

BAKERSFIELD SECRET

Thomas Bakersfield was born twenty-seven years ago of poor parents in Hornellsville, New York. His father was a mechanic, and Tom seemed to be taking after his father in a mechanical way, for he carried his head about filled full of all sorts of notions. Many of them he kept to himself. There was no getting around the fact that Tom was ingenious. He made many boyish experiments, and was a brilliant failure in his ideas of putting things into any practical execution. He seemed to have good ideas, but lacked the tact of making them a success. When he failed with his idea, he would pass it by and try something else. Once he thought he had his fortune. He conceived a preparation which would do away with shaving. This preparation was to be rubbed on the face, and was supposed to eat the hair off, losing its eating qualities when it reached the cuticle. He tried the experiment on himself, but when he rubbed off the preparation, he found that it took off not only the hair, but a good deal of his face, too. Poor Tom was soon dubbed a queer fellow and not much attention was paid to him nor his ideas. As time wore along, he wasted none of it. He worked and studied, and became a practical mechanic under his father.

In the course of events his father passed on, and it devolved upon him to support the family. He took his father's place and kept up the work and carried on his own experiments. Finally he came home very much elated and told his mother he had struck it at last. Further than this Tom would not speak of his discovery. No amount of questioning and begging moved him an inch. He simply told them he had discovered a great secret and that he was certain of its being all right. At any rate Tom said he was going to see about it. Accordingly he had inserted in the Herald, of New York city, the following advertisement:

Wanted—A man with \$500,000.
Must be well up in the sciences and mechanics. I have a discovery that will revolutionize the world. Address T. B., care Hornellsville Ledger.

Many letters followed the appearance of this advertisement. All sorts of information was asked for. The conditions and what the discovery was. He was bewildered with the bulk of mail he received. With a usual manner, he kept down any excitement from this sudden attention from the wealth of New York city by keeping housed up for a week. Tom was not to be seen. Out of the hundreds of letters he selected one from a man signing Richard Bulwer. Bulwer's letter seemed to please Tom and he liked the plain and honest conviction the letter expressed to him. Tom looked up Mr. Bulwer in the records of mechanics, and found him to stand among the highest. After having satisfied himself that Bulwer was all right he made reply to his letter and asked to see him at Hornellsville as soon as possible. In due time Mr. Richard Bulwer arrived at the quaint village where Tom had been born, raised, and where he had discovered the greatest secret the world was ever to know. Tom met Mr. Bulwer at the train and rightly guessed him by the initials on his grip. The walk from the depot to the secluded workshop of Tom Bakersfield's only served to acquaint him with Mr. Bulwer. Tom's simplicity and Bulwer's honesty of purpose were at once to be seen. Thus the two most essential elements of an understanding were mutually accepted before the workshop was reached. Bulwer was indeed a genius. Quick to see the practical value of anything in a mechanical or scientific way, he was a worthy counselor, and an exception in that he had money enough to back any project he might undertake. Tom was fortunate in getting an interview with him, and thus securing his interest, which meant the use of all the money necessary to carry out the scheme. Bulwer was well informed. He was alive especially to any new product of American genius. He kept himself in touch with all the latest inventions, discoveries, and used his money freely in research in mechanics and philosophy. Indeed, if the truth were known, who knows but Bulwer had come to see Tom merely to add one more new idea to his already headfull. After Tom had securely locked himself and Bulwer in the room where he had everything ready for Bulwer, they sat down at a table. After going over some formal matters concerning the

protection of this discovery, and each pledged himself to the other, Tom walked over to a table near by and withdrawing a cloth that covered an oddly-shaped thing, said to Bulwer:

"Here is my discovery."

This is what Bulwer saw. A large glass case with several glass bulbs inside. Some glass pipes, a copper wheel and an alcohol lamp. Bulwer never saw anything like it in all his experience and he could only look in astonishment at this marvelous machine. It was a contrivance beyond his ability to understand at first glance. Tom recovered the contrivance with a smile on his face and returned to the table and resumed the talk. He took from the drawer large rolls of paper. These papers contained the details of this machine. For three days and nights Tom and Bulwer were housed in this room going over this wonderful discovery. Mr. Richard Bulwer left Hornellsville with a satisfied look on his face which meant much to Tom and increased the respect for Tom Bakersfield in the village, when it became known that he had a man of Bulwer's reputation interested. Sometime after Bulwer had gone Tom received a letter from him. Immediately arrangements were made to leave. After leaving money for his folks, Tom quietly left the place and no one knew where he had gone. Curious neighbors went away disappointed, for none of Tom's folks knew whether he had disappeared. He had satisfied his mother that all was well, and that she would soon hear from him, but he wanted to be certain his whereabouts were not known to anyone. His wishes were fulfilled, for not even the wisest in the whole village could tell where Tom had gone. So, with the coming of other events in the village, Tom Bakersfield soon dropped from the minds of the people in Hornellsville and was a thing of the past.

It was about two years after Tom had left his village town that the following item appeared in the town paper, away out in the Western part of New York, in what was then known as Clarenceville. The item attracted much attention: "A Strange State of Affairs—Many of the citizens of Clarenceville are complaining of a loss of appetite. Several assert they have not eaten for some days, and yet are in a perfectly healthy state and enjoying the rest from eating. Many theories have been advanced as to this strange phenomenon, but no one can solve it. Speculation is in order. The condition is fast spreading. It will be watched with interest."

Two weeks later another item appeared in the same paper: "More Strange Things for You—Eating has altogether ceased in our town. Not a man can be found who has eaten for over seven days. The periods of fasting have varied in many cases, but the actual eating has become a figure of speech. People from all over the country are flocking to Clarenceville and are affected in the same way. We are gaining rapidly in population, and if this strange condition continues to exist, we will have struck a bonanza that beats gold or silver mines. No explanation has been offered. Can some one explain?"

The newspaper articles spread the news over the country and people began pouring into Clarenceville and all the newcomers quit eating along with the balance of the residents. It was a fact worth noticing that after going a certain distance from the town the seeming influence became ineffective. Only within a certain radius could this state of affairs be found to exist. One can scarcely imagine the revolution in business. Groceries closed up their doors. No one bought provisions, for none were needed. Cutlery, dishes, kitchen utensils, and all manner of eating paraphernalia lay idly on the storekeepers' shelves and in the warehouses. Housewives thought heaven had suddenly come down to earth. No more cooking. No more washing dishes. No more kitchen work. Really it was a wonderful condition of affairs in Clarenceville. Many eminent scientists speculated, and some visited the place, but none could explain. There was no question but the result of this strange phenomenon was quite as beneficial to the people as they had found eating to be in the past. Clerks and all manner of working men idled away the noon hour and at supper time were still happy to feel they were all right even though they had not eaten all day. Clarenceville was rapidly becoming a paradise on earth. Where this strange condition came from some could tell

yet they all hoped it had come to stay.

About a year previous to this strange condition of affairs in Clarenceville, Thomas Bakersfield and Richard Bulwer alighted from the train and put up at the hotel. They were looking for investments in real estate. They might locate there, so it was whispered. Stopping quietly at the hotel for several months, discussion dropped as to their business. Taking advantage of this Bulwer purchased a three-acre tract of land at the end of one of the main business streets. He soon had the property fenced in with a fence so high that no one could see over and he was secure from curious eyes. People who inquired what was going on there were told that Bulwer & Bakersfield were establishing a branch mill for one of Bulwer's big New York manufacturing concerns. Contractors were employed to construct two large buildings. Very ordinary in construction and nothing in the detail to indicate their purpose. They afforded absolutely nothing as to the character of the mill. In due time the buildings were completed and the workmen discharged. The place was then apparently closed up and no one but Tom and Bulwer were to be seen around the place. Following the completion of the buildings several shipments arrived for the new mill. The somewhat bulky material was enclosed in wooden frames, well packed from the public gaze. The only thing the public could tell anything about was a ten-horse power engine and a large boiler. Bulwer and Tom personally oversaw the installing of the numerous crates into the mill building. Passersby could hear the sound of the hammer and the saw within the high fence, but none were admitted to see what was being done. After a time the exhaust of a steam pipe showed actively had begun. Then presently a low, continuous humming was heard and kept up for several weeks, and at the time of the articles in the newspaper the humming in the factory was still going on. Nearly every day the new firm had shipments of material from New York towns. Nothing was ever shipped away from the plant and so the rather mysterious mill remained a secret so far as the real purpose was concerned. It was in good running order and was evidently at work, still nothing ever came out from behind that high fence enclosing that mysterious mill with its puff! puff! and its low musical hum.

One fine morning the mayor of Clarenceville was sitting in his office looking over the morning paper when he walked Mr. Bulwer and Mr. Thomas Bakersfield. After the customary salutation and greetings, Mr. Bulwer said he had a proposition to make to the mayor. Bulwer began by broaching the strange condition of affairs in the city. The mayor admitted that it was strange, indeed. Bulwer then told him that the firm of Bulwer & Bakersfield was responsible for the condition. The eyes of the good mayor, Mr. Harding, opened very wide at this. He was very much interested. After the mayor partially recovered, Bulwer told him that he and Bakersfield had discovered a secret which if put into effect would save all people from having to eat. He told him the firm had come to Clarenceville to try the experiment and the success was as well known to the mayor as to themselves, since he, too, had ceased to eat, along with the rest of the Clarencevillites. With all this evidence Mayor Harding was not without doubt that some trick was being played either upon the people or else upon himself. Which was the victim the good mayor was just then unable to decide.

"It is too preposterous to believe," he finally said. "I must have evidence of the proof."

"We have reserved one proof, which we think will soon convince you," replied Mr. Bulwer.

"And that is—"

"We shall shut down the mill, and if you then regain your appetite, will you then believe?"

"That test is perfectly satisfactory to me and if it bears you out, you gentlemen have my hearty support for what you may ask," quoth the mayor.

So the mill was forthwith shut down with the immediate result that everybody began to want to eat again and the return of appetites became general. The mill was closed for two days, and during this time even the mayor himself began to want to eat. Upon resumption of the mill all appetites again disappeared. The normal non-eatable condition resumed itself with its strange phenomenon.

order that his influence and testimony could be produced whenever needed. It seemed essential to Bulwer that they have someone occupying a responsible position to lend argument against the incredulous. The mayor said he was obliged to assist the inventors anyway because he had saved \$250 since they started up that mill, and he wanted to show his appreciation. The mayor was informed that the object was to go to a large city and establish a plant. That the right would not be sold. The mayor would go with them and aid in the project. There remained but one thing to do and that was to show Mr. Harding the plant and set out for the city. So Mr. Harding was escorted to the mill. Inside, the high fence it was a rather simple affair at first glance. It belied its mysterious air. Mayor Harding first saw the engine and boiler room; then he was taken into the preparation room, and lastly into the room where the actual results could be seen.

Tom Bakersfield had discovered indeed a formula whereby eating was entirely unnecessary. Bulwer, with his keen mind, when presented with the discovery, had readily discerned the value of the secret. He therefore lent his money freely and he and Tom soon arranged for this experimental station. Finding the people losing their appetites and losing their own as well, they were convinced the secret was a practical success. The mill had been built on lines to facilitate the working out of the invention. Immense steam pipes led from the boiler room through the building. The whole mill worked as a unit. It was virtually automatic, so complete in its every detail. Quantities of meat and provisions had been shipped daily to the mill from secret sources. This was sorted and mixed in the proportion as indicated in the formula. It was then exposed in a huge tank to sudden blasts of cold and then blasts of hot air, and steam jets ingeniously arranged to bring about the intermixture required in Tom's wonderful formula. This disintegrated and cooked the particles. To prevent the disintegrated particles leaving the tank partly cooked, Tom had invented an odor gauge which indicated the process of cooking. The gauge was so delicately constructed that the various chemical changes in the cooking and disintegrated were registered with accuracy. After reaching the proper degree of dissimulation in the first big tank the food was passed into a second tank and there again exposed to a similar blast of heat and cold. By this time the particles were all light enough to float. One again was it carried into a still larger tank and the same process of disintegration carried on, and then it was conducted in big pipes to a large sealed tank. In this last tank huge wheels revolved with lightning rapidity. These wheels stirred up this aerified mixture of meats and vegetables all proportioned off exactly in accordance with Tom's wonderful formula, until the whole indicated a given buoyancy, registered by another delicate gauge, when it was admitted into a huge fan, which caught up all the particles and blew them out into the air through an immense funnel, which protruded through the roof of the mill. Thus a vaporized mixture of eatables was continually sent out of this immense blow-pipe. The outside winds caught it up and wafted it over the village and thus the inhabitants breath-d in the microscopic particles and all appetites vanished. So long as the blow pipe continued to send out the particles of food into the air so long was appetite kept down. The formula of mixture was very elaborate and required a perfect proportion in order to make the air sustain the particles. Tom already had visions of cool eatables for use in the summer and hoped to expel by the use of his wonderful formula a food that could be sent out heated and retain its warmth for a limited number of hours and for a given radius from the plant. Through Tom's discovery people took on nourishment by breathing instead of eating. It was more satisfactory, too. By breathing the food, one would never breathe enough at one time for them ever breathe too much. There would be no such thing as eating too much. The particles would be too fine and not large enough quantities. Every breath contained food, so the secret was really simple as most mysterious things are when once understood.

The result of the visit of the mayor was that the three prepared to go to New York city at once. It was thought useless to stay in a place the size of Clarenceville, when the success of the discovery was beyond all doubt. The mill being on their hands and being faulty in that the buildings were hastily put up and not worth removing, the mill was burned one night by Tom and Bulwer, who claimed the fire to have accidentally caught from the engine room. In this fire the complete evidence of the nature and character of the discovery was

consumed and all that remained were the charred timbers and twisted iron and steel. Tucked away in Tom's coat was the precious formula. All depended upon that.

After the fire Tom, Bulwer and the mayor left for New York city. As Fate seems to more strangely work its wonders with men of genius, so Tom escaped not that hand that was settling down over him. It is not the province of mortal man to discern always the wisdom of the acts of that fearful, unseen god, called Fate, nor to avert its crushing or enlightening grasp, but it is man's province to obey its will and bow to what has ever seemed the inevitable. So

strange. Fate rode in the car with the merry party of three. In the middle of the night, while sleep held watch, the timbers of a burning bridge gave way and the train, with its human freight, dropped to the gulch below. The sparing fire left naught but the bones of the passengers and the blacked ruins. Among the ashes lay Tom's formula, burned and forever lost.

Thus one of the greatest inventions of the ages slipped out of the hands of man and to this day no one has ever figured out such a formula as Tom Bakersfield, with which the human race would lose their appetites and quit eating.

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