

# *A Modern Comedy of Science*

By ISAAC R. NATHANSON

*The puzzling fourth dimension is no easy topic to deal with. Let the reader try to draw a four-dimensional object—it is not safe to say a four-dimensional solid. There is true difficulty in picturing it to our mental perception, but who can picture what is going on in the ether, or who can realize that there is such a thing. And is there? This story will bring you into the four-dimensional world, or would do so if you could understand the world of the tesseract.*

**A** MOST unusual announcement appeared in the leading dailies of the city. The amusing comments it afforded, perhaps more than its bizarreness, won for itself a prominent little square on the front pages of the newspapers. All had received an identical typewritten copy from an unknown source, and it read as follows:

**NOTICE TO ALL AUTOMOBILE DRIVERS**

Reckless driving must stop immediately. Anyone exceeding a speed limit of twenty-five miles per hour within the city limits, crashing red lights, or in any manner or form wilfully breaking the safety traffic rules, shall promptly suffer serious damage to his car.

THE UTOPIAN REFORMER.

The leading paper printed it under the facetious caption: "Drivers: Beware, or the Bogy Man will get you." And another: "Ye Reckless Drivers: Read it and weep."

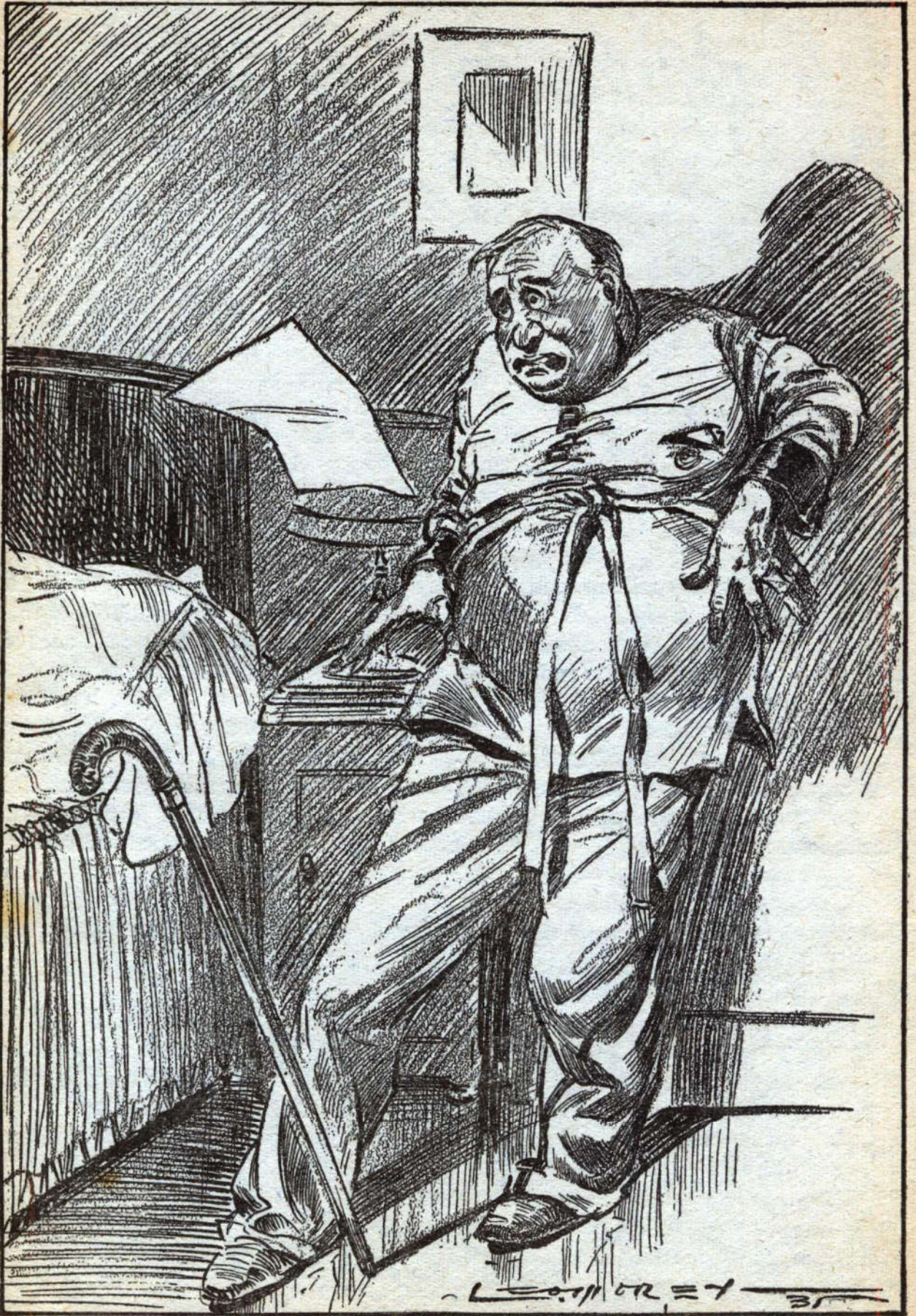
The local broadcasting station, which had also received a copy of the strange notice, decided to include it in its "Summary of the Day's News." The radio announcer chuckled as he delivered it.

John and Mary Citizen, turning the page, or twisting the radio dial, took the unheard of announcement according to his or her temperament; some with a smile, others with a growl; many thought it very odd. "What some cranks won't think of!" was a common reaction. An insignificant few wondered. In general, however, the odd notice thus broadcasted created considerable amusement, as well as wise-cracking by the perennial wise-crackers. And forthwith the notice was promptly forgotten.

A few days later brought another announcement, more definite in form and content, and which, again on account of its bizarreness, was once more given a prominent space, although headed with a humorous editorial twist. It read:

**WARNING TO ALL DRIVERS:**

The following will go into effect sharp at noon, Thursday, August the 1st: Anyone who fails to observe the common sense rules of safety, or drives at a speed faster than *twenty-five* miles anywhere within the city limits, or ignores traffic lights, or is reckless in any way whatsoever with a disregard for



*"To the astonished gaze of the mayor, a sheet of paper bearing the mayor's own insignia and resignation neatly typed, appeared out of the empty air."*

the life and limb of others, shall promptly suffer a smashed or disabled machine through an unseen agency.

THE UTOPIAN REFORMER.

Again it aroused more or less widespread comment, goodnatured and otherwise, on the part of the reading or listening public. A few timid souls, perhaps as many as you could count on the fingers of one hand, did indeed make a mental note to leave their precious vehicle of transportation inside the sacred precincts of their private garage, until the day announced should have passed safely by. And again, twenty-four hours later, it was all as promptly forgotten by everybody.

On July the 28th, that is, three days before the deadline, came a third and "Final Notice," which this time was given but scant mention in an obscure corner of one or two of the papers, while the rest refused to print it altogether.

"I say," exploded Clyde Hendricks, city editor of the *Daily World*, upon receiving the "Final Notice," "this is getting to be too good of a joke"; and promptly shifted the cigarette in his mouth, and as promptly thumped the crumpled typewritten notice into his already overstuffed waste-basket. "That for you!"

On second thought, Hendricks, with a mock groan and a twinkle in his eye, retrieved the crumpled piece of paper. "Hey, Jake!" to his star reporter. "Call Fitzhugh, will you? Got an assignment for him—the Utopian Reporter."

Jake looked up from his typewriter, glanced at his chief, and caught the drift. "T'hell you have. I'd call that a low-down, mean trick to play on that kid."

"Yep, I know. Got to have a little fun sometimes. Things been pretty

dull around here—no wars, murders, kidnaps, scandals—Call him."

Jake Hanson grinned and went out. "Fitzhugh!" rang his stentorian voice. "The chief wants you right away."

Bill Fitzhugh, a pink-faced, sandy-haired, very tall and thin young man, with two college years of journalism and one of science to his credit, flushed a girlish red, hesitated, then hastened to the city editor's office, visions of tramping around for another job tugging painfully at the back of his neatly barbered head.

Hendricks twirled around in his swivel chair, eyed the scared young reporter for a moment or two with great seriousness.

"Fitzhugh—" knitting his forehead and compressing his lips, as if he were about to say something of the greatest moment—"Fitzhugh, I've got an important assignment for you. Got to break you in on the big stuff, see? You've been talking a lot of science around here and giving your ideas of futuristic Utopias. Now show us what you can do. Go, find that guy who calls himself the Utopian Reformer. And mind you, we want a good story." Hendricks flicked the ashes from his cigarette and abruptly turned back to his desk.

"But—" stammered the nonplussed young fellow. "Where am I to go—how am I to find him? I—I—"

"Well, now, isn't that nice! Want me to lead you by the hand to him? Go find him—and don't come back till you do!"

"But—"

"Scram!"

The astonished young reporter ambled almost absent-mindedly out of the office, stood for a moment undecided, and was off.

"I'll say, that's a mean trick, Clyde," grinned Jake Hanson, "sending that kid off on such a wild goose chase."

## CHAPTER II

**A**UGUST the 1st arrived; a glaring sun, choking heat. There was nothing to indicate the day as different from others; the streets were clogged and jammed with their usual traffic. Perhaps it was the terrific heat, or perhaps it was that some drivers remembered the "crank" who had made the queer threats, and decided to show him up. At any rate, nearly everybody that hot day seemed bent on driving faster than usual, and paid less attention to traffic courtesies. An impish perverseness which we frail humans often evince when confronted with the unpleasant word "don't," somehow showed itself that day.

Be it said, however, in defence of the public, that everyone had quite forgotten the fact that the fatal August the 1st had arrived. The police kept a negligent eye for some dangerous "crank" or escaped "lunatic." Even Hendricks had forgotten about it, nor thought of the "wild goose chase" which in a prankful humor he had wished unto young Fitzhugh. Not even the creeping up of noon, the zero hour, was watched or heeded by the multitude.

But there was one person who awaited the zero hour with keen interest—Bill Fitzhugh. For several days now, uneasiness dragging his feet, he came and went from the offices of the *Daily World*, in fear of being called down by the city editor for his failure to track down the Utopian Reformer. If August 1st were only behind him. To Jake, who hailed him several times with a "found the

Utopian Reformer yet?" he mumbled a ferocious "No!" He had the uncomfortable feeling that he was being made the butt of some joke . . . Still, no one could be really sure with Hendricks, sometimes a jokester, sometimes a veritable martinet. And so the only thing to do was to spend every available hour prying into every unlikely place for some possible clue to this self-styled Utopian Reformer—to perdition with him, if there were such.

The first intimation anyone had that the Utopian Reformer was anything but a myth, was a series of explosions which occurred at stated intervals up and down a stretch of Washington Street, one of the main traffic arteries of the city. Thither young Fitzhugh sped as fast as his long legs and a car could carry him. Taking his station at an important crossing, the excited reporter awaited developments. He did not have long to wait.

A machine that looked as if fresh from the assembly line came roaring down Washington Street, zipped across the intersection at the modest speed of only fifty-two—seventeen miles faster than even the speedy limit set by the city ordinance. A sudden flash—a bang! The nice-looking, fast going car stuttered, careened toward the curb and stopped, hopelessly out of commission.

Another came purring pleasantly along, the driver blithely ignoring the red light turned against him. Another flash and a bang—the car leaned crazily to one side, a rear wheel smashed awry.

Still another driver, insisting on his right of way, barely avoided several children in the act of crossing the street, swerved and bore down without slackening up on an old lady who had been slow in negotiating the wide

thoroughfare, forcing her to jump for her life. A hundred feet more, and he, too, stopped with a smashed motor.

From then on, an almost more or less steady string of crashes followed one upon the other. Fitzhugh rushed frantically about here and there, all expectant and agog with the "big story" being played. He saw and heard the frequent explosions, the crashes, the dismay of the drivers—as if small bombs were being heaved at the transgressors' autos. But it was exasperating not to be able to get a single glimpse of the perpetrator, or perpetrators—it seemed impossible for it all to be the act of a lone individual—of these punitive crashes. Nor, question onlookers as he would, did he gain the least shred of enlightenment to add to his own observations.

By six o'clock that afternoon, the entire street, miles long, was littered and blocked with hundreds of disabled vehicles. Some stood near the curb, some stood sideways, others in the middle of the street, cars leaning this way and that. The din of honking horns, the blocked and slow moving traffic, the cursing and swearing drivers, the perplexed and exasperated officers giving useless orders, rendered the entire scene almost a comedy. From one end of the street to the other, helpless machines of all kinds blocked the way, waiting to be towed away: old timers, stately limousines and snappy roadsters, sedans, burly trucks, luxurious busses—all had disobeyed some traffic rule. Outside of property damage, however, no one had been personally injured.

A great outcry arose, and a hunt started for the "dangerous lunatic." The public, which had blithely disregarded the notices of the Reformer, now severely criticized the police department for not taking due precau-

tions against such a "dangerous person." The chief and his subordinates racked their brains. They were quite willing to arrest someone—anybody, anywhere—but whom, what?

The following day Washington Street was deserted as if smitten with a pestilence. Some cars of ancient vintage were still standing where they had been struck by the unseen force, not worth the cost to their owners to have them hauled away. "They ought to rename this street, 'Junk Avenue'," a wise-cracking observer remarked.

Under mammoth headlines appeared: "Recklessness Gets a Severe Lesson." And, "Authorities Negligent in Preventing Outbreak of Dangerous Lunatic." Another news-gathering institution, championing the inalienable rights of motorists to their highways, printed a scorching editorial: "The Public Must Be Protected."

Back in the editorial offices of the *Daily World*, the city editor, discomfited at his own laxness in taking the Utopian Reformer's threats so lightly, was all in a rage. The joke, which in a whim of fun he had sought to pull off on the cub reporter, was now on him. It had never occurred to him to take the thing seriously. Nor did the razzing he had got from the angry editor-in-chief, add any relief to his feelings; and so right down the line, one sore spot after another was trodden upon.

He bawled over the phone to Jake Hanson, the star reporter. "Go bring in that story."

Bill Fitzhugh had phoned in the exciting news, but not a word of the Reformer's identity. He strode into the office late that afternoon, tired and exhausted, keenly aware of his failure, and fearful of getting raked over the coals by the temperamental Hendricks. He almost jumped every time some-

one called his name. But to his relief, the city editor, who rushed past him several times, ignored him completely.

**T**WO days later, the Utopian Reformer shifted his activities to another busy thoroughfare. Habits are hard to break, and public memory can be horribly short. The scenes of the previous day were repeated. In a few hours this street, too, became clogged with broken, disabled machines. Cars that went too fast were usually ruined in the engine; other infractionists of safety usually suffered bent or broken wheels. Tempers generally were a total loss.

The repair facilities of the city's garages were strained beyond the limit. "It's an ill wind . . ." became for these folk an actuality, and they reaped a golden harvest.

By this time the authorities were thoroughly aroused. The papers came out with screaming extras; the news spread like wild-fire. Some timid folks became afraid to take their cars out altogether.

Another notice was received from the mysterious sender, and this time was given front page prominence without facetious embellishments. It read:

"Notice to all careful drivers: No harm will befall anyone driving with care and sense. Limit twenty-five miles an hour. Others beware. THE UTOPIAN REFORMER.

During the course of the next week or two, many other busy thoroughfares went through the same experience in greater or lesser degree. Many luckless drivers learned to their sorrow that the Utopian Reformer meant what he said—and had the power to enforce it, despite prodigious efforts to apprehend him. His activities ranged all over the city. He seemed to

cover unbelievably long distances in a short time. No reckless driver failed to draw the Reformer's punishment. Wiseacre drivers, used to taking chances, suddenly found themselves through with their joy-rides. His ubiquity was phenomenal. Around schools and playgrounds, automobilists were particularly careful, for in their vicinity the Reformer's venom seemed to be the strongest. Woe to any motorist who failed to give a child the right of way.

The greatest man-hunt in the history of the city proved without avail. The police smarted under the public criticism of their inability to catch the offender; and the daily papers, forgetting their original light vein, lashed them unmercifully. The poor officers did not know which way to turn. Mostly they were kept busy helping stubbornly guilty culprits push their smashed cars out of the middle of the streets. Every man was on duty; extras sworn in; and even the American Legion enlisted to help run down the Reformer, but all without the slightest clue to his identity.

"Seen the Utopian Reformer yet?" the reporter maliciously threw at Jake Hanson, every time they met.

"Go ask Hendricks," was the growling flare-back.

Before long, every driver of a car or truck went his way, meticulously observing the rules of safety, leaning almost backward to do so. Reckless driving became rarer and rarer and practically disappeared—perhaps because every reckless driver's machine had been smashed or disabled. Everybody joined the "Traffic Obstructionist Club," as the slower moving traffic was nicknamed. Accidents almost disappeared, and the Monday papers had to find other matter to take the place usually given over to injured

and dead over the week end. An occasional punishing explosion brought the state of affairs back to those who forgot themselves, back to their fading memories. Traffic courtesies in the city around became a balm to the heart and a gladness to the ear. And for the first time since the advent of that useful vehicle called the automobile, mothers could send their children to school without a heart-tearing fear gnawing inside.

### CHAPTER III

**T**HE vexatious and potentially dangerous situation brought about by careless motorists having been satisfactorily disposed of—at least to the apparent satisfaction of the Utopian Reformer—that strange individual promptly switched his activities to other matters; to wit: the municipal government.

In that particular field of social progress, things had not been going so well. The political, and hence the governmental situation which existed in the city and county, was a soreness to the eye and a stench to the nostrils. There was a great deal of political wire-pulling and much graft, even in high places. There was gross inefficiency and wastage of the public funds, to an extent which, had they been serving a private corporation, would have landed many of those public officials out of a job quicker than a cat's wink. Many hangers-on were on the payroll whose chief work consisted in calling for their pay-vouchers. Taxes were the highest of any city in the state, and going higher. The city was overrun with vice and flagrant violators of the law, much of it under the protection of those higher up or lower down. Several near-scandals, involving "leading Citizens," were bare-

ly hushed up, and a goat made of some minor officials. And if the legislative and administrative powers were well below the Utopian ideal, the judicial branches were not impartial nor Solomonic in their decisions. One judge had been impeached only recently.

And so, like the proverbial bolt from the blue, the Invisible Reformer began at the top, that is to say, with the far and widely known mayor himself. This dignified, accomplished and jolly gentleman had been elected by the local political machine. Though highly efficient and capable in his self-furthering labours, he was very incapable and lax in the performance of his public duties, to say the least. He winked at political machinations. In private life a wealthy contractor, it was more or less an open secret that he profited greatly in the distribution of patronage, even though barely within the law, and in a few cases, dangerously without. The mayor, John B. Williams, was a perennially smiling gentleman of about fifty, jovially fat to the tune of 280 pounds, with ample paunch and generous folds under his smiling chin. He waved the flag at patriotic meetings, was frequently called upon to address the Rotarians, Daughters of the Revolution, visiting conventions, and other notable gatherings.

This leading choice for the highest honors of a great city, received a letter one day, making an unheard of demand in no mincing words.

*Right Honorable John B. Williams, Mayor of our city:*

It pains me to advise you that you have been grossly inefficient in the performance of the high duties to which your trusting fellow citizens have elected you. Your failure to live up to your campaign pledges has been a shame and a disgrace. Other things I shall not mention—you know what they are.

This is to serve notice that unless you re-

sign voluntarily from your office within five days from date, giving any reason you wish, you shall be forced to do so.

THE UTOPIAN REFORMER.

On receiving this letter, the honorable mayor rolled his eyes, puffed his cheeks, opened his mouth—letting his expensive cigar fall to the floor—and, to the shocked ears of the winsome stenographer who was taking dictations, exclaimed: "To hell with him;" and crumpling the offending missive in his chubby hand, threw it viciously into the waste basket, accompanying the act with a few expletives of a kind which the surprised young lady preferred not to interpret. On second thought, he stooped over with a grunting effort and retrieved the note. "Guess I'll turn this over to the police," he muttered to himself. Then, remembering the unsavory contents: "Guess I won't." The next day he quite forgot about it.

One evening, five days later, as the mayor was about to turn out his lights preparatory to retiring for the night, he was startled by a low, slightly muffled voice right in his room. He was alone, dressed in his pajamas, sitting on the edge of the bed which groaned beneath his huge weight.

HE fancied he was mistaken. The idea of any one in his room seemed absurd. An uneasy thought stirred within him . . . his physician's admonition regarding his enormous overweight. "Guess I'll have to reduce my diet; commencing to hear things," and reached for the electric switch. Again the same voice startled him, and he jerked his hand away from the switch as if he had touched something red hot.

"My dear Mayor Williams:" the voice began, this time quite close to him. "Do not fear. No harm shall be-

fall you, unless you choose to disobey my orders; in which case I regret to inform you that you will undergo a very painful ordeal—yes, painful and very unsuitable to your dignity."

Mayor Williams arose slowly to his feet on trembling legs, and stared in a ludicrous and frightened manner about the room. Clearly he doubted his own senses. "Who the devil are you? What is it you want?" Seeing nothing, and receiving no immediate reply, he made a heavy effort to look under the bed, but stopped, unable to make the incline.

"I am the Utopian Reformer," the voice presently replied. "You have chosen to disregard the warning which you received five days ago, and I have come in person to remind you of it. I feel certain that in the privacy of this room you and I shall come to a complete agreement without being disturbed—no, do not call out; it will do no good; merely delay our interesting parley."

"If it is my resignation you wish to discuss," said the mayor evasively, at the same time looking furtively around and edging toward the door, "see me to-morrow morning at my office—and let me see who you are."

"No, I've decided to settle this little matter of your office tenure right here and now." The mayor heard the door lock click and saw the key disappear as if by magic. "Better sit down and let us talk this over as friend to friend."

"And if I refuse?"

"In which case—er—well, as I said, its going to be a mighty unpleasant interview—painfully persuasive."

"Then show yourself as a man, whoever you are."

"No, thanks; I prefer my present incognito, which serves my purpose perfectly. Here, sign this written res-



ignation!" and to the astonished gaze of the mayor, whose eyes nearly popped out of his head, a sheet of paper bearing the mayor's own insignia and resignation neatly typed, appeared out of the empty air, right in front of his face.

"I say, this is pure witchcraft," the man's lips trembled in unison with his knees. "You cannot force me into this through your hocus-pocus trickery," and he made a sudden lunge for the door.

Without warning, a tough-looking hickory stick suddenly appeared as if by magic, curved violently through the air with a loud s-swish-sh, and finished up with its long stinging end in sharp and undignified contact with that portion of the body on which even a mayor has to sit. Another and another swish followed in rapid succession, somehow managing to find the same spot. The victim bellowed with rage and pain. In his scramble around the room to avoid the biting blows, which now came down in a perfect shower, the mayor's nether half of his pajamas slipped to the floor; and as he stooped to raise it up, the invisible wielder of the stick brought it down with resounding whacks on the now howling gentleman's anatomy, raising huge welts that were a caution to see. The belaboring continued with a monotonous, "Now will you sign!—now will you sign!"

Scared inmates of the house broke in the door. A strange, ludicrous sight met their eyes. Loud snickering broke from the servants. The mayor, sadly hampered by his fallen pajamas, was squirming around the room and rolling on the floor, yelling like a madman; a swishing stick, as if wielded by unseen hands, was punishing his bare legs and other parts till they were red-raw; a voice from nowhere repeat-

ing over and over in company with the strokes, "Now will you sign!"

The howling mayor broke past the shattered door, followed by the punishing stick which only redoubled its blows. He ran from room to room, by this time minus the embarrassing half of his pajamas; but no matter where he ran, up stairs or downstairs, he could not escape the terrible stick which followed him. Until exhausted and bleeding from many raw welts, he whimpered; "I'll sign. Please wait till to-morrow."

"Very well," a voice was heard to reply; "I'll see you to-morrow in your room promptly at the same hour. Do not try to evade me. You cannot do it."

The voice and the stick disappeared, and a groaning and inflamed mayor sought to make himself comfortable.

#### CHAPTER IV

**I**N the morning, Mr. Williams' secretary was advised over the phone that his Honorable was not feeling well, and would not be down to his office that day.

The news somehow leaked out in part; and Jake Hanson, smarting from the sarcastic flips thrown at him by the city editor for failing to unearth the Utopian Reformer, appeared promptly at the Mayor's home for an interview regarding the happenings of the night before.

"Nothing happened," snapped the mayor in a vicious mood, altogether unlike his usually smiling self.

"What does the Reformer look like?" came the innocent query from Jake.

"How in the devil do I know?" wrathfully. "Go meet him yourself," wincing with a suppressed groan.

Toward evening, his honor, John B. Williams, decided not to risk spend-

ing the night under his own roof. Moving stiffly he got into his waiting limousine and with a groan sat down gingerly on the edge of the softly upholstered seat. Cautioning his chauffeur to drive without jolting, he was driven to a down-town hotel, where he put up for the night.

In a comfortable room on an upper floor, the mayor made himself at home for the night. A thorough search was first made of the room and a guard of several stalwart police was placed in front of the door. Every possible entrance was securely guarded. With a sigh of relief, he partook of a hearty meal brought up to him. He felt secure.

When his hour for retiring came, he decided to sit up, or to be more correct, sort of sit and stand up, till after the appointed hour for him to meet the Utopian Reformer. With that ticklish hour past, and feeling that he had outwitted his tormentor, he decided to go to bed. Again assuring himself that no one was in the room, including a last minute inspection of the closet and bathroom, he began to undress, slowly, very slowly. He donned his pajamas, not without an occasional start and look around. Everything was serene and peaceful, the life of the great hotel faintly audible, the noises of the street far below. Aha! He had fooled him.

"Well, Mr. Williams," a quiet voice sounded direct in his ear. His heart gave a great leap, and he almost died of fright. "What made you go to all this trouble? My dear fellow. I told you I would follow wherever you went. Please quit acting the part of a runaway bad boy, and listen to reason."

Mr. Williams stood speechless, his heavy jowl down, his mouth wide open.

"Will you sign?" A wicked-looking

hickory rod suddenly waved close to his nose, causing him to jerk back involuntarily. "Shall I begin again?"

The mayor made a move toward the door—a couple of resounding whacks suddenly bit through his silken pajamas. He jumped with pain, but before he could cry out, felt something clap across his mouth.

"You fool!" hissed the voice right in his ear. "It will do you no good to call others or to try to get away. Do you want everybody to witness your mortification while I chastise you up and down the halls, clad only in your pajamas? Another move and I shall let my switch do its duty, though it may pain you more than it pains me. Do you sign?"

His Honor listened to the unseen speaker, saw the poised stick, and wilted. "All right; I'll sign."

"That's a reasonable man," A typed sheet appeared. "Get your pen—on this dotted line!"

The mayor read the sheet, hesitated a moment, but seeing the stick out of the corner of his eye, hurriedly signed his name.

"Now, that's just fine," the voice exclaimed. "I'll trust you with this signed resignation; see that it reaches the proper hands to-morrow. If you fail—" the mayor jumped as he felt the light tap on his anatomy—"If you don't hand it in, I'll be wherever you go, and I promise you it will be even worse than this."

With this parting admonition, the punitive voice and terrible stick disappeared, leaving a troubled and much shaken mayor to pass the balance of the night in peace.

The next day, Mayor Williams handed in his resignation to take effect immediately. A bomb-shell was exploded when it was announced to a

surprised public that the Honorable Mayor Williams, "a tremendous worker for the public good," was forced to retire on account of ill health. A long trip would be necessary to recuperate from overwork.

In the course of the month or two following, a surprising number of resignations were announced by important office holders. There was much ill health, or doctors frequently advised a change of climate, or plain personal business pressed for attention. "A faithful servant of the people regrets to announce—" For a while it looked as if the entire official family of the city and county would be depopulated.

**F**IRST came the resignation of the county treasurer, followed by several other important county officials. Two street commissioners and the city safety director retired shortly after, as well as a number of their subordinates. Then followed a series of political bombshells, when over half of the city councilmen resigned one after another, on this pretext or that.

And hard upon these resignations which rained out of the sky on the bewildered citizenry, came that of the chief of police. This important official had been appointed by his now retired superiors over the heads of several who had served much longer and were more able men for the duties required. Only recently his department had received a "white-wash," of which it had required a copious spread. Rumor connected his resignation with that event. But others, more in on the know, whispered of an exciting night at that gentleman's home—in sumptuousness quite out of proportion to a police official's salary—when a riot call brought almost the entire police force to his home to subdue a strange attack on their chief. They came, they

saw, but did not conquer. The chief was squirming and running around in his underwear, yelling and screaming with pain and fright, as if he had lost his mind.

"The Chief has gone goofy," one officer had remarked.

"Goofy! Look at that stick coming down on his pants like the vibrating reed of a saxophone," spoke up a captain who had only recently witnessed a similar performance of another official, since resigned from office. "It's that damn Reformer putting in his licks." In truth, it was a ludicrous affair, despite the terror-stricken antics of the chief, and those who saw it found it hard to keep a straight face. Then someone began shooting, and other followed. A stream of bullets shot in the direction of the plainly visible stick.

"Stop shooting, you fools," roared the captain. "Do you want to hit the chief?"

The chief finally sank on a chair exhausted.

"All right, big boy," a voice was heard to say. "Don't forget to-morrow!"

At any rate, the chief resigned. A severe shakeup followed with the rise of a new chief; many new faces appeared who knew how to go efficiently and honestly about their business.

Nor were the judicial and other branches of the local government neglected by the Reformer. One judge after another, whom certain gentry praised for their willingness to lend a willing ear and a ready hand, resigned unexpectedly. Even the prosecuting attorney, who was more interested in winning cases than in winning justice, resigned to "give better attention to a lucrative private practice."

For a time the newspapers had much front-page copy. Circulation increased, and editorial hands rubbed each other with satisfaction.

Gradually stories of the strange doings of the Reformer spread all over town, despite the efforts of the embarrassed ones to keep it quiet, about this amazing invisible man who carried a tough hickory stick that became visible only during certain painful interviews—this man who was able to get in anywhere and through anything without disturbing lock or bolt, and who could not be avoided or shaken off.

The good people at home and at work discussed these political oddities which exploded one after the other, and shook their mystified heads. But they viewed with satisfaction a great lessening of the unbearable tax-load, the noticeable improvement in law-enforcement and civic righteousness; and in general were quite pleased with the new efficiency and the successful outcome of government by the people and for the people.

Bill Fitzhugh spent endless hours nosing into the most unlikely places and gatherings, cultivating the acquaintance of all sorts of individuals, queer and otherwise, in the hope of uncovering the Reformer. Yet not altogether fruitless. The occasional "scoops," which he got on the doings of that mysterious individual's moves, long before anyone else got wind of them, brought him envy from his more experienced fellow workers and praise from his chief—and not least, a substantial thickening of his pay envelope.

Then came another sensation, even more mystifying, and this time much more disturbing to the public sense of security, than all the others.

## CHAPTER V

ON the first of the month, Vernon Cothrell, the popular County Treasurer, was very much astounded, to say the least, when his head cashier and much trusted subordinate handed him the following curious and mystifying receipt which was found in the main cash box: "Received from the County Treasury the sum of two hundred, ninety-one dollars and sixty-seven cents, (\$291.67), in full for one month's salary. This amount I feel justified in taking. Advise the county commissioners that henceforth the above amount will be my unofficial monthly salary." Signed, "The Utopian Reformer."

A check-up of money revealed the amount of the receipt really was missing. The money had disappeared overnight where it had reposed in the huge steel vaults. The irate Treasurer threatened to arrest the Reformer for theft as soon as he could lay hands on him. The County Commissioners fingered the receipt doubtfully, inspected the steel cages, the burglar-proof safety vaults, the almost infallible time-clocks, and shook their heads in mystification. It was beyond them. The Treasurer ordered a sharp lookout, and a careful check-up showed nothing further missing from day to day.

When the first of the following month came around, Cothrell personally superintended the storing of the funds over night. He saw that the doors and combinations were properly locked. He also placed an armed guard.

In the morning he made it his business to be present at the opening of the vaults. Nothing seemed out of the way. Imagine his amazement when, upon looking into the cash box—an-

other receipt for \$291.67 left there by the same mysterious person.

Police were called; the premises thoroughly examined; but not a mark, not the slightest clew could be found. Everyone was dumbfounded. Many on the outside, quick to voice their opinions, as is usual with those who know least about a thing, declared it was all a hoax and a fraud. For a while suspicion was rampant.

Luckily for the new treasurer, his character was above reproach. In every circle the uncanny powers of the Utopian Reformer were discussed. The papers printed lengthy articles on the powers of the occult, on magicians of Houdini's type. And there was one learned treatise on the fourth dimension as a possible explanation, which everyone tried to read but few understood and nobody believed. After all, the average human mind is practical, and prefers to stick to common sense—which, again, can be and is easily fooled.

Canny bankers, merchants and others with cash or valuables grew worried and tossed about of nights. Suspicious housewives and other uneasy folk hid their precious valuables in unbelievably unlikely places. Heads of houses who missed money out of their pants pockets of mornings, cast suspicious glances until the wife told them she was short of change to pay the milk man. And good people who carelessly lost their bundles, or mislaid anything, their first thought was of the Reformer—who must needs have had more than all the warehouses in the city to store it all. And if that gentleman, evidently honest of heart and, if misguided, noble of purpose, could have heard everything that first impulse laid at his door, his ears would have burned off of him completely.

That he must have realized this, was certain; for shortly afterwards he felt constrained to publish another announcement: That no one need fear loss of their valuables through his agency; that only \$291.67 would be taken monthly from the County Treasury—and any other shortages anywhere could be laid to those usually responsible.

Therefore, there was a great sigh of relief. Whatever his powers, the Reformer was at least honest, and up to now anything but an unmitigated evil.

CAME one evening in the month of May, when young Fitzhugh, standing on the corner of Mulberry and Walnut Street, and turning over in his mind whether to move on or linger where he was, received the surprise of his young life. For hours he had been nonchalantly loitering in the vicinity of the home of a prominent citizen who, he suspected, might be the next recipient of one of the Reformer's unpleasant visits. It was a warm, beautiful evening in mid-spring, the soft air scented with the fragrance of lilacs now in full bloom. In another half hour, twilight would descend on the peaceful residential neighborhood. Aside from passing machines, and aside from himself, not a single pedestrian was in sight.

He was about to turn on his heel, when he was arrested by a, "Beautiful evening, isn't it?"

Startled, he whirled about to face the speaker, but saw no one.

"Gosh, looks like I'm beginning to hear things," Fitzhugh muttered sheepishly to himself. "Could swear I heard someone speak to me." He turned to go, but again was brought up short when he heard a soft laugh and a, "Nothing the matter with your hearing, young man. Stick around a

while longer; maybe you'll get something interesting to report."

Fitzhugh heard with amazement the unseen speaker who seemed right at his side. The voice had a slightly muffled sound, almost as if it came through a loud speaker. And yet—something startlingly familiar about that voice caught his attention—as if he had heard it before.

Bill quickly collected himself, and was about to ask for the speaker's identity, but realizing that no doubt such a question would not be answered, instead said: "Out crusading again!"

"Well, I feel I should do something in return for my unofficial salary," the invisible speaker countered with a chuckle, "to reimburse the people for their money; sort of earn my keep—eh, what?"

"To be sure, the things you have already accomplished have saved the people of this city and county many times your keep. But speaking of your unofficial salary, as you put it: just why do you take such an odd amount from the Treasurer's office? Why not even money? Or for that matter, a much larger sum?"

"Anything else you'd like to know?" ignoring his query.

"Oh, beg your pardon for my inquisitiveness; you know, I'm a newspaper man, and—" With that the young fellow, who for all his lanky slimness and almost girlish face, was possessed with sinewy muscles of steel, suddenly made a sweeping lunge with his long arms about the unseen speaker—and ended with a series of ludicrous clutches at the empty air.

"That's not a bit nice of you, Mr. Fitzhugh—after I was kind enough to single you out, so you could have some interesting news to report." There was an offended note in the

voice. "Good night, and good luck."

Chagrined at his own hastiness, and realizing he had muffed a wonderful opportunity for first hand information, Bill cried out:

"No, no, please don't go. I'm sorry, really sorry. I'll promise not to do that again, on my word." But he spoke to the empty air. The voice and the unseen presence had vanished.

"William Fitzhugh, you are a fool; just a plain, unmitigated fool," the young reporter gritted between his teeth. "A dunce. I wish somebody would take me by the seat of my pants and kick me all over the place."

Well, he at least got a clew, even though a faint one. But where had he heard that voice before! Though slightly muffled in tone, there was that strangely familiar ring about it. He ransacked his memory. And then something else, like an intuitive flash, suddenly struck him: the reason for the odd sum—\$291.67—taken from the County Treasury. Even if for moral reasons the Reformer did not wish the onus of helping himself to a large sum, as he proved he could easily do, why didn't he help himself to even money, say \$250, or \$275 or \$300: Certainly there must be a reason. Every first of the month, the same odd amount. Multiplied by twelve months it came out to \$3500.04 . . . His former salary! . . . Somewhere, somebody had received three thousand, five hundred a year! Another clew, and a poor one; just a guess certainly, yet something.

## CHAPTER VI

**L**OST opportunity or not, new excitements crowded one upon another, for the Utopian Reformer did not for long remain idle.

A huge strike which Fitzhugh knew

was brewing in the city, broke out violently into the open. The leading industry, employing thousands of men and women was shut down. The pay in the huge plants, which meant so much to the prosperity of the city, was notoriously low, lower than in any other competing industry in the country. On top of this, a further cut was ordered. A strike was called, and in retaliation the company declared a lock-out till the workers were willing to accept the wage-cut.

A deadlock ensued. There was much suffering and unemployment: Riots and bloodshed. After a time the company opened the plants, and imported many strike breakers. More serious rioting occurred, and the state militia was called in to preserve life and property. To add to the seriousness of the situation and the ugly mood of the strikers, certain outside labor leaders arrived on the scene, making impossible demands which rendered a compromise unlikely.

Almost as if unconcerned, Alton D. Rensler, president and controlling stock holder of the embattled Corporation, was at the fashionable Country Club. It was a beautiful spring day, with a healthful tinge in the air. He was enjoying himself. He had just finished a round of golf, and, mouth-ing a fragrant cigar, was resting on the spacious veranda looking out over the well kept grounds. He was satisfied with himself. Yes, this was a pleasant world indeed. . . . Anybody who worked as hard as he did and had the brains got on top . . . Always room on top. . . . Some expect plums to fall into their lap without going after them . . . . Many had the same chance he had . . . . That strike . . . . Oh, they'll come around to his way of thinking after a bit—who built up that place, they or he? Guess

he'd wash up and go into dinner.

He stopped on the way and twitted the pretty girl at the cigar counter. He leaned over and nipped the skin of her white throat with his fingers. She didn't like men of middle age, who were overly melting to pretty girls. But he was the enormously rich Mr. Rensler, and she needed her job, so she smiled sweetly—and he felt still more satisfied with himself.

Late next morning, well guarded, he arrived at his private office. He lit a cigar and settled himself comfortably in his chair to look over the reports of the day.

"Good morning, Mr. Rensler," a cultured voice in a well modulated tone addressed him.

He looked up and slightly turned his head, a frown on his face. He did not like to be disturbed thus unannounced. He would have to reprimand his secretary.

"Trust I am not disturbing you overmuch, but I have very important business with you."

Mr. Rensler, his short-cropped military moustache adding to the severity of his face, turned slowly in his chair to face the speaker, and seeing no one, frowned still more and swept the room with his eyes.

"Please to meet you, Mr. Rensler. I am the Utopian Reformer—perhaps you have heard of me. Come to have a personal chat with you."

Mr. Rensler, a wiry man of small stature, but a man of iron nerve, leaned back in his chair, an unperturbed expression on his face. He had been hearing quite a bit about this mysterious visitor . . . . What did the meddling fool want with him?

"What is it please?" he quietly asked.

"To see if I cannot help you find a way out of the unrest which at pres-

ent surrounds your business," the voice answered.

"Thanks for your kind offices; but I cannot discuss business affairs without seeing whom I'm speaking with."

"Sorry, but that is something that must for the time being remain undisclosed. However, I am standing just a few feet from you, and wish to assure you that anything which we may discuss between us, will be held in the strictest confidence."

"Regret, but I will not discuss anything of importance unless I may see who you are. Good day; I am very busy."

"In which case, we shall discuss things anyway. Listen carefully to what I have—"

The annoyed Mr. Rensler suddenly reached for the push button on his desk; but before he could reach it, received a violent rap over the knuckles. He winced with pain.

"Don't do that. You'll only waste your time and mine. I would advise you to listen in private to what I have to say. Any other move will only delay matters. Will you listen?—or would you prefer to meet me at your home this evening?"

"Go ahead." A sullen look came over the industrialist's features. He had heard some funny things about this mysterious man's calling on other men in their homes late at night, and he didn't relish any such experience.

"This deadlock between your company and the men," began the Reformer, "can be settled amicably. I know you can do a great deal about it, for you have the deciding voice. If you will make a reasonable settlement, these outside labor fomenters can be sent away—I'll give you my word for that."

"How do you propose to settle this trouble?" a shade of a sneer on Ren-

sler's face. "Pat the men on the back, I suppose?"

"Easy. Just post an announcement that the previous scale of pay will be reinstated. I have studied into it, and find the pay below the prevailing standard. I took the privilege of examining your balance sheet, and know for certain you can do it."

"That is none of your business." Sullen anger burned like fire-balls in the man's eyes. "This is a free country; the men are perfectly at liberty to get a job elsewhere."

"True, this is a free country," the voice replied, "but not always free for everybody to make a decent standard of living. Please remember, Mr. Rensler, many of these men and women have families and bought homes, and cannot easily go elsewhere. They have helped you build up your business. Besides, the prosperity of the town and perhaps your own, is involved. And further, fair play will lessen your labor turnover and increase production. Isn't that the modern tendency?"

At this the industrialist, his face livid with rage, rose violently to his feet.

"Who the hell are you anyway to tell me what to do:—you hocus-pocus impostor, a thief who helps himself to the city's money! So you're going to tell me! Begone; you are dangerous, whoever you are. I'll have nothing to do with you!"

"Very well, Mr. Rensler, if that's the way you feel about it. This is an important matter, and the welfare of many people is involved. I shall give you twenty-four hours to think it over. Unless you show your good graces toward a peaceful settlement—well, in that case I'm afraid I shall have to put you through an ordeal that, accustomed as you are to lord-



ship over men, will prove very undignified, to say the least—perhaps you may have heard of others who have already had the pleasure.”

Saying which, the Reformer’s voice died out.

As luck would have it, Bill Fitzhugh was just then sitting alone in the private waiting room that led to Rensler’s inner office. He had come for an interview and was patiently waiting for admittance into the sanctum sanctorum of the industrialist. He stopped twirling his thumbs when he heard Rensler’s voice through the closed door—heard another voice, with its polished cadence, the voice of the Reformer. He strained to catch the conversation, but could not make out a word.

A few minutes later, the private secretary admitted him into the inner office. It was plain to see that the man had been through some great excitement. His face was flushed and bristling with anger, and his eyes had a wild stare.

“I’m from the *Daily World*. Been waiting to get a statement from you, Mr. Rensler. What is—”

“Nothing new to state,” Rensler clipped off irritably. “I have already stated my position. Please see me some other day—I have a most pressing engagement.” He stood up, waiting for the reporter to leave.

Bill went out, but acting on a hunch, hung around outside, determined on sticking to Rensler’s trail. Something told him that wherever Rensler went, there would be the Utopian Reformer.

That same evening, Alton Rensler, his things packed, took a de luxe train for the California coast far away. Unobserved, the young reporter trailed him to the station.

Bill waited till the train pulled out, then raced for the offices of the *Daily*

*World*. He pleaded for permission to follow the runaway industrialist.

A day later saw the enterprising young fellow speeding toward the Pacific coast in a fast transcontinental plane.

**A**RRIVED in sunny California, and ensconced in the luxurious quarters of an exclusive hotel, Mr. Alton Rensler viewed with equanimity the outcome of world affairs, and his affairs in particular. Wires and radio reached all over, and he did not need to be home to keep in touch. This fool of a meddling trickster could now whistle. He chuckled with amusement when he thought of the meddler’s frustration at finding his object away indefinitely, destination unknown.

He played poker until late into the night with some friends; had a winning streak and was in good humor. And it was with a final cheering cocktail that he said good night, and took the elevator to his expensive suite.

In the privacy of his secluded quarters, he yawned sleepily, undressed, chuckling repeatedly to himself. Yohum, now for a good night’s sleep.

“Good evening, Mr. Rensler,” a pleasant voice rang out in the silent room.

Rensler, who had just donned his pajamas, straightened up as if a powerful electric current had run through him.

“I have come to finish the discussion we began in your private office back in the home town. Remember! By Jove, you do have a nice place here—I feel we will not be disturbed.”

With quick decision, Rensler reached swiftly for his robe, which was lying near by, in a sudden attempt to bolt from the room. But before he took two steps, the robe was jerked from his hand, and a sharp, stinging

blow whipped across the middle of his bent form, with a whack that echoed from wall to wall, followed by several others in quick succession.

"Ouch," he cried, face blanched, hands behind him hugging the hurt portion. The next moment, unseen but powerful hands gripped his shoulders and he was hurled on the bed, where he lay wreathing with pain that stung and hurt frightfully.

"Now, my dear Mr. Rensler, we'll get down to real business. Do not create a scene. I dislike scenes. They are undignified. Besides it will only be the worse for you. I don't wish to hurt your—m-m-h- feelings any more than I have to. So will you please go back and settle on the terms I suggested?"

"Never!"

"In which case it shall be my painful duty to convince you." Saying which, the Reformer seized the struggling little man, and turning him across the bed, with his face smothered in the bed-clothes, rained a vigorous shower of stinging, burning blows where it stung the most. The important industrialist, clad only in his thin pajamas, bare feet and little legs kicking in the air, hands extended backwards like a miscreant school-boy as he endeavored to ward off the biting blows of the tough hickory rod, was a sight that belonged to the funny movies.

But it was not so funny for Mr. Alton Rensler, great captain of industry, financier, large employer of men. Not since he was a boy had he felt anything like it. Through an unbidden association of memory, a somewhat similar stinging experience, with his irate father on the delivering end, came back to him.

The Reformer finally ceased his laboring, and the furious gentleman

slid to the floor, chattering with pain and rage.

"You shall hang for this, you shall rot in jail,—you—you—" and his voice, choked with pain and mortification, broke off almost with a sob.

"Shall I continue, or will you agree!" the inexorable voice demanded.

"Never!" Mr. Rensler, strong and wiry for his age and size, tried to wriggle away, but the irresistible grip forced him again over the edge of the bed, the swishing blows biting and burning into his quivering flesh.

"My God, stop! I'll agree to anything."

The swinging stick instantly stopped. "That's just fine. Now for the good of your feelings, and to save you further embarrassment, I'll promise never a word of this, well, er-r—discussion, if you'll return and do the right thing. But, remember: do not try to evade me again. I shall be at your side constantly all the way home, and until you have publicly announced a peaceful settlement."

**W**HILE this painful near-comedy was being enacted, young Fitzhugh was pacing restlessly up and down the thickly carpeted public corridor outside, past the suite occupied by the rapidly chastened industrialist. He could hear faintly the sort of subdued hubbub going on behind the locked doors. His sandy hair was all a mess from nervously running his fingers through it, and his small freckled nose twitched and his pale blue eyes snapped with excitement; but wisely he refrained from attempting interference. He knew that whatever the tribulations of the suffering one, the Reformer never inflicted serious injury.

The faint hubbub presently ceased,

and a minute or two later, he was startled almost out of his wits by that familiar voice again almost in his ear.

"Good evening, my young friend. Right on the job, eh?" The voice seemed somewhat out of breath, as if after a severe exertion. "You are quite an enterprising young man, I see."

Fitzhugh, though startled, almost jumped for joy. "Glad to hear your voice again. So sorry I displeased you the last time."

"If you'll promise not to be so rude again, I might favor you with some advance information. Besides, I don't mind telling you that my invisibility is not due to a method of refraction or form of psuedo-invisibility. My presence is imponderable to ordinary means of detection; therefore please don't make yourself ridiculous by trying to clutch at me. Here, pass your hand where you think I am standing." Fitzhugh did so, but he only fanned empty air.

"Does that convince you?"

"May I ask what makes you invisible and imponderable?"

"Anything else you'd like to know?"

Bill grinned, "What is to be your next move, Mr. Reformer?"

"Back to the home town. In so far as you seem to be a likely young man, I'll give you this information which may be of great interest to your reading public."

"I shall be grateful."

"You may announce in your paper that Mr. Alton Rensler has graciously agreed to settle the strike. Also, from now on, I may select you as my—well, sort of unofficial agent for announcing other reforms which I contemplate to usher in shortly. "Good night to you."

It was a scoop of the first magnitude. Two days before anyone else had any definite information, the *Daily*

*World* issued a flaming extra announcing that the generous Alton Rensler was en-route east, and would personally settle the great strike; even gave the all important details of the proposed terms of settlement, which were satisfactory to all.

Great was the joy in thousands of homes when the peaceful settlement was announced. Men and women flocked back to work in a pleased frame of mind. The news channels were very laudatory in their comments on the deciding part taken by the great industrialist and financier in bringing the strike to an all-round satisfactory close. He was praised for his civic interest and generous handling of the whole, now happily ended, affair.

## CHAPTER VII

**B**UT back on his regular job, Bill Fitzhugh puzzled more than ever over the fascinating mystery surrounding the Utopian Reformer. More and more the young reporter, of a scientific turn of mind, was convinced that science only could explain the Reformer's uncanny power to assume a state of imponderable invisibility, and his still more uncanny power to ignore lock and key, or any kind of a barrier to ordinary flesh. Certainly he took no stock in explanations of a supernatural order. Science, plain, rigorous science, even if of a totally new and unheard of development, was at the bottom of it all.

And always, that slightly muffled, yet somehow familiar sounding, but elusive voice haunted him. Now positive that somewhere, sometime he had heard it before, he was irritated by his inability to place it. Or was it merely, after all, one of those psychological phenomena which nearly

everyone experiences some time?—the impression that what one was hearing or seeing had happened before. Again, there was that odd amount of the Reformer's self-assumed salary. Why the odd amount! For weeks, acting upon his hunch, Fitzhugh probed and inquired into the lists of laid-off workers and professional men in many lines of endeavor. His newspaper connection gained him access to institutions which otherwise would have been denied him. Every time he came across the record of an individual who had been drawing thirty-five hundred a year, he would trace that individual's record, only to find such a one either gainfully employed once more, or of such a type which no amount of imagination could possibly connect with profound accomplishments into the rarified fields of the higher mathematics and the physical sciences.

Thus weeks went by since last he heard the Reformer's voice; and he often wondered what that strange individual was up to next, and if he would hear from him again. But one day, just as he was about to alight from his roadster in front of his own home, he was startled by the familiar voice.

"Good evening, my young friend."

"Oh, how are you, Mr. Reformer? Awfully glad to hear from you again. Been wondering what had become of you." Fitzhugh, delighted, waited expectantly, the uncanny feeling of an invisible aura close to him.

"I have an announcement to make regarding some important reforms which I shall next endeavor to bring about."

"Very well; I'm all ears. I see you are bound to have Utopia here and now," Fitzhugh said with a smile.

"No end to reforms, you know," the

other answered. "But all I can do is try and hit the high spots."

"You sure have hit some high spots all right," laughingly.

"Yes, I dare say I have," joining in the laugh. "But seriously, I am happy to say," he continued, "that these other reforms I have in mind should not require the good offices of my hickory rod."

"And what may they be?"

"Personal behavior—morals or ethics, if you please."

"Sounds good. But don't you know moral reforms must come from within?"

"Yes, yes; I know. That's just what I am planning to do—create an urge from within that will hasten some badly needed reformations."

"And pray, good sir, how do you propose to go about that? Don't you think when it comes to that, people should mind their own business?"

"All reformations and progress of any consequence in the world have always come about because someone or some group refused to mind their own business—or it would never have taken place."

On the morrow, another of those strange announcements appeared, signed by the Utopian Reformer. This time everyone read with the greatest attention, having learned from previous experience that the mysterious man's powers were not to be taken lightly. This notice, however, was of an entirely different nature, and not a few chuckled with malicious glee, hoping the Reformer would carry out his threat.

**I**N essence, it informed the public that everyone in the city would be, at one time or another, under a sort of unseen and unheard surveillance. That whoever indulged in malicious

gossip, unfriendly acts, evil deeds, or planned someone's undeserved disgrace; or if one business rival plotted the ruin of another; or if one were unfaithful to their marital pledge; or if any other form or kind of sin was going on;—he, the Utopian Reformer, had access to their innermost sanctuary or council chamber, and the evildoer or sinner would be revealed direct to those sinned against; thus exposing the rascal, the plotter, the deceitful and the wicked enemy. The righteous had nothing to fear.

On the corners and in offices and in homes wherever people gathered, this strange exhortation to refrain from sin on pain of discovery was discussed and talked about. The pulpit found praise for this new turn in the Reformer's crusading efforts. And there was much merry-making and good-natured bantry. It became a common form of greeting when two friends met: "Have you sinned today?" or, "Are you fit to cast the first stone?" or, "How fare you with the Golden Rule?"

True to his announcement, the Reformer circulated freely over the city, covering every section and class. At first no one took his activities along the lines of an improved morality as of much importance. Sin there always was and always will be. But gradually strange, disquieting, often times laughable reports began to circulate, filling many with dread or satisfaction, according to whether the shoe fitted or not.

Evil gossipers, for instance, were shocked and mortified when they found out that the object of their malicious shafts was mysteriously apprised of the identity of the mud-slingers. A business man, his plans all ready to ruin his rival, discovered with shame and dread that his rival

was forewarned in an unexpected manner. Unfaithful wives and philandering husbands never quite knew when their sinful excursions would be disclosed to their other half. Many cruel plans were thwarted, evil intentions nipped in the bud, victims forewarned, devilish lies nailed. Or gay Lotharios, of grandpapa's youthfulness, who sat in the seats of the mighty and posed as high-minded examples for the rising generation to follow, were sent home shamed and chastened by a quiet voice in their ear telling them they were being watched. Or a pilfering employe was apt to be unexpectedly called to the boss's office, his theft exposed, and given another chance to make good. Shameful neglect of an aged father or mother by children who bragged of their filial devotion, was revealed to neighbors and friends, thus bringing the finger of scorn into play. Evil habits of young men and women became known to the parents. And even perversion and degeneracy received a set-back when the brilliant light of disclosure was turned on.

The enviable news filtered into the outside world. The city's newspaper and local broadcasting stations cited long columns to prove that their city and environs for miles around was the finest model community in the world.

Then one day, Fitzhugh received a flash which gave him the first real clue to the true identity of the Reformer.

Untiring in his search for *the one* who, in pursuance of his theory, must have received, sometime in the recent past, a salary of \$3500 a year, he had obtained permission from the authorities to go over the records of the great university located on the outskirts of the city.

## CHAPTER VIII

The rather old-maidish woman in charge of the records eyed him quizzically, almost with suspicion, and at first seemed reluctant to reveal the records he wanted.

"Well, there have been a number of professors and associate professors receiving that salary, who are not here any more. Of what possible use can such idle information mean to you, mister?" She looked at him pityingly, irony in her dry voice.

"I'm a newspaper man, see? It might help me to make better mud pies. So ask me no more questions, but just trot out the information I want—or shall I report to your superiors that you may have personal reasons for refusing to divulge—"

"No, of course; you may have it by all means," she hastened to reply. "Makes no difference to me." She shrugged her thin shoulders with icy resentment. "Let's see—here are some: Associate Prof. Flinkinger; Prof. Forster; Prof. Newell—"

Fitzhugh jumped as if pricked with a pin. "You mean Dr. Sterling Newell?"

"Yes; know him?"

"Of course. He was my physics prof. How long since he left the university faculty?"

"About a year ago."

"And the reason?—"

"He didn't leave; he was let out—resigned, you know," and she giggled.

"Could you tell what he is doing now?"

"Nobody seems to know just what he is doing. Since you are so interested, you might go out to his house and ask him," she added with pointed sarcasm.

Fitzhugh departed in a highly elated frame of mind.

DR. NEWELL! His voice! Now it all came back to him. Strange he hadn't placed it before. He remembered him only too well: a fine-looking man of thirty-eight, tall and of athletic build, with none of the pallor that often comes from an academic life. He had been very popular with the students, whose rights he always championed. Poor man, his little girl, June, an only child, had been run over and killed by an automobile just two years ago, and the tragedy had broken him up completely. The professor was an outspoken man, fearless and radical, uncompromising in his ideals, and made many enemies; frequently clashed with the University authorities—and evidently lost out. Had a reputation for his profound researches into the realm of theoretical physics; a great mathematician in the thin heights where few could follow him. His lectures on the fourth dimension, in which he specialized, had always been fascinating, and made everything so plain, almost anyone could understand it.

Yes, he felt sure it could be no one else; everything seemed to point he was on the right trail at last. But he'd have to be careful; the evidence, though strong, was roundabout and would take lots of careful investigation to verify.

Without revealing his hand, he took to prowling a good deal about Dr. Newell's home which was in a quiet section of the city. Careful inquiry from neighbors, without arousing suspicion, elicited information that "Professor" Newell was a man of exemplary habits; seemed to have a modest but steady income of unknown source; that he spent a great deal of

his time in his well-equipped laboratory at home.

All this merely strengthened young Fitzhugh's belief that the Reformer, or Dr. Newell, or whoever it was, was achieving his state of invisibility by means of some highly evolved apparatus radically new in the annals of science; most certainly not through anything that could be classed with the supernatural or occult—although it almost smacked of that to an unscientific mind. That Dr. Newell had profound genius, even his enemies had not denied; and if anyone was capable of achieving a state of invisibility through some new principle of physics, or by means of a practical utilization of the hypothetical fourth or even higher dimension, Dr. Sterling Newell was as likely to be the very man to do it.

Furthermore, if the Reformer achieved his invisibility by means of some great scientific discovery, then, he, Fitzhugh, could not conceive of such a feat without some form of electrical energy entering into it. And if such were the case, a powerful radio beam, or a magnetic field suddenly trained direct on the Utopian Reformer, should obstruct the workings of his secret mechanism as thoroughly as a monkey wrench thrown into a delicate piece of machinery—and bring him into visibility. He almost decided to enlist the aid of his paper to help him construct the needed apparatus. But what a job to lug about such a necessarily heavy equipment on the doubtful chance of having the opportunity to use it. And when he thought further, he realized that he was basing himself on a wrong premise; for if this invisibility was due to Newell's practical conquest of the world of the fourth dimension, then nothing, of a three-dimensional nature or agency he

could conceive of, would have any effect on a higher dimensional sphere. Regretfully he felt obliged to dismiss the idea of direct interference. If only he were not such a rank amateur in the higher realms of science and mathematics!

And yet, again, Fitzhugh felt that something ought to be done. It was too much power for anyone to wield. So far, be it said to his credit, the Reformer had chosen to move in the direction of righteousness. So far, so good; aside from an uncanny feeling of uneasiness which many felt, the public, secretly or openly, were in sympathy with the almost mythical Reformer's activities. But what if that strange individual should suddenly go berserk, or launch out into fields detrimental to the public welfare!

A number of times he debated with himself whether he should confront the Reformer the next time the latter addressed him, with a, "How-dy, Dr. Newell," or whether he should merely call on the actual Dr. Newell under the guise of his newspaper duties, and see the reaction. He finally decided against such tactics, as these might only serve to put the man on his guard. Besides, what positive assurance had he that he was on the right trail, after all! No. Better wait and see.

At this juncture, things unexpectedly came to a sudden head. The industrial unrest which was prevailing, caused the entire city to break out in a new uproar, in which the Reformer decided to take an active hand.

It all came about on account of the city's street car system. The whole city was threatened with a cessation of all service due to the disaffection of the employes. The trouble, bad enough as it was, was considerably aggravated by the arrival of several out-

side strike fomenters and trouble makers. Their leaders sought to bring about a tie-up, and interfered greatly with the strenuous efforts made by level heads to reach a satisfactory settlement.

Through a streak of luck, Bill Fitzhugh overheard this pseudo-labor leader make the vehement assertion that "no damned fakir like that what-you-may-call-him, Utopian Reformer who ordered me out of the city, can scare me like it scared a lot of fellows here." Bill instantly realized that the braggart must have had a visit from the mystery man; and knowing the peculiarly persuasive tactics of that lusty crusader, and sensing fun in the offing, immediately took up his watch inside the big down-town hotel where this labor leader was domiciled.

**S**URE enough, that very evening at the hotel, there was a great uproar and fierce excitement. Without any warning whatsoever, and to the shocked astonishment of the large number of men and women who packed the main lobby, this particular gentleman, thinly clad only in his underwear, of a sudden came running wildly through the halls and corridors and down several flights of stairs. He ran screaming as if the devil were after him, all the way down the grand staircase, past the tittering crowd which jammed the huge public lobby on the main floor; all the time dodging and twisting grotesquely in an effort to escape the much discussed, now plainly visible hickory switch which was being wielded lustily by unseen hands. As he dodged in and out of the jam of people, a near-panic ensued; screams, shouts, laughter. "Run," "Give it to him Reformer," "You're losing your underwear."

In the midst of the great commo-

tion, an astonishing thing happened. Close to the screaming, scantily-clad man, a faint halo of bluish light began to glow, grew rapidly brighter, then went out with a blinding flash; and in its place, and to everybody's further amazement, a hazy, human-like form took shape, became clearer, and—lo and behold! There stood a tall, queerly armored figure wielding the famous hickory stick.

The entire body of the queerly covered figure, from the top of his head to his toes, was sheathed in a shiny, finely woven metallic suit that seemed all of one piece. Even his face was covered with the same material. A scabbard-like case hung at his waist. On his back and connected with the suit was a large knapsack that glowed with a dull luminescence. In his metallicly gloved hand, the hickory stick.

For a few moments the excited crowd stood still, too electrified to move. Then from many throats came a shout: "The Reformer! The Reformer!"

It was indeed the mysterious Reformer who had unexpectedly and in a most public way become suddenly visible. Something had evidently gone wrong with the workings of the suit or the mechanism which induced his state of invisibility. The actuating works had stopped, exposing him to full view in the very midst of his activities.

For a few brief seconds the exposed Reformer stood there as if stunned and as much surprised at the unexpected turn of affairs as anybody else. Although his face was masked, his extreme embarrassment was only too self-evident. Then panic seized him, and he made a dash to get away. In another moment, a wildly shouting, clamoring mob was at his heels. Laughter, hoots, screams, shouts.



The unreasoning mob instinct broke loose. "The Reformer! Stop him! Hold him!" a chorus of voices yelled. Scores of curious hands sought the fleeing man. With mailed fists he knocked over those who attempted to stop him; jumped down the broad stone steps and into the street, followed by the eager mob, whose curiosity to find out once and for all the identity of the Reformer, took on white heat.

With great jumping strides he ran around the corner of the building, across the crowded street at the risk of his life. Before he knew it, he ran almost full tilt into the corner traffic policeman who made a lunge at him, but was stiff-armed by the running figure and sent reeling. Pandemonium reigned. A short ways further on, some husky individual grabbed the fugitive and was felled like an ox by the lusty Reformer. But before the latter could get going again, he was set upon by half a dozen others, and all went down in a heap. But his prodigious strength stood him in good stead, for he broke away and continued his wild flight, determined to escape. Amidst tremendous excitement, he raced through the streets, by this time all in an uproar; up this thoroughfare and across that, the curious, shouting mob almost at his heels, as he dodged in and out.

He ran on, the mob ever growing in size like a gathering snowball. One motorist deliberately tried to run him down in the middle of a street. And one policeman, newly joined in the chase, pulled out his gun.

"Don't shoot, you fool," shouted Bill Fitzhugh, who was only a short distance behind the fleeing figure. "It's the Reformer; don't shoot him," others cried.

The fugitive, a powerful runner, finally cleared the main business dis-

trict, and raced through the residential section. Over fences, around corners, between houses, always managing somehow to keep ahead. At last, frightened, exhausted and panting for breath, he ran straight—for the Newell home, just as Fitzhugh expected he would; past his frightened wife who stood in the doorway transfixed with horror at the sight of the mob which bore down in a converging avalanche. "Something's gone wrong with the confounded machine," the Reformer panted.

In the doorway of his own home, he turned and faced his pursuers, who tried to crowd inside, and surrendered to several police officers. With a few deft twists of his hands, the Reformer removed his head piece, revealing his face—it was the well-known Professor Sterling Newell!

The unmasked reformer, now recovering himself, nodded to several who instantly recognized him, and with great dignity and a faint smile on his fine, scholarly face, bowed to the immense throng which packed the street.

Neighbors gasped with amazement when they saw that the much talked about and mysterious Reformer had all the time been living right in their midst.

The mob which filled the street and crowded the broad lawn and up the steps of the Newell home clear to the very door jambs, grew dramatically silent. A smile swept every face. After all, the Reformer's queer doings had been far from unpopular. Loud buzzing, laughter, good-natured banter. "It's Professor Sterling Newell—the Utopian Reformer." "Don't hurt him." "Leave him be." "He's all right." Such were the shouts that came from every side. One of the policemen thumped Newell heartily on the back

and shook his metallically encased hand. The good-natured mob, their curiosity now fully satisfied, burst into a cheer.

Bill Fitzhugh hung around till the crowd slowly dispersed. He chatted pleasantly with the Reformer, plying him with endless questions.

"On my trail to the last minute, eh?" the Reformer smiled. "You're a hard fellow to shake. I'm too excited and tired now. If you'll come around this evening, we'll talk."

## CHAPTER IX

**E**VENING found Fitzhugh seated in Dr. Newell's pleasant living room.

"The vast bulk of the public is heartily in your favor," Bill began. "You have struck a responsive chord. No one, who has made the acquaintance of your gentle hickory rod," he added with a grin, "will dare come out into the open against you; and even if they did, no jury in this county would convict you.

"Now, the main thing which everybody is dying to know, is the secret of your invisibility."

Dr. Newell smiled, then grew serious. "That is something which must die with me. A revelation of the secret of such power, men being what they are, might bring infinitely more evil than good."

"But surely, in the interest of general knowledge, and to satisfy the public at large, you could at least reveal something of the marvelous discovery which you have made."

The Professor remained for a few moments in thoughtful silence; then replied:

"I cannot divulge the working principles of my discovery, nor the

forces that are involved. For that matter, their basic nature I myself do not understand, any more than we understand the ultimate nature of matter and energy, although we may know how to apply them to practical ends.

"This much, however, I will say: The secret of my invisibility is not due to the utilization of any new principle in refraction, nor has to do with any plane of existence in purely three-dimensional form. Least of all is it due to any kind of jugglery. Suffice it to say, it was my good fortune after years of intense research into unknown fields of mathematical physics, to discover a plane of existence which the science of the higher mathematics has long pointed to, although never materialized, and which, for want of a better name, has been called the fourth dimension. I have evolved a practical means of entering this hitherto closed fourth-dimensional plane or sphere of existence through a powerful process of manipulating and bending the space-time relationship, or Einsteinean Interval. That's all there is to it." His serious expression relaxed with a smile.

"That's all, eh? I see. Very simple indeed." Young Fitzhugh's pale blue eyes twinkled, and his short, freckled nose twitched, as it usually did when he was amused. "Well, if you prefer not to disclose the physical and mathematical details of your great discovery, won't you at least tell something of this fourth-dimensional sphere and your experiences of it?—something that will explain, even if remotely, your ability, for instance, to get in and out of sealed and barred rooms and containers."

"Very good—if you will be satisfied with a rough analogy or surface explanation," (Fitzhugh eagerly nodded his head,) and the Professor's brow

knitted in thought as Bill waited for him to proceed.

"To begin with, I shall ask you to consider one of the most baffling contradictions known to mathematical science, and long the most tantalizing of paradoxes in the entire realm of logic, namely: the commonly regarded unreality of the fourth dimension when it comes to dimensional *construction*. Yet any mathematician will tell you that the fourth and even higher dimensions are realities in mathematical *extension*, although our eyesight and other senses ordinarily stop at three dimensions.

"To go into this a little further." The professor leaned forward, a bright gleam in his eyes, as he warmed up to the subject. "If you will conceive the various dimensions as motions in geometry, we may then form the following concepts: The path of a point in motion, describes a line. The path of a line in motion, may be visualized as a surface or two-dimensional plane. Similarly, the path of a surface in motion can describe a solid. And the path of a solid in motion is—? Right here, by analogy, we come to the fourth and even higher dimensions.

"Mathematicians have been able to symbolize a figure in four dimensions, and even study its qualities. But no one hitherto has been able to construct it out of solid material, for our senses, as a rule, cannot go beyond the three dimensions without special aid.

"Now, by way of imperfectly illustrating the powers of my discovery, I shall draw on this sheet of paper a straight line which we will assume has no breadth or thickness, to represent an imaginary single-dimensional world in the ordinary Euclidean sense."

"But Dr. Newell," Bill interrupted, "even the finest line drawn on a sheet

of paper, as any microscope shows, has length, breadth and thickness. So has the tiniest point or dot. Has it not?"

"Yes, of course. But we are here dealing with mathematical abstractions only. Please remember that such things as a point, line or plane have no real existence of themselves in the eyes of geometers, but are used purely as imaginary tools of thought, mere abstractions, if you will—like color or sound, which do not exist apart from some existing object which causes them.

"To continue. A tiny being who lived in such a world which I pictured, that is, a straight line which has no breadth or thickness, could know of no directions outside of the straight line. It could never know the plane on either side or the space beyond. The tiniest object in its path would prove an insurmountable barrier, for it could not pass around it, over or under it. And yet, a two-dimensional being, one who inhabited the entire surface of the plane, could easily remove such a barrier or go around it, and appear and disappear from the limited world of this one-dimensional creature as if by a miracle.

"Similarly, imagine the miraculous feats with which a three-dimensional being could astound one who knew only a two-dimensional world. The latter could move in any direction on the surface of a plane, but not off of it. It could never enter an enclosed space represented, say, by the letter "O," such as I trace on this paper. But a dweller of the three-dimensional world could remove any object, including the two-dimensional creature itself, from such a two-dimensional room, simply by lifting it off the surface of the plane, or enter the room without passing through any of the

walls, "O," by climbing over or under. What an incomprehensible feat to a two-dimensional being, that would be!

"By the same analogy, a being who lived in the greater world of four dimensions, could enter or leave this room you and I are sitting in, or remove any object in it, even if the room were absolutely sealed, without passing through the four walls, floor or ceiling. Such a being could, if he wished, keep himself entirely invisible and imponderable, as far as ordinary human senses could know. To a three-dimensional being, this seems impossible; but to a being who moved in four dimensions, it would be as easy for him to reach inside this room, not through any of its three-dimensional walls, floor or ceiling, but in the same way as the three-dimensional being ignored the two-dimensional walls of the room, "O," through the fourth dimension."

Dr. Newell here paused, an enigmatic smile on his face, and awaited further questions by the young reporter.

"And the bending or manipulating, as you call it, of this space-time relationship—the Einsteinian Interval—how about that? I always assumed that such things were beyond man—possible only in the infinite crucible of the cosmos."

"Not necessarily," the professor replied. "You merely mean, it has not been done before," smiling benignly. "In some such way our earlier ancestors, if they woke up today, would view many of our modern so called miracles of science. The radio, mechanical flight, and a hundred and one other such "miracles," would no doubt fill their primitive souls with mystification. Their wise men would attribute these as belonging either to

God or the devil, at any rate outside of man's province altogether."

"But what has this bending or manipulating of the space-time relationship got to do with the workings of your great discovery? Your ability to become invisible, for instance."

Dr. Newell eyed his young interrogator with a mixture of mild amusement and kind pity. "Well—if you think your editors will go to the bother of printing—"

"To be sure—"

"All right. Consider further our revised conceptions of time and space. As we know today, taken as a whole, there is no such thing as absolute time or absolute space, but rather an intimate union of the two—space-time, which, as I mentioned before, is called the Einsteinian Interval. This has been interpreted by modern physicists to mean that time itself is but the fourth dimension of space. As proof, we now know that the apparent dimension of any object, or, if you will, the space it occupies, varies with the velocity. On the other hand, time, as measured by our standards, also depends upon velocity—thus indicating some profound relationship between space and time.

"Therefore, by altering or warping this space-time relationship, such as retarding or advancing its general rhythm or tempo, however minutely, many strange and inexplicable phenomena can be brought about; that is, inexplicable to those who live a three-dimensional existence. Time being relative, or a mere function or dimension of space, will, if subjected to a powerful change—such as my apparatus is capable of—take any given object with which it is connected completely out of our ordinary means of detection. For in so far as our mind ordinarily is conscious only of the

present while it is in the very instant of passing, any powerful variation in the relative tempo of the space-time Interval, may remove an object completely outside the ken of our consciousness."

"I should think that this tempering with space-time would require the agency of a tremendous amount of energy, more than is humanly possible."

"Yes and no. All depends how it is done. Tiny man can lift an elephant. A fulcrum and a long enough lever, you know, can lift the sun itself."

"I see. Now, one more thing. How were you able to carry that hickory rod of yours without revealing it while in transit?"

"Oh, very easy; carried it inside a

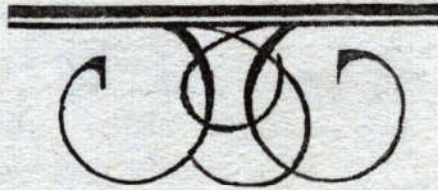
sheath that was part of my invisibility equipment. I removed it from its sheath only when I had—er—a duty to perform," he added with a soft chuckle and a gleam of his bright blue eyes.

"But, Dr. Newell: why a hickory rod?"

"Well, you see, for one, I did not wish to inflict serious injury to anyone. Second, I am a schoolmaster—the schoolmaster and his rod," smiling—"and as most men are merely grown-up boys, after all, I knew there were none who could long withstand a vigorous application to the right spot. All perfectly simple, isn't it?"

With that, the Reformer stood up, signifying the interview was at an end.

THE END



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