

The Spoilt Argument

By T-BONE SLIM

Man, the well known institution of hopes and fears (terrors), measures but poorly against the forces opposing him. Be the forces natural or artificial, mere man fades into insignificance—and grasps daily at straws to bolster his crumbling position. What the straws are is immaterial to this treatise, but we will mention just one, as a sample—superstition.

Ever an edifice for doubts and worries, his pomp, dignity and conceit appears ridiculous—poor helpless critter.

Eternally stuck. Never "all there." Always seeking precedent. Victim of habit.

(I've seen him searching his vest pocket for means with which to rescue a drowning woman.)

(I've seen him rescuing an ex-Follies girl—blister—full of sea water and sanctification a la Volstead, and I noted: when a virgin bottle departed his bent form he let go of the beautiful affinity and "dived" after the bottle.)

Values, what?

Usage?

But we shall be charitable. We will not paint his full picture. Do you recognize him from the description?

That's him.

Put him contemplating the ocean—"O, wot a beautiful ocean" . . . the thing he first sees is the bottom; two miles down. The next thing he sees is "the brink," then a dark hole—and a great uplift takes possession of his soul—he's startled.

(Yet, only a while ago, he saw the bottom clearly, a more cheerful vision.)

Next he sees the white-caps.

That settles it. He feels like a man in the tow of Ku Klux Klan, or Legion—yet, his feet are on solid ground.

What do you know about that?

Ain't he a most anticipating critter—he actually held his breath and thought he would drown right there on dry ground—dry by amendment.

Put him in a cockleshell boat and he begins to wish he had taken part in the last war and offered his life for his country—instead of drowning (like a rat) in that dirty water with a new necktie.

That's him. The bottom is now six miles south and he might hit a rock or run into a swordfish, circle-saw flounder and a school of cannibalistic sharks. How he wishes he had not neglected to make his will . . . Holy Mackerel, and not a cent of insurance! . . .

He's as good as lost—in desperation he gives one look at the ocean's Plimsol Line (the horizon).

My God! He staggers! The boat overturns, and he's in the water up to his knees! A pretty helpless critter. The water is awful wet. Get the coffin. The man thinks he's sunk.

That's him, uh huh.

He stands there like the justly famous September Morn—looking for help. He'll move when ice forms around his ankles . . . always did before.

Where's the life-saving crew?

Ah, they're playing pinochle—their "look-out" sighted our hero through a half-pint ocular and groaned: "a nut."

But no. He's not a nut. He's an individualist, slightly embarrassed.

But let him explain:

"The sea was rough, the rotten boat was making water fast when, all of a sudden, a giant tidal wave struck her and smashed her to smithereens—I went down and down and down . . . I thought I would NEVER come up . . . but I did . . . and swam ashore . . . about seven miles . . . nothing else for me to do . . . I had no life-preserver . . . and the cars weren't running," he adds whimsically—HIMsically.

That's him, you know 'im?

Don't ask him if he got any water in his ears.

Alone, he is helpless—weak.

Among many, he's as big as they make 'em.

He came near drowning on dry ground—in the dust.

We saw him shipwrecked in 18 inches of wet brine.

All right. Now put him on a ship of tonnage and watch him strut—see him throw his chest, lift his heels and voice. Why is that?

Ah, twelve hundred men took the trouble to build a bottom under him—and he feels strong—strong, encouraged merely by "the work" of twelve hundred "hands."

Supposing, the 1,200 were there?

You couldn't hold him down—he'd fly clear off the handle—just with his own power. Such is man. Fully dependant on others of his kind, and that is why he organizes in unions—so's to have help when he needs it most, much or little.

He'll never be satisfied with less than a one big union—the one big hand.