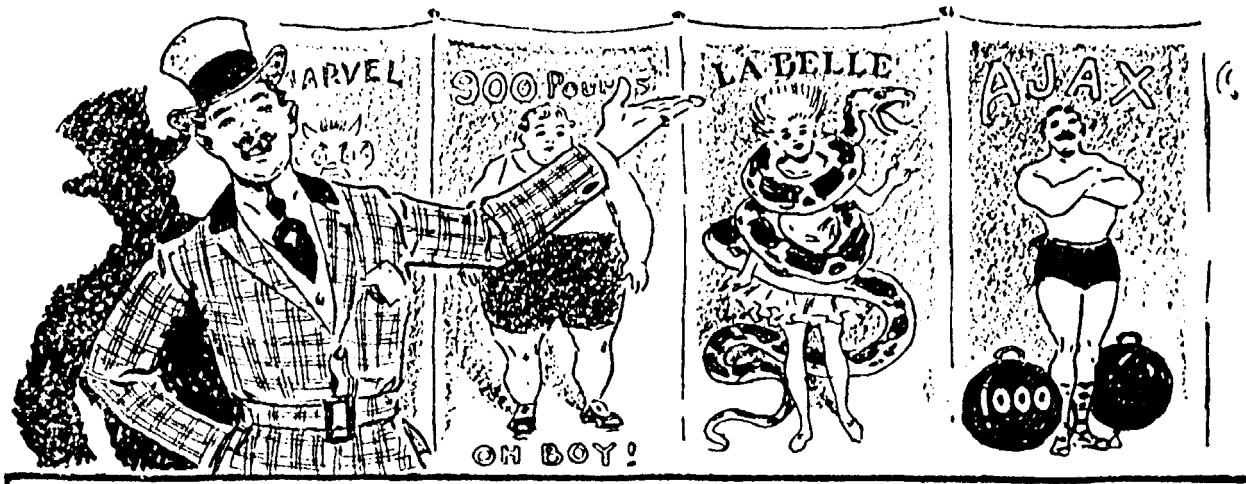


Adventures with the Move-A-Long Sideshow :



Fall of the Wise—^{By} Thomas Thursday~



WHEN we hit Frosty, Minnesota, our troubles began to reduce themselves and take a vacation. I wasn't crazy about playing that burg, because the last time we showed there the citizens paid attention to everything—but they didn't pay in cash. It was on the Northern Pacific and the blink at the same time. It had a circulation of about four thousand, including the mayor, but you wouldn't think that a live bird would roost there for a minute. However, some do that little thing.

Well, we landed at four a. m.—meaning almost morning—and by six had most of the wagons off the flat cars without having more than two or three wheels lose interest in the axles. By seven, “Leggo” Trott, the train master, heaved a sigh that was heard in the next county, gave the razorbacks a farewell bawling out, then curled up on a tarpaulin for a sleep. By nine, they had the big top off the ground and started work on the side show. I wasn't interested much in the big canvas, but when they got busy pointing my top toward the sky I'm on the job to see that no guy ropes are in danger of not working.

A few hours later, we had her in the air and started to put in the pits, or stalls, where the attractions sit and give the audience a chance to get their dimes' worth. And speaking of attractions, we didn't have the worst show that ever trouped under canvas.

For instance, we had Gianto, the Tallest Man in the World, who would make Jess Willard, champ aforetime, look as small as a quarter in front of a landlord. Then we had Obomah, the Giant Lady, discovered in the wilds of Zanzibar—Chicago—by an intrepid explorer. She was eight feet from the ground and weighed over four hundred pounds. And the only time she could speak a word of English was when a couple of silent talkers were missing from her pay envelope.

Next came Princess Mahulogoo, who could read your mind whether you had any or not. It made no difference. Two bits paid the bill. Then we had Queen Babess, the Albino Beauty. Oh, boy! Well, any time some hick sheriff didn't like the trick, Babess would go down and see the mayor. Next day there was a new police force in town. We also had—but there's no use giving the whole list. You can see by the samples that it was the best show on earth.

Everything was all set for the afternoon, when I discovered that our opener, Bryan G. Zing, the fellow who tells the folks on the outside what a great show we had on the inside, had failed to shine. Right away I suspected that he had gone off and got jingled, but when I remembered that the safety-thirst amendment to the constitution had been working more than union hours, I didn't know what to blame it on. I was sure that he couldn't get anything to sip in Frosty, because the

town was so dry you couldn't buy Shakesbeer in a bookstore. But I want to say right here that there wasn't a better opener in front of any show than Zing. Talk? Say, that beezark could convince an anarchist that a profiteer had a good chance of going to Heaven!

Well, ten minutes past opening time came around and I began to pace up and down the lot as peeved as a fiddler when two strings bust in the middle of his concert. I know that I can't do anything without Zing out front. Of course I could have the two grinders grind in a few, but that kind of work would be too slow, and the old dimes wouldn't come in fast enough to give the ticket sellers finger exercise.

I leaned up against the bally stand in disgust, doing enough thinking to give a philosopher a headache. I was about to cave in from worrying about Zing, feeling about as blue as a band leader playing a concert in a boiler factory, when some bird taps me on the shoulder. I whirled around and slanted a guy with a face solemn enough to make Dante look like a humorist. He had soulful Greenwich Village eyes, and a mop of hair that would have made old boy Samson look bald. He was holding one of those puzzle hats in his hand, and wearing one of those take-the-elevator-and-save-twenty suits. You know what I mean—one of those suits that make the ladies wonder how long it will be before us men begin to cop the rest of their styles.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but am I addressing the Mr. Ramble who has the honor of managing this institution?"

"Shoot!" I said, believing that he was about to unload "The Unabridged History of the Eskimos," at a dollar down and a new address a week.

"My name, sir, is Webster N. Swuddle, and I'm considered to be an amateur sociologist. No doubt you are familiar with the science."

"Sure!" I said. "I'm a college bird, myself. I took a complete course in janitoring at Barvard, but was rushed through because I didn't sweep up my lessons to suit."

"Remarkable, quite remarkable. But to come to the point, Mr. Ramble, I believe that it would be a most commendable idea for me to connect myself with your institution in order to study the characteristics of those who come under the heading of public entertainers."

Right away I saw that this beezark lived on sirloin of dictionaries and fillet de books. He could shuffle the lingo in a way that would make a

pickpocket think his fingers were frozen.

"Let me get you straight," I said; "are you looking for trouble or a job?"

"I think that the noun 'position' is what I'm interested in."

"What do you think you'd like to do?"

"That, sir, is a debatable point. What could you offer that would be in harmony with my talents?"

Oh, boy! I saw that he had an opinion of himself that wasn't so bad.

"Well, Mr. Swuddle," I said, "we pay the razorbacks fifty a month and they don't have to work so hard, at that."

"I fear that barbering is an art that does not appeal to me."

"Who said anything about shaves and haircuts? A razorback is a beezark who does the rough work—like putting up and taking down the tents. Follow me?"

"Perfectly, thank you. But haven't you something that would be more congenial to one who is scholastically inclined?"

"Well, I can put you in a pit as a freak," I replied innocently. Then I got the idea that this bird would make a corking Smileless Man.

"Say, Mr. Fuddle, I—"

"Swuddle is the name that I'm known by," he drawled.

"Well, Mr. Swuddle, how would twenty-five beans a week strike you for doing nothing? All you have to do is sit in a chair and let the rubes kid you. If you crack a grin, you lose your job. What do you say?"

"Absurd!"

"What do you want, hey?" I growled, getting kind of peeved.

"I think that I could lecture a little. In fact, at college I was considered a fair exponent of forensic oratory."

II.

WELCOME home! My mind began to work like a picture-play machine shooting the blond beauty in a runaway auto. I figured that if this bird could only get upon the bally stand and give a talk half as good as Zing, I could kiss half of my troubles farewell.

"Listen, Mr. Swuddle, I need a fellow to make openings worse than limburger needs sympathy! I

want some fellow to get up on that ballyhoo and tell the folks what a great, grand, and glorious show we got on the inside—all for two nickels or a thin dime. All you need is a little nerve and—”

“I accept the position,” he chirped, as if he was buying a dime’s worth of pretzels.

“Are you sure that you aren’t afraid of an audience?”

“When do I start my duties?”

How’s that for vanity, eh?

“Now!” I shouted, grabbing him by the arm and leading him into the tent. Soon as we got in, I promoted paper and pencil and wrote the same spiel that Zing used to pass out, word for word.

“Here you are, Mr. Swuddle; this is the dope. You haven’t got much time to study it—’bout half an hour. Do the best you can.”

He read the thing over just once, then tossed it in the air! “Quite simple, sir, I assure you. However, your conception of correct spelling is entirely too phonetic to be recited literally. Therefore, I shall take the liberty of translating it into pure Websterian.”

“You can talk in Hindu for all I care. But just pack ‘em into the tent. That’s the idea.”

After that I had one of the razorbacks haul out the Chinese gong, the same being the thing that wakes up the town in two wallops. Then I get Stronguyus, Successor to Atlas, to fetch out some of his weights and give the public a little free outside exhibition. Then I tell Mr. Swuddle to hop onto the bally and wave his handkerchief as if he was in need of help. Stronguyus begins to pump his one-thousand-pound weight up and down as if it was a nickel’s worth of air. Soon the citizens came scrambling up to the front of the bally stand to see what was causing all the noise.

“Listen, Mr. Swuddle,” I said, “I’ll start a little spiel, and then introduce you as the chief speaker. Then you tell ‘em all about it. You don’t feel nervous, or sick, do you?”

“My dear Mr. Ramble, the word fear, so far as I am concerned, is incorrect English.”

“Fine!” I said, but at the same time I felt kind of doubtful about those positive birds. I was afraid that he would get up there and stutter all over the works, making the show look like one of those get-the-hook nights.

Well, by creating enough noise to wake up the Stone Age, we managed to get nine-tenths of the people jammed in front of the bally stand.

“Lay off!” I told McHulihan, otherwise known as Stronguyus. He let the weight drop upon

the tin plate, which gave the audience an idea that the same weighed a little less than a million pounds, then struck a corking look-me-over pose.

I took off my hat and went to the front of the bally. “Ladies and gentlemen,” I began, “you are now standing in front of what is known as the Move-A-Long Circus Side Show, an exhibition of strange and curious people from all parts of the world. Now, we have secured the services of a distinguished explorer and adventurer, who will explain to you, much better than I can, all about the interesting attractions that are within this tent. I take great pleasure, ladies and gentlemen, in introducing Mr. Webster N. Swuddle. Kindly give him your attention.”

I stepped back graceful-like, made a neat bow to Mr. Swuddle, saying a silent prayer at one and the same time. He walked leisurely to the front, bowed to the right, left—and in the middle—coughed as if he was willing to choke or something, then looked the mob over for half a minute. Right away I thought that he had contracted a case of frozen feet. I was about to jump in and save the day when suddenly he opened up with a line of talk that would have made a college professor beg for mercy.

I heard strange names like Arisplato, Marcus Flookadoodle, or something, and Anthony Marks, Patrick Fitz-Henry, and a bunch of other birds that must have trouped when Barnum was a baby. He went on like that until he had his crowd with their ears flapping forward and their eyes in the right direction. I saw that he was the goods, all right, but I was getting anxious for him to pull something about the show. I was about to tap him on the back and tell him about it when he snapped into Zing’s spiel as if he had recited it all his life. Word for word! After he had finished with Zing’s talk, he commenced to review the Battle of Bull Run. I saw that he had the mob with their hands on their dimes, and I never let an opportunity like that slip by Doc Ramble.

“Make your turn!” I hissed. “Make your turn!”

“And so, ladies and gentlemen,” he concluded, “I can assure you with all the assurance that goes with the statement of a gentleman, that the attractions herein presented are just as reliable, just as trustworthy in every respect, as the famous Rimbino suspenders!”

Whatever suspenders had to do with a side show he didn’t explain—and I didn’t care, so long as he got the push in.

“Get to it, boys!” I shouted to the grinders. “Grind ‘em in—grind ‘em in!”

Mr. Swuddle made a bow as if he had just finished a violin solo, and then stood with his hands behind his back, looking at the sky. I walloped the Chinese gong to assist the general racket, and the crowd began to locate the ticket sellers. I saw at once, and without much trouble, that he had made a turn that would have made Phineas Taylor Barnum do considerable noticing. The only beezarks who didn’t come in were those who were not familiar with a dime.

“You’re all right, Mr. Swuddle,” I says, pumping his hand up and down like a hand-car motorman. “You’ll make a regular trouper in no time.”

“Much obliged, Mr. Ramble,” he chirped; “but I assure you that it causes me much grief to note that at least twenty per cent failed to expend the small sum asked.”

Well, he packs ‘em in like that for the rest of the day, and I realized that I struck a talking gold mine. After the last show that night, Flesho, the Fat Girl, wobbled up to me and wanted to know if it was a holiday.

“Believe me, Doc,” she moaned, “I’ve been standing on my feet all day giving shows. Of course I’m glad that we’re doing a good business, but at the same time if something happens to that new talker I ain’t going to cry none. Why, I lost ten pounds!”

“Never mind, old girl,” I says, “you’ll never lose enough to get a job as a sixteen model.”

III.

THE following day the sun came out bright and dazzled the whole lot. Mr. Swuddle was on the job an hour ahead of time, and sat on the bally stand reading one of those riddle books that made me sneeze when I slanted the title.

Well, he turned the trick again that day and wound up with his voice as strong as ever. And in every one of his ten orations he told glibly about Rimbino suspenders.

“Say, Mr. Swuddle,” I said, “I don’t get that suspender stuff at all. Of course I don’t care what you say, so long as you unhook the dimes, but I’d like to know what you’re driving at.”

“Ah, I thought you’d inquire about that! Is it possible, my dear Mr. Ramble, that you have never

heard of the famous Rimbino brand of suspenders? Known the world over, I assure you, sir. Personally I’ve tried all kinds of suspenders, but Rimbino is the only brand that has satisfied me. That is why I always give them a kind word when an occasion presents itself. Good night, Mr. Ramble.” With that he breezed out of the tent.

During the rest of the week he broke all records, and Zing became a dream of the past. I already had decided to pay him thirty-five a week, Zing’s regular salary, and was also thinking of asking the big boss to add some to it.

Blow-off night came around and I handed him his bit. “Sorry it isn’t more,” I said; “but if you stick with us for a few weeks I’ll see that you get some more. I reserved a berth for you, number nine, upper, in the *Milwaukee* Pullman. You’ll find the cars sidetracked over in the freight yard. We won’t pull out before morning.”

“Very well, Mr. Ramble. Good night.”

IV.

TEN minutes later I showed a bunch of razorbacks how to handle a stake puller without busting it all to pieces. We had been breaking up the works for about two hours, when I heard a voice calling me that wasn’t altogether strange.

“Hey, Doc!” it bellows. “Where are you, Doc?”

I flashed the lantern in the direction of the voice and spotlighted Zing!

“Get out of my sight, you big ham!” I shouted, not knowing anything worse to say.

As he came walking up in the dark he tripped over some stakes near me, and sat there and grinned. “Well, Doc, how’s every little thing, hey?”

“I’ll give you ten seconds to get off the lot. You’re through—fired—canned! Any time a feller lays down on Doc Ramble—”

“That’s all right, Doc; I know you had a good man, and all that, but—”

“What do you mean *had* a good man?” I snapped.

“I mean that he’s no longer with you—gone—finished—through. Do you follow me?”

“Yeah?” I growled. “What do you know about it?”

“Yeah,” he says, grinning; “I’m here to

announce, ladies and gentlemen, that Mr. Swuddle is now an ex-trouper.”

“Where did you get that bird’s name?” I demanded, becoming curious.

“Well, if you’ll oblige by getting tongue-tied for a minute, I’ll tell you a few things that’s liable to be interesting.”

“If it isn’t,” I said, picking up a stake, “you’ll get this for an encore. Shoot!”

“Then I’ll explain and take a chance of your having enough brains to understand. When we landed in Frosty, I left the train and blew down the main drag and went into a beanery. There was a fellow sitting opposite who was none other than Webster N. Swuddle, the same being the bird who batted for yours truly on the bally last week.

“Well, we got talking,” Zing went on, “and I told him my line, and also stated that I didn’t feel like working, owing to a certain amount of headache. He said he would like to take my place for a week, without you knowing anything about it. He claimed he had a little scheme that was legitimate that he’d like to try out. I’m satisfied to lay off for a week, any time, so I took him up to

the hotel and had him rehearse the speech for about two hours. It was decided that I wasn’t to shine at all. I knew that if I brought him to you and explained, you’d bellow your head off; so I told him your name and let him walk in on you as a stranger. And—Well, Doc, my headache’s now better!”

“What was the big idea?” I asked, not being a mind reader.

“Rimbino suspenders! Where’s your brains? You see, stupid, Mr. Swuddle is the advertising manager for a little suspender company out in Hempville, ten miles from Frosty, and—”

“Enough!” I howled. “I’ll admit that you framed me pretty smooth; but it might interest you to learn that you’re out exactly one week’s salary, which no doubt Mr. Swuddle is now enjoying!”

“All wrong, Doc!” he said with a grin. “For the first time in my young life I got mine six days ahead of time!”

“How was that?”

“Mr. Swuddle paid me in advance—and collected it back from you! Not bad, eh?”