

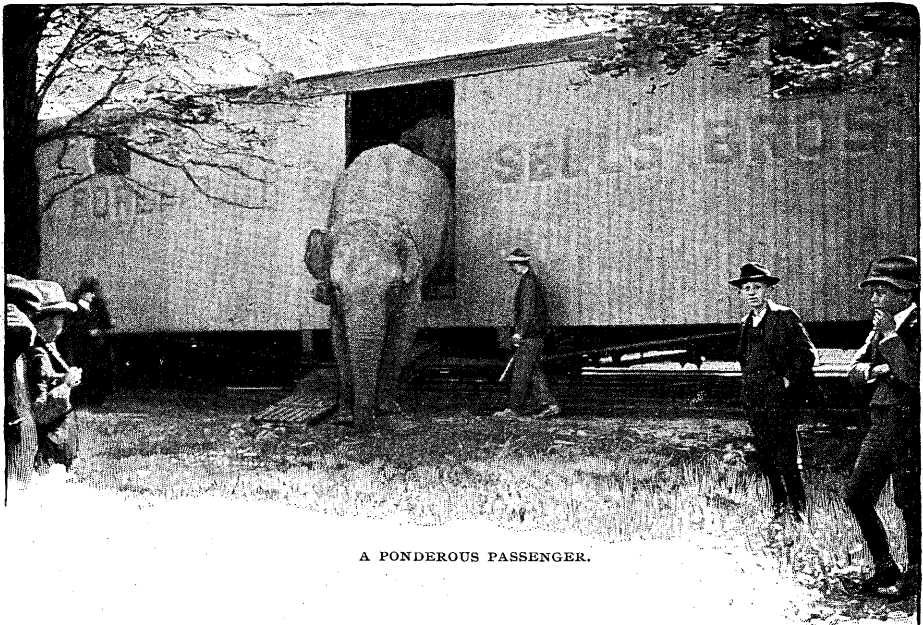
BEFORE THE CROWD IS ADMITTED.

THE ORGANIZATION OF A MODERN CIRCUS.

BY WHITING ALLEN.

SITTING, like birds gone to roost, on a fence surrounding a broad, smooth field, were some boys, watching impatiently the parting rays sink from a low oblique till the sun had gone to bed. With a firm resolve to beat the sun in its return to that field, they trudged reluctantly homeward. For those boys knew, as all others knew

who lived within fifty miles, that before the sun rose the pastoral quiet of that field would be broken, the twittering of birds, the chirping of insects and the lowing of kine would be hushed—unheard in the confusion of sound that would come from the squawking of birds from the tropics, the shrill trumpeting of huge elephants and the



A PONDEROUS PASSENGER.



AN EQUESTRIAN PAIR.

snarling and roaring of lions and tigers—that the circus would be there.

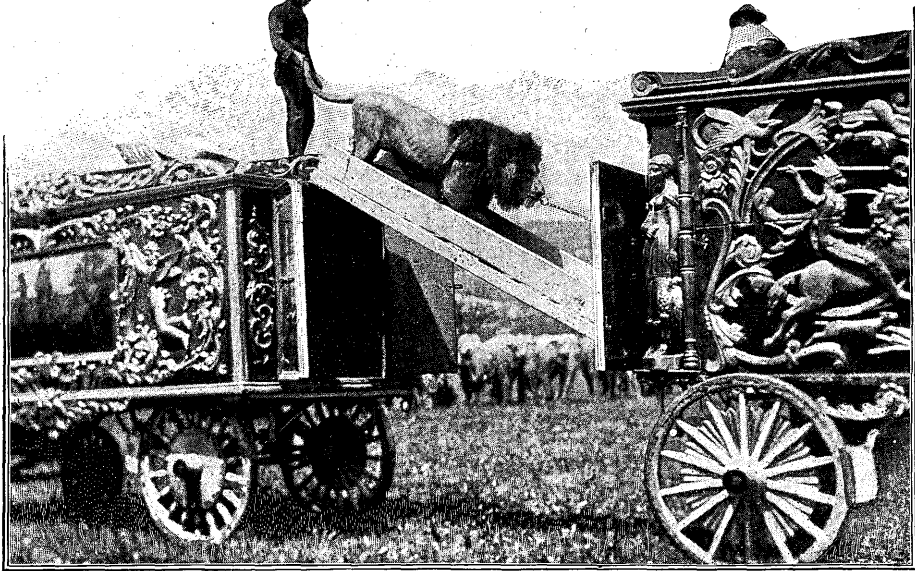
Greater wonder by far than all the curiosities and the performance of the circus is the really marvelous system which governs every element of its organization and makes possible its smooth and certain operation upon such a stupendous scale. It is given to no layman and to but few circus people to realize the scope of a circus organization. An outline of some of the multifarious elements will be attempted in the hope that it will prove interesting and comprehen-

sible. No other human institution is so generally known and so little understood as the circus. Along the same paradoxical line it may be said that no other thing so vast in dimensions springs so quickly into existence in a community or is so slow of growth. In one day it is in one town, the next day it is in another, and so on for a period averaging six months in every year. And yet it is built slowly and with the greatest conceivable care. Its accumulation and care are the work of many, but the central, creative intelligence is the mind of but one man. The number of truly great circus creators is extremely limited.

Such a man must know the country, its character and inhabitants, and this involves the industries and pursuits of the people of nearly every county and of every state in the United States. His knowledge along this line extends to almost every section of Continental Europe, omitting only Russia, Spain and Italy; every town in Great Britain and Australia, and nearly all the countries of South America. This knowledge must be largely specific, and the fund of it is enlarged continuously by the reports of agents who are sent months ahead along the route that is contemplated for an ensuing season. He has in his mind's eye a photograph of every town. He must know the location of the railroad yards and their relative position to the grounds the show will exhibit on. He must know approximately how much dirt it will require to fill in depressions that will become pools in the event of rain, and provide in advance of the arrival of the show to meet



CROWDING INTO THE BIG ARENA.



TRANSFERRING THE LORD OF THE DESERTS.

such a contingency. He must know that there are no bridges to be crossed that will not bear the burden of his heavy vans and cages, and that the elephants will refuse to cross—for an elephant knows instinctively if a bridge will not sustain his weight, and he can scarcely be forced to attempt it. In fact, the exceptions where he has been forced against his protest have invariably proved the infallibility of his instinctive judgment.

A general knowledge of all phases of national, state and municipal law that will affect the operation of his show is also necessary: licenses, their amount and manner of collection; contracts, their form and force. He must be familiar with the price of provisions for man and beast—the prevailing prices of the places to be visited,

and elsewhere, in order to take every advantage of the markets of various sections. He must be well informed about the railroad business, the materials and construction of all kinds of cars, and their dimensions in order that the entire route of the show may not be changed by a bridge or a tunnel too low or too narrow—and instances of shows suffering serious losses of time and money from such causes are not infrequent when their managers are inexperienced—the kind of iron and wood and paint necessary, and all the details acquired only by men who make this knowledge their life-work. Not only distance but the grades of a road sometimes make it impossible to carry a show from one town to another in time to give the exhibitions and get away, and he knows what parts of a road to avoid



COOKING FOR THE ENTIRE TROUPE.



A DIGNIFIED PARADE.

to obviate any loss from that source. He knows the basis of rates and how they are fixed by the different railroads, and avoids lines which are extortionate. He must not be charged for more engines and crews than are necessary to handle his show.

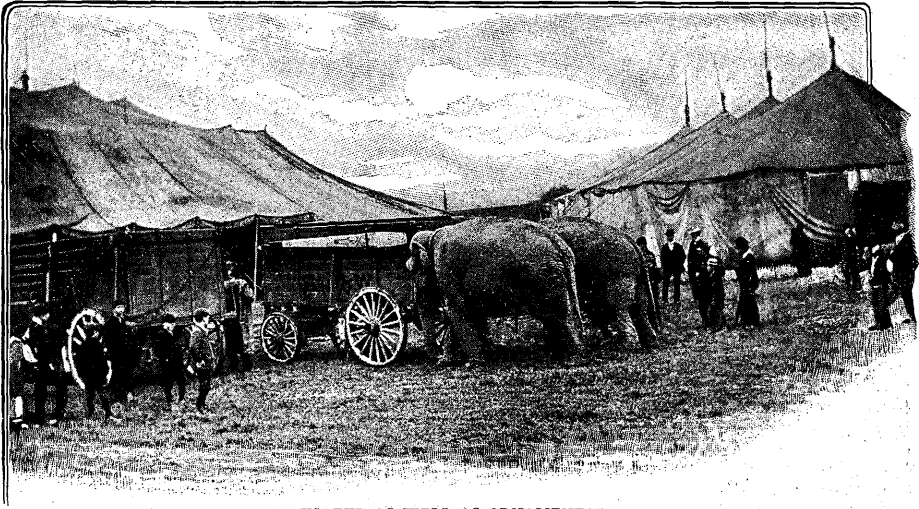
Better knowledge of the horse may not be had on any stock-farm nor in any gipsy-camp. He knows that the Norman, with its enormous strength and gentle disposition, allied with the wiry sinews and stamina of the American horse, will give him a short-coupled, stocky but nimble animal that will be able to bear the strain of sleeping standing in a moving train of cars at night and heavy hauling at day with no loss of spirit or of strength. He is a practical veterinarian, whose judgment of an

ailing horse must be quick, accurate and final. He has the same sort of knowledge of all kinds of animals, tame or wild; knows their habits and their food and how much they should have—that carnivorous animals should be made to fast one day in each week to keep them healthy. Sunday is fast-day in the menagerie. The sort of hay that each section of the country will supply and its effect on the horses, elephants, and other animals that consume it; harness and trappings, the kinds of leather, and every detail of their outfit to the width of the bit each of his horses must have, are also within the scope of a circus proprietor's range of observation.

Being the greatest of all consumers of lithographic printing, he is almost a master of the lithographic art as well as a practical printer in the knowledge of paper and of ink of every color—its cost, weight and endurance—so that he can figure with an equal advantage so far as knowledge goes with the printers who do the enormous amount of work he consumes every year. Being the heaviest of advertisers in proportion to the amount of business he is capable of doing, the circus manager must have a broad and precise knowledge of rates per line, per inch, per column and per page in the principal newspapers all



A HOTEL ON WHEELS.



USEFUL AS WELL AS ORNAMENTAL.

over the world. The preparation of all his advertising material is under his immediate attention and must meet with his approval before it goes to the public.

Truly great showmen have not been great alone in general success, but they possess that rarer quality, greatness in detail. Enough detail has already been given to show the extraordinary versatility that forms the central and controlling intelligence in the organization of a circus.

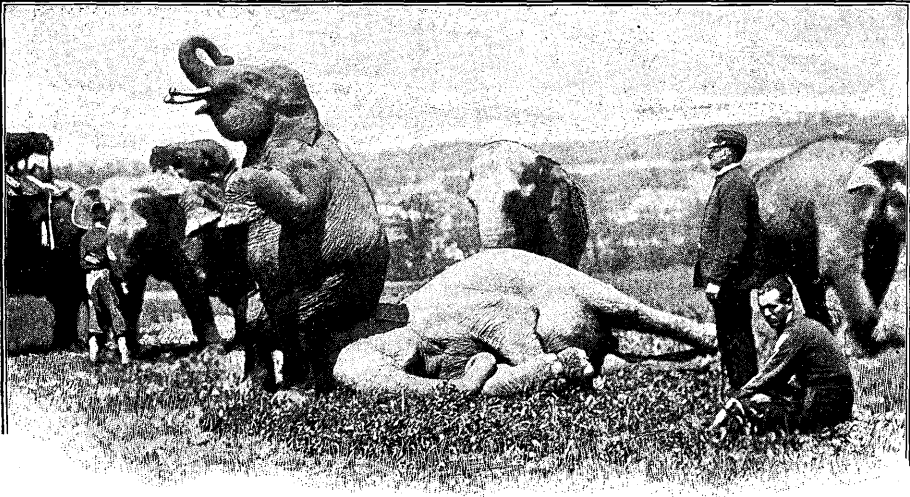
To illustrate further the character of that intelligence, it may be well to visit first the office of a circus while it is in its winter quarters. None of the first-class circuses extends its season beyond the middle of November, though the idea generally obtains that they migrate South during the winter and run along like the brook. The season ended, usually at some Southern point, the show is shipped into winter quarters. About one-half of the persons employed during the summer go to their homes, and it is a somewhat curious fact to the observant that they prefer the small towns or farms rather than the cities. There they while away the winter at various domestic and social pursuits. Circus women especially are fond of the quiet life in winter, and are domestic in disposition, seeking to avoid a crowd after six months of daily crowds in the pursuit of their calling. No woman will be employed by a first-class circus who is not accompanied by some male relative, and

scandals among the women are absolutely unknown. The remaining one-half of the employees are kept busy at the winter quarters in caring for the animals and the property and preparing for the next season.

In the office will be found the proprietors, surrounded by their agents. These comprise, usually, a general agent, whose duties are described by his title; a railroad contracting agent; two or three agents who are known as "contracting agents," who engage the lots, arrange for livery teams, bill-boards, provisions, et cetera; the treasurer, and the one or more bookkeepers, typewriters, et cetera; and a general press agent, whose winter duty is to prepare the advertising material—writing the various publications, copies of newspaper advertisements, lettering the big posters, et cetera—in short, to act as editor of the circus. Engagements with performers are usually made before the close of the preceding season. In any event, they are all made before the first of the year. As soon as they are done, the general agent arranges with the proprietor his appropriation



A LOOK AT THE SPECTATORS.



PUTTING THE ELEPHANTS THROUGH THEIR PACES.

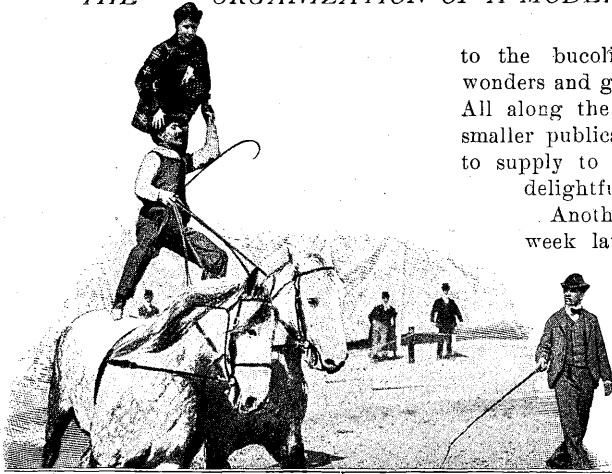
for posters and small printing for the following season, and then contracts with the printers. Descriptions of the acts and features to be advertised are given to artists who make a specialty of designing such bills, and they send in their sketches. The press agent supplies the verbal descriptions, and the printing begins. All this matter is well under way by the first week in March. Some idea of the extent of this work may be had from the fact that the largest circus

company used in a single season seventy-seven kinds of posters ranging from one sheet to thirty-two sheets in size, and twelve publications, from a four-sheet to a twenty-page book or courier, which have an edition of four hundred and fifty thousand each, or a total of five million four hundred thousand.

Regarded as the most important work of preparation, the selection of the route which the show will travel during the season is



IN THE DRESSING-ROOM BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE COMMENCES.



ACROBATS ON HORSEBACK.

made by the proprietors; they never delegate that work to any one else. Every phase of the condition of the country it purposes to traverse is known in advance. As soon as the route is determined, the agents are sent out making all kinds of contracts. These agents are kept about six weeks in advance of the show throughout the season, although it frequently occurs that the exigencies of competition necessitate the making of these contracts many more weeks in advance.

Three weeks before the day of the show to exhibit in a town, an advertising car appears in that town. The agent in charge of the car has telegraphed ahead the time of his arrival, to the livery man, the bill-poster, and all others with whom the agents have contracted for advertising facilities. From five to ten two-horse teams are waiting at the depot for the car to arrive. Immediately the bill-posters hoist into the wagon a metal barrel of hard paste, which when softened by water will make a total of about four barrels. They take also from three hundred to a thousand sheets of posters, and before night the barns are ablaze with the multi-colored posters that hold forth

to the bucolic passers-by the alluring wonders and glories of the coming show. All along the road, at every house, the smaller publications are spread broadcast to supply to the farmer's boy the most delightful literature of the year.

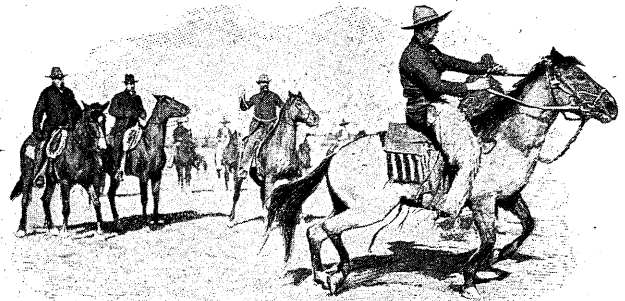
Another advertising car comes a week later. The men on this car restore all the posters damaged by wind or water, and a number of the bill-posters go out along the line of the railroads and cover all the boards at every station within a distance of thirty to fifty miles. In another week, still another car comes in to look after repairs to the advertising and replace some of the bills with others new in subject and design.



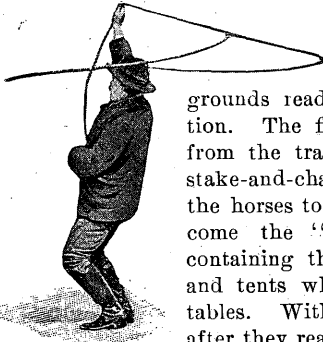
LIMBERING UP.

At about five o'clock, the show trains, usually three in number and of about twenty extra-long cars each, roll into the town. The first carries the workmen and workhorses, the tents and the necessary paraphernalia to place them in position. An agent who has arrived in the town the day before meets them to give them such information as is not included in the very exhaustive reports sent

in to the show by all the agents. These reports are so thorough that every sheet of paper that has been posted on a wall or board or hung in a window is accounted for—its location and the consideration that was given for placing it there. All



SOME ROUGH RIDERS.

THROWING
THE LASSO.

the provisions are on the grounds ready for consumption. The first thing taken from the train is called the stake-and-chain wagon, with the horses to haul it. Next come the "cook wagons," containing the open ranges, and tents which shelter the tables. Within half an hour after they reach the grounds, breakfast is ready for the workmen. Meanwhile the boss

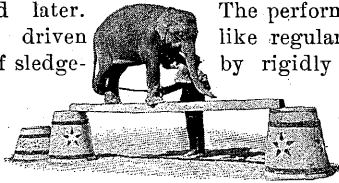
canvasman has staked out the tents as fast as he can stride, thrusting into the ground a slender iron spike that is soon to be replaced by a strong wooden stake to which the "guys," or ropes of the tents, will be fastened. Teams of horses pull the huge center-poles into an upright position. The vast reaches of canvas are unrolled and pulled into position over the rows of smaller poles which will be raised later. Thousands of stakes are driven into the ground by gangs of sledge-hammer drivers who will surround a stake and with unerring aim and in perfect cadence drive it many feet into the solid ground in less time than it takes to read this description of the operation.

By eight o'clock all the show has been removed from the trains to the grounds, and by this time the "cook tent" for the performers and officers has been put up, and breakfast, substantial, well cooked and always of fresh materials, is ready to serve. Then follows the work of preparation for the parade. Very few persons are exempt

from the parade. Occasionally a performer is so much of a star as to be free from that duty, but as a rule the officers and a large body of workmen who place the seats in position are the only absentees.

Usually nine o'clock sees the parade leave the grounds to make a tour through the principal streets. To the little folks who have never seen a circus parade, it is the incarnation of all earthly glories. Years after, they will tell their children of what a wonderful vision it was and sigh for the good old days to return.

When the parade is over, there is rest for almost everybody, except the side-show people, till after dinner. At one o'clock the doors open, and the serious purpose of the day is at hand, taking in the money and giving an entertainment in return. To any one who has witnessed the performance of a modern circus, it is unnecessary to tell of the perfect precision of movement of every one concerned with the program.



A YOUNG PERFORMER.

The performance moves with a machine-like regularity, which is obtained only by rigidly enforced discipline with a certain punishment by fines or dismissal following an infraction of rules that cover every phase of action and demeanor. Absolute sickness is the only possible excuse for a departure of any kind from the schedule.

When the afternoon program is ended, there is another period of rest for all but the side-shows. An early dinner is followed by pastimes of all sorts, strolling around the town or making necessary purchases.

At eight o'clock, immediately after the evening performance begins, the work of



FALLING INTO LINE FOR THE CHARGE.

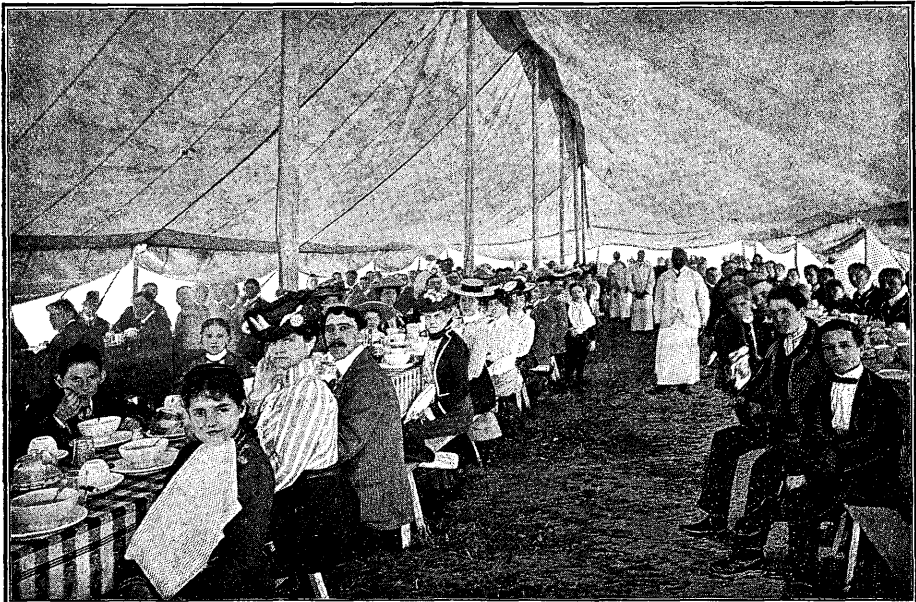


GETTING INTO LINE FOR THE PARADE.

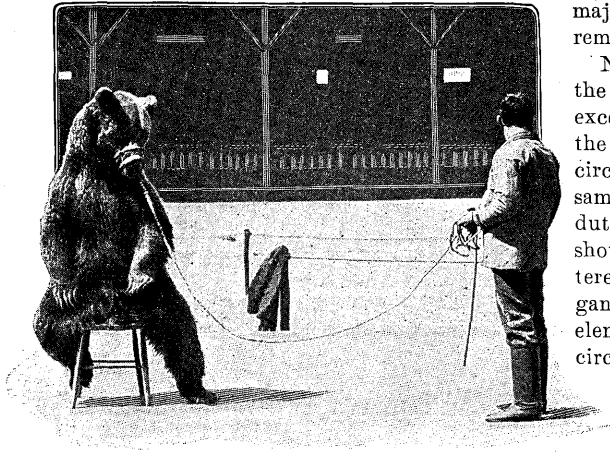
removal commences. The smaller tents for stables, repairs, wardrobe, lights, and various other purposes are taken down and loaded into the wagons and taken at once to the trains, where men who do nothing but load and unload the trains take possession of them. The horses return to the grounds for still another load of material. The menagerie tent is emptied of its dens and other contents in the same manner, and by the time the audience leaves the

tent that contains the arena—or “big top,” in circus parlance—the great tent through which they entered has disappeared along with other cares that infest the day.

During the concert at night the work of dismantling the main tent is in progress. It takes but a few moments to remove the seats used at the concert, when at a signal the walls of the tent are let fall and the top is lowered. Sometimes the work of loading everything left is of not more than twenty



IN THE DINING-TENT.



THE BEAR AND HIS KEEPER.

minutes' duration, and in another half-hour all the properties are on the train.

Schedules for the movement of the train are already prepared. Car doors are locked at midnight, and every one must be in bed save the limited number whose duties require them to look after the train. The berths in the cars are stationary, and more capacious than those of the Pullman sleeper. At the beginning of the season, each person is assigned to a certain berth, which must be occupied by the same person all the season. Each car has its porter who looks after it exclusively. Laundry and such matters are his perquisites.

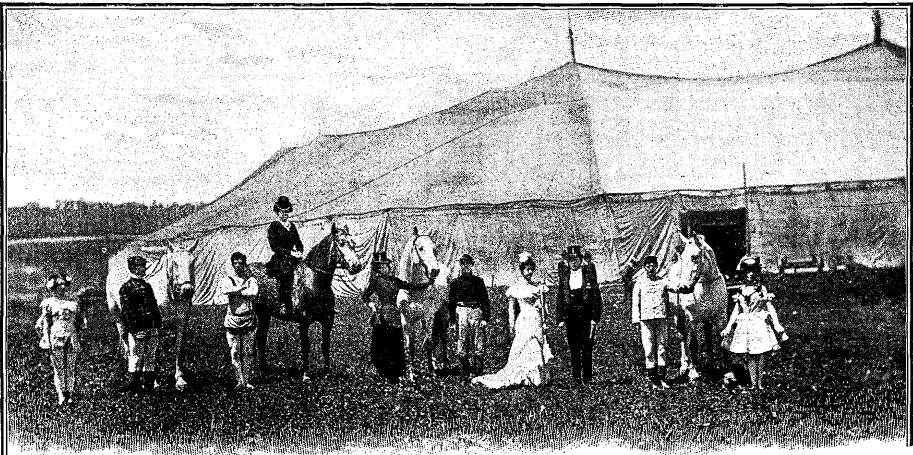
There are comparatively few changes in the personnel of a circus organization. The layman will be surprised to learn that a

majority even of the rougher workmen remain year after year with one show.

Nearly all the performers and all the officers, with scarcely ever an exception, are individually a reflex of the systematic organization of the circus. Every day finds them in the same place and performing the same duties with unvarying loyalty to the show. There is a community of interest that is infrequent in other organizations, and this fact is one of the elements of the slow growth of the circus to which allusion has been made.

A new show made up of strangers could not succeed.

That the circus is an illustration of effective organization, has been demonstrated in a most striking manner during the past five years that the Barnum & Bailey show has been in Europe. The first year, while it was touring England, the great English "Thunderer," the London "Times," contained a long and broad column editorial written by one of the most noted divines of the Church of England calling the attention of the government to the marvelous organization of the circus and urging the War department to assign officers to the show to learn from it the advanced methods it employed in the moving of heavy material, the erection of its vast tents, its system of railroad transportation, and kindred features. The suggestion was accepted, and thereafter the circus was accompanied by a detail of different officers



THE PRINCIPAL EQUESTRIAN PERFORMERS.

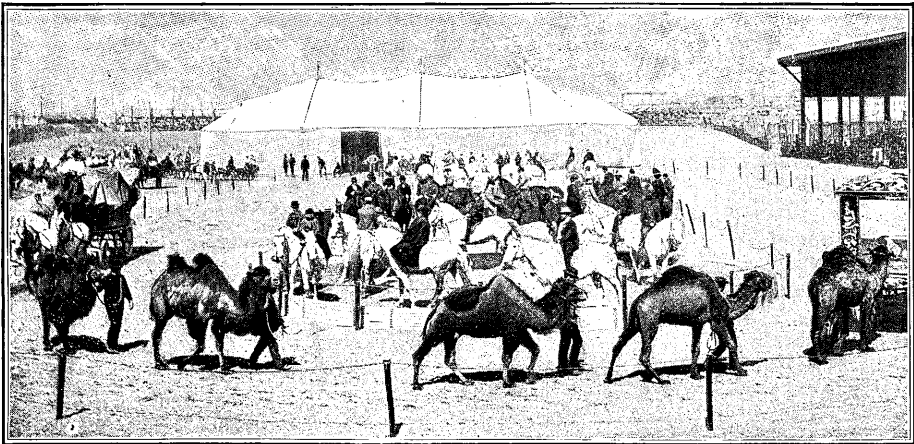


A HAZARDOUS DISPLAY OF CONFIDENCE.

every day it exhibited in the kingdom. Later, when it had crossed to the Continent and was exhibiting in one of the great capitals, the monarch of one of the greatest world-powers visited the show incognito on the closing night and personally witnessed the entire operation of the taking down and loading of the show, and expressed to some of its officers his wonderment at the excellence of the system. He got then his first idea of running heavy vans up and onto cars by means of skids or running-boards at the ends of the cars. He confessed almost shamefacedly that in his vast army they had been hoisting their heavy artillery over the sides of cars, with a manifest waste of time and labor.

In the circus there is a place for all things animate and inanimate, and all things must be in their places. A bit of color may be all that indicates the place for a certain stake, but it is enough. The stake will always be found in the same place, though the soil may be entirely different from that in which it stood the day before. As with the stake, so with all.

And so it is submitted that the modern circus is an exemplification of organization as nearly perfect as a human creation may be. It really may be regarded as providing some degree of profit as well as affording pleasure, especially to the young—and that means everybody, for all are of the same age while at the circus.



PRACTISING THE OPENING FEATURE.