

THE BUCKET BOY

BY ERNEST L. MEYER

THE newspaper on which father worked occupied the top floor of the *Germania* Building on West Water Street. One of its busiest employees, especially on hot summer days — and it used to get very hot in Milwaukee in July and August — was Heinz, the *Kesseljunge*. This bucket boy was not a boy at all. He was a superannuated city worker, for many years driver of a garbage truck. But at sixty he was let go because his strength ebbed and his eyesight failed. “Ah,” Heinz used to mourn, “if only my nose had failed. . . .”

Yet Heinz was lucky to get the job of *Kesseljunge* at the *Germania*, for it was an important post and his services were in great demand. He himself constructed the tools of his trade: two poles, each about five feet long and each artfully and deeply notched. The notches were designed firmly to hold the handles of one-quart beer buckets and Heinz had mastered the art of carrying six full buckets on each pole without spilling a drop.

Often I used to visit father at

the newspaper plant and Heinz and I became friends. The old man took such a fancy to me that he told me some of the secrets of his trade. He was proud of his post and he implied that if I applied myself assiduously and took his counsel to heart I might some day become a *Kesseljunge* and be held in high esteem by the gentlemen in the city room — even the *chef redacteur* himself, no less.

The thirst of the *Germania* employes was impatient and perennial. On hot days, the bellowings for the *Kesseljunge* sounded despairingly above the rattle of typewriters and linotypes. Despite the wailing, as of doomed men on a desert island, none of the gentlemen could be described accurately as languishing from hunger and thirst, for their upholstery was generous, in keeping with the generous times, and a special swivel chair had to be constructed for Gustav Haas, the managing editor, to accommodate his monumental beam and underpinning.

Herr Haas was a customer of the

Kesseljunge. So was my father, city editor, and all his reporters, and all the copyreaders save one who had diabetes, and all of the linotype operators and hand typesetters, so there was a constant clamor for Heinz and his two dozen buckets — one dozen always in use, one dozen always on the wing. There was only one woman on the staff, Frau Greta, who ran the daily half-page woman's department, and who went beerless because she did not think it dignified for lady contributors to drop into the sanctum and have them see buckets of beer strewn around promiscuously. So they gave her a room to herself down the hallway, where she kept her dignity amidst the drought. I never called on Frau Greta, but I was told by father that the atmosphere in her office was genteel but gloomy.

To do them credit, the men mixed labor valiantly with their libations. They got out a whacking good newspaper. To make sure that my boyhood recollections are accurate I only recently went through a file of the old and now defunct *Germania* for the period in which Heinz was *Kesseljunge*, that is in the early 1900's. Well patronized by advertisers, the afternoon daily was making money, ran from sixteen to thirty-two pages, and

had a circulation of around 40,000. There was also a morning edition, *Der Herold*, which was doing excellently.

The *Germania* was a well-rounded family newspaper. It had a complete report of world news from the Associated Press, which came to the office from the central Milwaukee AP bureau on sheets of yellow flimsy and had to be translated rapidly into German by sweating assistants of the telegraph editor. Now and then my father used to bring home great batches of the yellow flimsy, for bathroom purposes. The week-old news, printed in queer capital letters, fascinated me, though I found the market reports quite dull and colorless. The ponderous conservatism of the *Germania* editorial pages was leavened by short, sparkling fillers and the grayness of its special departments, devoted to the doings of Klubs and Vereins, was lightened by a daily page of puzzles, jokes and anagrams. It also ran what I think is one of the first "columns" in America. The columnist signed himself Philip Sauerampfer and he wrote delightfully in the jargon known as Milwaukee-Deutsch (*Die Cow hat ueber die Fence Geyumpf*) which later Kurt M. Stein used in his contributions to B.L.T.'s column in the Chicago *Tribune*.

II

All these features, together with the fact that Milwaukee still had a large German-speaking and German-reading population, made the *Germania* a paying property. Yet, even in those days there were dour fellows known as efficiency experts. One of them was Herr Fabrikus, who held a high position in the newspaper's business office. A gloomy gumshoe, this Fabrikus, always sniffing for the slipshod.

It happened on one particularly sultry day in late August that Herr Fabrikus came up from his ground floor grotto to the editorial rooms on the seventh floor, carrying in his hand a marked copy of that afternoon's first edition of the *Germania*. Beckoning my father to follow him, he walked into the privately partitioned office of *Chef Redakteur* Gustav Haas, and without announcement. He was that important, was Herr Fabrikus.

When they were seated, across the desk from the ponderous bulk of the managing editor, Herr Fabrikus spread the paper out flat on the desk top.

"This," he said sadly, almost on the verge of tears, "this — this is simply unheard of!"

My father and Herr Haas leaned over and scanned the open page,

which was marked here and there with heavy red circles.

"To what do you refer, Herr Fabrikus?" asked Gustav Haas.

"Fourteen typographical errors on page one alone. In the entire edition, if you will count them, forty-six typographical errors. Moreover, three names misspelled. Important names, mind you — names which any ignoramus of a new reporter should know how to spell correctly, and one of them the name of a shareholder, from whom we shall most certainly hear."

"Most unfortunate," sighed Herr Haas, "but such things happen even on the best regulated newspapers. I am sure that if you study the pages of such an English newspaper as the *Milwaukee Journal*, for instance —"

"This we have already done, Herr *Redakteur*," said Herr Fabrikus icily. "And counting column by column there are only one-half the typographical errors one finds in the *Germania*, and their spelling of names shines by comparison. Moreover, I have not finished. If you will kindly turn to page three you will see that I have encircled a certain advertisement. Yes, that is it. As you perceive, it announces the special sale of women's coats at Schuster's Department Store at

\$6.95. The amount should have been \$8.95. Schuster's have already called me on the phone, and I verified their ad copy, and they were right. It was the mistake of one of our compositors and if one thousand women, Herr Haas, buy these coats, we shall have to make up the difference, which is \$2000. Think of that!"

Herr Haas thought of it, and sighed again.

"But that is not our department," said Herr Haas. "After all —"

"Quite true," admitted Herr Fabrikus. "The ad department is not under your management. Technically, you bear no blame in the matter, but morally you most assuredly do."

"Morally?"

"But of course. You have jurisdiction over this entire floor, which houses both the editorial rooms and the plant of the compositors. You allow certain practices up here which are not tolerated in any other newspaper editorial rooms in the city, and are not even tolerated in our own business offices downstairs. I refer to a certain person in your employment by the name of Heinz."

"Heinz?" cried Herr Haas.

"The *Kesseljunge*?" cried father, furtively wiping his mustache.

"The very same," said Herr Fabrikus, pursing his thin lips. "I had one of our men check up on Heinz only yesterday. And between the hours of 7 A.M. and 3 P.M., which are business hours, mind you, this Heinz was observed making a round trip to the saloon exactly seventy times. Each time he carries twelve buckets of beer. Seventy times twelve is eight hundred and forty. Eight hundred and forty buckets of beer — and then one wonders why we have to pay \$2000 for a mistake in an ad made by a fuddled compositor."

"We have a very large staff, counting everybody," Herr Haas tried to explain, "and yesterday was the hottest day of the year."

"Heat or no heat," said Herr Fabrikus sharply, "the thing is indefensible. Typographical errors . . . advertisements bungled . . . the names of important people misspelled — and all on account of that damned bucket boy and your drunken staff."

"Drunkness," said Gustav Haas positively and with honest vehemence, "is not tolerated on our staff during the working day. I challenge you —"

"Very well, very well," broke in Herr Fabrikus. "At least you cannot deny that alcohol interferes with efficiency. This fact is well

known and has been accurately established. However, gentlemen, I have not come to deliver a lecture, but to issue an order. One hour ago I had a conference with the business management and the owner, and we arrived at a decision. To make a long matter short, this Heinz is to be discharged immediately and the institution of the bucket boy is to be abolished. However, I assure you we have been perfectly fair in this matter. Considering the heat wave, I have put in a requisition for four ice-water containers in addition to the two which are already on this floor."

"Ice water!" groaned my father, and he whispered into his beard: "Fatal!" And, uttered in German, fahTAHL is a very ominous word, indeed, presaging chaos and catastrophe.

III

Well, there it was. Poor old Heinz stored away his notched poles in a locker, hopefully, for future reference. And after he had drawn his last little pay envelope, he stopped at my father's desk and he said with melancholy, yet with a certain rugged optimism:

"I have given this matter careful thought, Herr Meyer, and I ask

you to believe that it will not work out happily for all concerned. Your gentlemen will not thrive on ice water. They will call for the *Kesseljunge* and the *Kesseljunge*, alas, will not be there. Now consider what will happen. You cannot abolish thirst by command, nor can you slake it with water, however nicely it may be iced. Thus they will be compelled to take trips, individually and privately, to the corner saloon for their sips of stimulating lager. Consider again, please, what this means. For every single trip I make with my dozen buckets, they must make twelve. Imagine what a hustling and bustling there will be, what a lamentable wastage of valuable time, what a wear and tear on the passenger elevator, not even to mention the prodigious use of electricity consumed in carrying your gentlemen to their accustomed refreshment. Has Herr Fabrikus considered the frightful consequences of his order, which is, to say the least, revolutionary? I am sure, Herr Meyer, if you will bring these simple facts to his attention he will admit his grievous error and send for me post-haste. He may even, who knows, supply me with a dozen or two new cans, for the old ones are badly dented and some of the handles are loose, which causes

spillings and gives me worries and anguish."

Thus Heinz ended on a note somewhat hopeful. My father promised that he would do what he could, particularly since he had a personal dietary interest in Heinz's notched-stick enterprise.

As it turned out, however, the morose foreboding of old Heinz was not quite accurate. After the *Kesseljunge* had departed, there was no wild stampede for the elevator, no grievous wastage of electrical juices. Instead, my father's gentlemen, and all the gentlemen of the composing room, as if by common consent, acted with discreet if somewhat dismal decorum.

This should have delighted the statistical soul of Herr Fabrikus. But it did not. Things did not improve on the newspaper. On the contrary, things got worse, much worse. The typographical errors increased to such an alarming degree that when Herr Fabrikus brought up one of his copies with the errors marked in red circles it looked like a convention of bed-bugs on a white sheet.

There were other annoyances. For example, there was the matter of the quarter-page advertisement which broadcast the virtues of a certain patent medicine for women. It was one of those Before and

After ads, illustrated with photographs. In some unaccountable manner, the illustrations got mixed. The part of the ad captioned "Before Using Mrs. Juniper's Rejuvenating Compound" flaunted the portrait of a beautiful lady, radiant and rosy and rounded. And the other half of the ad, entitled "After Using Mrs. Juniper's Rejuvenating Compound," displayed the same lady, haggard, hollow, with a tousle of discouraged hair. Not only that, but the second portrait was upside down. Herr Fabrikus, when he viewed it in print, was greatly disheartened.

The climax came with an episode in my father's department. There was an unwritten agreement among the gentle city editors and reporters of that day that the best people, the really nice people, especially if they were connected with advertising revenues, could commit no wrongs. Not major wrongs, like murder, but minor vulgarities, such as being picked up pickled in Juneau Park or trifling illegally with roulette wheels. If the best people did commit such vulgarities, the news of their indiscretions was generously hushed by the newspapers in the interest of public morality and the bursar's office.

It happened, quite by coincidence, that a few days after the

banishment of Heinz the *Germania* had a front page story written by Dolfee, the police reporter. It was an authentic scoop; no other paper in the city carried it. It simply narrated the fact that a certain Mr. Wimbleton Z. Jones, a department store executive, had been seized in a police raid on a River Street house. The address was good, but unconventional. The story, written with Dolfee's flair for accurate details, went on to relate that Mr. Jones had been captured while fleeing down a fire escape, attired in nothing but a woman's silk night shift which, for some reason unknown to police, he wore as a turban, insisting that he was the Royal Gak of Oomalong. A humane police officer, Dolfee further reported, decently shrouded Mr. Jones in his own coat and took him to the Emergency Hospital where the Gak was resuscitated with a stomach pump and, after paying a fine of \$25 and costs in police court, was restored to the bosom of his family at the Jones mansion on Grand Avenue.

It was a sprightly story, but it was not a sprightly Herr Fabrikus who appeared before my father with the home edition clutched in his trembling fingers. The item on page one was encircled in agonized red. Herr Fabrikus was more

pallid than usual and his thin lips were absolutely white.

"Herr Meyer," he said, pointing to the item, "this — this is simply unheard of!"

My father glanced at the page with interest and he said brightly:

"Truly said, Herr Fabrikus. The episode is quaint, to say the least. That is why I judged it worthy of page one."

"We are ruined," groaned Herr Fabrikus.

"If it is a libel suit you fear," said my father reassuringly, "pray set your mind at rest. I myself have checked on the facts, which are a matter of court record. The only untruth in the whole episode was uttered by the defendant, Mr. Wimbleton Z. Jones, when he assured the police officer that he was the Royal Gak of Oomalong. I have consulted the latest volume of the peerage directory and find that no such title exists. This is sad, but Mr. Jones, of course, may be forgiven because, under the circumstances of having been caught drunk with nothing on but a lady's night shift worn as a turban, he undoubtedly was in no mood for absolute accuracy."

"Herr Meyer," said Herr Fabrikus stonily, "I have no reference whatever to a libel suit. In fact, you know very well the cause for

ny agitation. Mr. Jones is an executive of a department store, one of our biggest accounts. I tell you again, we are ruined. This story should never have appeared in our paper."

"We received no instructions from the business office to suppress it."

"Of course not, because we did not know of its existence until it appeared in print and after most of the edition was off the presses. Simple, ordinary, everyday intelligence on the part of your reporters and of you should have dictated that this Jones item should have been suppressed."

"Herr Fabrikus," said my father gravely, "many more things enter into the matter of suppressing news than simple, ordinary, everyday intelligence. For example, you leave out the important item of humaneness. Yes, and of charity and tolerance. When our reporters, Herr Fabrikus, have a sense of well-being, of genial expansiveness, they are inclined to regard human foibles with a much more charitable eye. I regret to inform you, Herr Fabrikus, that our reporters for some days have not experienced the feeling of well-being and benignity. To be precise, not since the departure of Heinz, the *Kesseljunge*."

"Ah!" cried Herr Fabrikus, beginning to smell a spigot.

"These are the simple facts as I have observed them," went on my father. "Ever since the beginning of the regime of ice-water, Herr Fabrikus, our reporters have worked with a diligence that should give you great pleasure. Unhappily, though their diligence is praiseworthy, it is inclined to be ruthless. They bring in items such as they have never brought in before; as, for example, this whimsy about the Royal Gak of Oomalong, which under ordinary circumstances they would have passed by, charitably. The stories, moreover, are undeniably accurate. Accuracy, Herr Fabrikus, thrives on ice water. But humaneness, no!"

"Ah!" cried Herr Fabrikus again, and that was all he said. He was a man to know when he was beaten.

When Heinz was reinstated the following Monday, the old man went to my father and he said:

"Herr Meyer, believe me I feel no sense of triumph in this matter, nor even great surprise, though I confess this turn of events came about a little sooner than I had foreseen. I simply said to my good wife: 'Hannah, feel no concern about our fortunes. I know absolutely that the gentlemen at the *Germania* cannot get along without

the services of old Heinz and I am fully prepared, Hannah, to demonstrate this proposition mathematically. Multiply eight hundred and forty buckets of beer by eight hundred and forty elevator trips and the result, Hannah, is something beyond all human comprehension. So be assured that all will be well and that presently they will summon me, perhaps even by special messenger, who knows.' That is what I told my good wife, Herr Meyer, and sure enough the special messenger came early this morning. And here I am, very happy, and — and — well, to be sure —"

Thus the old man babbled, with wet eyes, and father uncomfortably ordered him to be on his way and fetch him a bucket of brew. Heinz went to his locker to get his clean white apron and the two notched sticks, and there he found also, of all things, two dozen shining new tin buckets. In the editorial room and in the composing room, Heinz was greeted with a perfect can-

nonading of "*Kesseljunge! Kesseljunge!*" and the paper ice water cups flew out of the window like confetti.

Thereafter, also, there was marked improvement in the quality of the newspaper. The number of typographical errors decreased, Herr Fabrikus discovered, by exactly 47 per cent. No more hideous upside-down females appeared in the advertisements of Mrs. Juniper's Rejuvenating Compound. And to the huge relief of Herr Fabrikus, the minor peccadillos of the best people did not again appear in print.

My father pointed out to me that all these advancements in the quality of the *Germania* followed close on the heels of the reinstatement of the *Kesseljunge*. He drew no moral from the tale, but, stroking his beard thoughtfully, he observed that it was just one of those happy coincidences which make life, on the whole, a pleasant and an amiable adventure.



Letter from London: — mostly about

WHY BRITISH SOLDIERS COMPLAIN

BY S. L. SOLON

ARMY grouching is a legitimate and necessary soldiers' pastime and it is a poor historian who measures morale by a private's expletives. The legions of Julius Caesar had their sour moments even as the armies of Winston Churchill do now. There is no need to see sedition lurking in every squawk, and mutiny behind every complaint. But those who walk down Civvy Street would be ill-advised to take the soldier and his grievances too much for granted. After all, the war has long ceased to be an exciting novelty for England, and after three war winters, the civilian can scarcely be blamed if he sometimes focuses on his own needs rather than on the needs of the forces. The soldiers' complaints remind him too much of his own exasperations; thereby, they lose the appeal of urgency. Still, like it or not, it is the armed man in battle who must win the war and that is reason enough to give his problems, both psychological and material, a special consideration.

Up to now, the soldier's chief

complaint has been his boredom. This does not necessarily mean inactivity. Certainly there is enough training, drill and fatigue to fill the Army man's hours. What he protests, however, is the feeling that too much of his time is taken up with militarily unproductive chores. This feeling irks the Canadians, particularly. A common remark is: "We came here to fight and we've been moseying around for a couple of years repeating what we've already learned." In contrast to the British Army, the Canadians are volunteers, largely unattached, young and bursting for excitement. It is not surprising, therefore, that several hell-raisers in their ranks have bucked up against the law and been involved in some unsavory messes.

The British soldier, who is usually a man with a family and has domestic problems to concern him, is inclined to take a longer view and a more sober perspective of the war's course. He is able to go home when he gets leave and, while family responsibilities may tend to in-