

lons. A scouting, a pioneering, a search for the solution of the seemingly insoluble. A desperate hunt for the elusive and unseen. An attempt to penetrate the clutching fog that's unpenetratable. The reaching for the unreachable.

Defeat and defeatism was written on every face. How to rally? What the rallying slogan? Mr. Barton made notable contributions to that end. But they were not enough to arouse the moribund spirit that prevailed. So they went home each to his task, awaiting a better opportunity and a more propitious time and perhaps meet again.

And so the last week of August Editor Barton was at his desk again. Another hot and humid day that strains one's energy for the mere act of living. He thinks of ^{the} one bright thing salvaged from the ugly ruin of his party, the certainty that Taft wouldn't be denied the traditional and customary second nomination of an incumbent in the Presidential office.

The crux of the matter --- of all the talks and conferences. He was sure that Taft would be nominated.

Very little comfort though in that thought. Well, they'll all go down with the sinking ship if he is defeated in the election. Loyalty, party loyalty!

But as he sank in his armchair to hibernate and to conserve his energy in the taxing heat his secretary came in with a list of appointments for the morning. Heading the list was Foster Forrest Senior.

In the busy whirl of important events he had half-forgotten the matter of Forrest versus Dreen. When he had thought of it he ^{had it} left in the background of darkness and doubt, as something ugly and repulsive. Something one had to face sooner or later. The later the better. Now the "later" is here. And he ^{had} promised. Rising reluctantly he left his office, and slowly proceeded to the City Room. Looking up from his typewriter George saw the familiar bulk of the editor looming over him. It didn't surprise him, for he knew the big man's step was light, and that he delighted in

surprise visits to the staff, when they were deep at work. But to George it was always a welcome appearance. There was the usual faint smile on the Chief's face, and he smiled back. Then a few brief words came from up above: "Tomorrow after lunch, about one, I should like to see you at my office." "Yes, Mr. Barton," George said, and that was all.

The crux of the matter had been reached, and had been overcome. He had committed himself. And George Sheraton the one to carry on from here. No matter how difficult and climactic a task might be, once it had been reached and surmounted the peak levels off into a smooth plateau, and becomes a pleasant vista. This matter of Forrest versus Dreen had an alluring light, and enough ^{warmth} in it to give him an inner glow of satisfaction. He'd face Forrest with a fait-accompli, and let him storm in all his fury.

But Mr. Forrest didn't storm, at least not with fury. Of course, the fact that Mr. Barton hadn't acted on the matter so dear to his heart had soured him, but all the fury had spent itself during the editor's absence, when he had tried to get hold of a minimal majority of the Eventide shares and had failed. The more painful since he suspected Mr. Black's hand in that too. He was a beaten man, and he knew it.

Mr. Forrest was crumpled and pressed in a chair when Barton entered his office. Little arrogance was left in the man. Not a cringing figure, but neither a remonstrative one. A passive being, who came to ask but not demand.

A well rounded crux, as a matter of fact no crux at all, Mr. Barton thought. He sat down in his favorite chair, and faced Mr. Forrest. The iron-merchant lifted his eyes as if to speak, but the editor gestured him to remain seated and hear him out. He found himself speaking gently and with reassurance: "My apology for the delay. As you probably know I was out of town. But I have ordered to have ^{it} looked into first thing tomorrow.

"I suppose it'll be that fellow who will..." There was irony in his voice. Mr. Barton cut in: "Yes, it'll be Sheraton who'll be looking

into this." His words fell flat on Mr. Forrest's ears. He remained silent as he sat rigidly in his chair. "You might remember that was the premise that was agreed upon," Mr. Barton went on. "George has certain ideas of his own, true, but he also is fair. And he has ability."

"Also to gloss over..." and he caught himself. No, he is beaten and might as well own up to it. "Well, I must leave it in your hands - this question of morals."

"No one has ever found me other than moral in the conduct of the paper."

"I hope your impartiality extends to my views." A courageous last fling in the teeth of certain defeat.

"That I promise," Mr. Barton said, a faint smile on his lips. "If at all there is justice in what you say it'll be brought out."

"Good day, sir," Mr. Forrest said through thin lips as he rose abruptly and left the room.

Mr. Barton leaned back and leisurely lit a "little" cigar, and luxuriantly looked down into the Square. He slapped his thigh and chuckled. What a team these two will make - Sheraton and Dreen! Here really was the crux of the matter, the reviving of the fading spirit of the old town. Its too provincial spirit, the Aroostook-potato spirit, the tight little community spirit, the lodge and Rotary idealism! It needs a bit of fresh air, a new conception, a new attitude. And who should do it better than these two? Dreen a dreamer, but yet the realist to carry through. And his George with his passion for battle, and that sharp pen. Crux indeed!

George dived off the float at eastern Promenade and disappeared under water. The water closed in above him, and Bianca looked about for a ripple would point that to his whereabouts, but there was none. Suddenly she heard a splash and ~~and~~ felt a grab at the big toe of her left foot which touched the water at the edge of the raft. She let out a scream and snapped her foot up. Then George's head appeared at the brim of the platform, a mischievous grin on his face that was running rivulets from his soaking hair. He made a grab for her leg, but she was ahead of him and jumped out of his reach. She stood and surveyed the head at a level with the boards, and forced herself to smile at his antics and the feat of swimming under them ^{boards} and coming out at the exact point where her foot was in the water.

"What'd you scream for?" he smiled to her from the water, "No water rats at this depth."

"There was one grabbing at my toe," she grimaced. And taunting him she moved over and punished him by stepping sharply on his fingers clutching the boards. But he didn't let go. Instead he looked up admiringly at the wet straightness of form which outlined sharply the delicate curving of her breast and the mold of her graceful thighs through the clinging striping of her wet skirt.

"That was no rat," he mocked her, "at least not of the rodent family." And with one swift pull on his arms he was on the float beside her. Encircling an arm around her waist he turned her to face him. Flourishing his other arm he declared: "Behold the Goddess of Revenge, of the Frown, of the Scorn! Which will it be?" As if answering himself, "No, no, Diana of the Chase!"

"Whom did she chase, man or beast?" She was getting into the spirit of the fun. "Oh, grow up, will you?"

"I shall never reach your ripe old age, no matter how much older."

"You'll never grow up," she protested.

"I am three years older, or is it two? yet you already are a hag of

of sixty," he prodded her.

"When you are sixty you'll be the same. Nyer stand still to hold on to."

"But I stand still long enough to hold on to you."

"Slippery as an eel," she shrugged her shoulders. "The older the more foolish."

"Ah the best in me - to be foolish. I hate clever people - mostly they are rascals. But I am no fool hanging on to you."

"Ah, go to h- "

"Before I go there let's have another swim. See if you can do the crawl better."

"You almost drowned me ~~me~~ last time."

"We won't go far." And jumping in the water he pulled her after him.

She called him a brute and splashed out after him with a vigor that astonished her. If she would only reach him she would pinch him hard enough, or scatch until the blood came. She struck out more furiously, but still he was ahead. She gave up the chase. Just then he levelled off and was abreast with her. Her anger had gone by that time.

"You are a beast," she managed to say as she gulped a mouthful of water."

"You were doing just fine with that stroke when you were trying to overhaul me," he consoled her. "What a burst of speed! I had to put on plenty of steam to keep out of your clutches."

"Oh, you---" and she laughed a gurgling laugh inspite of herself. It was gratifying to hear him praise her. She had just now begun to realize how fast and rhythmic her arms and legs worked. "A symphony of synchrony" as George would say. And she was fast! "You did it on purpose to make me chase you."

"The Goddess of the Chase," and he laughed into the water, making a peculiar burbling sound. "You had to learn sometime." Anchring his right shoulder to her left, "Tired my Goddess, lean on me."

"I can make it."

"We are turning back. Have appointment at the office."

"I'll be just in time to relieve father for lunch."

"Shoudn't be more than eleven, if that."

"We'll have lunch at my house and go together. I'll drive."

"I'm ready for the sacrifice."

"Safer than swimming with you."

His boss was a ^crock-ribbed republican, George knew, and he wouldn't put it past him to snub a democrat if the occasion arose, yet, that hadn't to an appreciable degree diminished his esteem of the man. He liked his thinking qualities, his expansive frame, and his broad nature. He liked the man, even ~~to~~ ^{him} pay homage, for of such qualities kings are made. He liked the man the way he was. The refining quality of the essential goodness of the man exerted a beneficent influence on him. Although exactly what it was he couldn't say. He was an ornament to him, to the place, and he could write better when he knew the big fellow was in his office. "An ornament", he smiled to himself, "a big ornament". Yet it wasn't stupid or blind loyalty. He would just as well as not denounce an act or an idea he would think wrong, even if it had come from the highest level, if his opinion, that is, were asked. And so he didn't remonstrate with the Chief if he believed that the Republicans were physically and spiritually better equipped to manage the country than the Democrats. It was a conviction through bringing up, ideas inculcated into the mind, in the plastic mind of youth. In its sponge-like receptive days it absorbs things which later harden into firm beliefs. A kind of faith. As long as there was no malice; and there was none in his boss. George knew little of politicians and politics and cared less, but he couldn't ascribe to the idea that the Democrats were dead ducks because they had been starved under a protracted Republican rule. Hungry for power, yes, but not riff-raff, or camp followers. If they grumbled against the Big

Boys of the reigning party, who had become fat and sleek with prosperity, and who had taken it for granted that they were the kings and heirs-apparent to lead the American people for ever and aye, who could blame them? The aphorism, Republicanism and Big Business! He distrusted slogans and the spoutings and mouthings of the demagogue and the mob. Often one's sympathy goes to the underdog; but one party is as American as the other. He didn't believe either that the average American is a Joe Doe to be pulled by his coattail, or by his nose, or by his tongue. Sure, the Barons would skin his tail, and pull off his pants. But would he let them? He wasn't so sure, for somewhere in the Little Man's make up there was a gall, and that gall might spill over and upset the applecart. True of both parties.

But what does he know about such things, and he a cub-reporter! And as he looked to the editor, the latter was stirring uneasily in his chair.

Yes, the Editor-in Chief of the Eventide, spokesman for his party, knew of the peculiar qualities of Little Joe Doe, otherwise known as Average American; knew of his restlessness, knew that he was getting resentful, even arrogant. Look out! The little man standing up on his hind legs, waving his arms, and bent on destruction.

The editor was stirring uneasily in his chair, his spacious brow furrowed.

There was no quelling of his qualms even in the little people in Memorial Square, who moved about and hurried about their little affairs like little ants.

He hasn't touched one "little cigar", George reflected, since he was observing him. A bad omen, and a bad time for an interview. But the big man had asked for it.

Suddenly the great man was aware of him. A smile crossed Mr. Barton's face. There was the surprise of an awakening, as one coming out of the

semi-pellucidity of a dream into the white brightness of pleasant reality. George was the pleasant reality, and the wonder of it. Though it must not be denied that he was a puzzle to him too - at times. But that's part of the wonder. And Mr. Barton relished his wondering about that cub of a reporter of his.

The crux is coming to fruition, to a point where it'll be off his back.

Thereupon he lit a new 'little-cigar' and enjoyed its fragrance. With a new consciousness of peace of mind - even though the reprieve was only temporary - he meditated in the blue smoke with whimsical joviality on George going ~~with~~ hammer and tong after this Mr. Forrest.

For the first time Mr. Barton regretted that he didn't own a swivel. He would have liked to take a twirl or two before plunging into the matter with George. Not that he was in doubt that George would accept the challenge of the new assignment, perhaps the most important one for him, but that it would give him time to pause, and to ponder this incredible young man. One couldn't sit straight-up, even trying to lean as far back as the straight-backed chair would permit, or even averting his face to look down the Square (with eyes ^{half} closed, as if he had something very deep to mull over), without saying anything for long. And he didn't want to say anything - not yet. In a swivel you swirl just for the sensation of the whirl. Once, twice, or even three times. And no one would ever suspect hesitation, or meditation in your mind. Well, he can ^{it} swivel away from facing George, but at least he can enjoy one more puff, one more exhalation of the blue smoke, before he spoke.

The assignment it turned out was no surprise to George. He told Mr. Barton he had been expecting it: What with the scurrilous letters in the paper about Mr. Dreen and his innocuous little troupe, which, though it had little of artistic merit, had yet great entertaining value with the fresh prettiness of the young girls and song and dance act.

"There'll be a lot of debunking to do," George said.

"Most of the letters are inspired, and meaningless," Mr. Barton's voice was toneless. "It isn't hard to guess by whom," George affirmed.

"His wings have been clipped by Mr. Black. Worth a gamble." Mr. Barton looked to George as if for confirmation. "I have never met Solomon Dreen, but what I hear of him he'll be good for this town."

"From the old school, but with new ideas. A brilliant fellow. From what Lena told me he came from a little town in Eastern Russia. The same town perhaps father^{had} visited on his Sabbatical leave." George pondered the idea. "Lena spoke of his mother's tragic death in a pogrom on Passover day. Father told the same story. Solomon may be the very^{boy} - ten years old then - whose mother was ravished by the hooligans, and met her death by jumping off the roof of her house. This will give me a chance to know him better. as father^{had} wished."

"A man of tragedy. But tragedy fashions character, like the crucible that distills purity." Mr. Barton turned to his right and looked down to the Square. "I well remember the year your father left for his Sabbatical. It was soon after I took over the editorship. Even then Forrest was after your father. But to me, and the same Jerome Black, it was an important event. It was so recorded in the head editorial."

And he smiled his broad enigmatic smile.