hunt, now in an agony of impatience.

And when the elevator at last reached the ground floor, he ran from the building at full speed and jumped into the first cab he found. Neither whip nor curse was spared to get him rapidly to Master's lodgings.

II

Henry J. Conant, proprietor of the *Dawn*, was, as Hunt said, forty years old himself, but his good angel died young. As he wore a slight moustache and no beard, he looked even younger than he was. His mouth, twisted by sensuality, was thin-lipped and cruel. His eyes were hard, and their glances bore down yours as a Scotch claymore might bear down a French rapier. He was tall in person, gave much care to his dress, was overbearing in manner, and said what he chose without regard for the feelings of others. He was cynical, passionate, consistent only in so far as consistency

consistency paid, and made his only ends in life money and power. He had excellent control over himself: he allowed even his violent temper to show itself in two cases only—when it could not harm his interests, for pleasure; when it could further them, for profit. No one liked him: he had won his way without help from any one by sheer force of will. Imagine a bull which had intellect and which was not to be fooled by red cloaks. Rather than encounter such an animal, the cautious toreador would resign. In this imaginary beast is found the type of such men as Conant. He was an ugly antagonist, and knew it.

Conant's wife—a convenient woman, whose money had enabled him to become the proprietor of the *Dawn* as well as its editor—was a weak, sallow thing to whom he paid no attention. Her only pleasure was to read her husband's paper, of which she understood nothing, and which seemed to her a daily miracle. Her only use in life, in his opinion, was to keep his house. He lived in a suburban town, "not," to quote Hunt again, "because he loved men the less, but a low tax-rate more."

When, five hours after the *Dawn* went to press—that is to say, at half-past eight o'clock—Conant came downstairs to breakfast, his first act was to pick up the morning paper. The greatest pleasure of his day, his employes averred, was to seek out in its columns causes for fault-finding, for excuse to make the day of his managing editor a burden, and sharply to rebuke his night-editor in the evening. Nor was he above "cursing out" any reporter who was unlucky enough to offend him. He made no speciality of dignity. Opening the paper, he ran his eye first over a leading article which he himself had written on some question of local politics. He read its execrable English with the complacency of one whose only grammar has been the columns of newspapers. Its political shrewdness flattered his pride: his rude thrusts at his enemies

enemies pleased his malice. Then he looked through a paragraph or two of a religious article, found himself bored, reflected with the calm of one who has taught himself to accept facts which he does not understand, that his readers liked that sort of thing, supposed it was all right, and after a sniff of contempt at the column of book reviews, and the concurrent thought that after all "book-ads" paid, turned to the news columns. There almost the first "head" to catch his eye was the suicide of a Mr. Mainwaring at the H—— hotel. Through this, using the "cross-heads" as an index to the important points, he glanced hastily. At its close a second article followed with the caption: "Another Suicide: A Well-known Newspaper Man kills himself at his Rooms." Upon this his attention became at once fixed. First in the ordinary type of the paper came this short paragraph:

"Mr. John Master, a brilliant journalist long and favourably known in newspaper circles, and at the time of his death connected with the staff of the *Dawn*, committed suicide early this morning at his rooms at 671, Ashley Street. Directly he left work at the *Dawn* office at three o'clock this morning, Mr. Master proceeded at once to his lodgings, and went to his room, which he entered without attracting the attention of any of his sleeping fellow-lodgers. At half-past three, Mr. Frank Bartlett, who occupies the next apartment, was awakened by a pistol-shot, and on rushing into the room of the unfortunate man, found him stretched upon the bed with a bullet-hole in his forehead and the still smoking 42-calibre revolver clutched convulsively in his right hand. Mr. Master leaves no family."

The second portion of the article was in agate type. This, as Conant noted with quick disapproval, was true even of the introductory sentence, which by rule should have been included in the first paragraph and printed in the same type. As he read the
opening

opening words of this longer part, Conant's face seemed to stiffen and harden visibly. They ran thus :

“At his bedside was found the following letter : ‘Before God, I declare the hypocritical editor and proprietor of this paper responsible for my death. Oh, I know what will be said—that if I had let rum alone I would have been all right. I know very well that but for drink I might still be what I once was, one of the leading newspaper men of the city. But because I was weak, was that any reason why this man should take advantage of that weakness for his own ends and careless of my sufferings? No! Read what I say, and then see what you think of him ; see if you think him the noble man who runs “the only respectable daily” in the city. We come from the same town, and I know all about him. And I propose to tell it too.’ ”

Conant instinctively darted a quick, cautious glance about the room, as if to see whether any one was observing him, and with a certain slight tightening of the lips, resumed his reading :

“‘I am the older man, and came to the city first. When he came up to town with his miserable bit of experience in newspaper work as correspondent from a country legislature to a country weekly, I was managing editor of *Facts*, the biggest sensational liar in town, and he came straight to me. I wasn't a saint. I accepted the profession as I found it, cynically, and enjoyed its lies and its vulgarities, called the public an ass, and thought myself its superior. Most journalists do. But at least I was good-natured and generous, and I gave this raw youngster his chance, and was rather proud to see him advance, as he did, rapidly. I drank. I lost my place, got another not so good ; lost that. As I went down, he went up. Finally, all I could get to do was irregular work, space work, what not—no one would give me regular employment. Meanwhile, he had got possession of
this

this paper—the devil knows how. I only know this, that while he ran it for the stock company which owned it, as he did for several years, it lost money rapidly, until they were all disgusted and sick, and they sold it to him cheap as dirt. Now, just as quick as he got it into his own hands, it began to make money. There was some funny business or other, you may be sure of that: and if he wants to sue me for libel, let him come to hell after me if he wants to. He'll be welcome—the devil's proud of him.' ”

A shade of cynical amusement passed over Conant's face at this outburst. “He's simply playing into my hands,” he reflected, “talking such rot. If his revelations don't amount to any more than that——” He relaxed his attitude a little, and took an easier position in his chair.

“When he got control of the paper, then began economies. The men who had served the paper long and faithfully, and by right of their service and ability drew large salaries, were one by one dismissed, and who took their places? Boys and old sots—boys for strength, old sots for experience. They supplemented each other well, and both were cheap. The sots did not stay long—neither did the boys. The sots went on sprees, and sots who happened to be sober took their places. The boys left on their first demand for an increase of salary. They were told that if they didn't like their wages they could get out. There were plenty of others. The force was kept horribly small besides, and the men were worked within an inch of their lives. The boys paid dear for their training. The office was a regular hell, where men got thin and pale and nervous from overwork, and then broke down and were discharged without notice. But the salary list was the lowest in the city, and while this worthy proprietor got the full benefit of these youngsters' enthusiasm and strength, he

saved thousands of dollars a year in salaries alone. All the thanks they got were curses for the blunders which of course they made. This was the office at which I applied for work. It was absolutely necessary for me to earn money. I had a feeble old mother up-country who only had me to keep her from the workhouse. I thought this worthy gentleman would do me a good turn, just as I had done him one year before. He knew I could do good work. He knew my mother. He believed my promise to keep straight—I know he did. I saw it in his eye. And what did he do? He took advantage of my necessities to offer me less than the other old sots, my likes. I cursed him inwardly and took his offer—I had to, and he knew it. At the end of a month he reduced my pay, and didn't condescend to give me an explanation for it. Still, I hung on, and kept straight. Then he set a green young fellow to work on the day-desk, though the man on it could do all the work on it himself by working like a nigger every second of his time. I knew what that meant. He don't incur extra expense for nothing. He was training my successor. Last night I got the G. B. Why? Because I got 10 dols. a week and the kid would do it for 8 dols. That's why. Did my former kindness to him, did the thought of my poor old mother whom his action would send to the workhouse make him hesitate one second to save that two dollars a week on my salary? Not a bit of it. I had served his turn, and he slung me aside as a drunkard does an empty bottle, careless on what stones I was broken. Thank God, my mother died day before yesterday. I got the news along with my discharge.' ”

“That's all sorehead stuff,” was Conant's mental comment. “An editorial saying that if the complaints of all the disgruntled and crank employés were believed—will fix that. My readers are mostly employers of help. They'll see the point. But ”—and
the

the editor's face suddenly clouded with wrath—"what did Hunt mean by printing such stuff. He'll get his walking papers so quick he won't know what's happened to him."

"And is there any need for this niggardliness, this cruel and unjust under-payment? No sir."

"What's that?" muttered Conant, straightening himself suddenly.

"There may have been once; but there isn't now. He takes great pains to keep the idea going that the paper makes nothing. But I know better. I know the minimum amount of advertising required to make the paper pay. There isn't a day that the paper doesn't have more than that amount—not a day. When that day comes there'll be no paper. Any one who knows its kind-hearted proprietor knows enough to know that. He doesn't spend his time working for the public good for pure philanthropy, and besides, for a man utterly without principle, as he is, circulation and advertising aren't the only ways in which a paper can be made to pay. This new traction road which every one should know is a big swindle—has his paper ever said a word against it? And how when he has a mania for boiling down things and will never print a political speech in full, be it never so important—how, I say, does it happen that the speeches of this corporation's counsel before committees are reported verbatim every time, to the exclusion oftentimes of legitimate news? How does it happen that speeches adverse to the corporation are never printed at all? Go in as advertising? Oh, yes, they're paid for; but a good many things go in as advertising which aren't advertising by a long chalk. How about this "special correspondence" from boom towns South and West, which begins when the speculators take hold of them, and stops when they let go? Is that advertising too? It always cracks up the goods, and is paid for. So I suppose

suppose it is. But the public—which is a fool—thinks it intelligent and disinterested investigation, and nobody tells it different. And I'm a fool, if a certain gang of political heelers in this town don't pay the paper regular tribute of hush-money. Nothing's ever said about their tricks, anyway, and the head of the paper is too well informed not to know about them. And I happen to know he's "in on the ground floor" in a good many enterprises of this same gang. There's more ways than one to pay bribes. There isn't a column of this precious, respectable sheet that isn't for sale—except the religious column. Nobody wants to buy that. Even once in a while its financial column, which he has shrewdness enough to keep both honest and able most of the time, is—oh, I know it—is worked in the interests of scheming and sufficiently generous speculators; and all this in a paper which shrieks periodically at the "regrettable sensationalism of the contemporary press." Other papers feed their pig-headed readers' swill, I know, but it's good, honest swill, and the pigs grunt their satisfaction over it. But this paper sells veal and calls it chicken, though you'd think "a discerning public" would know there couldn't be much cooked chicken in a shop where there was so much lively crowing. He has discovered that hypocrisy in journalism pays, and he's working it for all it is worth, and making money hand over fist. Meanwhile, he is starving his employés, even going so far as to sit up nights in devising schemes to take all the "fat" from his compositors, and you should hear him curse his night-editor if there happens to be three inches overset. He crushes the life out of every one whom he gets in his clutches that he himself may get the fatter, like an anaconda. He's through with me. He's got the last bit of valuable service out of me, and throws me on one side. But I don't like to become a sandwich man and advertise corn doctors, and die finally in a police

police station of *delirium tremens*. That would please him too much, or rather, it wouldn't trouble him at all—he'd know nothing about it. He has made me choose between that and suicide. On his head be it! Is there a hell? I hope so, for if there is, I'll be there, and after a time shall see him there with me. It'll be a sight to endure torments for. I say to him, *au revoir!* ”

“It'll be a fight to kill that,” said Conant, who looked pale.

While he read this letter, so vulgar in its lack of dignity, in its cheap phraseology, in its desperate pettiness, yet withal so terrible for him, his mind, active as a shuttle, was weaving about it a varied commentary of thought and emotion. It ran in and out of all the feelings—except pity. In those moments in which he realised the full import of the latter part of the old journalist's dying communication to the world, he had the sickening sense of defeat that is comparable only to the sensation of one hit in the pit of the stomach. Over the few points which were not true, and which he could disprove, he felt unreasonable exultation. For Master's sinister farewell he had only contempt. And it ran in and out of all the thoughts—except those of regret. This point was true; but who would believe it on the word of a revengeful and drunken employé, like Master? Would not a general denial, coupled with some eager—no, not eager—defamation of Master's character clear him? That point wasn't true: could he disprove it? What would people say to this? Wouldn't the public be delighted with that? How far could he count on public sympathy? Wouldn't Master have the better part of that? Or could he by clever lying bring it to his side? The affair would hurt the circulation of the *Dawn*. But if he could bring the public to think him abused, perhaps it would help the paper—be an “ad” for it. What would be its effect upon his

political fortunes? What would the other papers say? How did Hunt happen to print it? Wouldn't he fix Hunt?

When he finished reading, the query that remained uppermost in his mind was how widely Master's damaging letter had been printed. A pile of morning papers was by him. He took up the *Aurora*—nothing there. He looked quickly through the *Atlas*—nothing there. In the *Palladium* there was nothing; in the *Champion*—nothing; in the *Union*, the *Democrat*, the *Free Press*, the *People's Argus*—again and always there was nothing. Was his own paper then the only one to defame him? That was not possible! If Master had committed suicide how happened it that no other journal had printed a line about the occurrence? His nostrils dilated a little, as he began to scent a mystery. He picked up the *Dawn* again, and with eager, inquiring eyes read the circumstances of the suicide. It took place at half-past three in the morning, he was reminded. At half-past three? Between that hour and the time he usually went home, Master could not have gone to his rooms and written the letter: the time was not sufficient. Besides, half-past three was the hour at which the *Dawn* went to press. For the suicide to become known to the police and subsequently to the reporters, half-an-hour at least would be necessary. For the night-local man to write his account and for the compositors to put it into type would require at the very lowest estimate another half-hour. Half-past four—Hunt would not have held the presses an hour for an article defaming his own chief, even had he dared and had the wicked will to do so. Plainly, the report as it was printed must have been prepared and put into type several hours before the suicide took place. What did that mean? He looked at the paper again in search of some clue. The explanation struck him full in the face as he read the date—April 1.

He

He understood. Master, to avenge his discharge, had somehow smuggled this account into the paper. In a little time now, his morning sleep ended, his enemy would resort to some cheap restaurant, and there with the *Dawn* propped up before him against the sugar-bowl, would eat his breakfast and read and chuckle in secure triumph.

“God!” And with this intense oath, Conant leaped in a rage to his feet.

Thus outrageously to be scored, thus ignominiously to be fooled, thus shamefully to have his own weapon, the *Dawn*, wrested from his hand and turned against him by the most contemptible of his dependants—what could be more hideously humiliating? He thought of the delight of those rival newspapers against whose sensational methods he had so often hypocritically thundered. He divined how they would dress up the episode, and send it journeying abroad, like a skeleton in cap and bells, for the amusement of the nation. He read the head-lines under which they would place it. He heard what Homeric mirth would shake newspaperdom that day; what laughing congratulations would be given Master. He foresaw what capital his political opponents would make of the incident, with how pleasant an anecdote it would furnish them, how the story would follow him like his shadow, always present, the most elusive and exasperating of enemies. And this Master, this sot, this

“God!”

He seized his hat and overcoat and hurried to the station. And as he was being carried into the city by the too slow suburban train, he set himself to devise some scheme whereby yet Master might be thwarted. So rapid was the rush of his ideas that he seemed to have forgotten his anger. In reality, this kept his
mind

mind active, as the unseen fires in an engine make the visible wheels revolve.

When with set and angry face he stepped into the editorial rooms of the *Dawn*, there was an immediate hush among the talking groups of reporters. He divined at once that this interruption of regular work was due to Master's letter, and with an access of anger he turned upon Somers, the managing editor. This gentleman guessed what was coming and tried to ward it off:

"I've sent a man," he said quickly, "to see if it's true about Master."

"True!" shouted Conant shrilly. "True! you fool, what's the date of this paper? What's the date of this paper, I say?"

"Yes, I know," answered Somers hurriedly; "it's probably a fake, but still——"

"Probably a fake," cried Conant, "you know as well as I do what game this contemptible bummer has played on the paper. Here, give me some copy paper—I'll settle his account. And you Somers—you be d——d careful you don't hire another man like him in a hurry. It'll be all your place is worth."

Conant, not Somers, had hired Master; but Somers thought best to waive the point. Without answering, he handed his chief the paper he desired. Conant took it, but immediately giving it back, said:

"No—I won't write. You take down what I say. And be quick, too."

Pacing up and down the floor, he began to dictate a plausible "editorial." In it he represented himself as a benevolent person—the fact that there were a dozen men present who knew he was nothing of the sort was immaterial—who out of pure charity had given Master employment. With righteous indignation he explained

explained to the discriminating public that again and again he had been forced to caution this irreclaimable and ungrateful drunkard against indulging his besetting vice, and that at last, though with great reluctance, he had been compelled to discharge him. During all the time that Master had remained in the office, he had acted toward him with untold forbearance and done everything possible to reform him. And what had been the reward of his charitable kindness? Master had played him a most scurvy trick. He had taken advantage of the youth and inexperience of the night-editor, to whom he acted as assistant, to insert in the paper a lot of lies about its owner beside which those of Ananias showed white. Then point by point he rehearsed the history of his relations with Master. To each one, with the utmost skill, he gave a colouring favourable to himself, damaging to Master. The public, he concluded, would know which one to believe.

The managing editor wrote to Conant's dictation with stolid cynicism. The reporters about listened with a curious expression on their faces: when there was no chance that the "boss" would see them they exchanged solemn winks. When the article was ended, Somers looked up inquiringly.

"Have that put into type at once," said Conant. "Rush it, and have a proof pulled immediately. That'll fix him. Run it in all the evening editions, and to-morrow morning, d'ye hear?"

Somers obediently put the copy in the box and rang the bell. Just as the copy-box was whisked up to the composing-room, Hunt, looking rather haggard, stepped into the room.

As the canons of realism and those of propriety do not coincide, the abuse with which Conant greeted the young night-editor cannot here be completely set down. "Get out of here at once," he commanded in the highest, most strident tones of his harsh voice

voice, "do you hear? I want no man about who can let in the paper as you've done. You're either a fool or Master's accomplice, I don't care which. I won't have you in this office, and if I find that you've had anything to do with this affair, I'll make the city too hot to hold you—do you understand? Get out before I kick you out, you idiot. There are some April fool jokes that can't be played twice. Get out, I say!"

Hunt, utterly tired out as he was, staggered back against the wall as if struck by a physical blow, and listened to this onslaught with an air of such genuine bewilderment that even Conant was impressed by it.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he whispered at last.

Conant thrust a copy of the *Dawn* under his nose. "There," he cried, "look there! See what a fine lot of stuff you let get into my paper! Do you mean to say you know nothing about it?"

Hunt read the letter rapidly. Then taking a copy of the paper from his own pocket, he compared the two.

"There," he said, "it wasn't in the first edition. Yours is the second. That went to press after I left the office. There was only a harmless announcement of Master's death in the first. You'd better talk to the foreman."

This idea struck Conant. He turned quickly to Somers. "Is the night-foreman here by any chance?" he asked.

"Yes," said Somers, "he happens to be doing a day turn."

"Then why in thunder didn't you say so before? Call him down!"

A minute later, Hammond, a resolute-looking fellow whose bare arms were covered with printer's ink, appeared in the doorway.

"Why,"

"Why," said Conant, rapping the paper fiercely, "did you let that get into the second edition?"

"It came up all right, and so I printed it," said Hammond coolly. "I didn't read it—I don't edit the paper."

"Well, then why didn't you set it in time for the first edition?"

"When you don't make me let all the 'comps' go the moment there is any danger of their getting paid for waiting time, perhaps I can have enough men about to set up late stuff to catch the first edition. And perhaps you'd better spend a little money and get us a few more cases of agate."

"What did you print in agate for, anyway?"

"It was marked agate, and your rule is for letters to be in agate anyhow. That copy came up very late. I had all I could do to get it into the paper. The proofs weren't read. There wasn't time."

Foiled here, Conant turned again upon Hunt. "When you saw what you did in the paper, why didn't you investigate? It don't make any difference whether you saw the whole of it or not. It was your business to see it. If you didn't, so much the worse for you. I won't have any such jokes played in my paper."

"There's no joke about it," said Hunt quietly. "I went to his room just as soon as I saw the notice in the paper. He'd done just what he said. He's dead."

"What's that?" cried Conant. "You're lying. Master hadn't the sand. This is a new trick."

"Well," retorted Hunt hotly, "if you don't believe it, you just wait till you read it in the afternoon papers, that's all. I tell you he's dead."

"Well, it's d——d lucky for him he is, that's all," said Conant. "That lets him out; but it don't help you a bit. Why didn't

you

you investigate? Instead of that, like a fool, you rushed off to Master's room, did you, and left that in the paper. Didn't you know any better than to rush off to that besotted hound?"

"You don't think, do you," cried Hunt, "that I was going to let him kill himself if I could help it?"

"That was none of your business," retorted Conant. "You should have investigated. You're responsible for what goes into the paper. You don't think, do you, that I hired you as Master's keeper?"

"No," cried Hunt, "I don't—Cain."

Conant paid no attention. The bell rang and the copy-box clattered down with the proof of Conant's editorial article. Conant jumped for it, and looked through it rapidly. "Here," he said to Somers, "scratch out what's said about the April fool, and add a few words about the death: say, the most charitable view is that his lies were the result of insanity. And send a revised proof to all the papers."