

THE IDLE AMANUENSIS.

BY CHARLES H. WHITE.

There. Now we can be comfortable and free from interruption while I tell you that little story I promised.

It seems good to be sitting with you once again, after so long a separation. Calls to mind the times we used to have in '76, when you were slaving for Boynton & Blackman, and I was learning the rudiments of the business that I followed until about a year ago. Now I am independently situated owing to certain fortuitous circumstances which happened to come my way; yet I feel old and careworn and my hair is tinged with gray.

Let me see; it was in '81 that I left Syracuse to take a position in a broker's office located on Broad street, in New York City. The atmosphere of my surroundings was entirely in accord with my heart's desire, which was to become a potent factor in the financial whirlpool that annually whisks away the fortunes of thousands, to place them at the feet of the lucky few.

The room assigned to me by my new employers was a small one, in the rear of the principal offices, and lighted from a court. The solitary window reached to the floor, and opened out upon a balcony which encircled the court, communicating with the elevator shaft at the back of the building. The chief offices had doors which led to this balcony. I was the sole occupant of the little office.

Directly opposite my window was the window of another room, the counterpart of mine, and similarly connected with the other suite on the same floor. It was occupied by a young lady, evidently employed as a stenographer, as her typewriter was visible through the glass. From the first glimpse I got of her she attracted me strongly. She was pretty, and I always possessed a fondness for feminine beauty. In addition to that fact, she seemed to have almost nothing to do, and that peculiar condition piqued my curiosity. Hour after hour she would sit by the window with a book in her hand. Only on rare occasions would I see her doing any work and then for a few moments at a time. I could not comprehend the reason for this, inasmuch as the concern employing her (the eastern agency of a large beef house), seemed to transact a good business. I marvelled that any man should pay a salary to and reserve a room for a clerk, and then allow her to fritter away nearly all of the time. It was not long before I had privately conferred upon my sweet neighbor the title of "the idle amanuensis."

I soon discovered that the girl was not a stickler on certain points of etiquette. She did not wait for an introduction, but began to smile and bow to me on the third day of my occupancy of the little office. I responded with alacrity, and soon felt that a personal interview was on the cards. We did meet in the elevator, once or twice within the first week, but others were present on each occasion, and I made no advances. Doubtless the girl was of a similar mind, for she offered no active encouragement, merely nodding and bestowing on me one of her charming smiles. These smiles were sufficiently dazzling to captivate any man who was not already happily married or engaged.

It was during my third week that events began to draw in toward a focus. While working at my desk one afternoon, I heard a light tap on the window pane. Looking up I saw that the girl was standing on the balcony. She smiled and pointed to the balcony floor just outside my window. Following the direction with my eyes, I observed a folded paper lying there which I lost no time in securing.

It proved to be a note written by herself. The wording of the communication was brief but to the point and it set my heart to beating wildly.

"Dear Sir—Here's to our more intimate acquaintanceship. Shall be at home this evening, at No. — West Forty-second street. Please indicate through the window whether you will call. Sincerely, Ethel Thompson."

Would I call? I gave a series of most emphatic nods and had the satisfaction of seeing that their meaning was evidently understood.

I called on Miss Thompson that very evening. She bore herself in an intelligent and vivacious manner, as her appearance had led me to expect; and her demeanor was characterized by a refinement not in keeping with the unconventional nature of her invitation.

During our conversation she informed me that she was glad her office work was light, as she disliked the duties of an amanuensis.

"I have noticed," I said to her, "that you are not often busily engaged. How is it that so large a concern conducts so small a correspondence?"

This query provoked a laugh. "Why," she exclaimed, "we have another stenographer, who occupies one of the larger rooms. I do only the work dictated by Mr. Blossom, the manager. The regular run of the of-

fice mail is dictated by Mr. Pennoyer to the other stenographer. Mr. Blossom is away most of the time, and has very little for me to do. I am really not needed there at all, but Mr. Blossom is aristocratic and wants to have a private secretary." Then she added, in a different tone of voice, "The truth is that my position was created for me personally. I have what some persons denominate a 'pull' with the powers that be."

Toward the latter part of the evening she seemed suddenly to have thought of something.

"By the way," said she, "I was near forgetting a question I wished to ask of you. Your stockbroking business is a sealed book to me, and I am eager to learn something about it. I have been reading a good deal in the papers of late about 'D. K. & E.' stock, and what the bulls and bears are doing with it. There seems to be great interest manifested in that stock, and I wish you would explain to me what it means."

It happened that just at that time "D. K. & E." occupied a peculiar position in the market. It was being manipulated by rival factions in such a manner as to render its future more than ordinarily uncertain. Furthermore there was a wheel within a wheel, "D. K. & E." being merely a speculative centre, around which revolved interests more important still. The fight going on between the heavy operators was being participated in by many small investors; and, inasmuch as shrewd men with long pocketbooks were pitted against one another, the result would necessarily be that some wealthy operators would lose their fortunes, while the little fellows who happened to be on the winning side would be rewarded in proportion to the size of their investments. It is more or less that way in all stock deals, but this one was of so stupendous a character as to outclass most of those that had preceded it.

I knew very little about the inner history of the affair, but what information I possessed was entirely at Miss Thompson's service. She expressed herself as delighted with my imperfect explanation, and I was so well pleased at finding that I could interest her, that I determined to learn all I could about "D. K. & E." for her edification.

The chief clerk in our office was an approachable fellow, and he seemed to have taken a liking to me. His name was Fenton. Mr. Fisk had asked him to help me all he could, that I might gain a rapid insight into the business. Now, with my mind full of "D. K. & E." I applied to Fenton for information. He seemed pleased with my thirst for knowledge, and gratified it to the extent of his power. Every particle of fact or premise thus obtained was passed over to Miss Thompson. We met frequently; I became a regular visitor at her home, and notes were exchanged by us across the court. She had completely enslaved me, so that I was wondering how soon I might, with consistency, ask her to become my wife. On account of the low condition of my finances, I dared not yet broach the subject. Hence, nothing in the nature of love making was indulged in, though I was eager to advance beyond the stage of friendships, and she seemed willing to acquiesce.

Matters went on in this way for some weeks. We called one another "Ethel" and "Henry." This departure from orthodox formality had been taken at her suggestion.

"We know each other so well now," she had said to me, "that we may as well make use of our Christian names. It will seem more friendly. You are setting in the capacity of a brother to me; and you know," she added archly, "that I stand ready to be a sister to you."

However much I objected, privately, to the manner in which the privilege was granted, the concession itself was delightful, for it seemed to draw me closer to her.

One morning Fenton appeared to be excited over something.

"I tell you what, Walton," he said to me, "I'm in a devil of a quandary. I've just had a glorious tip on your favorite stock, 'D. K. & E.', but cannot see my way to take advantage of it. If I only had from \$1000 to \$5000 just now, I could make a lucky strike."

"Would you mind telling me about it?" I asked, in as calm a voice as I could command.

"Certainly I will tell you," Fenton replied. "Of course you won't breathe it to a soul." (I have it on the best of authority that "D. K. & E." is to be heavily unloaded tomorrow—pushed down to zero, in fact. The holders who cannot put up margins will be forced to sell out. Under ordinary circumstances, you know, this would mean that it was time to get from under; but in this case the man who has any 'D. K. & E.' stock would better hang on to it. If he has none, he should place his order to purchase as soon as it reaches 28. I have private

information that it will drop rapidly and stop at 24. A man buying at 28, you see, would have to put up a short margin of four points. Immediately it reaches 24 there will be a rush for it, and it will shoot up like a rocket. As soon as it strikes 96, the holder should sell. All this comes from the fact that 'D. K. & E.' is being used as a blind to cover operations on 'P. T. & Q.' While the struggle is going on over 'D. K. & E.' some quiet work will be done with 'P. T. & Q.' which will result in a grand coup. I am satisfied that my information is correct."

Well, I am ashamed to confess it, but I lost no time in conveying this information to Ethel, by means of an unsigned note. I was so proud of my ability to secure information, that I wanted to deliver it before it was stale. There would be no glory in telling it after it had become public property. Possibly my action in the matter was hastened, however, by a little note which I received from the girl shortly after my conversation with Fenton. It merely contained the question:

"Anything new today about 'D. K. & E.'?"

My message containing the "glorious tip" which Fenton had communicated to me brought forth a reply. It contained these words:

"Please do not come up tonight. I have another engagement."

During the remainder of the day, I noticed that Ethel was absent from her office. The next day and for several days thereafter it was the same. I became alarmed. Finally I rushed up to her house, only to be met with the information that Miss Thompson was not at home.

Meanwhile matters had transpired as Fenton had predicted. "D. K. & E." had fallen with great rapidity to 24. A scramble for it had ensued, and it had risen with equal celerity to 97. It was a matter for public comment that a man named Thompson—unknown on the street—had purchased at 28 and sold at 96, thereby reaping a snug fortune.

I saw no more of Ethel, but a letter received from her explained the mystery. I have it here, and will read it to you.

"Dear Brother Henry—You have earned the title I bestow upon you. I felt satisfied you would secure some valuable information for me. Papa made use of it. He is rich now, and we are to start for Europe immediately. I made him promise me a foreign trip when I could find him a way to make the needed money. He supposed it was a joke, but has learned to his entire satisfaction that I was in earnest. You have my blessing. I shall think frequently of you and should I ever marry, I will invite my brother to the wedding. Au revoir, Ethel."

"Blossom has decided to employ but one stenographer hereafter. I have no further use for my 'pull.'"—Waverley Magazine.

AN ELECTRIC DRY DOCK.

The Current Pat to a Novel Use at South Brooklyn.

The very latest adaptation of electric power is to the operation of the pumps for dry docks. What is said to be the largest and most powerful dry dock in the world has recently been built in South Brooklyn, New York, and so equipped that the port of New York from being the last on the list of ports where repairs to large vessels could be made has taken its proper place in the front rank, in keeping with its commercial importance.

The dock is built of five pontoons, each 80 feet long, with two extensions at the end each 36 feet long, although the final size of the dock is to be 700 to 800 feet, capable of taking care of vessels of the very largest size. The advantage in using electric power is its great flexibility, and the fact that it can be obtained from the public lighting circuits of the district, making the maintenance of a power plant unnecessary. There are two large centrifugal pumps, electrically driven, which have a capacity of from 5000 to 6000 gallons per minute. The great speed of operation of the dock is evidenced by the fact that a 9000-ton vessel was recently docked in exactly 51 minutes.

Another peculiar construction of this dock is that it is built in sections as before noted. Owing to this arrangement it is possible to use only the number of pontoons necessary to accommodate the particular ship to be docked. If it is a small ship only two sections need be employed, and larger vessels accordingly.

The pontoon design of the dock also enables a vessel to be docked which has a decided list, which in the ordinary docks cannot be done. By tilting the dock until the pontoon has assumed the same angle as the listed vessel the latter may be floated in and secured to the dock, when the latter is made to assume a level position.

The pontoons have wings at either side, the top of which are 56 feet above the bottom of the pontoons, all the pumps, etc., being placed on the platforms at the top of the wings.

The girl who is cultivating her voice can't expect to cultivate many friends.



Sample Highways Built.

MARTIN DODGE, Director of Public Road Inquiries Office, writes as follows in Municipal Journal and Engineer:

The reflex influence of the bicycle and the automobile has finally created a public sentiment that is crystallizing into betterment of the public highways to an extent that is most gratifying to the good roads enthusiast. Many States which have failed to make any appropriation for the improvement of roads in the past year yielded to the public demand and made for them liberal appropriations. The good example of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and other States is bearing fruit. In the aggregate, including the small appropriation made by the Government, millions of dollars have been set aside for the betterment of the country roads during this year. Canada is by no means a laggard, but rather well in the lead, when all things are considered, for she has appropriated \$1,000,000 to be expended upon the improvement of the highways during the season.

The good roads train which has been touring the South during the last three months, was made up at Chicago through the co-operation of the National Association of Good Roads, the Illinois Central Railroad and several manufacturers of road-making machinery. The train started from Chicago on April 20, equipped with eight carloads of the best and most important roadmaking machinery, expert operators, roadmakers and engineers, arriving in New Orleans on April 22.

The following week an object lesson road, about two miles in length, was built in the suburbs of New Orleans, over a low plain, formerly subject to overflow. It was desirable to raise the roadbed higher than usual to get above the action of the water, which softens the surface of the road so rapidly; therefore, earth handling machinery was used to advantage. The New Era grader, propelled by twelve animals, was first put upon the work, and earth was transferred from the sides to the centre, at the rate of four cubic yards per minute. Within the short space of two days the undisturbed earth was transformed into a smoothly finished roadway, over which automobiles could pass with perfect ease.

During the week a State convention assembled for two days in pursuance of a proclamation issued by the Governor of Louisiana. Every parish of the State was well represented, there being about one thousand delegates in attendance. As a result of this convention a permanent State organization was formed, which will operate in co-operation with the national association, to carry on the work already so well begun.

On the first of May the train left New Orleans for Natchez, Miss., where it remained a week building another object lesson road and holding a district convention for two days, at the close of which a permanent organization was formed for carrying on the work in that vicinity, and for the purpose of co-operating with the State association, afterward formed at Jackson, Miss., and the national association, formed last November at Chicago. We had here the hearty co-operation of the city and the county authorities, the object lesson road being built partly within and partly without the city of Natchez.

Our next stand was at Greenville, Miss., where we arrived on May 16. This is in the midst of the famous Yazoo Delta. The soil is an alluvial deposit, subject to overflow and inundation. A portion of this soil is known as "buckshot land," and is exceedingly difficult to handle and more difficult to retain in the form of a smooth roadbed. It was doubted whether the earth-handling machinery so successful in other soils, would be able to handle this peculiar buckshot formation, but our efforts were crowned with success, and we left them an object lesson of great value, in the form of smooth, well rounded roadbeds, raised well above the water level. We also had a very successful two-day convention, which terminated with the organization of a permanent association for the improvement of highways.

I left the train temporarily at this point, and the next stand was made at Granada and another at McComb City, and from McComb they went to Cambridge, after which the great convention was held at Jackson, Miss., where an object lesson road was built, as at each of the other places. The State convention was probably the largest and most successful of any road convention ever assembled in America and resulted in a permanent organization for the entire State.

From Jackson, Miss., the train went to Jackson, Tenn., where a similar program was carried out. The next great stand was at Louisville, Ky., where I again joined the train on June 27. The Governor of Kentucky had issued his proclamation for the State convention to be held here at this time, and continue two days. This was well attended by eminent men from all parts of the State, and was one of the best conventions ever held in the interest of good roads. Governor Beckham was present and delivered an address full of encouragement for the cause and urging the people to industrial activity. A fine object lesson road was produced here just outside the city limits, and a permanent organization formed for the purpose of carrying on the work in connection with the national association.

The train went from Louisville to Hopkinsville and repeated there substantially the same work that had been done in the other places. Owensboro, Ky., was reached July 14, and a most enthusiastic convention was held on the fair grounds in that city.

From here we crossed the Ohio River into Southern Illinois, and made a final stand at Effingham. It was expected that the train would move from here to Mattoon, but owing to a disastrous fire in that city, the engagement was cancelled, and the great tour of the good roads train was closed.

THE PRESIDENT ABROAD.

The Idea That He Cannot Visit Foreign Soil a Mere Superstition.

There is a popular superstition that the President of the United States is inhibited from leaving this country during his term of office, but it is superstition only. The article of the Constitution which relates to the President contains no provision of the sort, and therefore the President is quite free to do precisely as he chooses in this matter.

The reason why no President has ever visited foreign countries until after his retirement has probably been due to the fact that in the early years of the republic, before the invention of the telegraph and before the laying of the Atlantic cable, and also before the development of steamships of great speed, absence from the country would have meant so protracted severance of communication between the executive and the subordinate officers of the Government as to constitute what would have been practically an "inability to discharge the powers and duties" of his office. When it required a month to make the voyage to Europe and when letters and orders could be transmitted only by sailing packets, or, afterward by steamship, it would, of course, have been impossible for the President to visit England without practically abdicating his office and installing the Vice-President in his place. But now, when the time required to pass from New York to Queenstown is but little more than five days, and when immediately upon his landing he would be in telegraphic communication every moment with his Cabinet, there exists no satisfactory reason why he should not feel entirely free to perform a striking act in international courtesy.

It is not, indeed, true, that no President has ever gone beyond the boundaries of his country. President Arthur, during his term of office, went to Florida by sea, and although he did so on a vessel of the navy, and was therefore technically still upon American soil he was, as a matter of fact, shut off from communication with the administrative departments for several days; and President Cleveland also on one occasion, while shooting in the Adirondacks, crossed the Canadian border, and for several hours was, without knowing it, actually upon British territory.

If, indeed, the President of the United States were now to visit Egypt he need never be so remote from Washington in point of facility of communication as was President Monroe when, during the era of good feeling, he left the seat of Government and traveled by canal and coast and carriage to the city of Boston.—The Bookman.

A Burning Question at Bryn Mawr.

"Of course, some of our problems in mathematics are very puzzling," said the Bryn Mawr sophomore, "but there is a far harder question which is in no way connected with our studies. There is an unwritten law in Bryn Mawr that a girl must not walk alone with a professor, and we are all very careful about observing it. There is another rule, also unwritten, that a student must not walk about alone after dark. Now, if a girl is detained unavoidably in the evening, and while walking home meets a professor going her way, which rule is she to break? There have been a great many bitter discussions about that point, and nobody has ever reached a decision."

"Yes," said her friend, sympathetically, "it must be a very troublesome question. But what does a girl generally do when she is caught in such an embarrassing situation?"

"Oh, that," replied the young colleague, "depends entirely on how well she likes the professor."—New York Times.