



WHEN WE OLD 'UNS ARE YOUNG ONCE MORE

That's an awfully stale old joke, that one about "Have to take the children to the circus."

We want it understood that we go to the circus because we want to go to the circus, and we take the children along because it is as much fun watching them enjoy it as it is to watch the circus. And we don't take the children to "see the animals," either. We've told a few fairy tales in the brief span of our life, but we've never got down to the point of springing that old gag about "wanting to see the animals." No, sir-ee! We want to see the clowns, and the beautiful maiden in the tarlatan skirts dancing the minuet on the broad back of a horse, and the men who turn double flip-flops over the backs of fifteen horses and five elephants—count 'em—fifteen horses and five elephants. And we want to see the grand entry, and the daring young men on the flying trapeze, and the contortionists. We want to see the glitter and glare, hear the crash of the music and stretch our necks trying to see three rings at once.

For about four weeks before circus day we throw a year a day from our shoulders, and when circus day really dawns—and unless it is Christmas day and the Fourth of July no other day is so long in dawning—we jump out of bed feeling as young as we did something like thirty years ago when we ambled down the dusty country road with Will Pryor and Hugh Mercer and Ace White and "Doc" Eldridge and Art Collins and "Irish" Murphy and "Dutch" Hornberger and "Stub" Hart, and all the rest of the bunch to see the little one-ringed circus come into town by wagon. Of course we've got money enough in our pockets today to pay our way into the big top, but it isn't half as much fun to do that as it is to lug about 'steen barrels of water to the elephants and then sit around for an hour trembling with apprehension lest the fellow who promised you a ticket for it fail to show up at the designated spot and shove you under the canvass. The only thing that restrains you from chasing off down to the animal top and working the water carrying racket is the remembrance of the fact that you've got a lot of gray hairs in your head and a few aches in your bones that were not there the morning you sped down the country road to meet your first circus.

There are some things about the circus that are not quite like they were yesterday. The lemonade is neither so cold nor so palatable, and the sugar they use to stick the popcorn balls together is not as sweet as the kind that was used a little while ago. And somehow or other the balloons are not so bright and lack the buoyancy of the balloons they used to sell us. We don't care so much for the lemonade and popcorn and balloons as we did yesterday, but you bet we want to see that funny clown with the inflated bladder swat that mournful looking clown over the head and knock him seventeen ways for Sunday. If ever the circus cuts out that feature we're

going to get out a mandamus compelling them to put it back.

We feel awfully sorry for the children who have been born during the last twelve or fifteen years. What do they know about the real joys of going out to meet the circus? In these degenerate days the circus comes to town by rail, stopping away down in the yards amidst a riot of screeching switch engines and evil-smelling smoke, and the cages are run down inclined planes all at once and trundled off to the lot so fast that no one can keep track of them. That ain't no fun, nohow.

It was different yesterday when we were children. We knew that the day before the show reached our town it showed over in Mansfield, and that there was just one road by which it could get to our town. And 'long about 3 o'clock in the morning Will Pryor threw a handful of gravel against your bedroom window and you hopped out of bed and into your clothes with a speed that would make your fortune on the vaudeville stage if you could do it now. Then off down the village street you hastened, picking up the rest of the gang on the way. When the first blush of dawn showed up on the eastern horizon you were four miles out of town and wondering where on earth the circus could be.

Ace White always did have the best eyes, and of course he was the first one to catch the glitter caused by the first rays of the sun striking the bandwagon. One yell of warning and the whole bunch sped down the road to meet the procession. Come to think of it now it was a sleepy and bedraggled lot of people that came in with the circus. But they looked like magicians from the far east to us then. We chased along by the side of the band wagon for a while, then we slowed up and watched the dingy animal cages go by. By and by along came the two elephants, and there was no more lagging. We kept right alongside the elephants, all right, and when the sleepy-eyed man who looked after them spoke to us we swelled up and felt bigger'n ol' Grant. Finally we managed to get our hearts back to normal, and taking our courage in our hands we tremblingly broached the subject of carrying water to the majestic beasts in return for the blessed privilege of getting into the circus. Once upon a time we arranged with a beetle-browed son of Anak to pass us into the show in return for carrying water, and after we had fairly pumped ol' Doc H.ney's well dry the mean thing refused to keep his agreement and we had to stand outside and listen to the music and the shouts as they drifted out through the canvass. All right for that fellow! If we don't get him good and plenty before we die, we know he'll get it just the same. The man who would treat a trusting boy that way is going to get something extra in his'n when the final accounts are settled. But we are layin' for that fellow yet. When the circus comes to town now we get down to the lot a little early, and we spend a half-hour looking around in the hope of meeting up

with a beetle-browed elephant tender and if ever we do there is going to be a riot call and an immediate demand for the ambulance wagon. And the passenger in the ambulance wagon is going to be the man with beetle brows, too, and don't you forget it.

Thank goodness, however, there are some things the old-time circuses had which the modern circuses refuse to tolerate. Thirty years ago the circus ground was not a very good place for boys and girls and women, for there was too much liquor on hand, and the canvassmen and animal tenders could have given our army in Flanders valuable pointers on the use of profanity and obscenity. And the shell game men, and the short change artists, and the pickpockets and padlock men were almost as numerous as flies around the cook tents. All these things—except, perhaps, the flies—have disappeared. The circus attache who brings liquor on the ground or on the train, or who shows up under its influence, is paid off and fired instantaneously. And even the humblest canvassman has to be courteous and Chesterfieldian and refrain from profanity or find his pay envelope short for the first offense, and no pay envelope at all for a repetition thereof. The modern circus carries a detective force of its own, and that force works hand in hand with the local police. As a result the grounds of the modern circus are as free from gambling as a Sunday school picnic. Sometimes the circus employes do not wait for the police to act when they catch a pickpocket or shell game artist in the act. By the time they are through with Mr. Crook he is a candidate for the surgical ward in the city hospital. All these things have worked to make the modern circus as safe as a Wednesday afternoon matinee.

A very large per cent of the women traveling with circuses have husbands with the show, and circus managers long since learned that married people do better work, last longer and are easier managed than unmarried artists. Monday is always pay day for the artists with a circus, and every pay day the local express offices are swamped by circus employes buying money orders. Many of the "headliners" never draw a cent of their salaries until the season closes, then they get it in a lump and enjoy life during the winter. In big shows Sunday religious services are held every Sunday and the managers are only too glad to give the use of their big tops for this purpose. Three or four years ago the writer had the privilege of attending one of these Sunday afternoon services, held by the employes of one of the big shows, and 300 circus people sang the good old songs of Zion, and listened with interest to a short and earnest sermon, full of practical truths and admonitions, delivered by a circus man who, a few hours before, was clowning to the delight of 15,000 people. One would have to seek far before hearing those old songs sung better or with more fervor, or listening to a sermon that reached the hearts of the hearers with more direct and telling force.

Sunday on the circus lot is always as quiet as a church. The employes are taking advantage of the chance to rest, and only such work as is absolutely necessary is allowed by the management. Everything that can be put off until Monday morning is put off, and the city

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