

## Down and Out at Forty-five

(Continued from page 10.)

paper, to carry me along until I could get something else.

In a few days I would have to leave the boiling out institution, and had no place to go. Mr. White was in Colorado, and my letter had been forwarded to him, so there was a delay in getting a reply. Somehow, I had counted on a favorable word from him, and as day after day went by, and the mail brought nothing, my hopelessness became absolute. Then, when I had ceased to expect a reply, there came a long, generous letter, telling me to go to Emporia and make myself useful until he returned home, and then we'd discuss ways and means together.

I believe that was the gladdest hour of my life. You have to be down and out and well stricken in years, and ashamed that you are alive, to understand the joy of having one more chance.

And so, one October evening, as the sun was slowly sinking behind the western hills, a solitary horseman might have been seen pushing his jaded steed into Emporia. The next morning I reported for work at the "Gazette" office, and a small corner was cleared for me in Mr. White's private office.

I have said that I had a reputation as "a hog for work," and I lived up to it now. Work had become a sort of passion with me. It enabled me to forget for a while that I was forty-five, and dead broke, and starting in again at the foot of the ladder, in worse shape than when I first entered a newspaper office. I was a superfluity in the "Gazette" office; there

was no real place for me; a place had been made, just to give me a chance, and of course the wages were small.

But I wrote so much stuff the printers were in panic; and I was at my job by sunrise, and worked at it in the evening by lamplight. After two or three weeks Mr. White came home, and I'll never forget his hearty greeting. I had never seen him before, but he acted as though I were the long-lost Charlie Ross.

"You've been writing wonderful stuff, Walt," he cried. "Come up to my house to-night. I want to have a talk with you."

I went, and we had the talk, and my wages were raised, and I was assured that there was a place for me on the "Gazette" as long as I wanted it. This was balm in Gilead.

A heart-breaking time followed. In my days of riotous living I had piled up a mountain of debts. They had never troubled me when I had been stayed with flagons; but when my creditors heard that I was working and earning money, they came down on me, not as single spies, but in battalions. There were lawyers and bailiffs and collectors hot on my trail all the time, and I saw that it would take me ninety-nine years to pay them all, and the weight of discouragement oppressed me again.

Had it not been for the cheery sympathy of Mr. White in those dreary days, I'd have given up trying. His sympathy wasn't the easy stuff that exhausts itself in words. In fact, he never talked about my worries; but I know he understood them, and he let me know he was ready to help me out in any way, at any time. But he preferred to see me work out my own salvation. It was by manifesting his confidence in me that he kept me to the mark. I admired him so much, and was so hungry for his approval, that I was determined to make good if it were in me to do it.

And all the time the fleshpots were calling. If I quit work for an hour I could hear the march of the prodigal sons, and yearned to be with them.

There was a day when the managing editor wanted a stickful of stuff in a hurry, to fill a corner on the front page. It was a Saturday, and I sat down and wrote a little rhyme in prose form, urging people to go to church next day. I had been writing such little rhymes for years. When working for the Atchison "Globe" I used to write the advertisements of grocers and coal dealers in verse, and throughout my newspaper career I employed the talent indiscriminately. I always could write verse as easily as prose. The rhymes form themselves in my head as fast as I can write them down. I am never stuck for a rhyme. If there is a word in any corner of the language that will rhyme with another, it bobs up in my mind without effort.

The verse I wrote for the "Gazette" was printed with a border around it, and caused some comment. So I wrote another on Monday, and a third on Thursday, and so on. The verses became a feature of the first page. In the beginning they treated of local topics exclusively, then they had a wide range, and newspapers all over the country were copying them. It never occurred to me that the rhymes had possibilities as money-makers.

But one day Mr. White said, in that friendly way of his, "Walt, it's time we began to figure on getting you something for those rhymes. I have been waiting to see if you could keep up your lick before talking about it. You seem to be an inexhaustible fountain of verse, and I believe you can keep it up indefinitely. The newspapers are using the

### ANOTHER ENEMY WE MUST CONQUER



—St. Louis Republic.

rhymes everywhere, and I am sure they'd pay something for them. Now, I am going to write to a friend of mine who syndicates things, and I feel sure he will sell these verses so you'll have quite an income from them."

Then he wrote to Mr. George Matthew Adams, with the result that the latter agreed to syndicate the poems. He hadn't much faith in the proposition, for poetry has always been regarded, by publishers and syndicate men, as something to be touched with a ten-foot pole. At the beginning of the experiment Mr. Adams paid me eighteen dollars a week for six rhymes, and that's, added to my wages from the "Gazette," seemed opulence and restored some of my natural optimism. I began to think that perhaps God was in his heaven, after all.

The rhymes caught on, and every month or two Mr. Adams added something to my pay. That was more than eight years ago, and he has been at the same trick ever since. I have never asked him to add a dollar to my pay. He has kept on increasing the stipend with untiring generosity, and at the present time he probably pays me more than any other man ever received from rhyme alone.

It is ten years since I came to Emporia, with my extra shirt and my \$1.35. Emporia has been a tender nurse to me, and I expect, and hope, to potter around under her ancestral elms until Joe Dumm calls for me with his six-cylinder motor hearse. Since prosperity overtook me I have received flattering offers from Chicago and New York — even from London. But little old Emporia is good enough for me. The people here know me for the stuffed prophet I am, and won't allow me to get swelled up with false pride. When I begin to feel important, and realize that my hat is too small, I meet Carl Ricker or Harry

Peach, or somebody else who knew me when I had only one extra shirt, and I know I can't get by with any pose. I feel that this chastening of the spirit is good for me, so I remain in Emporia.

I have a sumptuous automobile with all modern improvements, and sometimes when I am jaunting along the road I begin to feel that the sun rises and sets somewhere in my neighborhood. Then I see a landmark that my weary eyes beheld ten years ago, when I had only one extra shirt, and I quit trying to look like Washington crossing the Delaware. Such things are good for me, for I don't want success to give me the idea that I am not a false alarm; so I remain in Emporia.

Now, there would be no sense in writing or printing such a story as this unless it has a moral. The Editor of The American Magazine believed my story might have value as showing that a has-been can come back — and that is the moral.

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