

THE DECISION.—The Story of a Cub Reporter's First Assignment.

By W. A. M. GOODE.

THORN! shouted the night city editor. The new reporter jumped up from his desk and hurried to the side of his chief. For one whole week Cyrus Thorn had been employed by the Gazette, and, so far, all his work had been waiting for something to do—sad and weary contrast to the breathless excitement of the newspaper life he had pictured. "Read that," said the night city. "It's from the Western Courier—a reliable paper."

This is what Thorn read: "It is rumored that Jason Orchard, the famous New York millionaire, will give \$500,000 to those who suffered in the recent terrific cyclone at Fairflower, Kansas. Mr. Orchard was born at Fairflower."

"You must go at once," said the night city, "and see Jason Orchard. I suppose I'd better tell you that he's the meanest man in New York. He's worth millions, yet, rather than spend a penny for a newspaper, he'll wait for the papers other people leave in the morning trains. I can't imagine that this paragraph is true, for Jason has never been accused of helping a living soul except himself. It's past all comprehension that old Jason—he's over seventy—should give five dollars, let alone five hundred thousand, to Fairflower, or any other place. It would take a mighty sight bigger cyclone than struck Fairflower to get money out of Jason." The night city chuckled at his own sardonic humor. "Still," he resumed, "the Western Courier ought to know what it's talking about; and we want a good, strong denial from the old man himself. You'll find him at his

house in Fifth Avenue. He'll be as mad as a hatter when he sees this clipping about Fairflower, and you'd best excuse yourself for suggesting that he might be generous. If he talks, so much the better; but get at him some way, and hurry back."

As Thorn was departing, the night city, mollified by the succinctness of his own summary of Jason Orchard, shouted to the cub reporter:

"Say, if the old man hits you don't hit him back. Telephone me, and we'll have him up for assault. That," murmured the night city, "would be a better story than you are likely to get."

The brusqueness of the orders and the unpleasantness of the errand in no way detracted from the enthusiasm with which Thorn bounded down the steps and ran, rather than walked, upon his initial assignment. For the first time in his life he was going to "do an interview," and with a man whose name was known throughout America. Apart from his extraordinary wealth and public meanness, Jason Orchard was known all over America and Europe as the man who once averted, by means of his hoarded millions of ready cash, a widespread financial panic. In place of national gratitude Mr. Orchard had received, and continued to receive, national interest, which he preferred.

It was thoroughly consistent with the bearish attitude which the millionaire preserved toward the market and mundane affairs that he treated Thorn's card with scant attention. "Go and see what this reporter wants," he said, somewhat testily to his son. And as the young man, already worth a small fortune in his own right, was departing to fulfill the errand, Mr. Orchard added:

"Tell him that I utterly refuse to be

disturbed at this hour of the night by fool newspapers."

Thorn, still standing on the steps, listened patiently while the millionaire's son conveyed an exaggerated version of the foregoing. Thorn entreated Orchard junior to take the clipping, reporting the gift to Fairflower of \$500,000, to his father. Curt refusal was the only response.

In despair of fulfilling his instructions "to see the old man himself," Thorn asked: "Well, can you tell me if it's true?"

"True?" Orchard junior's voice rose almost to a shriek. "True? My father giving \$500,000 to some one-horse place in Kansas? Do you think my father's gone crazy?"

Young Orchard laughed loud and bitterly. His earlier days had taught him stern lessons in paternal penuriousness. "Why," and he looked half pittingly at Thorn—"why, I don't believe my father was even born at Fairflower. And—"

"What's that about Fairflower?"

Jason Orchard appeared in the doorway. In the same quiet way in which he was accustomed every other minute of the day to tear tape from the stock ticker, he took the clipping from his son's hand and read it.

"Come in here," he said to the cub reporter. The impassiveness of the tone sent a chill through Thorn that instantly banished the first thrill of delight at the unexpected intervention. He followed Jason Orchard into the study. The old man's son stared in amazement at the retreating figures. He knew that his father was eccentric, but his eccentricity had never before reached the point of courtesy to reporters.

"Well, I'll be—"

He turned and saw his mother, who

had been attracted by the voices in the hall. "I do hope Jason will be kind to him," said Mrs. Orchard, rather fearfully. "He has such a nice face—for a reporter." Then Mrs. Orchard went to bed.

In the study Thorn stood dry-lipped, leaden-throated, his eyes riveted on this strange, hard face that now was bent over the clipping from the Western Courier. For all the gifts the world had to offer Thorn could not break the silence.

Then he heard a dry, rasping voice saying:

"So you want to know if this is true?" The words seemed to come from miles away. "Does it occur to you, young man," the voice went on, "that if I did give \$500,000 to Fairflower it would be no concern of the newspapers? Have I not a right to meditate giving to charity without being cross-examined by reporters?"

The implied sarcasm, the open challenge, and the realization that an interview had actually commenced, restored all Thorn's energy. At twenty-two years of age one is not permanently overawed.

"I know it's none of my business," Thorn began, "or anybody else's." It sounded rather lame, but he plunged boldly on, looking straight into the old man's half-shut eyes while he talked. "You see, sir, other people—that is, the Western Courier—circulated the report, and the Gazette—that's my paper, you know—has no other alternative than to ask you personally. It's only in the interests of truth; and, of course, we didn't think it was really true. That is," added Thorn hastily, "we thought—I mean—we scarcely thought—"

"Quite right. You imagined I wouldn't be giving such a sum to



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