`P-pardon, lady,' he said, 'but couldn't leave without exchangin' comp'ments sheason with lady th' house. "Gainst princ'ples gen'leman do sho.'

And then he began the ancient salutation that was a tradition **in** the House when men wore lace ruffles and powder.

The blessings of another year —'

Fuzzy's memory failed him. The Lady prompted:

Be upon this hearth.'

'— The guest —' stammered Fuzzy.

And upon her who —' continued the Lady, with a leading smile.

`Oh, cut it out,' said Fuzzy ill-manneredly. 'I can't remember. Drink hearty.'

Fuzzy had shot his arrow. They drank. The Lady smiled again the smile of her caste. James enveloped Fuzzy and re-conducted him toward the front door. The harp music still softly drifted through the house.

Outside, Black Riley breathed on his cold hands and hugged the gate.

'I wonder,' said the Lady to herself, musing 'who — but there were so many who came. I wonder whether memory is a curse or a blessing to them after they have fallen so low.'

Fuzzy and his escort were nearly at the door The Lady called: `James!'

James stalked back obsequiously, leaving Fuzzy waiting unsteadily, with his brief spark of the divine fire gone.

Outside, Black Riley stamped his cold feet and got a firmer grip on his section of gas-pipe.

`You will conduct this gentleman,' said the Lady, 'downstairs. Then tell Louis to get out the Mercedes and take him to whatever place he wishes to go.'

LII

Proof of the Pudding

SPRING WINKED a vitreous optic at Editor Westbrook, of the *Minerva Magazine*, and deflected him from his course. He had lunched in his favourite corner of a Broadway hotel, and was returning to his office when his feet became entangled in the lure of the vernal coquette. Which is by way of saying that he turned eastward in

Twenty-sixth Street, safely forded the spring freshet of vehicles in Fifth Avenue, and meandered along the walks of budding Madison Square.

The lenient air and the settings of the little park almost formed a pastoral; the colour motif was green — the presiding shade at the creation of man and vegetation.

The callow grass between the walks was the colour of verdigris, a poisonous green, reminiscent of the horde of derelict humans that had breathed upon the soil during the summer and autumn. The bursting tree-buds looked strangely familiar to those who had botanized among the garnishings of the fish course of a forty-cent dinner. The sky above was of that pale aquamarine tint that hall-room poets rhyme with 'true' and `Sue' and 'coo.' The one natural and frank colour visible was the ostensible green of the newly painted benches — a shade between the colour of a pickled cucumber and that of a last year's fast-back cravenette raincoat. But, to the city-bred eye of Editor Westbrook, the landscape appeared a masterpiece.

And now, whether you are of those who rush in, or of the gentle concourse that fears to tread, you must follow in a brief invasion of the editor's mind.

Editor Westbrook's spirit was contented and serene. The April number of the *Minerva* had sold its entire edition before the tenth day of the month — a newsdealer in Keokuk had written that he could have sold fifty copies more if he had had 'em. The owners of the magazine had raised his (the editor's) salary; he had just installed in his home a jewel of a recently imported cook who was afraid of policemen; and the morning papers had published in full a speech he had made at a publishers' banquet. Also there were echoing in his mind the jubilant notes of a splendid song that his charming young wife had sung to him before he left his uptown apartment that morning. She was taking enthusiastic interest in her music of late, practising early and diligently. When he had complimented her on the improvement in her voice she had fairly hugged him for joy at his praise. He felt, too, the benign, tonic medicament of the trained nurse, Spring, tripping softly adown the wards of the convalescent city.

While Editor Westbrook was sauntering between rows of park benches (already filling with vagrants and the guardians of lawless childhood) he felt his sleeve grasped and held. Suspecting that he was about to be panhandled, he turned a cold and unprofitable face, and saw that his captor was — Dawe — Shackleford Dawe,

dingy, almost ragged, the genteel scarcely visible in him through the deeper lines of the shabby.

While the editor is pulling himself out of his surprise, a flash-light biography of Dawe is offered.

He was a fiction writer, and one of Westbrook's old acquaintances. At one time they might have called each other old friends. Dawe had some money in those days, and lived in a decent apartment-house near Westbrook's. The two families often went to theatres and dinners together. Mrs. Dawe and Mrs. Westbrook became 'dearest' friends. Then one day a little tentacle of the octopus, just to amuse itself, ingurgitated Dawe's capital, and he moved to the Gramercy Park neighbourhood, where one, for a few groats per week, may sit upon one's trunk under eight-branched chandeliers and opposite Carrara marble mantels and watch the mice play upon the floor. Dawe thought to live by writing fiction. Now and then he sold a story. He submitted many to Westbrook. The *Minerva* printed one or two of them; the rest were returned. Westbrook sent a careful and conscientious personal letter with each rejected manuscript, pointing out in detail his reasons for considering it unavailable. Editor Westbrook had his own clear conception of what constituted good fiction. So had Dawe. Mrs. Dawe was mainly concerned about the constituents of the scanty dishes of food that she managed to scrape together. One day Dawe had been spouting to her about the excellences of certain French writers. At dinner they sat down to a dish that a hungry schoolboy could have encompassed at a gulp. Dawe commented.

`It's Maupassant hash,' said Mrs. Dawe. 'ft may not be art, but 1 do wish you would do a five course Marion Crawford serial with an Ella Wheeler Wilcox sonnet for dessert. Pm hungry.'

As far as this from success was Shackleford Dawe when he plucked Editor Westbrook's sleeve in Madison Square. That was the first time the editor had seen Dawe in several months.

`Why, Shack, is this you?' said Westbrook somewhat awkwardly, for the form of this phrase seemed to touch upon the other's changed appearance.

`Sit down for a minute,' said Dawe, tugging at his sleeve. 'This is my office. I can't come to yours, looking as I do. Oh, sit down — you won't be disgraced. Those half-plucked birds on the other benches will take you for a swell porch-climber. They won't know you are only an editor.'

`Smoke, Shack?' said Editor Westbrook, sinking cautiously

upon the virulent green bench. He always yielded gracefully when he did yield.

Dawe snapped at the cigar as a kingfisher darts at a sunperch, or a girl pecks at a chocolate cream.

`I have just —' began the editor.

`Oh, I know; don't finish,' said Dawe. 'Give me a match. You have just ten minutes to spare. How did you manage to get past my office-boy and invade my sanctum? There he goes now, throwing his club at a dog that couldn't read the "Keep off the Grass" *signs.'*

`How goes the writing?' asked the editor.

`Look at me,' said Dawe, 'for your answer. Now don't put on that embarrassed, friendly-but-honest look and ask me why I don't get a job as a wine agent or a cab-driver. I'm in the fight to a finish. I know I can write good fiction and I'll force you fellows to admit it yet. I'll make you change the spelling of "regrets" to "c-h-e-q-u-e" before I'm done with you.'

Editor Westbrook gazed through his nose-glasses with a sweetly sorrowful, omniscient, sympathetic, sceptical expression — the copyrighted expression of the editor beleaguered by the unavailable contributor.

`Have you read the last story I sent you — "The Alarum of the Soul"?' asked Dawe.

`Carefully. I hesitated over that story, Shack, really I did. It had some good points. I was writing you a letter to send with it when it goes back to you. I regret —'

`Never mind the regrets,' said Dawe grimly. 'There's neither salve nor sting in 'em any more. What I want to know is why. Come, now; out with the good points first.'

`The story,' said Westbrook deliberately, after a suppressed sigh, 'is written around an almost original plot. Characterization — the best you have done. Construction — almost as good, except for a few weak joints which might be strengthened by a few changes and touches. It was a good story, except —'

`I can write English, can't I?' interrupted Dawe.

`I have always told you,' said the editor, 'that you had a style.'

`Then the trouble is the —'

`Same old thing,' said Editor Westbrook. 'You work up to your climax like an artist. And then you turn yourself into a photographer. I don't know what form of obstinate madness possesses you, Shack, but that is what you do with everything that you write. No, I will retract the comparison with the photographer. Now

and then photography, in spite of its impossible perspective, manages to record a fleeting glimpse of truth. But you spoil every denouement by those flat, drab, obliterating strokes of your brush that I have so often complained of. If you would rise to the literary pinnacle of your dramatic scenes, and paint them in the high colours that art requires, the postman would leave fewer bulky, self-addressed envelopes at your door.'

`Oh, fiddles and footlights!' cried Dawe derisively. 'You've got that old sawmill drama kink in your brain yet. When the man with the black moustache kidnaps golden-haired Bessie you are bound to have the mother kneel and raise her hands in the spotlight and say: "May high heaven witness that I will rest neither night nor day till the heartless villain that has stolen me child feels the weight of a mother's vengeance!" '

Editor Westbrook conceded a smile of impervious complacency.

think,' said he, `that in real life the woman would express herself in those words or in very similar ones.'

`Not in a six hundred nights' run anywhere but on the stage,' said Dawe hotly. 'I'll tell you what she'd say in real life. She'd say: "What! Bessie led away by a strange man? Good Lord! It's one trouble after another! Get my other hat, I must hurry around to the police-station. Why wasn't somebody looking after her, I'd like to know? For God's sake, get out of my way or I'll never get ready. Not that hat — the brown one with the velvet bows. Bessie must have been crazy; she's usually shy of strangers. Is that too much powder? Lordy! Now I'm upset!"

`That's the way she'd talk,' continued Dawe. 'People in real life don't fly into heroics and blank verse at emotional crises. They simply can't do it. If they talk at all on such occasions they draw from the same vocabulary that they use every day, and muddle up their words and ideas a little more, that's all.'

`Shack,' said Editor Westbrook impressively, `did you ever pick up the mangled and lifeless form of a child from under the fender of a street-car, and carry it in your arms and lay it down before the distracted mother? Did you ever do that and listen to the words of grief and despair as they flowed spontaneously from her lips?'

`I never did,' said Dawe. `Did you?'

`Well, no,' said Editor Westbrook, with a slight frown. 'But I can well imagine what she would say.'

`So can I,' said Dawe.

And now the fitting time had come for Editor Westbrook to play the oracle and silence his opinionated contributor. It was not for an

unarrived fictionist to dictate words to be uttered by the heroes and heroines of the *Minerva Magazine,* contrary to the theories of the editor thereof.

`My dear Shack,' said he, If I know anything of life I know that every sudden, deep and tragic emotion in the human heart calls forth an apposite, concordant, conformable, and proportionate expression of feeling? How much of this inevitable accord between expression and feeling should be attributed to nature, and how much to the influence of art, it would be difficult to say. The sublimely terrible roar of the lioness that has been deprived of her cubs is dramatically as far above her customary whine and purr as the kingly and transcendent utterances of Lear are above the level of his senile vapourings. But it is also true that all men and women have what may be called a subconscious dramatic sense that is awakened by a sufficiently deep and powerful emotion — a sense unconsciously acquired from literature and the stage that prompts them to express those emotions in language befitting their importance and histrionic value.'

`And in the name of seven sacred saddle-blankets of Sagittarius, where did the stage and literature get the stunt?' asked Dawe.

`From life,' answered the editor triumphantly.

The story-writer rose from the bench and gesticulated eloquently but dumbly. He was beggared for words with which to formulate adequately his dissent.

On a bench near by a frowsy loafer opened his red eyes and perceived that his moral support was due to a down-trodden brother.

`Punch him one, Jack,' he called hoarsely to Dawe. Wat's he come makin' a noise like a penny arcade for amongst gen'lemen that comes in the Square to set and think?'

Editor Westbrook looked at his watch with an affected show of leisure.

`Tell me,' asked Dawe, with truculent anxiety, 'what especial faults in "The Alarum of the Soul" caused you to throw it down!

`When Gabriel Murray,' said Westbrook, 'goes to his telephone and is told that his fiancee has been shot by a burglar, he says — I do not recall the exact words, but —'

do,' said Dawe. 'He says: "Damn Central; she always cuts me off." (And then to his friend): "Say, Tommy, does a thirty-two bullet make a big hole? It's kind of hard luck, ain't it? Could you get me a drink from the sideboard, Tommy? No; straight; nothing on the side." '

`And again,' continued the editor, without pausing for argument, 'when Berenice opens the letter from her husband informing her that he has fled with the manicure girl, her words are — let me see —'

'She says,' interposed the author: "Well, what do you think of that!" '

'Absurdly inappropriate words,' said Westbrook, 'presenting an anti-climax — plunging the story into hopeless bathos. Worse yet; they mirror life falsely. No human being ever uttered banal colloquialisms when confronted by sudden tragedy.'

`Wrong,' said Dawe, closing his unshaven jaws doggedly. 'I say no man or woman ever spouts highfalutin talk when they go up against a real climax. They talk naturally, and a little worse.'

The editor rose from the bench with his air of indulgence and inside information.

'Say, Westbrook,' said Dawe, pinning him by the lapel, 'would you have accepted "The Alarum of the Soul" if you had believed that the actions and words of the characters were true to life in the parts of the story that we discussed?'

'It is very likely that I would, if I believed that way,' said the editor. 'But I have explained to you that I do not.'

'If I could prove to you that I am right?'

'I'm sorry, Shack, but I'm afraid I haven't time to argue any further just now.'

'I don't want to argue,' said Dawe. 'I want to demonstrate to you from life itself that my view is the correct one.'

'How could you do that?' asked Westbrook in a surprised tone.

`Listen,' said the writer seriously_ 'I have thought of a way. It is important to me that my theory of true-to--life fiction be recognized as correct by the magazines. I've fought for it for three years, and I'm down to my last dollar, with two months' rent due.'

have applied the opposite of your theory,' said the editor, 'in selecting the fiction for the *Minerva Magazine.* The circulation has gone up from ninety thousand to —'

'Four hundred thousand,' said Dawe. 'Whereas it should have been boosted to a million.'

`You said something to me just now about demonstrating your pet theory.'

'I will. If you'll give me about half an hour of your time ill prove to you that I am right. I'll prove it by Louise.'

'Your wife!' exclaimed Westbrook. 'How?'

'Well, not exactly by her, but with her,' said Dawe. 'Now, you