



IN CLOWN ALLEY.

CLOWNING NOT WHAT IT WAS

Modern Circus Ring Entirely Too Big to Talk In.

NEW METHODS ARE NOW USED

Must Be Action, Hard and Quick, if You Are Going to Make People Laugh—Interview with a Bunch of Clowns.

NEW YORK, April 4.—Many of the costumes that the Barnum & Bailey clowns offer for the inspection of the people who come to see them are worthy of special mention. They are the very last cry in things sartorial, and if Broadway does not copy them, well, it's a loss to the world of the Great White Way, that is all. Here's a chance to get away from the rule of the conventional.

One of these outfits has a waistcoat of large plaids. It is worn with a coat of elephant's breath that has short bobby tails wired to give the required nonchalant air. The trousers are modestly high and only exhibit four inches of snow white hose. A long, light wig lends distinction. The shoes are of the flapping kind. Color, hay. A frock coat of the vintage of 1812 is worn with a dark red sweater, champagne colored stockings and no shoes. A mule, heavily belted, should accompany wearer.

With a swallowtail cut to half the usual length at the back, a bright red necktie with flowing ends is very effective. This should enclose collar with six inch points, built so as to hold the head very erect. Large loose shoes that beat time with the walk and visible stockings are worn.

Thin white batiste with many frills. Red belt drawn taut over expansive waist girth, black stockings, flap shoes, small linen cap set flirtatiously on the side of riotous yellow curls.

A policeman's coat is worn over tipped bustle and shoulder pads. It has three rows of buttons down the front, the middle row very small. A blue flower on left breast gives a Paquinlike air. A clay pipe and whiskers are absolutely indispensable.

With the radiance of this accumulation of fashions and folly in the eyes, it is hard to realize that the rows of men who sit silently in the press room after the circus is over are the very ones who a few minutes before flaunted their magnificence before thousands of spectators. All the white zinc and grease paint has been washed off, and the presmiate attire replaced by the common, ordinary Madison Square Garden kind of business suit, a little the worse for wear in a few instances, showing the storm and stress of life on the road.

There is not the slightest attempt to get away from the current mode. Everything is rigidly conventional and correct. Each one of them has a clean shave, a shoe shine and immaculate linen.

There are fat men and thin men, old men and young, those experienced in circus ways and those to whom life has still something to offer besides a weekly salary and a problematic engagement for next season. But the cheerful ease of the ring is replaced by what in circus talk is called sawdust fright.

It is caused by the unusual experience of being interviewed. All the merry quips and cracks with which people ordinarily associate the circus clown are gone. They sit on the extreme edges of their chairs and wait for each other to speak. When the one ventures, after explanatory cough, the rest admire and envy his eloquence and self-possession.

"If we'd only known about it two days ago," one of them confesses, "we'd had a chance to think up something to say. Lord, lady, we've got stories enough. Some of us've been more'n forty years in the clowning business. But you can't think of stories right off the bat, begging your pardon, this way."

Then they introduce themselves and each other. "Lady, I'm the policeman, the jockey and the ballet girl."

"I'm the man with the long rope and the short dog. My! but I thought he'd bite my ankles today, exposed as they be."

"I'm the one whose feet flap the most."

hurt yer. Walsh's got the floor. What, he's backed out, too?"

"Well, I don't know, lady. It's tough for you, and with pictures coming our way too. Lord! Seems as if we'd ought to think of something. The trouble's right here, now. We'll tell you, there ain't nothing new in the business. Clowning's the same story, year after year."

"Oh, yes, of course we go to different places, all over the world, in fact." It is Foolish Ford who is speaking, a middle-aged man, with a deeply furrowed face and kind gray eyes. "But it's all the same to us. We don't care whether a town's up or down."

"I'm thinking of San Francisco, when I say that. I was there before the earthquake and I was there after it. Didn't see any difference to talk about. Up above the ground or down below it, what's the odds? It's just a town, that's what it is."

"Now, I've been in London a heap o' times. Lived right near Westminster abbey; and all last season I was so English that I had my trunk marked 'Sir Richard Cornerford, Liverpool, England.'"

but I never went near the abbey to go inside.

"I don't know why clowning makes you feel that way, but it does. You get so god-darn tired of places where George Washington was shot and Abe Lincoln was born that you just leave 'em for the rubber-necks."

"And, then, besides, we're thinking." This is from one of the other thirty-five clowns. "You see, when you're a clown it's up to you to think up something original, for no matter how good a stunt you may have you can't go on doing it forever. You've got to have something every bit as good as you had before and a heap sight better. It keeps you guessing in your spare minutes."

"One or two wipe off the perspiration from their brows at the memory thus evoked."

"Some of the salaries of the clowns run as high as \$100 a week, some don't get more'n \$25. The cleverest clown is the one that fools the manager the best. He is the best if he can do that, for it ain't an easy trick. He's stopped fooling and is the real thing. Have you got that down?"

"The way a clown does is to think up something smart, and then submit it. You needn't think it'll go because you write a letter sayin' it will or because you laugh at it yourself." It is the inventor of the rubber-neck coach trick who now has the floor.

"We tried that trick first in Brooklyn and they laughed at it and then we were up a tree because we thought it wouldn't take in New York, but it has."

"New York's the ticklish place. Take a trick all over the country and get a laugh wherever you strike the tent poles, and then tote it off here to this burg and you get the frozen mitts."

"Then, again, some fool thing that the country jays would be ashamed to smile at will bring down the whole Garden. People'll go home and talk about the button busting clown comically for a week and bring over their mothers-in-law to see it."

"Have you ever been in Paris, lady?" interrupts one whose name is unknown, "and did you ever get knocked down by a cab and get arrested for blocking traffic and fined for it? Well, that would remind you of one of the many joys of the merry clown's life."

"If he gets kicked by a horse that is showing off in the acme of expert equitation and acrobatic equestrianism, or if he is knocked over by one of those graceful little Roamin' chariots, or perhaps if a trapezist in his marvelous aerial act forgets and falls on him instead of the net, why everybody wants to know what the clown's doing in the way the Paris business has got to be under foot and interfering with the legitimate business."

"It's up to the clown to look out for himself, and when you've got everybody in your neighborhood interested in your stunt and you can only hold 'em there for a minute or two by the power of your marvellous personality, it's mighty hard work to have to be eternally and forever trying to crawl out from under the weight of half a dozen animals of one kind and another."

with the ringmaster, and between them they managed to fire the changes, on all the local gags and the jokes.

"He would interpolate a comic song now and then and answer back if anyone asked him a question. It was hard work, but it didn't begin with the work of the clown today."

"Now it's action, something doin' and doin' quick and hard. You've got to get a laugh as soon as people look at you. You can't give 'em a chance to go home and talk it over and come to some family decision. No, sir-ee."

"So our surest way is the makeup, for the modern circus is too big to have talk in. You wouldn't be heard. A clown has to get up his own rig, buy it or have it made; then it belongs to him, and the value of a clown is oftentimes measured by the amount of funny costumes he has in his repertory."

Here at the Garden I suppose every clown has four or five changes which he puts on in the course of one show, never appearing in the ring in the same gown. We don't spend much time browsing about libraries or Fifth avenue auction rooms, but sometimes we do get an idea from a cartoon, and junk shops are our favorite hunting ground. Anything funny that we see we get and hang on us."

"Many of the costumes are very expensive, \$5 or \$10 maybe, and as they don't last long the accumulation of this property represents quite an item of expenditure. We do economize oftentimes by using one year's costume for the next season's rainy day suits. That's our only way of getting anywhere near ahead of the game."

"And if you get a funny idea be sure that it will be copied right away. The flap feet when they first came into the business made a great hit, but the season wasn't over before every clown in the country was

flapping his feet, as if he'd invented 'em."

The policeman breaks in. "I suppose I'm considered the funniest clown in the business." There is a little choking sound heard from the rows, but it does not break out into articulate speech. "This makeup of mine's a direct inspiration."

"I was calling on a lady friend and telling her that I was looking for a long coat. She was a good sized woman, somewhere near 200 pounds, and she opened the door of the wardrobe and showed me her last year's garment hanging there. It was all right but the color, and she suggested that I have it dyed, which I did."

"Then I sewed three rows of buttons down the front, the small row in the middle, and borrowed from another lady friend her bustle and shoulder pads—the first one didn't have 'em in stock for obvious reasons. You see what a success it is. The children simply love me."

"It's a queer thing about them kids. Just as soon as they get old enough to throw a stone they're on the lookout for a cop to throw it at, but let there be a policeman clown, they can't see him too often. They just grow crazy over him."

It is while the subject of children is being discussed that a letter is brought in by one of the officials, who reads it aloud. It is from a Harlem parent who has lost two boys and thinks they must be with the circus.

After its contents have been thoroughly digested by the assemblage there is a deep silence. Walsh looks fussed up about it and Eganer crosses his legs and uncrosses them nervously.

Finally there is a chorus of protesting voices: "Oh, of course they've run away with the circus. Led to their ruin by the clowns' talk. Whenever there's a circus in town and the boy's mistaid of course he must have joined. And why do they always think they're going to be clowns? It requires some training to ride bareback or swing on the bars, but none, of course, to be a clown; oh, no, none at all. Think of it! As if we didn't have troubles enough without stealing children to train."

"Well, but," begins a mild-voiced clown in the second row, "we couldn't get along without the kids. That's true enough. They come pleased in the beginning, and all you've gotter do is to take a little notice of 'em, wave a day day and they're with you from start to finish. No weary work trying to smooth out the glassy stare."

"I remember one orphan's day. Well, lady, I've been clowning now for some thirty odd years, and when I think of it I get a queer sort of feeling somewhere."

"It was a benefit performance and a whole founding establishment was there—courtesy of the management. How they did enjoy it! Didn't seem to have too much fun in their lives, and they lugged as if it had been bottled up for a long time. After the show was over the manager asked me as a great favor if I'd stand at the door and shake hands with the children as they went out. Would I? You bet I would!"

"I never enjoyed handshakes like those. One by one the kids sidled up, some scared as could be, some brash; those were the ones who were going to be clowns themselves when they grew up. Some of the littiest ones hesitated, not through fear—oh no—but they wanted to-what do you think? Sure, kiss me!"

"Did I let 'em? I lifted them one by one in my arms and they kissed me so hard that when they got through all the white zinc was kissed off in a smooth circle all around my mouth. But what did I care?"

If I could draw \$12 a week for that, why couldn't I make \$5 being a clown? I put it up to the manager and he gave me a try. I succeeded and am now at the top of my profession."

There is a decided movement of disapproval. One says: "We ain't sayin' you ain't, but the profession of clowning is different from a turnip, in that it has more'n one top."

"Got that down in your notes?" says the tall man, "for if you ain't, think I may use it myself. We're always looking about for chunks of wit, for when the circus season is over nearly all of us go into vaudeville, and some of us have even tried the legit."

"I played two seasons in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., in a temperance drama called 'Dot the Miner's Daughter.' The neighbors said I was good, but the general public agreed with my family. I never went back."

"Some people think that the clowns live together, herded like freaks, and I met someone around asking for the clowns' boarding house. The truth is that most of us have been born and brought up in the business. We married in it and our children are taught the circus stunts as soon as they begin to walk and talk, but we'd all of us like them to go into the legitimate and make a name for themselves, get away from them long footprints of the one-night stands and the seasons on the road."

"We don't any of us retire rich. Barney Barnato, the South African millionaire, was the only one, and the disappointment of riches or the contrast between his life as was and is made him commit suicide in midcareer. There's many of us have left clowning for good, Richard Golden and

"The dark man who speaks next was with Walter Mair's show in the beginning. 'I began in the concert that took place after the show, and one day it occurred to me

"At the end of that time I went home in a box car and put my trunk in pawn before I started. Same with you fellows? Beginning's nearly always identical. Next year I got \$35. Same with you fellows? Thought so."



THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH FOR THE STAR.

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THE ROPE AND THE DOG.

Billy Chifford, for instance, but perhaps you'd better not mention their names and give 'em free advertising."

"The real excitement of the clown's life begins when he starts in betting. Every Saturday night in Clowns' alley, we call the clowns' dressing room, we bet on the number of weeks and the town where the circus'll end. It's in the Clowns' alley that all special announcements are made and anyone has the privilege of stepping on the table and making a little speech."

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