



## C H A P T E R 2 0

I WAS A REPORTER ON THE *MORNING CALL* OF SAN FRANCISCO. I WAS more than that—I was the reporter. There was no other. There was enough work for one and a little over, but not enough for two—according to Mr. Barnes’s idea, and he was the owner and therefore in the best place to know.

By nine in the morning I had to be at the police court for an hour and make a brief history of the fights of the night before. They were usually between Irishmen and Irishmen, and Chinamen and Chinamen, with now and then a fight between the two races for a change. Each day’s evidence was just like the evidence of the day before, therefore the daily performance was killingly dull. All the courts came under the head of the reporter “regulars.” They were sources of information which never failed. During the rest of the day we combed the two from end to end, gathering such material as we might, wherewith to fill our required column—and if there were no fires to report we started some.

At night we visited the six theaters, one after the other; seven nights in the week, three hundred and sixty-five nights in the year. We remained in each of those places five minutes, got the merest passing glimpse of plays and operas, and we “wrote up” those plays and operas, as the phrase goes, every night from the beginning of the year to the

end of it, trying to find something to say about those performances which we had not said a couple of hundred times before.

After having been hard at work from nine or ten in the morning until eleven at night getting material together somehow, I took the pen and spread it out in words and phrases and made it cover as much ground as I could. It was fearful, soulless work and almost completely lacking in interest. It was awful slavery for a lazy man, and I was born lazy. I am no lazier now than I was forty years ago, but that is because I reached the limit forty years ago. You can't go beyond possibility.

I was higher-toned forty years ago than I am now and I felt a deep shame in my situation as slave of such a newspaper as the *Morning Call*. If I had been still higher-toned I would have thrown up my job and gone out and starved, like any other hero. But I had never had any experience at being a hero. I had *dreamed* of heroism, like everybody, but I had had no practice and I didn't know how to begin. I couldn't stand to begin with starving. I had already come near to that once or twice in my life and got no real enjoyment out of remembering about it. I knew I couldn't get another job if I resigned. I knew it perfectly well. Therefore I swallowed my pride and stayed where I was. But whereas there had been little enough interest in my industries before, there was none at all now. I continued my work but I took not the least interest in it, and naturally there were results. I got to neglecting it. As I have said, there was too much of it for one man. The way I was conducting it now, there was apparently work enough in it for two or three. Even Barnes noticed that, and told me to get an assistant, on half wages.

There was a man down in the counting room—good-natured, obliging, unintelligent—and he was getting little or nothing a week. He was a graceless boy who had no feeling for anybody or anything. He was called Smiggy McGlural. I offered the job of assistant to Smiggy and he accepted it with gratefulness. He went at his work with ten times the energy that was left in me. He was not intelligent, but this quality was not required or needed in a *Morning Call* reporter and so he conducted his office to perfection. I gradually got to leaving more and

more of the work to McGlural. I grew lazier and lazier and within thirty days he was doing almost the whole of it. It was also plain that he could accomplish the whole of it and more all by himself and therefore had no real need of me.

Mr. Barnes discharged me. It was the only time in my life that I have ever been discharged and it hurts yet—and I am nearly in my grave. He did not discharge me rudely. It was not in his nature to do that. He was a large, handsome man, with a kindly face and courteous ways, and was faultless in his dress. He could not have said a rude, ungentle thing to anybody. He took me privately aside and advised me to resign. It was like a father advising a son for his good, and I obeyed.