

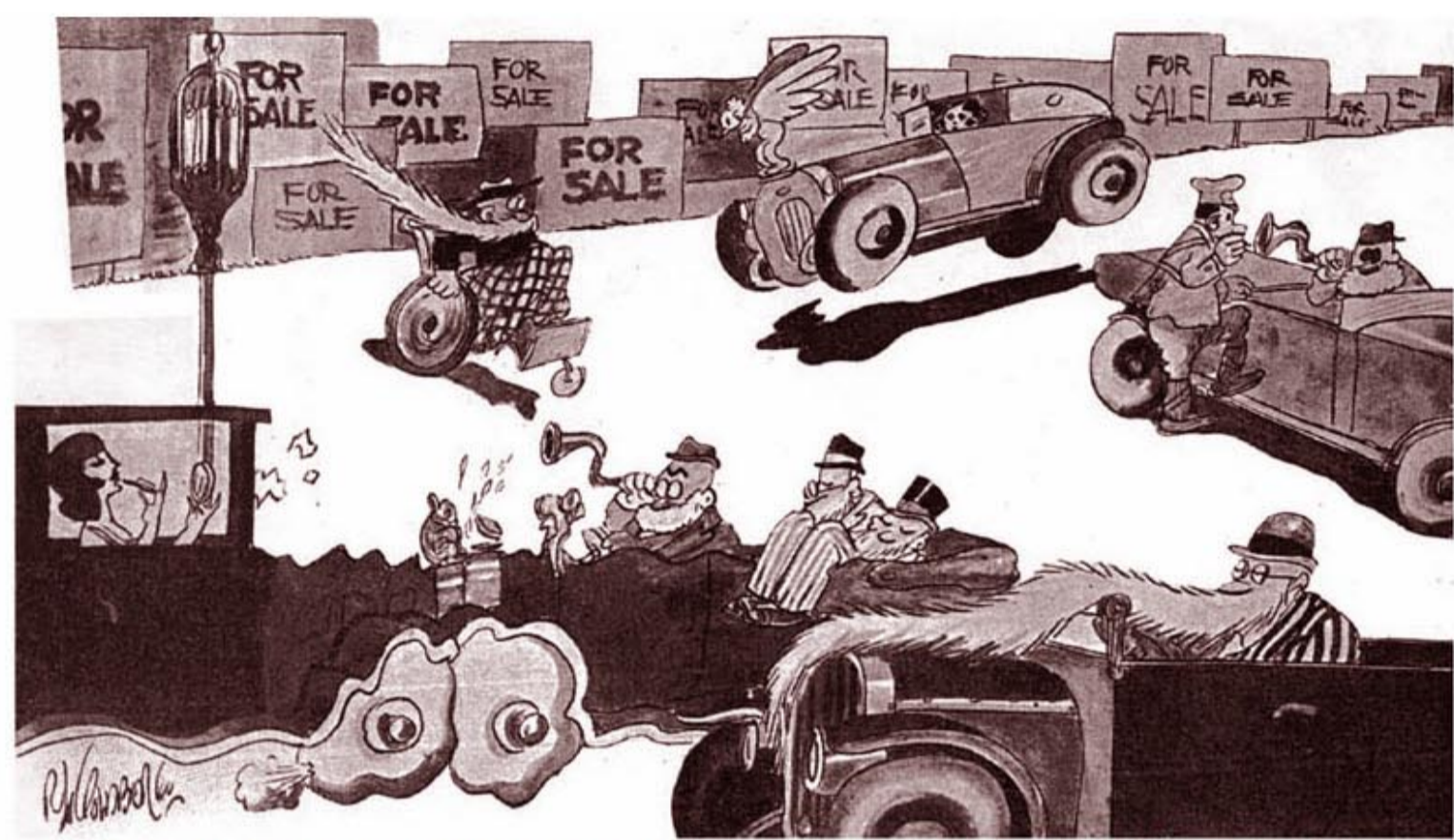
PHOTOPLAY

December, 1930

Rube Goldberg's First Picture

Inventor of self-supporting socks
lives through studio experience

By Rube Himself



In Hollywood all the automobiles seem to be driven by dizzy women and eighty-year-old men



Ye Olde Rube

I PULLED up in front of a gas station that looked like Luna Park in Coney Island and before I could say what I wanted a sun-bronzed attendant, clad in immaculate white, thrust his head through the window and said, "God's country, isn't it!" I simply answered, "No," and drove off.

Everything in Southern California is fine. When you step off the train a representative of the Chamber of Commerce sneaks up behind you and gives you a jab of something that makes you feel sorry for people who have to live anywhere else.

Once you get the avocado dust into your veins you are lost to the rest of the world. You bulge with local pride and your eyes blaze with the light of ecstasy every time they break ground for a new cafeteria.

You develop that best-in-the-world complex. You know that you have the best roads in the world, the best ocean in the world, the best automobile collisions in the world, the best music in the world, and the best toothaches in the world.

I happened to be in Hollywood when the reports for the 1930 census came in. Extra papers appeared on the streets with screaming headlines: "Orange Manor shows stupendous increase of 568 per cent during last ten years;" "Bilgewater had three citizens ten years ago. Today it has ninety. An increase of three thousand per cent;" "All census records broken by Santa Boloney." I couldn't quite get the importance of these startling announcements.

Mere numbers never did impress me. If I had read, "John T. Zoolf, a resident of Pasadena, just invented a new self-tying shoe-lace out of his own head," that would have impressed me as being important. But what I started out to tell you about was my first experience in making a motion picture.

Frankly I was very much scared when I reported on the Fox lot the day after "The Golden State Limited" deposited my trembling form on an empty but beautifully illuminated real estate development. On the way to the studio I saw fourteen automobile collisions. All the cars seemed to be driven by dizzy women and eighty-year-old men.

When I arrived all the supervisors immediately called a conference. I felt flattered. But I soon found out that a conference in Hollywood is equivalent to a yawn anywhere else. While I waited they were holding a conference to decide how



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to dispose of a goldfish that had died during the night.

I had never written a scenario or a play so it was with short gasps and wheezes that I recited my plot to the assembled executives. My final gulp was greeted with an eloquent silence. I did not know that it is a matter of etiquette for the others to wait for the highest-salaried of the executives to speak first. He finally said, "I guess that herring I ate last night didn't agree with me."

THE next in financial importance spoke up. "You must be careful, chief," he said. "I stick to simple things. If you want something tasty and nourishing try pigs' knuckles with cream."

"Speaking of food," said the top notch supervisor, addressing me, "how would you like to have dinner with me tonight? Let's all have dinner. You're my guests." I felt flattered to be included in the invitation. They decided to pick me up at my hotel.

When the celluloid chiefs arrived I invited them upstairs for a cocktail. Much to my joy and surprise they accepted with astonishing agility. As the cocktails took their exhilarating effect the conversation drifted around to talk of where we should eat. Not knowing any of the Hollywood feed stalls I modestly allowed the movie giants to settle it among themselves.

Finally the host was struck with a brilliant idea. "Why not eat right here in this beautiful room?" he asked in the form of a question but which the others took as a final edict. The others knew at once they generally send them away into the desert where they hope they will be wiped out by a cyclone. But they tolerated me because I had a knack of making myself inconspicuous by posing as one of the figures on my modernistic lamps.

My pet sequence in the picture, "Soup to Nuts," was the opening shot. I was confident that it would be a scream.

It showed a close-up of Napoleon standing in deep meditation while cannons roared, dense clouds of smoke filled the air, and martial music played. In the distance a terrific battle was raging.

AS the full scene was revealed you were startled to discover that Napoleon was not Napoleon at all, but an obscure customer trying on a costume of the great general in Otto Schmidt's costume shop.

The man had no pants on and was standing around fuming and fretting while Schmidt was in another part of the shop looking for the rest of the costume.

You saw that the cannon's roar was really a noisy radiator and a giant negro beating a rug and the smoke was furnished by a pressing machine. The battle scene in the background was a tapestry.

The chief supervisor viewed the sequence on the screen the morning after it was taken and conceived the brilliant idea that it would be funnier if Napoleon's B. V. D.'s were spotted with large polka dots. The director made the whole scene over at great expense. At the preview it was taken out altogether for some reason or other—mostly other. You, poor movie fan, will never see it. The studio ash cans are full of these pictorial gems brewed in the heart's blood of inspired authors.

At another time, the supervisor in charge of the picture was quite tickled over the fact that

P H O T O P L A Y

he succeeded in hiring a ten-dollar extra girl for seven-and-a-half. The next day we took a soda fountain scene that was equipped with about four hundred dollars' worth of nut sundaes and angel cake which were not used in the story at all.

The people in the company had a private picnic and I believe that some of the cast sent the company their doctors' bills for stomach-aches. You can't follow the movie line of reasoning. "But," you answer, "how about the reasoning of all the biggest business and financial brains in the country who predicted that this country was in for a long period of prosperity just before the crash came?" You're right.

When you come to analyze it, dumbness knows no social or commercial bounds.

I went to some of the parties in Hollywood and met many of the actors I had known in New York during their less opulent days. As soon as an actor signs a movie contract it is an unwritten law that he buy a house with a patio. A patio is a hall room with three orange trees in it. I watched some of these people when they thought they were unobserved and noticed a momentary shadow of wistfulness flit across their beach-tanned countenances. They seemed to be longing for just one taste of the grime and warm reality of their early struggles.

They play tennis and talk continually about the great outdoors. But their hearts are indoors in the dimly lighted theater where all pulses quicken with that first thrilling blast of the overture.

In the vast enterprise of making pictures where *papier-mâché* cities rise up at the beckoning of an idea there is no confusion. Nobody seems to attach much importance to the thing that astonished me most—the technical end of the game. The director simply says, "Give me a piece of the Third Avenue elevated and a couple of blocks on East Eighty-third Street," and in a couple of days he starts shooting. The sets look more real than the originals. Every time I went back to my hotel room at night I would look in the bed to see if Du Barry or Ivan the Terrible were not hiding under the covers.

Everything seemed like a prop.

I REALLY had a marvelous experience and found everybody pleasant and kind. When they disagreed with me there was no persona feeling—they either thought they were right or were trying to protect their jobs. Everybody connected with my picture was sincerely anxious to make it a success. There are thousands of reasons why a picture is good or bad and no one person can control the final result. If you have a good story and good direction and good acting the picture is apt to be a success. But not always.

At the two previews of "Soup to Nuts" which I attended the audience really laughed so loud they could not hear many of the lines. The laughs were a break for me. And they were a break for the audience because they did not have to listen to half the dialogue I wrote.