

the Bavarians; the girl's good-night, as applied to him, fell upon ears deafer than any post.

Sharlee walked home through the tingling twilight; fourteen blocks, and she did them four times a day. It was a still evening, clear as a bell and very cold; already stars were pushing through the dim velvet round; all the world lay white with a light hard snow, crusted and sparkling under the street lights. Her private fear about the whole matter was that Queed Senior was a person of a criminal mode of life, who, discovering the need of a young helper, was somehow preparing to sound and size up his long-neglected son.

VII

In which an Assistant Editor, experiencing the Common Desire to thrash a Proof-Reader, makes a Humiliating Discovery; and of how Trainer Klinker gets a Pupil the Same Evening.

THE industrial problems of the Bavarians seemed an inoffensive thesis enough, but who can evade Destiny?

Queed never read his own articles when they appeared in print in the *Post*. In this peculiarity he may be said to have resembled all the rest of the world, with the exception of the Secretary of the Tax Reform League, and the Assistant Secretary of the State Department of Charities. But not by any such device, either, can a man elude his Fate. On the day following his conversation with Mrs. Paynter's agent, Fortune gave Queed to hear a portion of his article on the Bavarians read aloud, and read with derisive laughter.

The incident occurred on a street-car, which he had taken because of the heavy snow-fall: another illustration of the tiny instruments with which Providence works out its momentous designs. Had he not taken the car — he was on the point of not taking it, when one whizzed invitingly up — he would never have heard of the insult that the *Post's* linotype had put upon him, and the course of his life might have been different. As it was, two men on the next seat in front were reading the *Post* and making merry.

" . . . 'A lengthy procession of fleas harassed the diet.' Now what in the name of Bob . . ."

Gradually the sentence worked its way into the closed fastness of the young man's mind. It had a horrible familiarity, like a ghastly parody on something known and dear.

With a quick movement he leaned forward, peering over the shoulder of the man who held the paper.

The man looked around, surprised and annoyed by the strange face breaking in so close to his own, but Queed paid no attention to him. Yes . . . it was his article they were mocking at — HIS article. He remembered the passage perfectly. He had written: "A lengthy procession of pleas harassed the Diet." His trained eye swept rapidly down the half column of print. There it was! "A procession of fleas." In *his* article! Fleas, unclean, odious vermin, in His Article!

Relatively, Queed cared nothing about his work on the *Post*, but for all the children of his brain, even the smallest and feeblest, he had a peculiar tenderness. He was more jealous of them than a knight of his honor, or a beauty of her complexion. No insult to his character could have enraged him like a slight put upon the least of these his articles. He sat back in his seat, feeling white, and something clicked inside his head. He remembered having heard that click once before. It was the night he determined to evolve the final theory of social progress, which would wipe out all other theories as the steam locomotive had wiped out the prairie schooner.

He knew well enough what that click meant now. He had got a new purpose, and that was to exact personal reparation from the criminal who had made Him and His Work the butt of street-car loafers. Never, it seemed to him, could he feel clean again until he had wiped off those fleas with gore.

To his grim inquiry Colonel Cowles replied that the head proof-reader, Mr. Pat, was responsible for typographical errors, and Mr. Pat did not "come on" till 6.30. It was now but 5.50. Queed sat down, wrote his next day's article and handed it to the Colonel, who read the title and coughed.

"I shall require no article from you to-morrow or next day. On the following day" — here the Colonel opened a drawer and consulted a schedule — "I shall receive with

pleasure your remarks on 'Fundamental Principles of Distribution — Article Four.'"

Queed ascended to the next floor, a noisy, discordant floor, full of metal tables on castors, and long stone-topped tables not on castors, and Mergenthaler machines, and slanting desk-like structures holding fonts of type. Rough board partitions rose here and there; over everything hung the deadly scent of acids from the engravers' room.

"That's him now," said an ink-smearred lad, and nodded toward a tall, gangling, mustachioed fellow in a black felt hat who had just come up the stairs.

Queed marched straight for the little cubbyhole where the proof-readers and copy-holders sweated through their long nights.

"You are Mr. Pat, head proof-reader of the *Post*?"

"That's me, sor," said Mr. Pat, and he turned with rather a sharp glance at the other's tone.

"What excuse have you to offer for making my article ridiculous and me a common butt?"

"An' who the divil may you be, please?"

"I am Mr. Queed, special editorial writer for this paper. Look at this." He handed over the folded *Post*, with the typographical enormity heavily underscored in blue. "What do you mean by falsifying my language and putting into my mouth an absurd observation about the most loathsome of vermin?"

Mr. Pat was at once chagrined and incensed. He happened, further, to be in most sensitive vein as regards little oversights in his department. His professional pride was tortured with the recollection that, only three days before, he had permitted the *Post* to refer to old Major Lamar as "that immortal veterinary," and upon the *Post's* seeking to retrieve itself the next day, at the Major's insistent demand, he had fallen into another error. The hateful words had come out as "immoral veteran."

"Now look here!" said he. "There's nothing to be gained talking that way. Ye've got me — I'll give ye that! But

what do ye expect? — eighty columns of type a night and niver a little harmless slip —?”

“You must be taught to make no slips with my articles. I’m going to punish you for that —”

“What-a-at! Say that agin!”

“Stand out here — I am going to give you a good thrashing. I shall whip . . .”

Another man would have laughed heartily and told the young man to trot away while the trotting was good. He was nearly half a foot shorter than Mr. Pat, and his face advertised his unmartial customs. But Mr. Pat had the swift fierce passions of his race; and it became to him an unendurable thing to be thus bearded by a little spectacled person in his own den. He saw red; and out shot his good right arm.

The little Doctor proved a good sailer, but bad at making a landing. His course was arched, smooth, and graceful, but when he stopped, he did it so bluntly that men working two stories below looked up to ask each other who was dead. Typesetters left their machines and hurried up, fearing that here was a case for ambulance or undertaker. But they saw the fallen editor pick himself up, with a face of stupefied wonder, and immediately start back toward the angry proof-reader.

Mr. Pat lowered redly on his threshold. “G’awn now! Get away!”

Queed came to a halt a pace away and stood looking at him.

“G’awn, I tell ye! I don’t want no more of your foolin’!”

The young man, arms hanging inoffensively by his side, stared at him with a curious fixity.

These tactics proved strangely disconcerting to Mr. Pat, obsessed as he was by a sudden sense of shame at having thumped so impotent an adversary.

“Leave me be, Mr. Queed. I’m sorry I hit ye, and I niver would ‘a’ done it — if ye had n’t —”

The man’s voice died away. He became lost in a great

wonder as to what under heaven this little Four-eyes meant by standing there and staring at him with that white and entirely unfrightened face.

Queed was, in fact, in the grip of a brand-new idea, an idea so sudden and staggering that it overwhelmed him. He could not thrash Mr. Pat. He could not thrash anybody. Anybody in the world that desired could put gross insult upon his articles and go scot-free, the reason being that the father of these articles was a physical incompetent.

All his life young Mr. Queed had attended to his own business, kept quiet and avoided trouble. This was his first fight, because it was the first time that anybody had publicly insulted his work. In his whirling sunburst of indignation, he had somehow taken it for granted that he could punch the head of a proof-reader in much the same way that he punched the head off Smathers’s arguments. Now he suddenly discovered his mistake, and the discovery was going hard with him. Inside him there was raging a demon of surprising violence of deportment; it urged him to lay hold of some instrument of a rugged, murderous nature and assassinate Mr. Pat. But higher up in him, in his head, there spoke the stronger voice of his reason. While the demon screamed homicidally, reason coldly reminded the young man that not to save his life could he assassinate, or even hurt, Mr. Pat, and that the net result of another endeavor to do so would be merely a second mortifying atmospheric journey. Was it not unreasonable for a man, in a hopeless attempt to gratify irrational passion, to take a step the sole and certain consequences of which would be a humiliating soaring and curveting through the air?

It was a terrible struggle, the marks of which broke out on the young man’s forehead in cold beads. But he was a rationalist among rationalists, and in the end his reason subdued his demon. Therefore, the little knot of linotypers and helpers who had stood wonderingly by while the two adversaries stared at each other, through a tense half-minute, now listened to the following dialogue: —

"I believe I said that I would give you a good thrashing. I now withdraw those words, for I find that I am unable to make them good."

"I guess you ain't — what the divil did ye expect? Me to sit back with me hands behind me and leave ye —"

"I earnestly desire to thrash you, but it is plain to me that I am not, at present, in position to do so."

"Fergit it! What's afther ye, Mr. Queed —?"

"To get in position to thrash you, would take me a year, two years, five years. It is not — no, it is *not* worth my time."

"Well, who asked f'r any av your time? But as f'r that, I'll give ye your chance to get square —"

"I suppose you feel yourself free now to take all sorts of detestable liberties with my articles?"

"Liberties — what's bitin' ye, man? Don't I read revised proof on the leaded stuff every night, no matter what the rush is? When did ye ever before catch me —?"

"Physically, you are my superior, but muscle counts for very little in this world, my man. Morally, which is all that matters, I am your superior — you know that, don't you? Be so good as to keep your disgusting vermin out of my articles in the future."

He walked away with a face which gave no sign of his inner turmoil. Mr. Pat looked after him, stirred and bewildered, and addressed his friends the linotypers angrily.

"Something loose in his belfry, as ye might have surmised from thim damfool tax-drools."

For Mr. Pat was still another reader of the unanswerable articles, he being paid the sum of twenty-seven dollars per week to peruse everything that went into the *Post*, including advertisements of auction sales and for sealed bids.

Queed returned to his own office for his hat and coat. Having heard his feet upon the stairs, Colonel Cowles called out: —

"What was the rumpus upstairs, do you know? It sounded as if somebody had a bad fall."

"Somebody did get a fall, though not a bad one, I believe."

"Who?" queried the editor briefly.

"I."

In the hall, it occurred to Queed that perhaps he had misled his chief a little, though speaking the literal truth. The fall that some *body* had gotten was indeed nothing much, for people's bodies counted for nothing so long as they kept them under. But the fall that this body's self-esteem had gotten was no such trivial affair. It struck the young man as decidedly curious that the worst tumble his pride had ever received had come to him through his body, that part of him which he had always treated with the most systematic contempt.

The elevator received him, and in it, as luck would have it, stood a tall young man whom he knew quite well.

"Hello, there, Doc!"

"How do you do, Mr. Klinker?"

"Been up chinning your sporting editor, Ragsy Hurd. Trying to arrange a mill at the Mercury between Smithy of the Y. M. C. A. and Hank McGurk, the White Plains Cyclone."

"A mill —?"

"Scrap — boxin' match, y' know. Done up your writings for the day?"

"My newspaper writings — yes."

In the brilliant close quarters of the lift, Klinker was looking at Mr. Queed narrowly. "Where you hittin' for now? Paynter's?"

"Yes."

"Walkin'? — That's right. I'll go with you."

As they came out into the street, Klinker said kindly: "You ain't feelin' good, are you, Doc? You're lookin' white as a milk-shake."

"I feel reasonably well, thank you. As for color, I have never had any, I believe."

"I don't guess, the life you lead. Got the headache,

have n't you? Have it about half the time, now don't you, hey?"

"Oh, I have a headache quite frequently, but I never pay any attention to it."

"Well, you'd ought to. Don't you know the headache is just nature tipping you off there's something wrong inside? I've been watching you at the supper table for some time now. That pallor you got ain't natural pallor. You're pasty, that's right. I'll bet segars you wake up three mornings out of four feelin' like a dish of stewed prunes."

"If I do — though of course I can only infer how such a dish feels — it is really of no consequence, I assure you."

"Don't you fool yourself! It makes a lot of consequence to you. Ask a doctor, if you don't believe me. But I got your dia'nosis now, same as a medical man — that's right. I know what's your trouble, Doc, just like you had told me yourself."

"Ah? What, Mr. Klinker?"

"Exercise."

"You mean lack of exercise?"

"I mean," said Klinker, "that you're fadin' out fast for the need of it."

The two men pushed on up Centre Street, where the march of home-goers was now beginning to thin out, in a moment of silence. Queed glanced up at Klinker's six feet of red beef with a flash of envy which would have been unimaginable to him so short a while ago as ten minutes. Klinker was physically competent. Nobody could insult *his* work and laugh at the merited retribution.

"Come by my place a minute," said Klinker. "I got something to show you there. You know the shop, o' course?"

No; Mr. Queed was obliged to admit that he did not.

"I'm manager for Stark's," said Klinker, trying not to appear boastful. "Cigars, mineral waters, and periodicals. And a great rondo-vooze for the sporting men, politicians, and rounders of the town, if I do say it. I've seen you hit

by the window many's the time, only your head was so full of studies you never noticed."

"Thank you, I have no time this evening, I fear —"

"Time? It won't take any — it's right the end of this block. You can't do any studyin' before supper-time, anyhow, because it's near that now. I got something for you there."

They turned into Stark's, a brilliantly-lit and prettily appointed little shop with a big soda-water plant at the front. To a white-coated boy who lounged upon the fount, Klinker spoke winged words, and the next moment Queed found himself drinking a foaming, tingling, hair-trigger concoction under orders to put it all down at a gulp.

They were seated upon a bench of oak and leather upholstery, with an enormous mirror reproducing their back views to all who cared to see. Klinker was chewing a toothpick; and either a toothpick lasted him a long time, or the number he made away with in a year was simply stupendous.

"Ever see a gymnasier, Doc?"

No; it seemed that the Doc had not.

"We got one here. There's a big spare room behind the shop. Kind of a store-room it was, and the Mercuries have fitted it up as a gymnasier and athletic club. Only they're dead ones and don't use it much no more. Got kind of a fall this afternoon, did n't you, Doc?"

"What makes you think that?"

"That eye you got. She'll be a beaut to-morrow — skin's broke too. A bit of nice raw beefsteak clapped on it right now would do the world and all for it."

"Oh, it is of no consequence —"

"You think nothing about your body is consequence, Doc, that only your mind counts, and that's just where you make your mistake. Your body's got to carry your mind around, and if it lays down on you, what —"

"But I have no intention of letting my body lie down on me, as you put it, Mr. Klinker. My health is sound, my constitution —"

"Forget it, Doc. Can't I look at you and see with my own eyes? You're committing slow suicide by over-work. That's what it is."

"As it happens, I am doing nothing of the sort. I have been working exactly this way for twelve years."

"Then all the bigger is the overdue bill nature's got against you, and when she does hit you she'll hit to kill. Where'll your mind and your studies be when we've planted your body down under the sod?"

Mr. Queed made no reply. After a moment, preparing to rise, he said: "I am obliged to you for that drink. It is rather remarkable —"

"Headache all gone, hey?"

"Almost entirely. I wish you would give me the name of the medicine. I will make a memorandum —"

"Nix," said Klinker.

"Nix? Nux I have heard of, but . . ."

"Hold on," laughed Klinker, as he saw Queed preparing to enter Nix in his note-book. "That ain't the name of it, and I ain't going to give it to you. Why, that slop only covers up the trouble, Doc — does more harm than good in the long run. You got to go deeper and take away the cause. Come back here and I'll show you your real medicine."

"I'm afraid —"

"Aw, don't flash that open-faced clock of yours on me. That's your trouble, Doc — matching seconds against your studies. It won't take a minute, and you can catch it up eating supper faster if you feel you got to."

Queed, curious, as well as decidedly impressed by Klinker's sure knowledge in a field where he was totally ignorant, was persuaded. The two groped their way down a long dark passage at the rear of the shop, and into a large room like a cavern. Klinker lit a flaring gas-jet and made a gesture.

"The Mercury Athletic Club gymnasium and sporting-room."

It was a basement room, with two iron-grated windows

at the back. Two walls were lined with stout shelves, partially filled with boxes. The remaining space, including wall-space, was occupied by the most curious and puzzling contrivances that Queed had ever seen. Out of the glut of enigmas there was but one thing — a large mattress upon the floor — that he could recognize without a diagram.

"Your caretaker sleeps here, I perceive."

Klinker laughed. "Look around you, Doc. Take a good gaze."

Doc obeyed. Klinker picked up a "sneaker" from the floor and hurled it with deadly precision at a weight-and-pulley across the room.

"There's your medicine, Doc!"

Orange-stick in mouth, he went around like a museum guide, introducing the beloved apparatus to the visitor under its true names and uses, the chest-weights, dumbbells and Indian clubs, flying-rings, a rowing-machine, the horizontal and parallel bars, the punching-bag and trapeze. Klinker lingered over the ceremonial; it was plain that the gymnasium was very dear to him. In fact, he loved everything pertaining to bodily exercise and manly sport; he caressed a boxing-glove as he never caressed a lady's hand; the smell of witch-hazel on a hard bare limb was more titillating to him than any intoxicant. The introduction over, Klinker sat down tenderly on the polished seat of the rowing-machine, and addressed Doctor Queed, who stood with an academic arm thrown gingerly over the horizontal bar.

"There's your medicine, Doc. And if you don't take it — well, it may be the long good-by for yours before the flowers bloom again."

"How do you mean, Mr. Klinker — there is my medicine?"

"I mean you need half an hour to an hour's hardest kind of work right here every day, reg'lar as meals."

Queed started as though he had been stung. He cleared his throat nervously.

"No doubt that would be beneficial — in a sense, but I cannot afford to take the time from My Book —"

"That's where you got it dead wrong. You can't afford *not* to take the time. Any doctor'll tell you the same as me, that you'll never finish your book at all at the clip you're hitting now. You'll go with nervous prostration, and it'll wipe you out like a fly. Why, Doc," said Klinker, impressively, "you don't realize the kind of life you're leading — all indoors and sede'tary and working twenty hours a day. I come in pretty late some nights, but I never come so late that there ain't a light under your door. A man can't stand it, I tell you, playing both ends against the middle that away. You got to pull up, or it's out the door feet first for you."

Queed said uneasily: "One important fact escapes you, Mr. Klinker. I shall never let matters progress so far. When I feel my health giving way —"

"Need n't finish — heard it all before. They think they're going to stop in time, but they never do. Old prostration catches 'em first every crack. You think an hour a day exercise would be kind of a waste, ain't that right? Kind of a dead loss off'n your book and studies?"

"I certainly do feel —"

"Well, you're wrong. Listen here. Don't you feel some days as if mebbe you could do better writing and harder writing if only you did n't feel so mean?"

"Well . . . I will frankly confess that sometimes —"

"Did n't I know it! Do you know what, Doc? If you knocked out a little time for reg'lar exercise, you'd find when bedtime came, that you'd done better work than you ever did before."

Queed was silent. He had the most logical mind in the world, and now at last Klinker had produced an argument that appealed to his reason.

"I'll put it to you as a promise," said Klinker, eyeing him earnestly. "One hour a day exercise, and you do more work in twenty-four hours than you're doing now, besides feelin' one hundred per cent better all the time."

Still Queed was silent. *One hour a day!*

"Try it for only a month," said Klinker the Tempter.

"I'll help you — glad to do it — I need the drill myself. Gimme an hour a day for just a month, and I'll bet you the drinks you would n't quit after that for a hundred dollars."

Queed turned away from Klinker's honest eyes, and wrestled the bitter thing out. *Thirty Hours stolen from His Book!* . . . Yesterday, even an hour ago, he would not have considered such an outrage for a moment. But now, driving him irresistibly toward the terrible idea, working upon him far more powerfully than his knowledge of headache, even than Klinker's promise of a net gain in his working ability, was this new irrationally disturbing knowledge that he was a physical incompetent. . . . If he had begun systematic exercise ten years ago, probably he could thrash Mr. Pat to-day.

Yet an hour a day is not pried out of a sacred schedule of work without pains and anguish, and it was with a grim face that the Doc turned back to William Klinker.

"Very well, Mr. Klinker, I will agree to make the experiment, tentatively — an hour a day for thirty days only."

"Right for you, Doc! You'll never be sorry — take it from me."

Klinker was a brisk, efficient young man. The old gang that had fitted out the gymnasium had drifted away, and the thought of going once more into regular training, with a pupil all his own, was breath to his nostrils. He assumed charge of the ceded hour with skilled sureness. Rain or shine, the Doctor was to take half an hour's hard walking in the air every day, over and above the walk to the office. Every afternoon at six — at which hour the managerial duties at Stark's terminated — he was to report in the gym for half an hour's vigorous work on the apparatus. This iron-clad regime was to go into effect on the morrow.

"I'll look at you stripped," said Klinker, eyeing his new pupil thoughtfully, "and see first what you need. Then I'll lay out a reg'lar course for you — exercises for all parts of the body. Got any trunks?"

Queed looked surprised. "I have one small one -- a steamer trunk, as it is called."

Klinker explained what he meant, and the Doctor feared that his wardrobe contained no such article.

"Ne'mmind. I can fit you up with a pair. Left Hand Tom's they used to be, him that died of the scarlet fever Thanksgiving. And say, Doc!"

"Well?"

"Here's the first thing I'll teach you. Never mister your sparring-partner."

The Doc thought this out, laboriously, and presently said: "Very well, William."

"Call me Buck, the same as all the boys."

Klinker came toward him holding out an object made of red velveteen about the size of a pocket handkerchief.

"Put these where you can find them to-morrow. You can have 'em. Left Hand Tom's gone where he don't need 'em any more."

"What are they? What does one do with them?"

"They're your trunks. You wear 'em."

"Where? On -- what portion, I mean?"

"They're like little pants," said Klinker.

The two men walked home together over the frozen streets. Queed was taciturn and depressed. He was annoyed by Klinker's presence and irritated by his conversation; he wanted nothing in the world so much as to be let alone. But honest Buck Klinker remained unresponsive to his mood. All the way to Mrs. Paynter's he told his new pupil grisly stories of men he had known who had thought that they could work all day and all night, and never take any exercise. Buck kindly offered to show the Doc their graves.

VIII

Formal Invitation to Fifi to share Queed's Dining-Room (provided it is very cold upstairs); and First Outrage upon the Sacred Schedule of Hours.

QUEED supped in an impenetrable silence. The swelling rednesses both above and below his left eye attracted the curious attention of the boarders, but he ignored their glances, and even Klinker forbore to address him. The meal done, he ascended to his sacred chamber, but not alas, to remain.

For a full week, the Scriptorium had been uninhabitable by night, the hands of authors growing too numb there to write. On this night, conditions were worse than ever; the usual valiant essay was defeated with more than the usual ease. Queed fared back to his dining-room, as was now becoming his melancholy habit. And to-night the necessity was exceptionally trying, for he found that the intrusive daughter of the landlady had yet once again spread her mathematics there before him.

Nor could Fifi this time claim misunderstanding and accident. She fully expected the coming of Mr. Queed, and had been nervously awaiting it. The state of mind thus induced was not in the least favorable to doing algebra successfully or pleasurably. No amount of bodily comfort could compensate Fifi for having to have it. But her mother had ruled the situation to-night with a strong hand and a flat foot. The bedroom was *entirely too cold* for Fifi. She must, positively *must*, go down to the warm and comfortable dining-room, -- do you hear me, Fifi? As for Mr. Queed -- well, if he made himself objectionable, Sharlee would simply have to give him another good talking to.