

By THOMAS
THURSDAY



AND HOWE!

Another Breezy Narrative of the Sideshows

ONCE upon a time a snappy old hombre named George Bernard Shaw lassoed a workable fountain pen and proceeded to dash off the following load of horse feathers:

Those who can, do; those who can't, teach.

For positive proof of Kid Shaw's startling statement we'll take for our text today Mr. Henry Harrison Howe, the lad whose knowledge surpassed his ability. Make yourself comfortable, boys and girls, and I'll try and finish this tasty tale before any of us fall asleep.

Since my name ain't quite as well known as Charley Lindbergh, I better break down and confess my identity, as I know some folks don't care to get too familiar with strangers. In round numbers, I'm Doc McKeezick, and at the time the following eye opener transpired, I was managing the sideshow with Ike Sullivan's "Wild West Rodeo and Freak Hippodrome."

Well, to stir up some action, as the Marines remarked to Sandino, we was playing a Western slab called Angelharp when the cultured and gentlemanly Howe loomed into view. At that moment I was having what is known as a hell of a lot of trouble with my ballyhoo talker, Foghorn Finnegan, who got the weird notion in what passed

for his head that his job was worth at least one hundred bucks per week, without counting tips.

"Listen, Doc," says he, just before we opened the show, "did you tell Old Man Sullivan that I craved bigger and better wages for driving these cowboys and bad bimbos into the show?"

"He said he wouldn't pay Herb Hoover or Al Smith that much," I retorts in a well-modulated voice.

"Then tell 'at ape to hire a new boy!" he yelps. "I am all washed up. This baby is headed for the mild and woolly East. Alley oop!"

"You wouldn't leave me cold, would you?" I demands.

"As frigid as Mr. Zero's grandpop," he says. "If Sullivan can't pay top price for a top guy, I am headed for the land of New York, out where the East begins. Toodle-oo, Doc. Hope to see you along Broadway!"

"If so," I says, quite the bit annoyed, "I hope you will be nestling in a manhole."

Exit Mr. Finnegan and enter Bill Dolen, our highly imaginative public relations man, which is a new and fawncy name for press agent.

"How's things breaking?" begins Bill.

"Over my head," I says. "That bindle stiff I had talking on the ballystand just give me a load of lip and departed hence."

"Fine!" whoops Bill. "It's time you got a real orator. I can promote you an old chap who can recite Shakespeare by the yard, Plato by the foot, and all the classics by the ream. As for delivering a talk, he can spot Washington sixteen senators and drown them out."

"What is it?"

"Met him at the Sagebrush Cafe," goes on Bill. "He's short of pennies, and I think he would be tickled silly to work for you. He was a trifle pie-eyed when I saw him last, but genius and gin are twins. But it isn't a habit, he claims."

"Just a thirst, hey? Er, what makes you think this monkey can deliver a spiel from the ballystand?"

"I'll let you sample this boy for yourself," says Bill. "Back in moment."

Ten minutes later Bill came ambling down the midway, towing a tall, angular guy, who looked like a cross between a Florida kumquat and a full-page advertisement for the latest in hair tonics. He had plenty of wool, what I mean! More, he's wearing a cutaway coat and a stovepipe kelly, that passed out of style when grandpop played with rattles.

"This is Mister Henry Harrison Howe," says Bill. "Mister Howe, shake hands with Doc McKeezick, one of the best known grifters in the business."

"I am charmed to meet you, sir," quacks Mons. Howe, offering a clammy hand. "This gentleman has prevailed upon me to accept a position with you as a—er, what did you say it was, Mister Dolen?"

"Ballyhoo spieler," says Bill. "In other words, a boob buster."

"Gracious me," moans Howe, "what on earth is that?"

"Let's get down to business," I suggests. "I want some piffle peddler to get up on that stand and tell all the cowboys, rangers, or what have you, one fairy tale after the other. Explain to them that we have the greatest show on earth, Barnum and Bailey be blowed. Eh, did you ever talk in public before?"

"Yes, indeed," he admits. "For a number of years I lectured on conceptual psychology, art psychology, symbolic psychology, efficiency psychology, and—"

"You should ought to be a riot," I says. "Follow me into the tent and I'll give you the regular spiel

that I want you to hurl at the audience."

I shoved him inside, grabbed the typewritten lecture out of the trunk, and tossed it to him.

"Here's the goo," I says. "Take it home and study it for a hour or so, then come back and I'll try you out."

"This," says he, after a quick examination, "is very, very bad. It impresses me as an insult to even moronic audiences. If it is all the same to you, my dear sir, I shall take this back to the cafe and revise it."

"Make it snappy," I begs. "The whistle on this factory will blow in less than no time, if not sooner."

He returns a half-hour later, looking as serious as arsenic on tripe.

"Glad to see you back so quickly," I says. "We are ready to shoot the first ballyhoo."

"Shoot—the what?" he demands. "I just loath the sound of firearms."

"In plain Websterian," I explains, "I aim to start this show pronto and immediately. Are you sure you can make a nice speech to the gun-toting lads?"

"With pleasure," he says. "I have revised your weird lecture and made it more refined and instructive."

IGAVE orders to the boys to slam the Chinese gazinka—the gong that wakes up the slick and the dead—and pretty soon the ballystand is crowded with a large assortment of tough and ready Western hombres. The Hon. Howe mounted the stand beside me and Abe McGill, the Fire-Eater, and posed like a backwards politician addressing a hicknic.

"Just a moment, Socrates," I says to my new orator. "I will say a few introductory remarks, then introduce you as the speaker of the day."

I stepped to the front and unwound a fair line of assorted goo-ga.

"In conclusion, lay-dees and gents," I says, "I will introduce to you a man who is known the world over for his wonderful flow of words, a hombre who has spoke before kings, queens and what have you. This guy—"

I feel a jerk at my coattail. I whirl around and behold no less than Mr. Howe.

"Good Lord," he whispers, "what a speech! My dear sir, I beg you to retire and permit me to save the situation. Do!"

I did. He removes his hat with the greatest of culture, brushes back his flowing mane, then slips his hanky up his right sleeve. Next, he bows like Lord Chesterfield and gets down to business.

“Mister Chairman, ladies and gentleman,” he begins, in a deep bass voice, “before I call your attention to the various uncouth exhibits within this tented pavilion, it is my desire to speak a few words in reference to bio-psychology. It is my idea that all lectures should be instructive. Now, my dear friends, I feel assured that you will be glad to hear that bio-psychology has cured arteriosclerosis and nervous indigestion, suicidal mania, exhaustion, defective vision, epilepsy, palsy, asthma, deafness, goiter, kleptomania, domestic troubles, insanity, prostate trouble, rheumatism, universal arthritis, (*Hot poultice! Imagine this in front of a sideshow!*) shell shock, ptosis and colitis, fever, panic, dementia praecox, imbecility, and—”

While the audience opened their traps in amazed wonder, the old beezark went on in that strain for five minutes, then switched to a history of malaria in the land of Panama and, as he was about to unload some facts about the proper diet for crocodiles, I noted the customers backing away.

I promptly grabbed him by the arm and yanked him backward.

“What and the hell is the idea?” I yelps. “The crowd is beating it. Step back, shut up, and maybe I can save the wreck.”

With a pained look in his eyes, the profound orator folded his arms and let forth a few well-bred snorts. I rushed to the front and tried to interest the remaining crowd with the regulation hooey about the freaks, but they gave me a brace of ha-ha’s and a couple or three ho-ho’s and beat it down the midway. This makes me extry peeved at the work of Henry Harrison Howe, don’t think it didn’t!

“What a fine flop *you* turned out to be!” I snaps. “Who in Gehenna did you think you was talking to, the College of Physicians and Surgeons? Why didn’t you recite the hokum lecture I gave you to study, hey?”

“I am sorry, indeed, my dear sir,” he says, “but I refuse to degrade myself with such rubbish. I really thought—”

“Yeah,” I admits, “that’s the trouble. You should never ought to do any heavy thinking in front of a sideshow audience. Serve ‘em with a large order of boloney, seasoned with whoop-la. Meantime, I have a idea you are canned. Try

Bawston.”

“I am also sorry,” he confesses, in a less haughty tone. “It seemed to me that the people would enjoy a higher form of lecture, even though it was delivered in front of a freak show. Well, many thanks for the opportunity, my dear sir. Frankly, I wish I had pleased you; I am rather embarrassed from a financial standpoint, and I do not know what is to become of me. Well, good day, sir.”

He started to walk away with such a hangdog look that I felt a bit sorry for him. I did some speedy thinking. The only trouble with the lad, I figured, was that he was a educated gent among a lot of roughneck showmen. What to do? What to do?

“Wait a minute, kid!” I bellers after him. “If you really want something to do, and will take any portfolio to keep the wolf from the old homestead, I’ll try and fix you up.”

“Thanks awfully,” he smiles. “I’d be glad to accept any—er—legitimate position.”

I brought him over to the big top and told Horse Collars Hawkins, our treasurer, that Howe was a gem of a gentlemen, and what could he do for him?

“If this bird is just *half* as honest as you say he is, we need a ticket taker right now, and he’s got the job,” says Horse Collars. “No fooling, it would be a positive novelty to have a bona fide gent around this trick. Follow me, bimbo!”

Howe thanks me with much dignity and walks off with Hawkins. Meanwhile, I walk back to the sideshow escorted by a headache. I need a ballyhoo spieler, and how!

I find Bill Dolen lolling on the ballstand.

“That gil you wished on me would of been okay lecturing at Yale and Harvard,” I says, “but as a boob-biffer he was like the Indian Ocean—all damp.”

“So?” coos Bill. “Well, I’ll dig you up another. I’ll wire a ad into *The Billboard* for the best outside talker in My Country ‘Tis of Thee, and it will catch their next issue. Be good.”

About a week later, while we was annoying a drum called Hicksap Gulch, Bill comes up to me with a letter in his hand.

“Get a load of this,” says he. “This baby looks like your man.”

Here’s the news:

Dear Doc McKeezick:

I have accepted that job advertised in The Billboard. Ever hear Bryan talk? I'm better. Salary to start will be small; salary to finish will be big. See you soon after this letter of acceptance arrives.

*Yours 'till Sitting Bull stands up,
C. Reginald Smythe.*

"He ain't no trouper," I says. "No showman ever parts his name in the middle; if he did, the boys would part his beezers in the middle. What do you make of it? It looks like a portion of horse feathers to me."

"Never cross a bridge before it's built," advises the sage Bill. "Maybe this lad will turn out to be a whirlwind."

"With the accent on the wind," I says.

JUST before we opened the sideshow the next day, a cloud of dust appears at the far end of the midway, and a moment later the town's only taxi careens up to the ballystand. Before it could halt, a snappy looking lad leaps out of the back seat, trips on his ear, and comes up smiling. He's dressed a shade better than the Prince of Wales, meaning Panama hat, pearl gray spats, latest-from-Broadway suit, and a malacca cane.

"Greetings!" he grins. "If I am not mistaken, you are Doc McKeezick, my new employer. In short, I'm your new man, C. Reginald Smythe. Put 'er there, big boy!"

Before I have a chance to open my trap, the breezy lad grabs my hand and pumps it snappily.

"Er, just the one moment," I begs. "What's it all about? Right now I am somewhat busy."

"That's the sort of man I crave to work for—busy!" he says. "Tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it—only better! The world is my oyster and I intend to open it!"

"If bunk was meat," I sniffs, "you'd be a boloney factory. Lads who can actually *do* things, don't yelp about it."

"That's just why I am different," he retorts. "I can both tell you how good I am, and then prove it. How does that strike you, old thing?"

"Come with me, scissors-bill," I requests, and pushed him into the tent. I grab the old typewritten lecture and shove it into his mitts. "I want you to read this, study it, then get up before a audience and spill it."

He takes the lecture, squats on some rolled

sidewall canvas, and begins to read. While he was thus engaged, he let forth various and sundry snorts, sniffs, grunts, groans, or what have you in the icebox, Fritz?

"S'matter—sick?" I asks.

"Hell no," he replies, "but this mess *is!* Woof, what a fine load of embalming fluid. Do you mean to say that a crowd will stand and listen to this? Reads like a love story in *The Gal's Home Pal*. Well, no matter. I can change it in a jiffy!"

"Do it and I'll brain you," I says with my usual politeness. "The first guy changed it, and the last seen of him he was collecting tickets over at the big top. In other words, wise biscuit, he was a terrible bust!"

"Oh, I won't harm it any. Just wish to brighten up the dead. Gimme a pencil, big boy, and I'll strut my stuff."

Fifteen minutes later he came back, with a smile from here to there.

"Now I'll show you something!" he whoops. "Get me a crowd and I'll turn them into your show so fast you'll think it's done by magic. Alley oop!"

Of course, I figured that Mr. C. Reginald Smythe was a large order of choice and fancy tropical air. Ain't I read hundreds of fiction stories where the blowhard turned out to be a flat tire, and the modest, unassuming fathead won the prize, the girl, and eventually worked his way up to be president of the Unholy Silk Sock Corporation? And did not the blowhard accept the portfolio of third assistant janitor in the same corporation? I'll tell the Turpin-eyed world I have!

Well, *hombres*, strange as it may seem, C. Reginald Smythe mounted that ballystand and reeled off the best ballyhoo spiel I have ever heard on a midway. When he whooped about the so-called freaks we had on the inside of the tent I almost believed him myself. When he finished, the sombreroed lads stepped up to the box office and bought tickets almost as one man. No fooling, I thought I was dreaming! Speaking of personality, my new hired help had large quantities of "it."

"*Magnifico!*" I says in my best Spanish. "You surprised me, and you go on the payroll at fifty smackers per week. And if Old Man Sullivan lets forth a whinny of protest, we'll both quit. Er, which show did you work on before?"

"None," says he. "This is all Greek, Hindu and Patagonian to me."

"You wouldn't kid *me*, would you?" I asks.

“Honest, Mister McKeezick,” he retorts, grinning boyishly, “this is my first experience. To be frank about it, I was formerly a dull and sluggish clerk in an old bookshop, until I happened to run across this book called ‘Why Be a Failure?’”

He reached in his hip pocket and pulled out a small green bound book and patted it fondly.

“Before I read and studied this book,” he continues with the greatest of enthusiasm, “I was dead, but too lazy to close my eyes. But after I read it and studied it—hot coffee!—I was a new man. I decided to get out of the city and try my luck at anything. Then I chanced to see your ad in *The Billboard*, and—well, here I am, big boy. Eh, would you care to read it?”

“I ain’t got any time to go in for art and science,” I says. “My head ain’t the right shape to receive any culture.”

Just between us, as the ham remarked to the sandwich, I didn’t believe a word he says about the book waking him up, or that he was formerly a clerk in ye booke shoppe. Howsoever, as long as he made good with the kid-show, I wouldn’t of cared if he told me that Amelia Earhart was his only daughter!

“As to fifty a week,” he goes on, “that will be fair for a start—but not for a finish. As to that, the book says—”

“I’d rather not hear any more about the book,” I says. “I am now giving you *beaucoup* pennies, and I will have to blackjack Old Man Sullivan to get him to slip you that. Be nice!”

“Well, we can take that matter up later,” he continues. “But please understand that I will require bigger and better wages in the near future. The book says—”

“Book be blowed!” I snaps and walks away briskly.

Well, during the rest of the date at Hicksap Gulch the kid-show played to fine business, thanks to the snap and pepper of C. Reginald Smythe. Just to show his versatility, he wrote and tried out two new lectures, and both went over like Lindbergh—big. He gave all credit to the little book, “Why Be a Failure?” and I thought he was kidding.

OUR next stand was laboring under the title of Yahula, and Mons. Smythe went over bigger and better than ever. Even Old Man Sullivan broke down and confessed that my new ballyhoo talker was worth at least *half* of his salary.

“I admit he’s a nifty crowd crammer,” says the Old Man, “but fifty berries per week is enough for five or six senators. See if you can slice off ten!”

“I am thinking of adding on ten,” I snorts.

“Okay,” says he, “if you take it out of your own poke!”

Next day things began to pop.

I was reposing on the ballstand, dreaming of the net profits—for the boss—when I felt a tap on the shoulder. Turning around, I beheld nature’s gift to womanhood; i.e. Abe McGill, the Fire-Eater.

“Lo, Doc,” begins Abe.

“Howdy, Abe,” I says. “How’s tricks?”

“Rotten,” moans he. “How can they be good in show business? That being understood, I have called to announce my retirement from the grift in a coupla three weeks, if not sooner.”

“Good luck,” I says. “Which same you’ll need.”

It’s a hobby of mine never to pay any attention to the squarks of kid-show freaks. During the season it is customary for them to quit at least twice a week while under a thirty-week contract.

“Get the idea out of your nut that I am kidding,” flares Abe. “For two cents, I’d blow this show right now!”

“Sorry I ain’t got the two cents,” I retorts. “Er, what do you aim at doing?”

“Plenty,” he says. “I been reading and studying a book and I have found out that I am a sucker.”

“You could of got the same information by asking me,” I returns. “Know any more bedtime stories?”

“All my life I have wanted to be a great actor, and the book says that a guy can be whatever he wants to be.”

“Sure,” I admits. “Look at me for the very good example. I wanted to be President but a lad named Coolidge beat me to it. Meantime, stick to fire-eating and eat tasty and often.”

“Stick to your uncle!” he snorts, getting redheaded. “I am going to be a great actor, and I don’t mean I just reckon so.”

“Well,” I says, “for all I know, maybe you could play the part of a clown.”

“I am gonna study Shakespeare, and play the main parts,” explains Abe with the greatest of innocence.

“See if that annoys me,” I says, and Abe snorts and beats it into the tent.

A few minutes later, several of my best freak attractions stroll out of the tent, each carrying a

copy of the little green bound book. Baby Bessie, the One-Ton Girl, led the parade, followed by Lulu Labelle, the Albino Beauty, Lord Leano, the Georgia Hairpin, and Madame Hirsute, the Bearded Lady. Without a word to me, they stroll out to a grassy spot and hold a conference. While I was wondering what it was all about, C. Reginald Smythe came up and joined me on the ballstand.

"Listen," I says, "how did them stoneheads get hold of that library? They have the same book that you showed me some days ago, ain't they? Do you happen to know what has caused the outbreak of high art and litterture?"

"Why, yes," he smiles. "You see, Doc, I chanced to show the book to Abe McGill, and he read it and told me that it woke him up, just as it did me. Then Abe told the others and they all sent for a copy."

"Not so good," I remarks. "It's liable to put fool ideas into what passes for their heads, and there will be Sheol to pay."

"I think it has already," replies Smythe. "Some told me this morning that they are going to quit the show and enter some big profession."

"That's a laugh in any langwidge," I says. "If them babies quit trouping they'd be on the county, over the hills to the poorhouse. Why—"

Another tap on the shoulder interrupts me. Looking around, I behold no less than Baby Bessie, the One-Ton Girl.

"Well," I asks, "what have you got in the line of grief?"

"I am gointa, now, leave this show soon," she says. "I am tired of throwing my life away, sitting on the platform and letting a flock of skinny old hens give me the merry giggle."

"Oh, have you caught the new fever, too?" I asks. "What's your new racket going to be, flying across the Atlantic on the back of a eagle?"

"I have decided to take up expressionistic dancing," she titters.

"Well," I says, "if a elephant can do it, there ain't no reason why you can't succeed. Where are you going to park all that fat you got on, hey?"

"I can reduce, can't I? The book says—"

"I'd rather not hear anymore about it," I cuts her off.

"See if I care!" she snaps, and beats it into the tent.

"That damn book must be hot stuff," I says to Smythe. "I didn't think even a earthquake could

wake them chumps up."

"You ought to study it yourself," grins he. "For all you know, you may have some latent powers in your makeup that you don't know anything about. Why, just think, you might have the makings of a king in you!"

"Don't give me the grins," I says. "I bet there's a joke in that book some place, and I am going to find it out."

To make a clean bosom of matters, I did!

JUST as the show closed that night, Chief Rain-In-the-Pan, a full-blooded Mohawk named Pete Sullivan, came up to me and announced his retirement from the show business.

"I suppose," I sneers, "that you have read a little green bound book, called 'Why Be a Failure?' and it's got you all hopped up. Well, what have *you* decided to be, successor to Mussolini or heavyweight champ of the world?"

"Nothing so crude," says the chief. "You know, Doc, that I am one of the best talkers in front of a bead joint in show business. I ain't never seen no other gil that could even touch me when it come to lecturing on Injun lore and selling Injun trinkets. So I have decided to make a lecture tour of the United States and Canada, telling of my experiences among the various tribes."

"You and Buffalo Bill, hey? And speaking of tribes, you know as much about tribes as I do about outboxing Gene Tunney. If wearing gloves at night softens the hands, you must sleep with your hat on. Forget it and stick to show business!"

"Forget nothing!" yelps the chief. "I am gonna check out of this sucker's game, and pronto!"

I leave him raving and walk down the lot. Outside of the big top, I meet my old friend, Henry Harrison Howe.

"Well, kid," I says, "how's things coming?"

"Very pleasant, indeed," he drawls. "I am indeed grateful to you for your aid in getting me the position. You see, I have plenty of time to read and study."

"Good," says I. "Horse-Collars Hawkins told me only the other day that you was the best ticket taker he ever seen. That's praise from Caesar."

"I'm charmed to hear it," he says, and that was that.

As I hiked back toward the kid-show a thought dawned on me and socked me between the eyes. I began to wonder if a book like "Why Be a

Failure?" could arouse a bunch of sideshow freaks, why couldn't it wake up Henry Harrison Howe? He had plenty education, large gobs of culture and refinement. All he needed was some shot of dope to wake him up. What he needed was a whole slew of pep!

The next day three more freaks came up to me and announced that that they was leaving the show in the fast approaching future. One said he was going to be a doctor, one a lawyer, and the other broke down and admitted that he always knew he could be a good senator. I told them all to go to a naughty word, and then hunted up C. Reginald Smythe.

"Hey, listen!" I snaps. "What in the Hades sort of whoop-la is in that book, anyways? It's got this show all cockeyed, and hopped up everybody but the stuffed mummy in the glass case. If it works

like that, I want to buy a copy for the guy who's taking tickets over at the big top. If it wakes him up like it has the rest, he should go over like Niagara Falls—big."

"I thought it was time you took a look at it," enthuses Smythe. "Here—I'll make you a present of my own copy, I know it all by heart. Read it several times, and I bet it wakes you up the same as it did everyone else."

I grabbed the book, sat on the ballystand and prepared to give it the once-over. I turned to the first page and—*o sole mio!* Here, good people, take a look for yourselves:

WHY BE A FAILURE?
By Henry Harrison Howe

Woof!

