

Perkins' Harmonizer

Attuning Minds of Others to One's Own

By JAMES F. B. BELFORD

J AUGUSTUS PERKINS is an inventor. I do not object to this. I realize that every man has a right to select his own occupation, to build his own pathway to the stars, so to speak, but I do object, and with reason, when J. Augustus uses me to exploit his infernal contrivances. Yes, I know I am secretary of Perkins, Ltd., and the job is a good one, still I earned it.

About a month ago he came into my office, his hat on the back of his head, and a rather offensive air of success surrounding him. I requested him to put away his cigar, as my directors would not like it. I was secretary at that time of the Society for the Preservation of Posterity, and many of my directors were maiden ladies. In reply he leaned forward and tapped me on the chest.

"That's just it," he said, "that's just it. You give away too much to the opinions of others. You are ceasing to be a free man and becoming a slave. Cultivate your individuality." Resuming his first position he puffed heavily at his cigar.

"It's all very well," said I, "to talk of my individuality, but if Miss Grimes comes in and smells this smoke, I may be dismissed. I have to obey orders."

"You do not have to obey orders," replied Perkins. "I grant you that for centuries the rule has been for the strong to order, and the weak to obey. But a new era has dawned. Henceforth there will neither be ordering, nor obeying of orders. The words 'obey,' and 'command,' will become obsolete. The domestic, business, and social arrangements of life will proceed smoothly, and harmoniously. Intellectual co-operation will replace the present system of master and serf. Thanks to Perkins' Synchronic Telepathist and Infallible Harmonizer." His air was more offensive than ever.

"Just what," I answered quite shortly, "do you mean by that jumble?"

"This is what I mean," he replied, producing from his pocket something that looked like a metallic beetle with wire antennae. "There lies the key which unlocks the door of hope for the human race. That little instrument means the death-knell of all discord. Behold in it the precursor of the millennium!"

I looked at the thing, but could see nothing but metal and wires. I said so very frankly. Perkins was not confused.

He said, "I expected scepticism, but I am prepared to let the Harmonizer justify itself. Listen to me. You understand the principle of wireless telegraphy?"

I nodded. As a matter of fact I don't, but it does not to appear ignorant with Perkins, he loves explanations.

"Well, then," he continued, "what Marconi has done with aetheric vibrations, I have done with the subtler vibrations of the mind. With the Synchronic Telepathist in your possession, you attune the minds of those you meet to your own. That means they are in sympathetic accord with you. As you wish they wish. As you see a matter so they see it. Do you grasp the possibilities?"

He was holding the thing as he spoke, and whether it was the effect of the machine, or of Perkins' logic, I found myself believing thoroughly in the instrument. Before my mind vistas of wonderful possibilities opened out. The result was that I purchased a Harmonizer, and also took shares in the company he was forming.

One of the reasons that urged me to the investment was my love for Miss Gladys Jones. I had seen her for the first time six months before, and had thought of her almost continually since. Her father was one of the few gentlemen directors of our society, and sometimes she came in the carriage with him to the board meetings. Besides opening the door, and dusting a chair for her I had had no opportunities of declaring my passion. But if my love was secret, it was none the less sincere; and I hoped by the aid of the Harmonizer to bring about an understanding.

THAT afternoon Miss Grimes came to the office, as she sometimes did, to look over the letters, and arrange her work. She was one of our most active lecturers. Miss Grimes was tall and angular, of a severe and determined cast of countenance, and verging on the age of fifty. She went into the inner office, while I sat at my desk. My work for the day was finished, and idly I took the Har-

monizer from my pocket, and from studying it, began to daydream of love and happiness. How long I remained in this state I do not know, but I was aroused by the voice of Miss Grimes calling me. Even then I was struck by a different note in it. Usually it was loud, nasal, and if I may use the word, bossy. Now it seemed softer, more humanized. With the Harmonizer in my hand I went into the inner office.

Miss Grimes smiled most kindly, and asked me to draw up a chair beside her. She made some inquiries in a tentative manner, paying no attention to my replies. She seemed nervous, and embarrassed, blushing frequently, and hesitating in her speech. She would glance at me from under her eye-lashes, then away. A strange sensation came stealing over me. Miss Grimes ceased to appear the formidable creature she had heretofore been, and became pleasing, yes, lovable. She inclined her head toward my shoulder; unconsciously I placed my hand upon hers. In a moment we were clasped in each other's arms.

I have only a dim memory of that afternoon, but I know that we vowed eternal fidelity, and that our



Under the influence of Perkins' Harmonizer, the formidable creature became pleasing, even lovable.

wedding was set for the next week. Finally, after many embraces, we separated and I returned to my lodgings.

AS I walked away from the office, the glamour that had overtaken me began to disappear. Before I had gone six blocks, I realized fully what I had done. Here was I, Algernon Simkins, twenty-two years of age, solemnly pledged to marry a woman old enough to be my mother, and of a most uncertain temper. How could I endure the chaff of my friends? How could I sit opposite that face every morning at breakfast? How could I endure that acid tongue? I turned hot with shame and cold with apprehension. The thought of a lady pierced me like a knife. Heavens, what had I done? I rushed to my boarding-house and up to my room. Throwing myself on the bed, I wept.

There came a hesitating tap at the door. I knew the sound; it was Tootles, my landlady's husband, with the hot water. Calling on him to enter I renewed my bitter train of thought. In the midst of my flood of grief I felt a hand on my shoulder. Turning my head I saw Tootles, tears in his eyes, an expression of sympathetic sorrow on his face. In a voice broken with sobs, he tried to speak his feelings. I clasped his hand. We sat together on the edge of the bed. I spoke of my unfortunate position; he told me of the severity with which Mrs. Tootles treated him. I lamented

the fatal effect my appearance had wrought. He deplored the stringency of Mrs. Tootles' ideas as to pocket-money. Sadly, we agreed that we were waifs of misfortune, drifting on a sea of misery.

The sharp voice of Mrs. Tootles broke up our communion. Tootles turned away, giving me one last look of deepest sympathy. When he had gone my mood changed again. I was angry with myself for making a confidant of Tootles. I was angry with Tootles for intruding on my grief. I paced the room, my indignation growing hotter. Another tap, and Mrs. Tootles bounced in. My anger seemed to communicate itself to her. In a sneering way she apologized for Tootles. I sneered back that Tootles' actions were easily accounted for. In a moment we were at it, hammer and tongs. Her delivery was so rapid, and her utterance so vehement, that I was at a disadvantage. Still I made a few remarks as to her general appearance, the board which she provided, and her capacity in every way, which took effect. After a last scathing harangue, she departed, banging the door.

THE boot-boy brought me a telegram. It was brief. It was from Miss Grimes. It read as follows:

"Consider yourself discharged for insolence. Do not report at office again. Your salary will be sent by mail."

"I read this with mixed feelings. I had regained my liberty; but I had lost my job. But as a vision of Miss Grimes floated before my eyes, I threw the telegram into the air, and executed a *pas seul* of joy.

The room next to mine was occupied by a portly German professor of music, and his equally portly wife. Hearing the clatter I was making, they came to my door, the Professor carrying his violin. Instantly their faces lighted with a reckless happiness. The Professor tucked the violin under his chin and played a jig. Mrs. Professor, her arms a-kimbo, joined my break-down. Other boarders rushed to the scene only to join the revel. Up and down the hall, in and out of the rooms we danced, until the gong rang for dinner. That broke the spell. Warm and dishevelled, we made for the dining-room, Mrs. Professor panting, and ejaculating, "Ach Gott!"

I am extremely fond of roast goose; and Mrs. Tootles had provided one for this evening, flanked by a leg of pork. As soon as I saw the goose, I determined to make it the chief ingredient of my dinner. To my disgust everyone else did the same. The result was that each portion was very small, my own, owing, perhaps, to my late disagreement with Mrs. T., being infinitesimal. To add to my dissatisfaction, I saw Tootles, who waited at table, sneak a drumstick, wrap it in a napkin, and thrust it into his pocket. My dinner was spoiled, and I felt aggrieved. Each countenance at table indicated the same state of mind. Soon sharp things were said. Recriminations flew about. Even the Professor accused his wife of taking his bread. It was a most uncomfortable meal.

It has always been my custom to take a walk after dinner. This evening I discussed the matter with myself, and decided to follow my usual habit. I put on my hat and coat, and taking my stick sallied out. I strode along meditating on the strange events of the day. My mind reverted to the Harmonizer. I took it from my pocket, and watched the wire antennae quiver with the motion of my walking. The thing seemed to have a life of its own. There was something uncanny in its perpetual quiver. I thrust it into my coat-pocket, still holding it in my hand.

HANDSOME carriages dashed by loaded with gaily-dressed people, bound for theatre and opera. I pictured myself seated in one of them. In imagination I joined the festive rout, and revelled in their pleasures. One of the best-appointed of these drew up to the curb. A footman sprang down and opened the door. A head was thrust out which I recognized as that of Mr. Rufus Jones, one of our directors, and the father of Gladys. Cordially he invited me to enter, and in a moment I found myself sitting by Gladys, with Mr. and Mrs. Jones beaming at me from the other seat. We drove to the theatre where we occupied a box in the best tier. We had supper at Vandella's afterward. I left the carriage at 16th St. in a state of delirious happiness. Little did I dream of what would follow.

I had forgotten my latch-key and was forced to ring. Mrs. Tootles opened the door for me. She wore a highly-coloured dressing-gown that had seen better days, and a night-cap perched recklessly on the back of her head. The traces of our recent encounter still seemed to linger on her countenance. But as I stepped into the hall and closed the door,

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