

The Made Man

Story of a Weakling Who Came to Know His Own Worth

By JOHN HOLDEN

THE town band had blared and blustered through the first half of the weekly concert and the thirsty musicians were seeking liquid refreshment—some, clamorously, at the Golden West bar-room, others more politely boisterous at the soda-fountains.

Men in shirt-sleeved undress and women in non-sleeved full dress sauntered up and down Main Street absorbing the cool of the evening. Bevy and coveys of giggly girls loosed ripples of silvery laughter on the caressing air. Youthful gallants, self-consciously taking a tentative dip into the swirls of feminine society, courageously annexed a shy charmer here and there and proudly piloted her past timid and envious companions into a laughter-ringing ice-cream dispensary. On the stone steps of the Golden Rule Grocery, directly underneath the open window of Judge Morgan's office, the customary gang of tobacco-chewing rowdies swapped dubious yarns and planned small-town devilry.

The judge and I were chatting idly, scantily cognizant of the hoodlums below, when two voices suddenly raised in altercation leaped to our attention.

"Yessir, Bull—I'll bet the drinks you can't cut Milton Cherry out!"

"Got yuh, kiddo. A schooner o' suds wouldn't go so worse—eh, fellows?" The kingpin of local rowdyism eyed an approaching couple with no excess of pleasurable anticipation. "Believe me, though, a guy earns a drink when he braces a skirt like that."

"Stay with your bet, Bull; don't get cold feet."

"Me? You watch! Your Uncle Dud's some masher when he gets going good." Bull Wilson burlesqued a careful toilet and waited for the approaching couple to draw abeam.

"There's a young man that illustrates a point in psychology," observed the judge. "Milton Cherry's mental and physical equipment is as sound as any young fellow's, and yet he's been a butt for ridicule ever since he was a little shaver. Do you know why?"

I acknowledged my ignorance.

"Because his mother—poor, foolish woman—couldn't bear to clip his long, golden curls the day she first sent him to school. Of course, his schoolmates nicknamed him 'Baby' on the spot. The name stuck like a swarm of mosquitoes at a summer resort. The natural result soon followed. They say that at first he showed some spirit—tried to whip his tormentors—but he was smaller than they and pretty soon he became a baby in fact as well as in name. You see what he is to-day. He's grown so accustomed to being called a baby and a coward that he thinks he is a coward and slinks around taking the kicks and abuse of everybody."

The object of the judge's derogation slouched rather than promenaded up Main Street in company with a negligent and negligible young woman. Birdie Cramp was a good girl, but a young man of parts would hardly subsist on ten cent lunches in order to buy flowers for her; and, at that, gossiping sisters were wont to affirm that she had set her snares for the lowly Milton only after a fruitless attempt to enslave a more exalted gallant.

As the couple neared the wagering corner coterie, Bull Wilson advanced with clumsy, cap-doffing courtesy. "I got something to tell you, Birdie," he smirked, insinuating his husky frame between the girl and her escort. "Let's walk up street."

BIRDIE hesitated, obviously pleased at the star third baseman's attention, but with a nervous glance at the abashed Milton.

"I—I don't know as we want your company," stammered the latter, cowering from his own temerity.

"That's the talk, Milton! That's tellin' him where he gets off!" The spectators tensed forward, gleefully hopeful of sanguinary action.

"I want to speak to you about the dance Tuesday night," lied Bull. Birdie's eyes must have signalled assent, for a sudden shift of his broad shoulders staggered the slight and unathletic Milton into the gutter; and the victor sauntered off with the silly girl, wigwagging a triumphant hand behind his back.

"You big boob! You coward! Ain't you got no spunk at all?" blazed the loafers in disappointed derision. One of them pushed the rejected one toward another. The receiving tormentor relayed the victim to a comrade. Buffeted back and forth like a medicine ball, his derby pulled down over his eyes, the victim of his own pusillanimity disappeared around the corner, still harried by his loud-voiced and strong-armed persecutors.

"It's a shame," I said.

"It's not!" snapped the judge. "It's what any milk-sop deserves. I wish I had the training of him."

As he spoke the door at the bottom of the stairs burst open and the object of our commentary scrambled up beyond the reach of his pursuers.

"Come here, Milton!" called the judge, and the boy scuffed into the room.

In a padded chair, Milton soon regained his usual stolidly acquiescent composure. "Now, my boy," commenced the judge, in a not unkindly voice, "tell me why you let that bully humiliate you."

"I—I couldn't help it, sir."

"Couldn't you fight him?"

Milton looked up, surprised. "I—I don't know—I guess I could."

"Then why didn't you?"

From his looks, I surmised that the idea had never occurred to Milton.

"Young man," went on the judge, kindly, "I have watched you grow up a butt for the ridicule and

again, 'I'd make a man of that boy if he'd give me half a chance.'

"By encouraging him to fight, like any common ruffian?" I doubted.

"Certainly. I suppose your method would be to stuff him with learning—as if mere learning would command the respect of his unlettered tormentors! That's the trouble with you theorizing school-masters—you minimize the value of physical force—as if force, bloody and brutal and cruel as Hell itself, is not the foundation upon which all civilization is reared. If war broke out how many regiments could you decimate with a volley of mathematics or Latin?"

"YOU can't change human nature," I replied. That young man is what he is and that's all there is to it. He's not the ambitious, pushing kind. What's the use of putting fool notions in his head? He's contented enough as he is—why not let him alone?"

"Because he's never had his chance."

"Men who amount to something make their own chances," I insisted.

"Not always. Your chance was furnished by your parents and so was mine," replied Judge Morgan.

Milton Cherry lived with his widowed mother, a weak-eyed, work-worn little woman who did cheap and inefficient dress-making in a down-at-the-heels cottage, the weed-strewn lot of which abutted on my own unpretentious premises.

One evening, a few days after the boy's interview with Judge Morgan, I was putting about the tool-and-trash-house at the rear of my lot when a curious sound from the Cherry shed, across the alley, came stealing in on my senses. It was a sort of dull rhythmic pounding, like a housewife hammering tenderness into a beeksteak; but much faster—the tattoo of a steam rivetter muffled to the dull tone of a distant drum. I listened—and the noise stopped. In a few seconds it recommenced—a rub-a-dub-dub that stopped and started irregularly as though the performer lacked control. Curiosity at length gaining the upper hand, I stepped across to the Cherry shed—to find the mild-mannered and unathletic Milton engaged in the belligerent exercise of punching the bag!

"I'm taking the judge's advice," he panted sheepishly, a new vivacity in his colourless voice. "Lincoln was a strong man—besides—it's good fun. Try it yourself."

At college, ten years before, I had acquired some adeptness in the use of such appliances. Milton was so appreciative of my instructions that before I fully realized what I was getting into I had promised to box with him when he received his set of gloves.

"I don't want to get into any fight," he insisted. "Only to be able to hit back if any one picks on me. I hope you won't mention this."

However, news of Milton's training soon leaked out, and, of course, the town toughs could put but one interpretation upon his actions. He was preparing to lick Bull

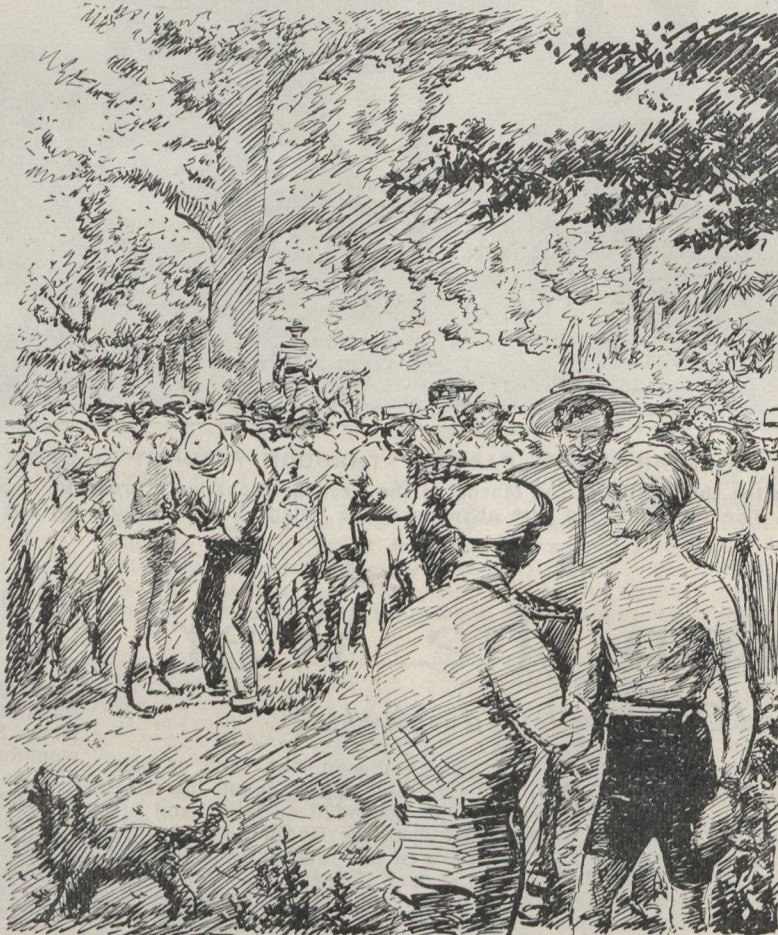
Wilson!

Immediately the hitherto lowly and despised young man became a personage. The juvenile population lionized him. The tough coterie guessed he possessed a little spunk after all. Even the adult population caught the contagion of the idea. Milton Cherry, the insignificant, the puny, the craven-hearted, the poor poltroon who had been a standing joke for years—Milton was training to whip the champion fighter of Watertown! In vain Milton protested that he entertained no such intention. The report spread faster than his denials; in fact, half his auditors disbelieved him, while the other half jeered his denial so vociferously that presently he allowed the report to go unchecked.

WOMEN and tender-hearted old gentlemen said it was disgraceful, the boy ought to be stopped; Bull Wilson would surely defeat and very likely would seriously injure him. There was not one of them, however, who did not accord Milton a hitherto lacking measure of respect, and their respect seemed to be making a new man of the boy. His diffidence and sour expression commenced to fade away. He acquired friends innumerable; most of them false ones, whose one object was to get him into a fight, a few of them sincere enough. His employer took him off the delivery waggon and put him behind the counter, where his rising notoriety and increasing affability brought some new trade, and he was even granted a slight increase in wages.

At his training quarters, as his shed was now

(Continued on page 25.)



"All the sports were on hand, as well as many who did not belong in that category."

tricks of boys not a bit stronger or smarter than yourself. Do you know why they treat you in that manner?"

"No, sir."

"It's because you let them!—let them!—do you understand? Now, Milton, I want you to turn over a new leaf. Fight them! That's the only way you can gain their respect. You can hold your own even with Bull Wilson if you train your muscles—and what if you are beaten? People will nevertheless admire your courage, you will gain their respect and your own self-respect, you will acquire the assurance to secure a better job than delivering groceries—in a word, you can alter your whole life, Milton, by fixing in your mind the belief that you are as good a man as any one."

Somewhat to my surprise, Milton listened with rapt attention. "You think I am?" he queried, his not unintelligent features seeming to light up with some new purpose.

"I know you are!" emphatically asserted his mentor. "Have you read the life of Abraham Lincoln?" he asked, arising and stepping over to his voluminous bookcase.

"No, sir."

"Then here it is. Read it and try to absorb the lesson it teaches—that the highest pinnacle of honour and service is not beyond the reach of even the most humble." The judge handed the book to Milton, shook his hand in cordial good-will, and bowed him out as courteously as though he were a rich client.

"By George!" he exclaimed, when we were alone