

Adventures with the Move-A-Long Side Show
Vanity Fair—and Warmer
By Thomas Thursday



IF you know of anything worse than a bird with a twin-six nerve, page Doc Ramble, manager of the side show, en route with the Move-A-Long Greater Circus—that's me. Fenwick Clicker—that's him.

On July 1st, I put an ad in *The Showmen's Gazette* stating that I could use the world's best inside lecturer for the side show, and would shoot a ticket to the right party, no matter if the same was then in Peru. My other lecturer had made arrangements to quit and blew without calling my attention to the fact.

We were showing Lazuma—which is in Montana, though you can't prove it by the map—when the general delivery slipped me the following gem:

HON. Doc RAMBLE, care of Move-A-Long Greater Circus, Lazuma, Montana.

My DEAR Doc: Kindly take notice that the undersigned has accepted the position offered in the *Gazette*, and will leave within an hour to join you. He is fresh from college, where he led the Pro Bono Publico Orators' Club without undue exertion. He has an appearance that would make those collar-ad chaps look like the last rose of summer in a blizzard, and a face that won an armful of blue ribbons before it was two years old. As far as lecturing is concerned, he has a vocabulary that would make that chap Webster look like a snail racing with a motor cycle.

References? His ability will make you forget to ask for same.

Personality? That's him clean through! He

will now close and proceed to pack his suit case. Thanking you for the position, he is, yours for pep.

FENWICK CLICKER.
Woofgus, Iowa.

Right away I discovered that this bird was as timid as a landlord. He forgot to mention that he was about to run for president or was an ex-ambassador to Sweden. I passed the letter to Emerson Dreem, our double-barreled press agent, and asked his opinion. Dreem slanted it three times to make sure that he was awake, then chirped:

"Just as modest as a peacock with a new suit of plumes, ain't he? Didn't even wait to find out whether you wanted him or not! Well, he's either the world's greatest or a bloomer, take it from me. Gonna send for him, Doc?"

"I didn't get a chance, did I? He wished himself on me before I had an opportunity to do anything."

I figured, however, that if a beezark had enough nerve to shoot me a letter like that, then it was up to me to show him that I was game.

II.

DREEM and I ambled up to the lot and distributed the good news. And while on the subject of lots, I want to say right here, ladies and gentlemen, that lot would have been O.K. for a water carnival. It must have rained for three years steady just before we landed, because the whole

works would have made the Great Lakes look like an acre of mill ponds, but that's neither here nor there, as the three-shell fellow would say.

After Queen Babess, the Albino Beauty, had read the letter, she inspected her mirror for signs of waning beauty and remarked, "Well, Doc, if Mr. Clicker is what he says he is, he's just what I've been looking for. Introduce me to him first, will you? Not that the other dames would have a show, understand; but I ain't gambling."

Speaking of beauty, Queen Babess—nee Lenora Belle Casey—had most of those movie queens looking as if they had just got up for breakfast—white hair, pink eyes, and a figure that no adding machine could register; which is a long way of saying that a female is brainless.

When Flesho, the fat lady, slanted Mr. Clicker's modest essay, she began to brush the best collection of hair ever turned out by a hair factory, and appeared satisfied.

"'Bout time we got a regular-looking feller talking on us, believe me! How old do you think he is? Well, don't forget my right name when he blows in. And listen, Doc; I don't mind if you tell him I'm single."

Just then Skeletino—the Human Toothpick—ambled over to get an earful. I might mention in passing, that this bird was in love with Flesho and out of love with everything else. He weighed thirty-eight pounds, counting his nose and eyebrows, and could be used for a key when occasion demanded. Although he had been courting her for some time without adding to his score, he still lived on hopes and vermicelli.

He leaned against her platform, looking fawningly at his ladylove, and demanded some attention. Flesho threw the brush at him.

"That ain't no way to treat me, Mayme!" he whined. "I just come over to see how you was."

"I wish you'd buy some opera glasses and see from a distance!" she growled. "You're a pest—that's what. Besides, I wish to give you warning that a regular-looking feller is coming to lecture, and I'd like you to keep outa sight." After which she flashed the letter on James Cicero Swatt—alias Skeletino.

"Say, Mayme, you ain't gonna turn me down for this chap, are you, huh?" he pleaded after slanting the gem.

"Begone, shrimp!" she snapped.

"You know that I ain't famous for a good

temper!" And Jimmie ambled away—which gives me a chance to switch this yarn to another track.

III.

THE following evening, as they say in the eye-strain pictures, I was leaning on a guy rope, when I felt a tap on the shoulder. I whirled around and slanted a bird who looked like an escaped movie hero. He was wearing a suit that could have competed with a brass band, while his hat was surrounded by a two-color ribbon. He was twirling a cane that must have been bought in a jeweler's, and he owned a smile that would have made Doug Fairbanks look like a carload of dyspepsia. One glance convinced me that he wouldn't have looked out of place wearing skirts and high-heeled kicks.

"Hello, Agnes!" I said. "What's disturbing you?"

"Beg pardon, old chap, but the name's Fenwick—not Agnes. I'm looking for Doc Ramble, my future employer. I accepted the—"

"Halt!" I commanded. "So you're the beezark who cornered the nerve market, hey? Well, I'm going to give you a chance; that's the kind of a bird I am. The salary to start will be thirty-five per, and about the same to finish—unless you buy the show. How's that hit you, Fenwick?"

"Perfectly lovely, Doc—immense! May I not start my duties immediately?"

Oh, boy! I was in one think that Mr. Clicker wasn't a regular trouper, because no trouper worries about starting anything but riots. I grabbed him by the bridle—I mean coat—and raced him into the tent.

As soon as the female attractions got a quarter look at him, the powder puffs began active service.

"Miss Flopper," I said to Flesho, "allow me to introduce to you Mr. Fenwick Clicker, our new lecturer."

"Charmed to meet you, Miss Flopper!" chirped Fenwick, making a Lord Helpus bow. "You're looking splendid, I assure you!"

I took a side slant at Skeletino on the next platform, and, if looks were bullets, Mr. Clicker would have resembled a pound of Swiss cheese in a second.

Next I escorted Fenwick to Queen Babess' platform, and introduced him to Miss Casey. She had enough powder on her nose to blow up St. Helena and pulled a smile on him that she must

have practiced all morning. He didn't seem to be much impressed with her beauty, but was just as polite as a wine agent in a desert state.

Well, I gave each and every line a chance to pipe Mr. Clicker, and then I slipped him the lecture, the same being neatly typewritten in pencil on wrapping paper. And mentioning a great spiel on freaks, ours had the complete works of Grimm and Andersen looking like the truth. But if you slipped folks the real dope they would moan for their dime back and say the show was a fake—same as their own business.

"This lecture is remarkable, Doc," chirped Fenwick, after reading it. "Of course, it couldn't be used as a textbook on grammar or a lesson in rhetoric, but, nevertheless, it's good. The talk on Flesho, for instance, stating that she was born of parents whose combined weight was less than two hundred pounds is—er—magnificent. And the one about Skeletino, mentioning that his parents weighed together more than five hundred is most remarkable. And the—"

"Can it!" I growled. "All you've got to do is reel this stuff off without letting your face flirt with a grin. Just follow copy. If it happens to mention that lemons are red and bananas are pink, you're being paid to shoot the same. That's the kind of stuff folks like."

IV.

THAT afternoon we jammed a good push into the tent, and I hung around waiting to hear the new beezark put over the spiel. I wasn't any too sure about his ability, because when a bird begins to sing about himself in high C, he generally hums in low Z when the time arrives to get busy.

"Start with Stronguyus, Mr. Clicker," I said to him, "and work right around. Then take a ten-minute layoff to give the joints a chance to get a play."

"That's me, Doc!" he chirped and hopped up on the platform.

And say! Maybe that bird couldn't shuffle the lingo! I've heard great talkers—like Bryan and the wife—but that chap had them both looking tonguetied and lockjawed.

He ignored the regular spiel and put in a lot of stuff that made Stronguyus stand with his mouth as wide open as the Brooklyn Bridge. According to Mr. Clicker, Stronguyus was a prince who ran

away from home, having been converted to democracy, and who had developed his great muscles in order to overthrow his government in the near future.

When Mr. Clicker had concluded, he hopped off the platform, extracted a mirror from his vest pocket, and gave his face the once-over. He patted his hair as if it was a rich uncle or something, and didn't seem to worry who might be looking. Talk about vanity! Say, that beezark had Becky Sharp looking as dull as a barn door!

When he hit Flesho's platform that dame was fixed up like a Mardi Gras and blushing like twenty dollars' worth of roses. She gave the powder puff a little more exercise and pulled a smile on Fenwick that would have made Marc Antony think that Cleopatra was dead all over.

"I always enjoy lecturing on Miss Flapper," began Mr. Clicker, putting his arm upon her neck. "She's just as good-natured as a pretty lady should be, and a marvel of erudition and decorum."

Oh, boy! I saw right away that he knew the dictionary by heart, including the pictures and the maps. He went on in that riddle lingo for about five minutes longer, gave Mayme a farewell pat on the back, slanted his mirror, and then hopped up to Skeletino.

Jimmie gave him the elevator look and seemed undecided about the best way to send Fenwick to the next world. And when Mr. Clicker got an eye-ful of Skeletino, his smile went down like a busted thermometer. Jimmie had a grip on his cane as if it were the United States Treasury, while his face looked as peeved as a caged parrot in front of a biscuit factory.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Fenwick, standing as far away from Jimmie as possible, "we are presenting on this platform Skeletino, the man who gave the designer of the toothpick his inspiration. He weighs exactly thirty-eight pounds—all below his neck—and is chiefly noted for vanity. Now, for the benefit of the single ladies in the audience, I wish to state in behalf of this—er—human exclamation point, that he is a bachelor. So, girls, if you're looking for a husband who would come in handy as an ornament for the mantelpiece here's your chance. And now—"

Zam! Jimmie biffed Mr. Clicker over the bean with the cane and then sat down in disgust. The audience thought it was a little framed-up comedy and roared its approval.

“As I was saying, ladies and gentlemen,” went on Fenwick, as if nothing more than a fly had hit him, “Skeletino is perfectly harmless and possesses a pleasant temper.” After which he lopped off the platform and went on with the show.

V.

DURING the next two days everything was as quiet as the Battle of the Marne with Russia thrown in as an olio. Believe me, the presence of Mr. Fenwick Clicker stirred up enough trouble to satisfy the Marines for life.

It figured up like this: Stronguyus was strong for Queen Babess, but Miss Casey was weak for Stronguyus. Reason: F. Clicker. Next, as the barbers mumble, Skeletino was keen for Flesho, but Miss Mayme Doodleday Flapper didn't know he had been born. Reason: Ditto. And to make things worse, as the cook said throwing garlic into the soup, Fenwick refused to give Babess a tumble, but paid a million dollars' worth of attention to Flesho. He would spend more time upon her platform than any of the others, and when he would get around to Skeletino he would slip that poor beezark enough verbal wallops to make Job take up boxing.

It did not take me long to figure that storm clouds were about to gather over the whole works, so I decided to keep my mouth shut and my eyes open.

On Friday, just before we opened for the afternoon, Emerson Dreem came dashing on to the lot with a couple of movie camera men, and he had a smile on his face that disturbed his ears.

“Howdy, Doc!” he chirped. “I am now about to demonstrate once more that I'm the world's best press agent.

“Behold! You see before you the representatives of the *Flicker Weekly*, shown every week in every movie house in the country. You know, stuff like ‘Mayor Halfoff Lays Corner Stone for New Cheese Factory at Flookadoodlebergh,’ et cetera. Get the idea, Doc? Now, just shut those handsome eyes of yours and imagine ‘A Day With the Move-A-Long Greater Circus and Side Show,’ flashed across the screen. Great stuff, hey?”

Well, the camera birds breezed into the tent and began to “shoot” everything in and out of sight. When they “shot” Flesho, Fenwick had his arm around her neck as if he owned her, while she

smiled up at him as if he could buy out Rockefeller and hire Morgan for a footman.

Believe me, I sure felt sorry for poor James Cicero Swatt. When they reached Jimmie, he had a face on him that could have chased the Germans out of Belgium with a single glance. When Babess' turn came, she was dolled up enough to make a movie star go back to the glove counter for life.

Well, after the movie birds “shot” everything but the cat, they blew out, telling us to watch for the pictures in the theaters. Dreem was all puffed up like a dozen toy balloons and didn't care who noticed it.

VI.

AFTER the show that night, the Battle of Vanities was heard all over the lot. Babess was as sore as an elephant after muffing a peanut because friend Fenwick didn't pay any more attention to her than if she had been a Mexican dime; Stronguyus was peeved below zero owing to Miss Casey's infatuation for Mr. Clicker; while Skeletino was so plumb mad that he seemed ready to eat fried bullets for lunch.

“Say, Doc,” he croaked to me that night, “I don't wanna hurt anybody, but if that big ham don't stop fussing around Mayme, I'm gonna disarrange his looks! Why, to think she'd turn me down for that simp! Ain't it cruel, Doc; huh? And he's thick, too. I bet every time he scratches his dome he gets a handful of marble dust!”

And the song of Stronguyus sounded like this: “Y'know, Doc, the only thing that stops me from bouncing a stake off that sissy's dome is that I ain't got no use for electric chairs! Why, if I just tapped him with this paw of mine the insurance company would be out some change. Not that I'm jealous, y' understand; but when a feller tries to steal a chap's girl right in front of his face, I'm goona declare war!”

Well, sir—or ma'am—things went along nice and quiet like until Saturday morning, and then you would have thought that Mars had hit the earth for a homer! I had gone up to the main drag to see if it was possible to buy a pair of shoes without paying a handful of diamonds for them, and when I got back I saw from a distance a delegation of wild folks waiting for me, the same belonging to the side show.

I could see Skeletino ambling around like a

chicken in a cloud-burst, while Stronguyus seemed to be pacing him. Queen Babess was jawing with Princess Mahulogoo—the past, present, and future dame—and I thought they were discussing ways and means to hang someone without trial.

“Hey, Doc!” shouted Stronguyus as I rambled up. “You’ve got something to worry about, believe me!”

“What’s disturbing you?” I inquired. “Did you lunatics just get notice that the world was going to stop working, or something?”

“Listen, Doc!” squeaked Skeletino, grabbing my arm. “Flesho has went! Flesho has went! And say, Doc, that big stiff stole my girl!”

“If there’s anyone around here who hasn’t gone nutty, will he or she kindly step out and explain?” I asked, wondering what was what.

“That’s me!” chirped Dreem. “And I wish to inform you on behalf of the Move-A-Long Circus Side Show that the same is now out one fat lady and a lecturer. Where they have sped I knoweth not! That’s all, Doc. Now start to worry!”

And start to worry I did! Losing the fattest girl in the world, along with a good lecturer, isn’t my idea of a good joke. For a while I thought friend Fenwick was playing us a little trick just to get Skeletino to quench his thirst with some carbolic; but when night came on and the missing stars failed to shine, I began to do enough thinking to make Darwin look brainless.

VII.

WHEN we sloughed that night for the last time in Lazuma, there was still no Flesho or Fenwick in sight. The next stand was at Mount Ballam, twenty miles west of Lazuma, and in the same state—both mentally and physically.

The first day at Mount Ballam went by, and the lost ones were still gone. The same on the second. Skeletino would have lost weight worrying about Mayme, if he had any to spare, but he did the best he could by moping around as if the world had fallen on him. Babess kept up a rapid-fire chatter about what she thought of a nice-looking chap like Fenwick running away with a female balloon, while Stronguyus was tickled silly that his girl

wasn’t the one who breezed away with the handsome lecturer.

Then, suddenly, like the well-known bolt from the sky, the mystery was solved! I was sitting on the bally stand on the third morning with Bryan G. Zing, my outside talker, when Dreem came ambling up with the solution in his hand.

“Here’s a letter for you, Doc!” he chirped. “Maybe it’s some dope about Flesho.”

Dreem guessed it! I read the letter aloud:

HON. Doc RAMBLE, care of Move-A-Long Greater Circus, Mt. Ballam, Montana.

My DEAR Doc: The undersigned desires herewith to apologize profusely for kidnapping one Mayme Doodleday Flopper and wishes to make the following confession:

Having the honor of being the star actor of ‘Marvelous Pictures,’ he decided to assist his company to procure the fattest lady in the world to be used in a gigantic photoplay named ‘Under the Marquee,’ which is destined to be the greatest romance of circus life ever produced.

As the scenario demanded nothing less than the fattest lady in existence, he volunteered to obtain her at any cost. Learning that the aforementioned lady was under contract with the Move-A-Long Greater Circus, he decided to use his wits in order to add her to the cast. Noting your ad in *The Showmen’s Gazette*— But why explain more to an intelligent man?

Miss Flopper will return to you at Mt. Ballam next Friday. She says that she always wanted to be a movie star, so don’t be too severe with her when she rejoins you.

In conclusion, the undersigned apologizes once more for his indiscretion—although he admits he’s clever—and sends his best regards to all—including the Toothpick. Yours for pep,

FENWICK CLICKER.
alias LESTER LOVEWELL.
Woofgus, Iowa.

P.S. By the way, Doc, those scenes taken by the *Flicker Weekly* (?) at Lazuma turned out great! Regards to your clever press agent.

“Beg pardon, gents,” chirped Zing, as soon as I finished reading; “but what was it that Barnum said about one being born every minute?”

“Yeah!” growled Dreem, scratching his ear. “I guess Doc and me musta been born on time!”