V. H. Chap XII

Young Interview - January 21st

Arranged that I should see Y. this afternoon at 3:30. He was ready quite promptly. Case going in with me and at his request staying. I asked, of course, about the accident. He says, "Dick is not seriously injured - his nose is broken - a cut on the face." How serious he does not say and I do not press him. But tell him that broken noses can be made very beautiful now. And he said, "Well I was telling Dick last night that his new nose might look better than the old one."

He looked worn, grey, more tired than I have ever seen him. Think the anxiety of the accident has been great for him. He must feel that if ~~the quality~~ an evil fatality pursues our sons He says that Josephine is only slightly scratched.

Tell him I want to talk about Van Hornesville. That I can see many reasons for his doing what he is doing there - the way it impresses me is that he is making a contribution to the problems of saving our back country-from back country settlements from being entirely wiped out by the new movement; I am impressed that what he is doing there is not building an estate but reviving a community. That it is a community interest and not a personal one that ~~interests~~ touches him.

But before this I have said that I have tried to straighten out the Young genealogy without very much success. He says, "There you have a ~~strange~~ stern task." He says that he does not think that his family is connected with the Youngs of the Young's ~~pact~~ patent - that he is probably English. That his ancestry came in with they are

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Palatinate

one of the migrations is likely but they must have come, he thinks as early as 1750 to the hills above the Otsquago Creek. Says that they were not, these immigrants, in a position to secure large ~~portions~~ Palatine like the man of the Young ~~family~~ Palatine - that they were really refugees. I must begin at the bottom.

Young goes on to develop what has happened in and around Van Hornesville. First men that came ~~horded~~ avoided the valleys - went to the hills to clear off land. These hills are rounding-possible to make big fields. Soil - good. They took up their tracts for farms and began the work of clearing. Says for the first generation or two the family was occupied in getting the land ready ~~for farming~~, building ~~Became~~ sheltered. They supplied their own ~~meat~~ wants the best way they could. The result of their work one sees on the hills around Van Hornesville - beautifully cleared and in many places well cultivated. It must have been well cultivated from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

"As soon as the land had been conquered," Young goes on, it was neccesary that they get things from the outside. Our nearest settlement had been on the hills and was called after the creek, Otsquago. They contracted that into Squag Squag.

This I tell him I had never heard of and Case, too, he had never heard of it. Probably it was a settlement like New Salem, catering to the simple needs of the farmer. All that is left of Squag now is the burying ground. No sign of a town. Squag was

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wiped out when the first Van Horn, 1791, undertook to divide power from the Otsquago Creek to run mills to serve the surrounding country. That is, the Valley with its stream was the second step to the developing of the country. Van Horn built four mills. (See record) A grist mill, of course, a foundry. And Young talked at some length of the articles made there. There is a collection of these in one of the buildings at Van Hornesville. These should be looked at more carefully. Plows there, probably andirons - probably parallel to that of Mordeci Lincoln at Cohasset. Here at the new settlement people came and planted corn and wheat and a general store immediately came up. Here was probably a tavern but Young does not speak of that. There had been a school apparently at Squag - the school now comes to Van Hornesville as a more convenient point, since the farmers come here for their needs. Houses are built - it becomes a good sized town, I take it. The difficulties of getting in and out are great and sometime in the 30's or 40's a road is built from Coopertown to Fort Plain - has a stage line. And now stage coaches run over this - probably the mail is brought in occasionally. V. H. is connected with the world. A cotton mill comes to the valley from the Connecticut in the 40's. The water power there having been exhausted, according to Young. Probably cheaper labor and cheaper market. Is this the calico factory of which Mrs. Young talks.[2] At all events they are all a thrifty, really self-supporting community with contacts with the outside world. He thinks change came rather rapidly after the Civil War. Speaks of a mail order catalogue as one of the elements in destroying the

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general store. You had a larger variety of choice. It was an interesting thing to study in the long winter evenings, enticed you to buy. Exactly the appeal that a seed catalogue has nowadays. Other invasions were made apparently. The ability to get to town - the call of the town on youth - the factories outside. All of these things made the small industries of Van Horn impractical. It gradually lost its importance, no longer thrived as a town. I take it that the decline was marked at the time of Y's. boyhood, though the farms around were evidently prosperous, in a way. Cheese was one of the chief products. He goes to College - was married in 98. Has two children. But whatever he does seems to have in no way loosened his ties with V.H, rather to have clung to them. "It was home," he says. "And I felt myself rooted there - I could not pull myself out. My children from the start felt the same way - they all consider V.H. home and always have. It is the pull of tradition and the pull of temperment, too. They like this kind of thing and to them all it is the dearest spot in the world."

Of course in Young's case, as he said, his father and mother were there - they were on the farm. "The time had come by 1903 that I felt they should go into town, give up farming, thought of buying a home for them. And I did not have very much money. Mrs. Young and I were talking only the other night about how close we had to figure in those years. I had already two children in 1903 and to buy a house made great drain on my savings."

I think he said he paid $1900. for the house. (See notes. in Russell file - Interviews with Mrs. Young.)

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store - then the store began to revive." (He does not explain the way the store was able to revive - was his own financing - the taking over of their certificates so that they had money instead of having to wait five years for the percent of which the League held back. They had money so that they could buy at the store - that revived the store then.)

"They came there and it seemed possible to revive the mill. They could bring their wheat, corn, etc., for grinding when they came with their milk. So that the mill which had fallen into disuse was revived." (See story of that also.)

He does not say, "I revived it," but as a matter of fact he did buy it, and put it I think under Titlow's direction.

"The town began to pick up with these industries - these interests. In time I was buying more and more land around - our herd was improving. I never spent any money in fancy buildings ~~that it takes~~ to take care of my cows. As a matter of fact I didn't want anything better than my neighbors had. I wanted to show them that we could have a first class herd without the extravagant buildings that so many people seem to think are the first requisites of a herd. I didn't want rickety ~~to be~~ cows - much preferred rickety buildings. At any rate ~~xx~~ this was a community enterprise in my mind - the restoring of Van Hornesville - making it prosperous again. And everybody to do that must take part. I didn't want anything better in the farming business than my neighbors could have if they would exercise the same kind of care that I had been trying to do for twenty-five years or so. Anyone of them could begin a herd as

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I began mine."

"Then the school house burned down and it became necessary to have a new one. I talked to the people about it, said that if they wanted it done and would take their part in the building that I would put money into it - that would be my part - and that they must contribute their interest and advice. It was arranged with the district fathers, whoever they are, and with Albany that supervises all these things, that the school house be built. The thing was to keep their interest - to make them feel that they were a part in producing the results. The people took an interest from the first, because the men that were doing the work were all local men. Of course we had an architect from outside, but we did the work. An assistant of our architect came up once and criticised, very unpleasantly, the wall that the men had started on which we were really experimenting - not knowing quite how to get the best effect. He said roughly to our head mason, an important man in the village, 'I don't like your wall - I don't want that kind of a wall.' And the mason and his associates laid down their tools and said, 'We'll wait until Mr. Young comes.' Well, of course, that was breaking up the whole thing - this was a community enterprise and they left us to work it out and decide as a community when we got, by experiment, what wall we wanted, we were not getting our results. So I told the architect what I thought about that kind of handling of our problem. They had something in mind that they wanted to imitate - a piece of early stone work, made in a little schoolhouse on the hill - one hundred

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and fifty years ago. Our men had advanced as masons since that time. They didn't want to do that kind of work. I said, 'You Architects ~~will~~ never do anything but copy what artisans have done before.' You do not work things out with your mind like the artisan does when he is given a job. This work is to be ~~made with~~ marked frames.' (Though I don't know if that is the term he used.)

At all events he called back the men and said, "Now you ~~can~~ make the best kind of wall you know how - you are to take your time - study it - decide when you have it right."

"The whole town seems to have gone to it. That was the way," went on Young, "that the Cathedrals were built ~~by~~ but copying ~~a~~ plan, but the whole community working together to get the soundest results - each man having leeway for his invention. The making of the beautiful wall at the Van Hornesville school is one of the most interesting things in this story. The way that this head mason would arrange a stone - his sense of color - because one of the beautiful things about this school is the walls, is the color in it, much lime stone around there and evidently the architect had an idea that a solid lime stone rock wall was the proper thing, but Young wanted color. The Mason saw it and they went out and sought all around the hills for round heads, as he called them, split them. These are glacial stones - various qualities - various types. It would be interesting to note what kind of stone has gone into these walls. I fancy ~~some kind~~ of granite. ~~At~~ all events much color came in.

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Young says that it was beautiful to see these men laying the stone temporarily, going off eyeing it, not right - replacing, finally deciding, "Now, that's what we want." And so settled on the matter.

"Of course," he said, "it cost a great deal more money than the architects would have charged, but also look at our results and compare it what the architect's plan had given us. Also we were building more than a wall - we were building a community - building up the men into interested citizens in a community project. Releasing their skill - stimulating them to new hard effort. The building of this school did a great deal for the end that I had in view. Now it is their school - not my school at all. They built it. They know, some of them, where every stone that is put into those walls came from. They gathered about in the evening and talked it over - they talked it over in the grocery - every house - every family had something to say about what was going on there.

"Of course what we have now is more than we bargained for. We built a school for Van Hornesville. They said to me in Albany, 'Why do you not build a community schoolhouse and take in all the surrounding district?' But I said, no they have not asked to come in. And I did not want to force anything. Van Hornesville must have a school and we were united on that. We will do it but these other districts have their schoolhouses and have not asked for a community school. But what has happened is, that five or six surrounding

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districts have come to us and said, 'We would like our children to come to your school.' And we have given them permission. But we built for sixty children - that being the high peak when I was a boy and now we have a hundred and fifty three. That has crowded out some features of the school building which were very dear to me, for instance, the library. That library was I really think, one of the most beautiful rooms I have ever seen." (Put in description of furniture, etc. George Washington pieces.

It is a beautiful room now, as I remember it.

"But now we have had to take it for the accommodation of the people. And the districts are hoping that we make a community school. I told them that we will do this if they will vote and they in turn will bear their share of the upkeep. That is it is not releasing them from the obligation to do something towards the support of the school.

"The place is so beautiful now that of course it is going to be a problem to add to it, without spoiling it." They told me at Van Hornesville that Mr. Young has his plan.

Young is a man who is jubilant over the way the children are responding to the school. He tells of the results of the Damrosh concerts which they get every week. The teacher of music evidently prepares them. The children remember the music of Beethoven from Wagner, he says. And hearing again a selection, recall very quickly what has been told them about the composer - about the music itself - developing a keen appreciation in them. Can't tell what will come out of that, he says, with a chuckle and a twinkle.

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"And there is the Principal's house which is used freely by the children. That is what I wanted. I had that furnished in a striking fashion - gay - something different from what they had ever seen - good things, too. I wanted these children to become familiar with what is good, so that when they get out they will not be overwhelmed by their first contacts with superior surroundings, awed by them, made self-soncsious. It is a matter of fact that I in my first years in Boston had my self possession constantly shaken by the (unfaired) infamous elegance ~~duty and~~ of certain places where I was admitted. I never had seen anything of that kind. It shook my confidence, disturbed me for years. Now these youngsters, familiar with this house, with the way of refined living, going out will take it as a matter of course. They may even say when they are shown by some of their new acquaintances something that they think particularly elegant, 'That's nothing-our Principal's house in Van Hornesville is more elegant that that.' That is each step in this school plan has been made with reference to ~~the keeping up with~~ around community spirit - community taste - community appreciation. Of course it was necessary if we were to have these teachers who would understand the thought and intent behind our school that we give them quarters that would attract them. It was necessary to build houses for these young teachers - you could not get the proper one if they had to live in narrow and unattractive quarters, which might be rented in the village. So our teachers home was a ~~little~~ one treat - a pleasant sitting room - the gay furnishings.

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The radio and the moving pictures in the school house had been an immense enlightenment for the community, I take it. Mr. Young told that at the weekly moving picture show only the members of the Parent Teacher's Society could be admitted. So the parents wanted to go to see the pictures, joined the society and joining the society they are admitted to the excellent principles.

What you get then is a community enthusiasm - interest - quite unheard of, in the education of the children. I mention the proposed laboratory and Madame Curie' remarks about it and he laughs and chuckles with his beautiful, appreciative acceptance of an idea.

One of the immediate effects of these new surroundings was in the appearance in the dress of the children. They wore any old thing - not particular about hands or ears - in the old battered school house. But in these new surroundings they instinctively looked to their appearance the manners, language of the children - all of them improved. Almost unconsciously.

Put in here the story that J. H. tells me about the children who demanded new sanitation , etc. from their fathers.

The conversation pulls to his mother. He speaks of my sending her "In the Footsteps," and her pleasure in it. I tell him I think she is one of the most adorable women I have ever met. The look of her - her face, so like his. He said, "I am interested in your reaction to her personality. She is a remarkable woman.

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