

Mr. Feeny's Social Experiment

A Story of the Seed that Fell Upon Good Ground

By VAUGHAN KESTER in the American Magazine

On the street some one had handed Mike Feeny an oblong of pasteboard. Mr. Feeny stoked with the Gulf & Mexican Transportation Line.

"Is it a ticket to a show?" he asked, removing his pipe.

"It is; go on in and enjoy yourself." And the donor laughed. He was a pleasant-looking young fellow in evening dress, much like the young fellows Mr. Feeny sometimes saw on the awning-covered promenade deck.

"I'm beholden to you," said he, being a person of manners when sober.

And pocketing his blackened pipe he strode into the brilliant foyer of the Music Hall where the many lights fully disclosed him as a stoop-shouldered man of large muscular development, clothed in respectable shore-going garments recently purchased at a bargain of a Jewish gentleman on the river front. A great shock of violently red hair formed an aureole about his long sad face, and the drooping ends of a blonde mustache reached well back toward the freckled lobes of his ears. Mr. Feeny was strictly Irish, with the large potentialities of his race.

Now Mr. Feeny did not know that the International Congress of Economics had assembled there to give expert testimony, and charting a careful course in new shoes that pinched somewhat, he followed the trickle of well-dressed humanity into the building, where an usher showed him to an aisle seat in the last row of orchestra chairs. The orchestra was finishing a classic prelude. This first attracted Mr. Feeny's attention. It was displeasing to his musical tastes, and he remarked in a husky whisper to the gentleman on his left.

"Say, buddy, them fiddles is on the bum—"

"Hush!" said the gentleman raising a warning finger.

"What for should I hush?" demanded Mr. Feeny. "Cheese it yourself!"

Feeling the incident closed, Mr. Feeny's glance shifted in the direction of the stage, where a number of men and women were seated in a wide half circle.

"'Tis a white-faced minstrel show! But oh, heavens, ain't them girls the hard-featured huzzies?" thought Mr. Feeny.

A gentleman had arisen and was making a few introductory remarks, the exact drift of which was lost on Mr. Feeny, but as he subsided, his place was taken by another gentleman who smilingly acknowledged the decorous ripple of applause his name had evoked. He commenced to speak and Mr. Feeny gave him his undivided attention.

"He's a grand flow of words. I wonder he don't choke," was his mental comment.

Eventually he became aware that he was listening to an account of the decay of the cottage industries of France. Laboriously following the speaker he possessed himself of this concrete fact in segments and was moved to instant contempt of the speaker's conclusions. He had never noticed this decay in industry; his personal observations led him to believe that while jobs were sometimes hard to secure, there was always plenty of work after you got them.

He prepared to quit that spot with expedition, since he felt that any more economics would constitute a surfeit. But as he slid from his chair, the first gentleman advanced again to the centre of the stage, and Mr. Feeny caught a name he knew, the magical name of MacCandlish.

"I'll see the next turn," he told himself, as amidst a perfect storm of applause a cheerful little man of a portly presence approached the footlights. "It's him all right, I seen him onct through the bull's-eye window of the smoking room afore the mate cussed me out forward,—and him worth his hundred millions!" Mr. Feeny breathed hard.

There was the hush of expectancy. The little man smiled kindly, tolerantly, while the lights seemed to cast a golden halo about him.

"It is my privilege to appear before this Congress to speak on the uses of wealth," he began in a soft purring voice. "And I only regret that I have not had the leisure in which to prepare a paper on so interesting a theme. However—a few thoughts occur to me—"

Mr. MacCandlish paused for a brief space, and then once more that kindly voice flowed across the footlights. "It has always been my conviction that those who have lacked the opportunity to examine the operations of wealth are frequently led astray. In the first place, riches are invariably the direct result of great economic services undertaken for the good of mankind!"—and thus launched, Mr. MacCandlish began to deal not with the dead and dry bones of theories and panaceas, but with the living actualities of trade and production.

"Ain't it grand what the likes of him does for the likes of me!" thought Mr. Feeny in a pause, and then again that soft

another may have? A little better shelter, perhaps, more costly clothes, and his three meals a day!"

"'Tis true," thought Mr. Feeny. "They'd bust if they et oftener, the way they feed; and as for clothes, I've seen their lady friends with far less on than a workin' man's wife'd think decent."

Mr. Feeny had entered that building a rather heedless person who got drunk at every port of call, and who knew the inside of every calaboose in every flea-bitten center of civilization along the Caribbean, but he was to quit it a groping intellectualist with a germ lodged in his brain that was to fructify.

Mr. Feeny boarded the Orinoco of the Gulf & Mexican Transportation Line a chastened spirit. His last hours ashore, and the last of his wages, had been spent in a second-hand book shop where he had acquired three books which under various titles dealt with the burning question of why the other fellow happens to have it

survived the days of heavy toil that were his portion.

"But I've read hotter stuff," he told himself, one black night when he had been at sea ten days. He lay in his bunk and listened to the heavy seas break under the Orinoco's quarter. This was varied by mighty shivers when the racing screw fanned the air. And then suddenly it was as if tons and tons of water with the weight of lead, and driven by some vast power, had dropped on the Orinoco. Mr. Feeny sprang from his bunk. His first instinct was to rush for the deck, but thoughts of his mates in the stoke-hole sent him down the iron ladders that gave access to the vitals of the ship. As he gained the engine-room, the stokers burst out of their steel-walled pen, and after them came a rush of steam.

"All out?" roared Feeny.

"All out," someone bellowed in return, and they began swarming up the ladders, Feeny leaping from round to round in advance. At last spent and breathless they issued into the black night.

Then came a second shock. A mighty sea lifted the Orinoco, three thousand tons of steel and wood, and tossed her like a cork against something that did not yield to the terrific impact. Mr. Feeny picked himself up from among his fellows.

"She's aground—and no thanks to her!" he bawled.

"The crew's gone with the boats!" said someone in his ear.

"Is that you, Tom Murphy? Let's see what's come of the millionaires!"

Mr. Feeny, chastely garmented in an under shirt, and with a wind-blown halo of red hair, invaded the smoking room. His mates, naked to the waist and grimy from their toil, but showing patches of white skin here and there where the waves had touched them, slouched at his heels. They found that capital was just getting on its feet. MacCandlish, his ruddy cheeks the color of Carrara marble, was crawling out from under a table where he had been thrown; the others of his party were variously scattered about the room.

"Yer left," said Feeny, dispassionately. "Like us, yer left—for the Captain's gone with his crew. I'd recommend you lifted the large armchair off the stomach of the fat gentleman on the floor in the corner, he's breathing hard and quite purple," and Mr. Feeny having thus delivered himself, withdrew with his mates.

"'Twas a shame for the captain to leave 'em. I hope he drowns—"

said Feeny. "For duty's duty—which reminds me that I'm the oldest man in the stoke-hole with more tons of coal to my credit than you'll equal even if your given length of days, so I'll serve notice on ye, one and all—I'm skipper!"

A wan light was lifting out of the east.

It spread over the tossing seas and under the low, ragged clouds that the gale sent hurrying into the south.

"There's land!" cried Mr. Feeny. Peering through the saline reek of the storm, they saw first a narrow spit of land, and here and there a stunted palmetto. Then as the light spread, higher ground, dense with a tropic growth; while beyond was the sea again, a long restless line of the blue that backed against the horizon.

Mr. MacCandlish and his friends issued from the saloon and worked their way along the bulwark to the group of stokers.

"Well?" said the millionaire, and he addressed himself to Feeny.

"I'm thinking, sir, we'd best leave the old hooker when the sea ca'ms down a bit. Yonder's one of the lifeboats hanging to its davits. Presently we'll h'ist it over the side and go ashore," said Feeny.

"Then you don't think we are in any imminent peril?" asked Mr. MacCandlish.

"That feelin' you got comes mainly from an empty stomach," said Mr. Feeny, soothingly. "Here, Tom Murphy! you see if you can get these gentlemen their breakfast." He himself went below and accumulated a pair of trousers.

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KING GEORGE AND QUEEN MARY

Who are on their way home to England from the Durbar at Delhi

voice opened up fresh regions for him.

He saw that what Mr. MacCandlish called the law of supply and demand,—which he seemed to hold in the very tenderest regard,—regulated things. He saw too that millionaires were only far-sighted individuals who had mastered the fact that what the world tossed aside today it would urgently need tomorrow, and garnered this waste, exacting a small margin of profit for the service.

"It's great!" Mr. Feeny told himself in a spent whisper. "I can go somewhere as far as I can get, and raise things—no matter what—and then one of these here capitalists comes along and says: 'Feeny, me boy, how are your crops? I've one end of a thousand miles of railroad track at your front gate for to haul 'em away with.' No wonder they're well paid—'tis right they should be—I begrudge 'em nothing."

"And after all"—it was Mr. MacCandlish speaking—"let us see what actual advantages the millionaire has, what does his money buy him in excess of what

all; a condition that is much older than political economy, just as language is older than grammar. Now the Orinoco, newly scraped and painted as to state-rooms and gilded saloons where the eye and foot of Mr. Feeny never penetrated, had been chartered for a mid-winter cruise. Mr. Feeny heard this directly from one of his mates, Tom Murphy, who had it from an oiler, who had it from the second assistant engineer.

"It's a party of magnates," he explained. "We're to have close on to a billion dollars aboard—live weight, you understand. MacCandlish, the big railroad man—you've heard of him in the papers, Feeny—is one of the bunch, and they've got a Protestant bishop along—but I don't think much of the likes of him!" In theory, at least, Mr. Murphy was an ardent churchman.

"For what are they usin' this old hooker?" demanded Feeny.

"They're goin' down to have a look at mines in Mexico," said Murphy.

Mr. Feeny's first keen lust for wisdom