

# PEEPS UNDER THE CIRCUS TENT

## SURPRISES FOR INEXPERIENCED ONES

### IN GLIMPSES OF TRAINING METHODS.



STANDING ON THE HANDS

**A** PEEP into the circus is sure to bring the tender-foot visitor surprises, yet not of the sort he expects.

The world of the circus, which is wreathed with halos of glory by the boy, and blackened and "sickled o'er" by the blasé imagination of the man, is neither the glitter and gold of the one nor the barren barbarity of the other.

It is a cross between the two, and the time to see the quality of its nature is in a morning visit, when the lights are out and the sun is up, and the circus world is in its morning *neg ligée*. It is then that the small boys begin their visits.

To their glorified sight nothing within the sacred tent is without its charm; and they peer through its holes and under its edges at breakfast time across to the three long tables where executive staff, performers, men, women, and children are gathered about the owner and his associates.

#### Trained as Children.

Nearly all the performers have been born to the purple, and some of them come from families which have been on the road for three and four generations, so that when they begin their training at 2 and 3 years of age they bring to their first lessons all the incentive and adaptability of heredity. The first outside training is in the development of daring, the expansion of the lungs, and the hardening of the muscles. Only when the acrobat is young can he learn when to hold on and when to let go. It is instinct for a child to catch at something when he feels himself falling, but the circus child must acquire the instinct of catching only at the right instant and of turning at the right moment.

The first athletic wack of a tumbler is jumping from a springboard and getting the uneasy sensation of springing through the air. After this comes a somewhat technically known as the stock somersault, where there is a revolution so slow that the spectators scarcely realize that it has taken place. The tumbler springs into the air and turns over slowly with practically no exertion.

Then comes the "tuck" preparatory to the real somersault. Both legs are tightly grasped half way between the knee and ankle and pressed closely together while simultaneously the muscles of shoulders and back are brought into play, acting like the balance weight of the wheel to help him in completing his revolution. He must wait to take his tuck until he has sprung as far in the air as his legs or the force of the springboard have carried him; if he goes too soon he will fall, and if he waits too long he is sure to be thrown, and in either event to break his bones.

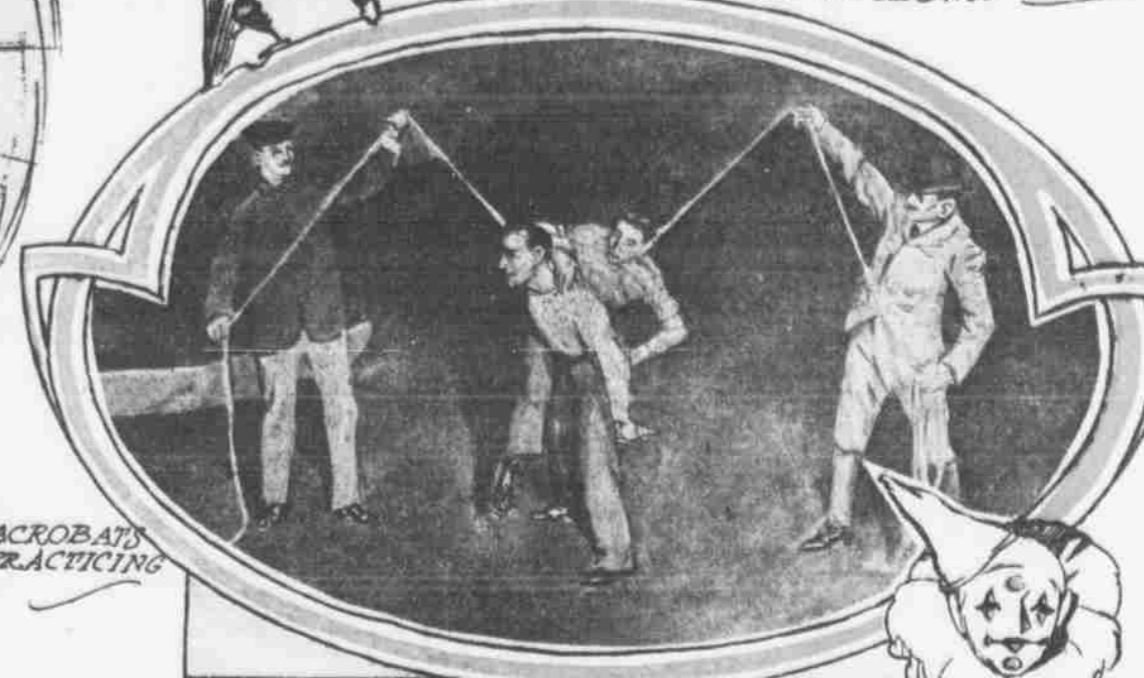
To do all this requires a nicety of calculation, as do also the distances for jump, turn, and fall. So that from necessity he is by no means an unintelligent man, but understands mathematics and geometry pretty well, and often knows enough to



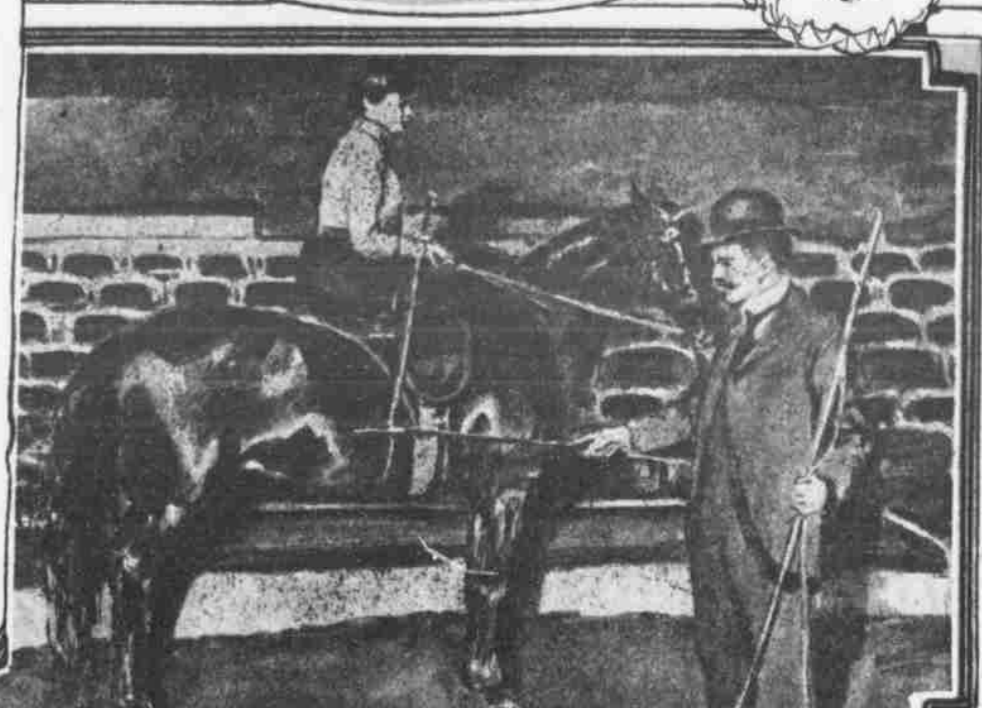
ON THE TIGHTROPE



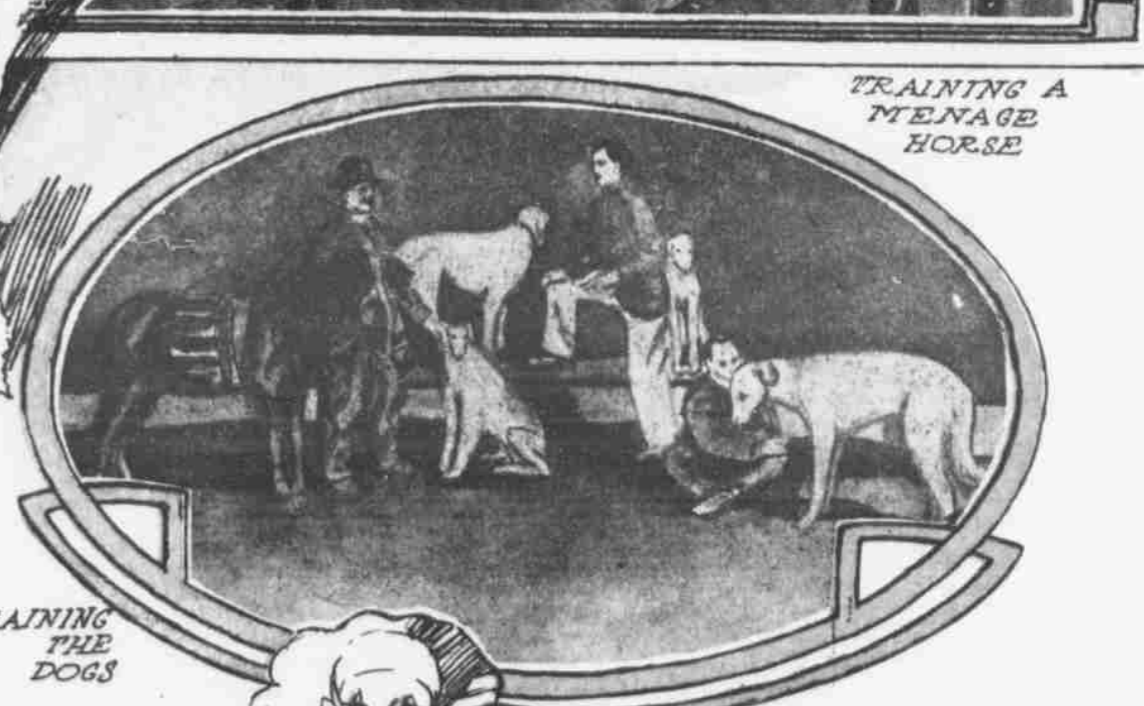
THE MAN IN THE SHIRT-SLEEVES IS A CLOWN



ACROBATS PRACTICING



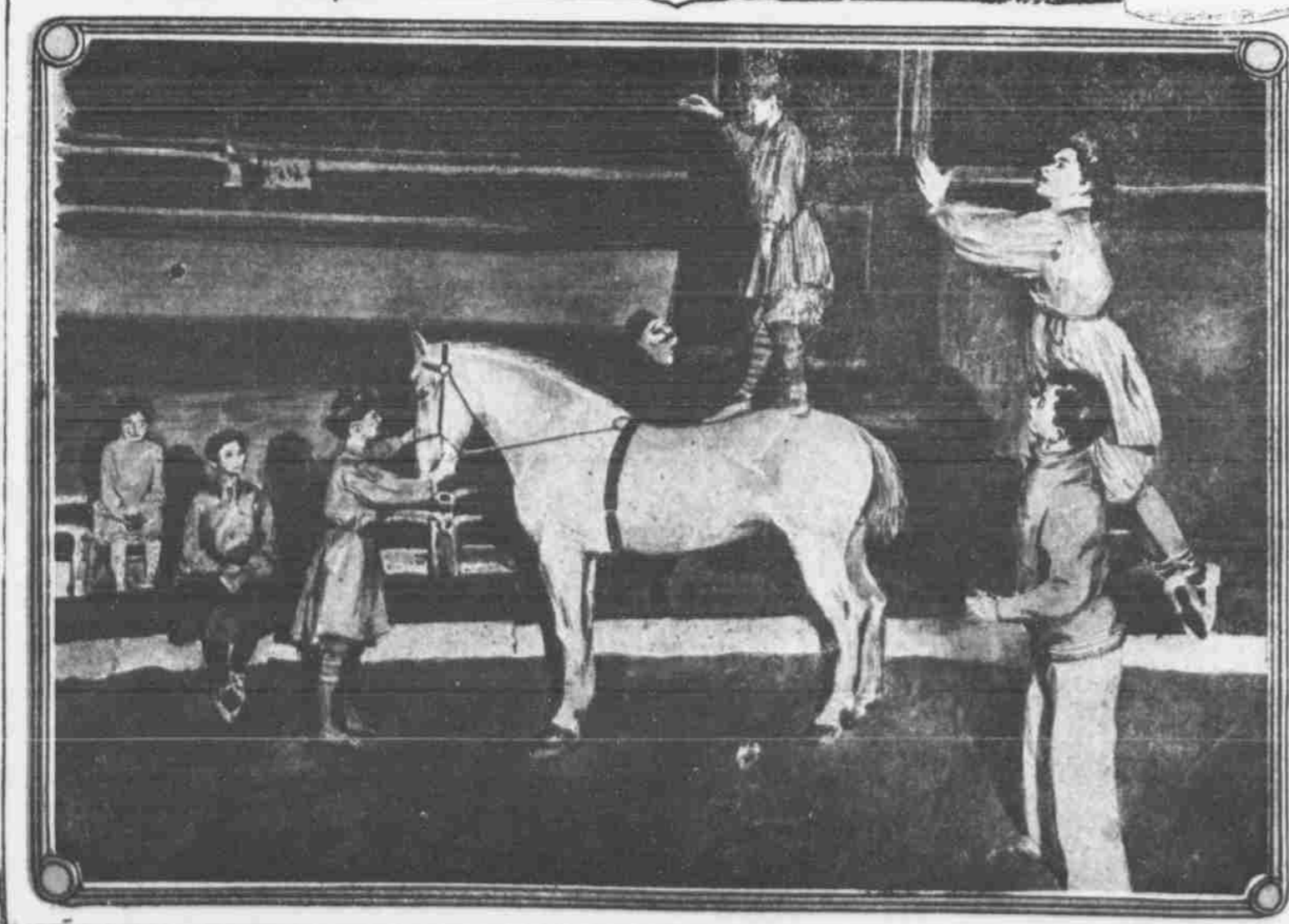
TRAINING A MENAGE HORSE



TRAINING THE DOGS



CEASAR OF



PRACTICING POSES



THE HORSES PRACTICING

Invent his own apparatus, whose size, shape, and strength must all be calculated with great precision. He needs withal a remarkable degree of presence of mind, and, as old circus men aver, he is often born with a mental balance which becomes not only a habit, but an exact science, and is one of the perquisites of an aerial artist who essays the feats of the flying ring.

#### Take Great Care of Bodies.

All this means clear, high thinking, and plain living, and a physical life that moves with the precision of clockwork. He is well and plainly fed, and forbidden drugs and liquors on pain of instant dismissal. Profanely also in some circuses brings a ticket of leave, and there is a story of a famous circus owner who heard one of his drivers speaking unpublishable words to a troupe of children. "Go get your pay, and don't come to the lot again!" he shouted to the devil, and, leaping to the wagon seat, took charge of the horses himself for the rest of the journey.

The ropewalkers, whether of the tight or slack rope fraternity, do not scorn the assistance to balancing that a small Japanese parasol, or a fantastic fan, or some other graceful object lends them in rendering their picturesque poses with finish and ease. To the onlooker these added paraphernalia may appear purely as ornaments, or more probably as artistic extras, which not only enhance the spectacular effect but demonstrate the performer's greater skill. In reality they play a leading rôle of the utmost seriousness, and have saved many a wirewalker from losing his poise and falling perhaps to his death.

#### Dislike Mechanical Aids.

Generally, however, intrepid outdoor promenadeurs of wire threads, and all the tumblers and tricksters of the circus, disdain all handicaps to the full flow of their daring, and put no bridle on their courage. Nets and mattresses are used, but so absorbed are they in the enterprise in hand that they actually do not know whether the safety appliances are in place or not. A useful device that has saved many bones and necks from wreckage, is the drilling of the horses to music. In every good circus the horses go with the band, and stop with the band, and in time of accident the director calls halt to the musicians; and if the chariots are racing round the ring in one of the most perilous of circus movements and some one has come to grief the halt means life really rescued from the jaws of death.

Most of these recklessly brave women and girls are of domestic instincts. As soon as their starry skirts and blazing bodices are off for the day, they work on sewing and fancy work for their families in some far away home; not on their circus finances, which are in the keeping of the circus "mother" and the sewing tent of the institution. Sometimes they ask to bake a cake, and if the chef of the circus kitchen vetoes their request they beg the use of some kitchen in the town where the circus happens to be, buy their eggs and milk, and pay a neat rental for the stove which they need, in order to give expression to their femininity.