

By Sidney Smith

THE VAGRANT DUKE

By GEORGE GIBBS

Author of "The Splendid Cutaway," "The Yellow Dove," "The Secret Witness," etc.

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THIS BEGINS THE STORY. Peter Nikolaevitch, Russian Grand Duke, exiled by revolution, comes to this country as Peter McGuire and goes to work as a rattle box maker in the employ of Jonathan K. McGuire, a member of a gang of crooks who have taken charge of the house. By strange coincidence he meets the man who was once his enemy, Dan Cameron, on the ship that brought him over, on the Jim Coast...

AND HERE IT CONTINUES. Peter stared at him for a moment, but the man would not meet his eyes. "Who are you?" asked Peter at last. "Who are you?" asked Peter at last. "Who are you?" asked Peter at last. "Who are you?" asked Peter at last. "Who are you?" asked Peter at last.

"No, understand," he muttered. "No, understand," he muttered. "No, understand," he muttered. "No, understand," he muttered. "No, understand," he muttered. "No, understand," he muttered.

After that clearing of the air things went somewhat better at the camp. Jesse Brown, though not aggressive, was steady and honest, and had a certain weight with the Jerseymen. As to the others, there was doubt as to whether anything would have satisfied them. For the present, at least, it was a question of getting on as well as possible with the means at hand.

There was a limit to Peter's pay, and other men were not to be had. Besides, Peter had promised McGuire to keep the sawmills busy. He knew that when he had come to Black Rock he had set on the ground, and before he had fallen behind the schedule, and that only by the greatest perseverance could he make up the time already lost.

As he rode back to his cabin on the afternoon after his encounter with Shad Wells and the stranger with the black moustache, he found himself quite satisfied with regard to his summary dismissal of Beth. On Beth's account he had hesitated, but he had decided that before he had come to Black Rock they had been friends as well as distant relatives, and Beth in her freest moments with Peter had expressed the hope that Shad would come around. Peter had given him every chance, even while he had known that the myrrh was working against both McGuire's and Peter's interests. Flynn and Jacob, the men Peter had sent away, were radicals and agitators. Flynn had a police record that did not bear close inspection, and Jacob was an anarchist and out and out before Peter had come to Black Rock they had shown Shad's credulity and after the fight at the cabin he had been their willing tool in interrupting the completion of the contract. For all these things Shad had hoped that if Peter couldn't get the lumber out when promised, McGuire would put the blame on the new superintendent and let him go. That was Shad's idea, he had never been decent enough to warrant Beth's friendship, his jealousy had warped his judgment. Peter was no longer sorry for Shad Wells. He had brought all his troubles on himself.

The same madmen who had done Nicholas to death and had killed one by one the misguided Emperors, Olga, Tania, the poor little Caesarevitch and the rest of them. Did they consider him, Peter Nikolaevitch, lumberjack extraordinary, a possible future claimant to the throne of Russia? Peter smiled grimly. They were "training" at a great while swallowing the cannon.

And if they feared him, why didn't they strike? The stranger had already had ample opportunity to murder him if he had been so disposed, could still do it during Peter's daily rides back and forth from the cabin to the camp and to the upper reserve. All of these thoughts succeeded slowly, as a result of the percolated inspiration at the bunkhouse which had liberated a new train of ideas, beginning with the identification of the Russian character of the lumberman, and ending with the beard and workman's shirt that under the rather modish gray slouch hat and American clothing in which Peter had seen him enter. And Peter had merely let the thoughts pass, and had no proof of the fellow's purposes, and if he had even discovered exactly what those purposes were, there was no recourse for Peter but to ask for the protection of Washington, and this he had no desire to do.

If the man suspected from the quickly spoken Russian sentence that Peter now guessed his mission, he had given no sign of it. But that meant nothing. The fellow was clever. He was doubtless awaiting instructions. And unless Peter took his case to the Department of Justice he could neither expect any protection nor hope for any security other than his own alertness.

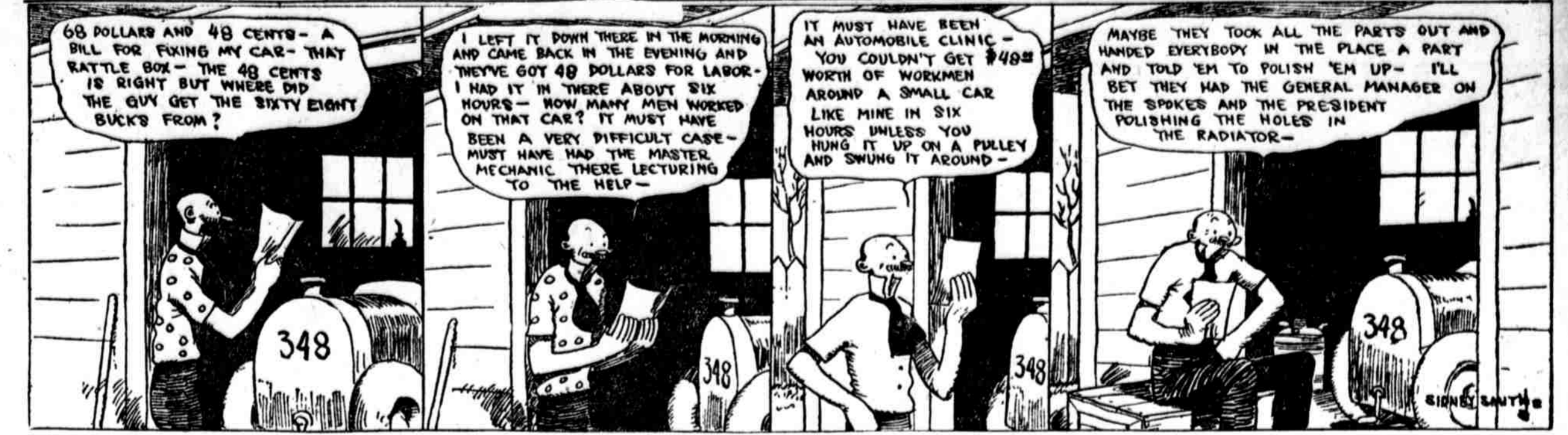
At the cabin Beth was waiting for him. The hours of music and Beth were now as much a part of Peter's day as his breakfast or his dinner. And he had only failed her when the pressure of his responsibilities was too great to permit of his return to the cabin. The hour most convenient for him was at the close of the day, and though weary or discouraged, Peter always came to the end of this agreeable hour rested and refreshed, and with a sense of something definitely achieved. For whatever the days brought forth of trouble and disappointment, down at the logging camp or the mills, here was Beth waiting for him, full of enthusiasm and self-confidence, a tangible evidence of success.

The diligence with which she applied his instructions, the ease with which she advanced from one step to another showed her endowed with an intelligence even beyond his early expectations. She was singing simple ballads now, English and French, and already evinced a sense of interpretation which showed the dormant artist. He tried at first, of course, to eliminate all striving for effect, content to gain the pleasure of the music which he was striving, but she soared beyond him sometimes, her soul defying limitations, liberated into an empyrean of song. If anything, she advanced too rapidly, and Peter's greatest task was to restrain his optimism and self-confidence by imposing the drudgery of fundamental principles.

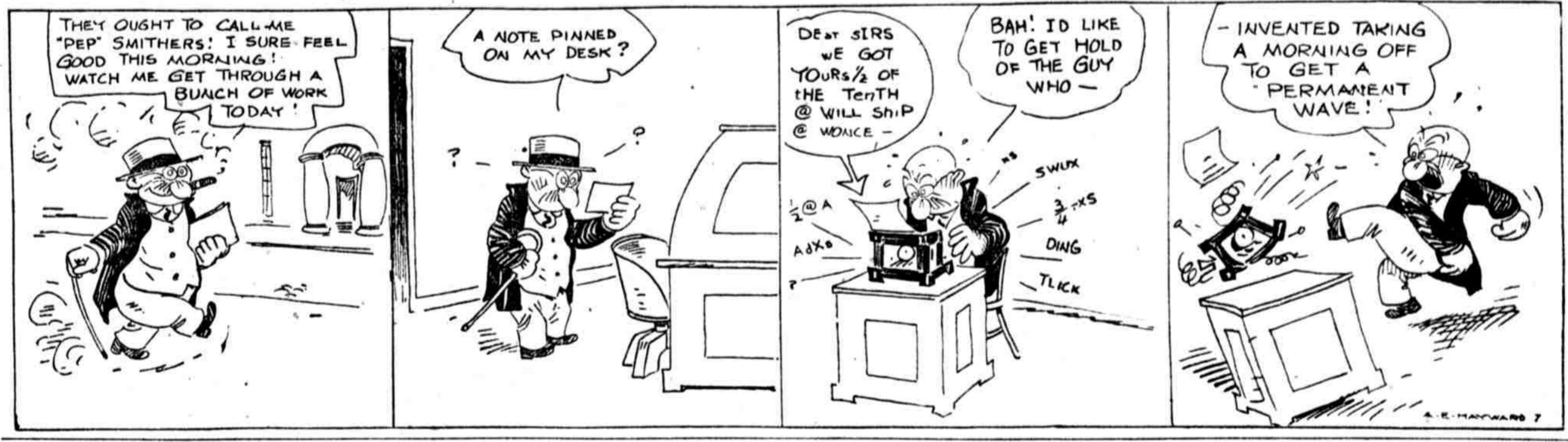
And when he found that she was practicing too long, he set a limit of an hour. Beth's eyes shot fire, but she was young and strong and only once had he noted the slightest symptom of wear and tear on the piano and prohibited the home work for forty-eight hours.

As to their personal relations, Peter had already noticed a difference in his own conduct toward Beth, and in hers toward him—a shade of restraint in Beth's conversation when not on the topic of music, which contrasted rather strangely with the candor of their first meetings. Peter couldn't help smiling at his memories, for now Beth seemed to be upon her good behavior, repaying him for her earlier contempt with a kind of awe as at an attainment. He caught her sometimes in unguarded moments looking at him curiously, as though in wonder at a mystery which could not be explained. And to tell the truth, Peter wondered a little, too, at his complete absorption in the task he had set himself.

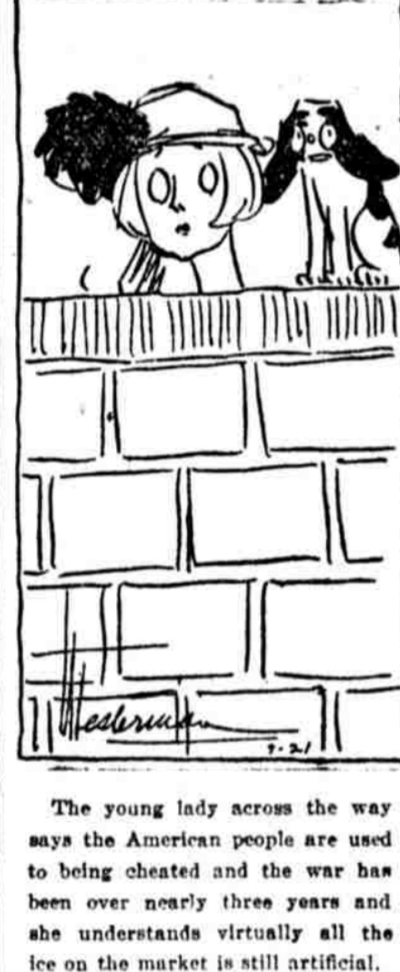
THE GUMPS—Ahem!



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Besides, It Puts Such a Kink in the Business



The Young Lady Across the Way



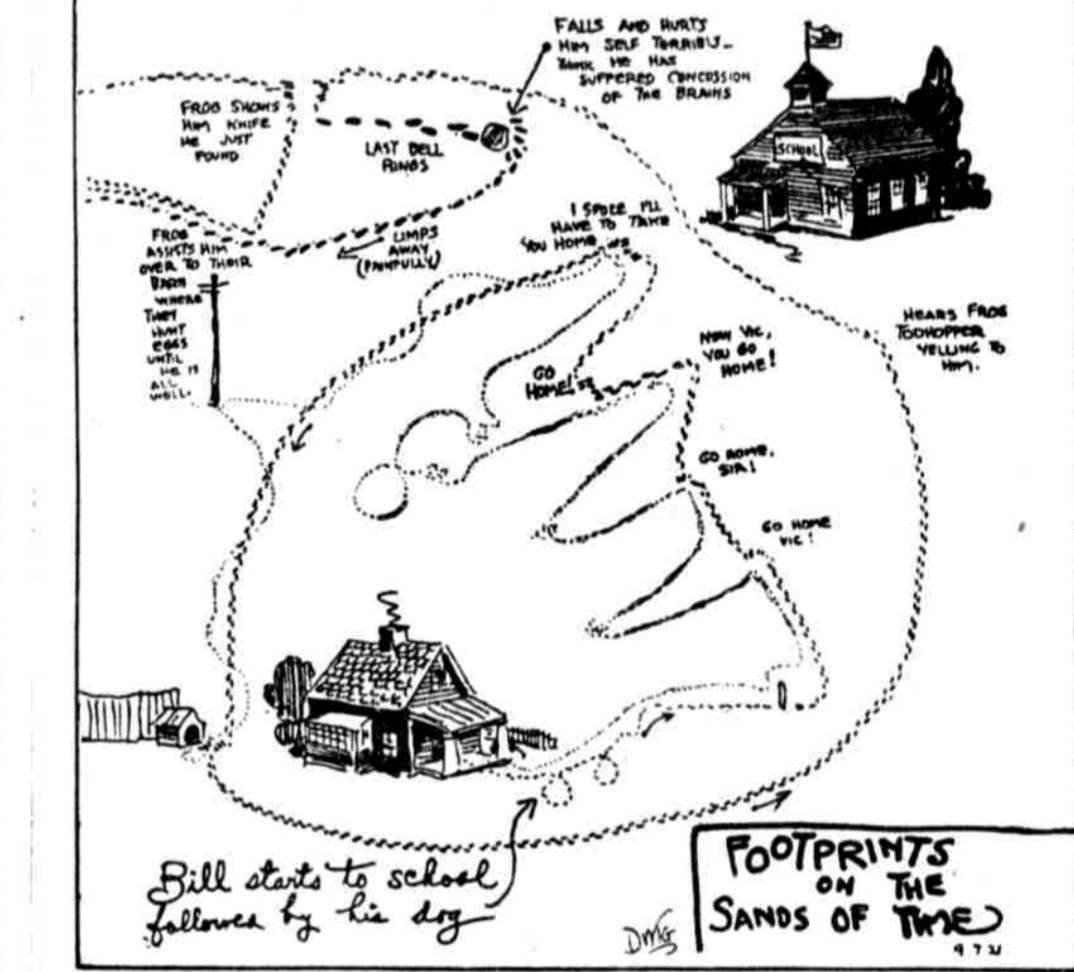
The young lady across the way says the American people are used to being cheated and the war has been over nearly three years and she understands virtually all the lingo on the market is still artificial.

THE POWERFUL KATRINKA



THE POWERFUL KATRINKA HAD A TOUGH TIME MAKING THE MAN WHO PUT IN THE COAL COME BACK AND CLEAN UP THE AWFUL MESS HE LEFT BESIDE THE BASEMENT WINDOW.

SCHOOL DAYS

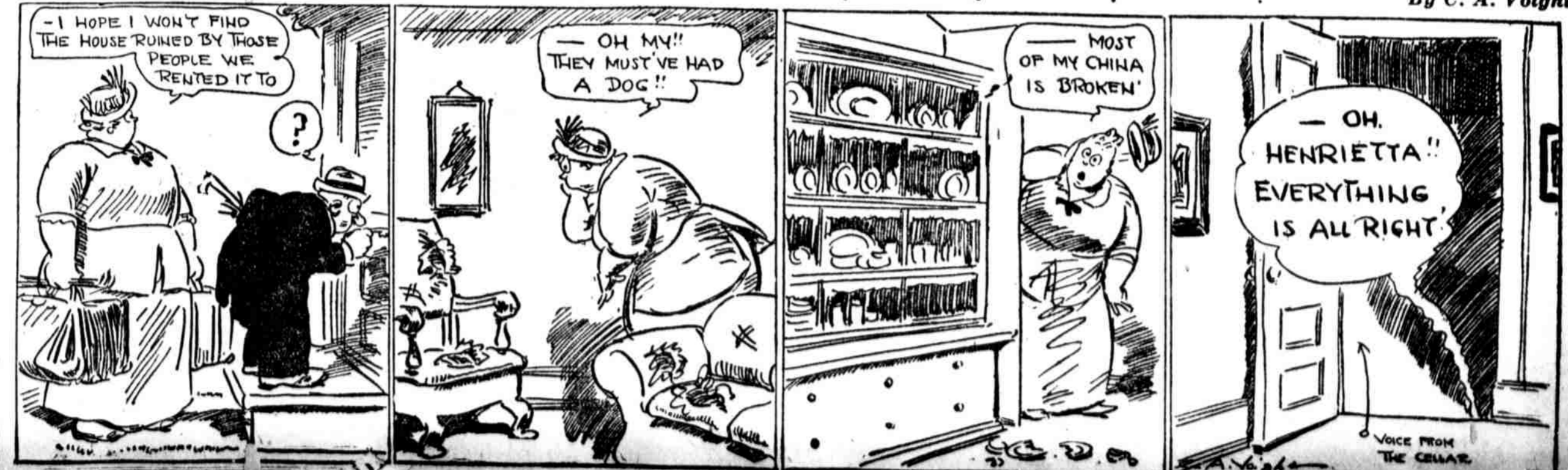


Bill starts to school followed by his dog. FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME.

MOVIE FAN—She's Not That Sick



PETEY—The Return to Town



CONTINUED TOMORROW