

Bread and the Circus

By Hubert Crackanthorpe

THEY are the largest travelling circus in Europe. Their staff numbers over two hundred and fifty ; they have a hundred and seventy horses, seven elephants, eight lions, two tigers, three camels, and a dromedary ; their *cortège* on the road is sixty-three waggons long. I joined them at Dieppe : they had parted with their interpreter, and I took his place.

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Monday, 2 a.m.—There was no moon ; all night the wind had been screaming, driving spasmodic showers before it ; overhead, above the roofs, vague forms of tattered clouds were scudding.

In the market-place, flaring petroleum lights flitting to and fro ; dim figures hurrying hither and thither through the darkness ; loose horses neighing as they stampeded among the tent-ropes ; incessant volleys of oaths echoing from wall to wall.

“Here,” Jim, the stud-groom, called to me, “hold this lot o’ ’orses, will yer ?” He thrust a bundle of halter-ropes into my hand, and disappeared into the darkness.

The big tent came down with a run, and lay before me bellying and flapping in the wind, followed by the crashing of the poles, as the men swung them into the tent-waggon. Close beside me, I caught

caught a fitful glimpse of a drunken groom, muttering to himself as he belaboured a horse with his fist; then, of a sudden, Jim's voice bellowing behind me :

"Mind yerself. Shift them 'orses. The elephants are comin!" And their black, monstrous forms loomed in front of me, moving silently past, swinging their trunks from side to side.

"We always give 'em an hour's start. They can't do above three mile an hour. Come, bring them 'orses up to the band-waggon. Here, boy, hold a light for 'im. Look alive; we're behind time as it is."

Already, on all sides, the rumblings of heavy wheels, and crackings of whips were starting up; the waggons were moving to their places. The nigger tent-men set a light to the soiled forage; the wind scattered the dense columns of smoke towards the sea, and the great tongues of crimson flame flickered up, licking the air, and revealing that the market-place had at last been cleared.

"All ready," sang Jim's swinging tones.

"All ready . . . all ready," floated back a dozen wavering, distant answers.

"Into the buggy with yer. Pull the hay up round yer waist: it'll keep the cold out."

Ahead, through the twilight, toiling up the hill, we could perceive the long train of lumbering waggons, each with a ragged petroleum flame swinging beneath the axle.

"Pull ov—er. . . . Pull ov—er," and one by one they made way for us as we cantered by them.

"Wake 'em up. . . . Wake 'em up," and Jim, upright in buggy, lashed each successive team into a hand gallop.

When we had reached the front living-waggon, and only the wet, open road glimmering wanly in the sickly early morning light, lay ahead of us, back we turned down the hill again, waking

up the stragglers, rousing the sleeping drivers with fine bursts of the vernacular. And so, up and down the line, till we were hoarse with shouting, and till the last waggon had left the outskirts of the town.

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4 *a.m.*—For an hour we had been leading the way, jogging along the straight, broad road. Jim had dropped to sleep, and was swaying heavily from side to side, his battered face resting on my shoulder.

Behind us the continuous, somnolent rumbling of the waggon wheels, and the rhythmical tramp of the horses' feet. Now and then, a boy on a thoroughbred would gallop past us, cracking his stock-whip, chasing a drove of foals. The treeless plain lay around us, all dark and mysterious ; at intervals, we brutally broke the silence of some sleeping village street.

By-and-by, a rift broke in the clouds ; a slab of dark-blue sky appeared ; and the rain ceased to beat in our faces.

And a strange, drowsy sensation crept over me—a sensation that I had been sitting there always, driving the cream-coloured mare, endlessly journeying through the night, with the long line of waggons lumbering behind.

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6 *a.m.*—When I awoke, the sun had risen, and the great plain of corn, stretching away and away to the horizon, was rippling in the fresh morning breeze like a glittering golden lake. Crowds of peasants were running from their harvesting to the road-side to watch us go by. Moving ahead I could see a dark, shifting mass ; the elephants were still some two miles away. I fell to wondering curiously concerning this strange little world with whom I had
thrown

thrown in my lot, and to envying them not a little their roving, adventurous, free-living life.

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St. Valery-en-Caux, 9 a.m.—We were encamped in the centre of the town, in front of the Hôtel de Ville. In less than an hour and a half every tent was in its place, and the horses, tethered in droves, were clattering to water through the streets.

It was settled that I was to mess in the elephant tent with the Armstrongs—Joe, the elephant-keeper, Maggie his wife, and Lieutenant George, the lion-tamer, his brother, better known to the public as “Himalayan Henry.”

They were both handsome, strapping fellows. George, the “lieutenant,” had been in the show business all his life. He wore a trailing, coal-black moustache, and his hat cocked jauntily on the side of his head, and boasted himself a terrible chap with ladies. Joe had been but three years in the show. Before that he had been a tram-conductor in Birmingham. He was slow of speech, hulking, and shy. Maggie was a Lancashire girl. She had big blue eyes, a pale complexion, and rosy, sensitive mouth. She had been married just six months. She bullied her husband; George, on the strength of his superior salary, bullied them both; and they all three bullied “Scottie,” or “Jimmy Pimples,” the little under elephant-keeper, a sandy-haired, crimson-faced, unshaven, unwashed ruffian, who helped Maggie Armstrong to wash up the dishes, did odd jobs for us, and rated the elephants in generous Glasgow.

“Scottie” slept on a hay-bed beside the camels and messed with the coons beneath the tack-waggon; and we four lived in a small double tent pitched in a corner of the large one that covered the elephants.

There were seven of them, as I have said.—“Jim,” the patriarch,
with

with his wizened, wrinkled forehead, his tattered, worn-out ears, and weak, sunken eyes, for ever wearily winking with the fatigue of his hundred and twenty summers, submitting without a murmur to the buffetings of his coquettish granddaughter, "Ida"; "Rose," a fat, gluttonous, middle-aged dame, and "Palm," her husband, with his great indolently humorous face—an entirely respectable bourgeois ménage; "Nick," the youngster, always squealing and stealing the hay; "Tim," the monster elephant, restlessly rolling his vicious white-rimmed eye (he had killed a man some six months ago); impatient, irascible, and sullenly watchful of his little wife "Tiny," the beauty of the band, jealously marching by her side on the road, with his trunk around her neck, and in the evenings, rumbling to himself with pride, as he scraped her down with the jagged edge of an old condensed-milk tin.

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Midday—The post had just come in. The manager, a freckled, sandy-haired young man, was giving out the letters in the dressing-room, sitting swinging his long legs on an elephant-tub, with his hat jammed tight on the back of his head. One by one the men came forward; some sheepishly, some jauntily, some with tremulous eagerness. And the more illiterate ones remained loitering at the mouth of the tent, hesitatingly fingering their envelopes, curiously revolving them, trying to decipher the post-marks. Sam Giddens, the clown, a bald, thick-set, elderly gentleman, adjusted his gold-rimmed spectacles, and plunged into a copy of the *Era*. Quito, the jockey, and the two tumbling boys were discussing the incidents of the journey.

"'E got me down, smashed my 'at in, and tore my coat a'most off my back," Tommy was explaining.

"What, the black horse?"

"Yes, that black swine."

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"I can't stand this country. All the women look to me like men, and all the men like women. I saw about thirty of them loading a waggon of wheat this morning. It's barbarous, that's what it is," remarked Miss Lucile, the wire-walker.

"And the way the people bathe too, men and women all together; I call it disgustin'," Quito declared.

"I niver see'd sich a country for rain. It's Mister Tommy de Lo all day long."

"And d'ye mind how before we started they were all for telling how the sun was always shining in la belle France?"

"It's a dreary place, I call it, niver a Sunday from month end to month end," chimed in old Mrs. Chigwin, as she settled her fringe. "This 'ull be the first year for nine years that I've missed Bank Holiday at Portsmouth. You see no life here—no great crowds trippin' about, enjoyin' of themselves. Oh dear, oh dear, what would I jest give to be 'ome agin—nice clean lodgings and a bit of fresh steak," she concluded mournfully.

"I reckon it 'ud be a lot better if we could pick up the lingo. I can't get beyond 'quatre sous cognac,'" broke in the vet.

"Ah! you'd learn that quick enough in Chinese, doctor."

"I only joined the show five months ago, when they came tenting in France," the old man remarked, turning to me. "I've had a proper college education, though you might'n't think it, and fine business down at Reading. Many's the year, I tell you, that I've turned over more than two thousand pounds. This has been a terrible come-down for me."

"What was the trouble?" I asked.

"Drink, young man, drink," he answered warningly, "and
for

for eighteen months before I joined them I hadn't earned a penny."

He looked it, bloated and aged and enfeebled before his time.

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Meanwhile the ring-master went on:—

"And when we got to the bridge, the horses got frightened and wouldn't cross. All at once the waggon gives a great bump and Sam begins calling out that we'd fallen into the river and swimming for his life about the waggon floor. Didn't you, Sam?"

But the clown, deep in his paper, made no answer.

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"Hulloa, Sandow, who's bin makin' your face up this time?" asked the manager, as the hulking saddler sauntered up for a newspaper, with a bruised eye and an ugly, swollen nose.

"It be Jacko agin, sir. He were drunk agin at t' start, and when I went fur to wake him, he sets on me, with the result what you all kin see."

"What did you do to him?"

The big man lifted his heavy shoulders.

"I jest chucked him oot o' t' waggon. That be the wirst o' having my strength. If I was a mite o' a chap like him" (pointing to Quito), "I'd have given him the grandest hiding he'd iver experienced. Yes, that I would, yer damned little varmint," he added, as Jacko, a wizened, impish creature not five feet high, appeared grinning behind him.

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"Circus-life! circus-life!" the old doctor philosophised to me confidentially, wiping his beery eyes. "It's bin a terrible come-down for me."

* * *

1.30 *p.m.*—"The parade's better than the show. The show's right enough, you know; but the parade's *AI*," Lieutenant George had declared.

The band, in red coats and firemen's helmets, led the way, packed in a car all gilt and glittering glass, drawn by ten plumed piebald horses. Next, on prancing, plum-coloured steeds, eighteen ladies, sumptuously attired in plush and satin and heavy brocade. Then the thoroughbreds, and the ten trick ponies, tight-reined, arching their necks and tossing their silky manes, led by foot-grooms in scarlet livery. Behind these, the four monumental gilded cars—allegorical representations of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales—each drawn by eight white horses, and carrying on its pinnacle a golden-haired girl reclining in appropriate attitudes. Behind them followed the team of elephants (with the coons dressed in tiger-skins sitting in scarlet howdahs on their backs), dragging the lions' cage with Lieutenant George in full uniform, inside amongst the beasts, smoking and twirling his freshly waxed moustache. Next, escorted by a cavalcade of tent-men, dressed as Turkish grandees, the six tableaux—monster paintings relating the appearance of the show before Her Gracious Majesty the Queen in the midst of a tropical forest. And lastly the tigers, the camels, the dromedary, and the three painted pay-waggons.

Every window was packed with faces: the streets were swarming with people. I rode through the town, perched on the box of the gilded band-car (I had been ordered there in case of difficulties with the local police), bowing to the crowd from side to side, and feeling like an Eastern potentate at the head of his triumphal progress.

* * *

8.30 *p.m.*—The afternoon show had done fair business; but in the

the evening the boss and the manager sat in their shirt-sleeves at the windows of the pay-waggons, struggling in desperation to keep pace with the demands of the surging crowd.

Inside, the flaring petroleum lights flickered over a dim, circular wall of upturned faces. A dull, continuous hum of voices filled the tent—over three thousand had been packed inside ; and when the overture struck up, they were turning people away from the doors.

I wandered away, in the face of the driving rain, through the narrow, empty streets. Here and there, through a lighted window, I caught a glimpse of a family group, sitting round a shaded lamp, the women at their needlework, the fishermen smoking over a crumpled newspaper. The muffled strains of the band, playing "Nancy Lee," carried past me on the wind, grew fainter and fainter, and presently died away altogether.

And before me, all wrapped in darkness, the sea lay sullenly lashing the shore ; to the east a lighthouse glimmered, and near at hand, moving quite slowly through the night, passed the three lights of a steamer.

We were to start at three to-morrow morning. The night looked ugly ; out in the channel a heavy gale was blowing ; the sky was starless and black as pitch.

* * *

11 *p.m.*—Maggie had spread us our supper on a table built of piled forage, and round it we took our places, each sitting astride a hay-truss. To-night she was busy with discreet attentions towards the lieutenant ; for he had had a lot of trouble with one of his lions, and it was the talk of all the tents.

"Yes, he was a bit obstinate, wasn't he, Joe? I had a job to get inside the cage, him standing over the door pawing at me.

That's

That's the way with lions," he went on, turning to me, "as long as you're below them, they all make to jump on you, but once get above them and they just slink and snarl at your feet."

"I reckon there's some human beings what isn't much different," remarked Maggie.

"No, there's no life insurance in our trade. Pass the salt, Joe, old man," the lieutenant concluded.

Outside, the wind was hooting through the camp, banging against the side of the tent, and at intervals lifting the side-poles off the ground. And the huge, vague shapes of the elephants swayed uneasily in the fitful flare of the hissing petroleum light, their trunks, like black, hungry serpents, swinging incessantly across the gangway.

After supper, Joe and Maggie wished us good-night. George and I stayed drowsily chatting of the day's gossip, and of the storm that was raging without. By-and-bye we lay down on the hay, to sleep till the watchman should come on his rounds. . . .

. . . Gradually I became conscious of Joe's voice beside me; then a ringing peal of Maggie's laughter. I opened my eyes: the tent was still dark. I could hear the tramp of feet outside, and the distant neighing of horses.

All at once the hay seemed to tremble beneath me, and something rough and wet and living touched my hand. I sprang up: above me loomed a great black form.

"Hulloa, where's his bed got to?" I heard Maggie laughing, while Joe shouted:

"Rose, get back, yer greedy beast."

She had got loose in the night, and whilst I slept had been standing over me, craftily stealing the hay from beneath me, till at length I was lying on the bare, dusty ground.

* * *

Tuesday,

Tuesday, 2.30 a.m.—The rain was rattling against the sides of the tent. Joe and “Scottie” were moving the elephants out. Tim was trumpeting at the top of his voice, and trying to drag the tent down about our ears.

The whole camp seemed a scene of hopeless, indescribable confusion. The men were all shouting to one another in the darkness. Every gust of the gale was extinguishing the petroleum lights. I wandered about in search of Jim, stumbling over the tent-ropes, splashing into pools of standing water, jostling against huddled groups of men vainly endeavouring to rekindle their lights. It was rumoured that half the show had already started, and that the “boss” had been knocked on the head by a falling tent-pole. The rain was falling in torrents. I caught a glimpse of the ladies scurrying under their umbrellas to their omnibus, old Sam Giddens among them, wrapped in a multitude of horse-blankets.

It was half-an-hour before I found the buggy, and could hear Jim’s voice bellowing close at hand.

One of the leaders of the last tableau team lay kicking on the ground, entangled in his traces. Jim was cursing the driver as he had never cursed before. We all lent a hand. I sat on the horse’s head, while the others worked at the straps. Of a sudden the light went out. The horse started plunging: I was pitched into a pool of water; and when we could see again the animal had kicked himself clear.

We were the last to leave. Drenched to the skin, with the buggy-hood down, despite the rain, lest the wind should overturn us, we crawled up the hill on to the cliffs. The trees were all writhing in the gale; below us, with a dull, continuous roar, the surf was crashing against the rocks. Jim had been drinking heavily; before we had gone half-a-mile, he was rolling in his sleep. The light behind the buggy was the only one still alight.

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At every turning, till we were clear of the town, I stood up, holding it aloft, trying to decipher the sign-posts. And then, when I had found the road, and we were out in the open country, I let the mare jog along at her own pace, and sat helplessly shivering and waiting for the sunrise.

About four it seemed to be growing lighter. I turned back down the line, and found the last waggon lagging more than a mile behind. I shouted to the driver, but he gave me no answer. He was either dead drunk or numbed by the wet. I shook Jim till my arms ached, and when I had waked him, told him the trouble. We both sat bawling in concert, and at last extracted a feeble, incoherent answer. We stopped the waggon, and shouted to the man to come down; he answered thickly that his arms were stiff with cramp. I cantered back to the tack-waggon, roused a couple of coons, and with their help we lifted the man down. Then we battered at the door of a wayside cottage, till the terrified inhabitants let us in. We lit a straw fire, and tried with brandy and rubbing to bring him round. But he had been badly drunk the night before, and the liquor had taken all the warmth out of him. So we stowed him away on a hay bed in the tack-waggon, set the boy who was driving the foals on the box of the tableau, and I mounted the thoroughbred in his place.

The day was now breaking; and we were at least four miles behind. Jim lashed the tableau team into a hand-gallop, and I followed behind in charge of the foals.

About six o'clock we came up with the elephants, slouching silently along, and tearing up the corn by the roadside as they went. . . . An hour later we rejoined the rest of the show, and at half-past eight we could see the wet roofs of Fécamp twinkling in the distance.

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It was a regular ceremony ; it took place every morning behind the small horse-tent. The doctor sat on the steps of the harness waggon, and the tent-men lounged round him in groups. He would knock the ashes carefully from his pipe, wipe his beery eyes, and clear his throat authoritatively before unfurling the *Standard*. He would begin at the top right-hand column of the inside page, reading mechanically almost right through the paper—the political speeches, the police news, the foreign telegrams, the theatrical notices, and the sporting intelligence—till he had come again to the advertisements. No one made any comment ; the tent-men just loitered and listened ; and when he had finished, they strolled away silently, as they had come. The scene, in its droll solemnity, struck me as curiously pathetic.



The “boss” was a podgy, thick-set little man ; he had a ruddy moustache, and a merry twinkle in his small, round eyes. His clothes were always ragged, and smeared with mud ; for a clean shirt, I fancy, he professed a convinced contempt. With every one, down to the youngest stable-boy, he was familiar and friendly ; but, when he was roused, no one—not even Jim, the stud-groom—could compete with him in the matter of swearing. This “born gift” of his, as the men called it, had long ago won him universal respect. He lived in a luxurious waggon, the fittings of which had cost three hundred guineas. His father had been a circus proprietor before him. It was said that he was worth two hundred thousand pounds ; and every morning he would strip and help the men hammer in the tent-pegs.

Mr. Henderson, the trick rider, shared the “boss’s” waggon. He shaved every morning, wore clean cuffs, folded trousers, and
glistening

glistening patent-leather boots, and carried a gold-topped malacca. But the fact that his expletives began with the fourth instead of the second letter of the alphabet, stamped him, so everyone agreed, as a gentleman with a college education.

The men never mixed with the inhabitants of the towns, for none of them knew any French. At Dieppe, twenty-five of them had given notice ; at Havre half of the orchestra were to leave us. Almost everyone was suffering from acute home-sickness ; after the evening show the tent-men would sit round the petroleum lights smoking and eternally chatting of England.

A few kept a perfunctory route-book ; but most of them, when we set out in the morning, had never troubled to learn the name of the town where we had spent the day. Their life was almost entirely centred in the busy routine of the camp.



Wednesday, 5 a.m.—It was a short stage from Fécamp to Etretat ; and as we got upon the road, the sun was already flooding the sky with crimson light. Beneath us the sea lay spread like a blue, wide, empty plain ; by the roadside the reapers were hurrying to their work amid the corn-sheaves ; the crowds were busy loading the long-bodied, four-wheeled Normandy waggons.

The wind had dropped, swelling milk-white clouds hung overhead. Every village was thronged with peasants, waiting to watch us go past. The fresh, warm rays of the morning sun crept through me, bringing a keen, exquisite exhilaration. And there returned my old instinctive affection for the terse picturesqueness of the so-called lower classes. And I remembered, with a twinge of bitter regret, that at the Havre I must leave them to
journey

journey on without me over the continent day after day and year after year. . . . I felt I would be content to become one of them, to share irrevocably their rough, roving life.

* * *

11 *a.m.*—The “boss” had promised “Jacko” a medal as champion sleeper. He travelled in charge of the drove of hospital horses, and slept the journey through, lying flat on his face on the back of the old ring-mare, with a horse-rug thrown over his head.

When, this morning at the start, Jim hauled him unceremoniously to the ground, and set him to drive the last tableau-team, he screwed up his tiny bloodshot eyes, and swore he would be revenged.

He was supposed to be running after Maggie, and Joe, whenever he found him hiding in the hay in the elephant-tent, used to thrash him and throw him outside.

We were all sitting at breakfast, when, to our surprise, the stunted, impish creature sauntered in, puffing ostentatiously at a cigar-stump.

“Well, Jacko, did yer ’ave a good sleep on the road?” Maggie asked maliciously.

“What d’ye think I did?” he asked, his wizened face grinning from side to side. “Why I’ve bin an’ knocked a bloomin’ ’ouse down.”

And so, it appeared, he had. They had hustled him down the long hill into the town, and he had swung the waggon with a crash into a cottage, built of rubble and mud, and had knocked a huge hole in the wall.

“A lot of old women were sittin’ at breakfast. Lord! ’ow they did jump and squeal,” Jacko continued, with pride.

Then,

Then, catching Joe's eyes, and moving warily to the tent-mouth, he added, chuckling,

"The coves 'ave sent in a claim for five hundred francs damages. That'll teach Mister Jim to set me drivin' 'is blasted tableaux."

And off he swaggered to tell the tale of his prowess to the coons and around the horse-tents.

* * *

6 *p.m.*—When we came in to tea, after the day-show, we found Scottie, busy before a cracked mirror combing his sandy locks. He looked more unkempt than ever; his face was streaming, for he had been helping to drag the lions' cage out of the ring, and the stubble of a three days' beard covered his chin. When Maggie asked him to build up a table for us, he retorted excitedly: "Can ye na see that I'm busy?" and recommenced desperately the parting of his hair.

"What's up, Pimples, going courtin'?" asked the lieutenant.

"I'm engaged to conduct a party o' ladies round the establishment. I'll be standin' you boys drinks at the buffy when I git back."

He hurried off, clapping the "lieutenant's" forage-cap on the back of his head. Presently we heard him grandiloquently pushing back the crowd of loafers, and at the tent-mouth we caught a fluttering glimpse of white skirts and lace parasols.

"This, ladies," Scottie began, stroking poor old Jim's inoffensive trunk, "this elephant be two hundred and thirty year of age. He's often very ferocious, as yer kin see by the red in his eye. It takes fifty powerful men to hold him when he's fashed. Over there, ladies, the handsome gent with the moustache, sitting on the hay, that's Mr. Lieutenant George Armstrong, the celebrated

brated wild-beast tamer, who's performed before all the crowned and uncrowned heads o' Europe. A remarkable shy man, ladies, though his looks belie him. He started lion-tamin' at the age of twelve, and he'll be eaten alive some day as sure as I'm standin' here. This be 'Tim' the biggest elephant in any circus. He killed the last under-keeper, an Irishman, and that's why I'm here now. There's a tremendous lot o' courage required in our trade, ladies, as ye kin all see for yerselves," Scottie continued, straightening himself with a spasmodic attempt at gravity. "Now, this way, if you please. If ye'll follow me, I show ye the horse-tents and the seventeen Arabian horses that the Sultan of China gave with his own hands to Mr. Henderson. . . ."

We had finished tea before he reappeared, ruefully displaying a coin in the palm of his hand.

"Fivepence," he burst out, "and I shewed 'em over the whole bloomin' show and told 'em many a thousand lies. . . . Fivepence," and he threw the coin ferociously into the hay.

* * *

Thursday, 3 a.m.—"You're late, young man, very late," said the manager reprovingly. "Jim's been gone this hour past. He waited half an hour for you, and then had to take on Didon, the Frenchman who drives the 'bus, to help him find the road. We're dreadfully short of drivers. I don't know how we're going to manage."

We stood watching the departure of the blacksmith's waggon. The sky was glittering with stars, a couple of petroleum lights were swinging aimlessly in the distance; the camp seemed almost empty.

"Didn't I tell you you'd oversleep yourself, if you didn't get to bed,

bed, instead of sitting up playing poker with Silvado ? ” the manager went on. “ Look here,” he added suddenly, “ you’d better take the ’bus. You’re accustomed to driving ? ”

“ Yes, but not four horses,” I objected.

“ Never mind, jump up. Keep your wheelers well in hand, and the cream cob off the pole, or he’ll start kicking.”

Behind the blacksmith’s waggon, the ’bus team was being harnessed, while I could vaguely perceive the huddled forms of the sleeping ladies. My heart was full of pity for them as I mounted the box.

I had just steered out of the gateway, to my surprise, without a spill, when through the darkness I heard the boss’s voice. “ Wake ’em up there, Didon. What’re yer up to. Shove ’em along.” And, running alongside the team with his stock-whip, he set them off at a hand-gallop.

We swung round the corner into the main road, the ’bus lurching heavily as we bumped over the kerb-stone. From within floated a muffled series of feminine screams. . . .

And then, on we rattled through the night, through the dark stillness of the sleeping country. . . .

* * *

6 a.m.—“ Stop at the bottom of the hill ; you’ve got a shoe loose,” shouted one of the boys, galloping alongside.

I listened, but I could hear no clinking of flapping steel ; every horse was going as sound as a bell.

“ No, they’re all right enough,” I called back.

“ There’s a buffy at the bottom,” retorted the boy.

I remembered that there was a half-crown fine for stopping for drinks on the road, and that a lame horse or a shoe loose was the only

only excuse accepted. So when we reached the wayside inn I pulled up.

"What's up?" called a voice through the glass.

"Shoe loose, doctor," I answered.

The next moment he was on the road beside the team.

"Where's the buffy?" he asked.

I pointed with the whip to the house, and soon some half-dozen of us were sitting in the kitchen, and they were standing me coffee and cognac all round.

* * *

8 *a.m.*—The shipping of the Havre was in sight—a delicate tracery against the sky, like a distant winter forest. Beyond, across the river, wrapped in pale blue haze, stretched the cliffs of Honfleur, and the offing, all shimmering in the sunlight, lay studded with snow-white sails. . . .

With the skid on, we swung down the long hill into the city.

And as we pushed our way through the streets, tight-packed with a staring crowd, and bawled unceremoniously at the local police, and forced the irate tram-drivers to retreat till there was space for us to pass them, and searched at every turning to the right and to the left for the square where we were to camp, I realised more than ever the exhilarating charm of this reckless, adventurous life.

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Havre, 9.30 a.m.—He was a little French cabin-boy. He had deserted his ship, and had followed the show from Dieppe. He used to explain to us with pride how, if he were caught, he would get forty-eight days' imprisonment. His clothes were a mass of filthy rags. I gave him a pair of trousers, and he stole my cigarettes.

He

He was always ravenously hungry, and would work till his face was streaming for a crust of bread. His devotion to Joe was untiring; every day he ran the whole journey alongside the elephants, belabouring "Rose" with an old bit of bamboo. And all the afternoon he used to fight the town-urchins who came swarming round the tent-edge to tease the elephants. He confided to me his passion for the circus, and his longing to become a tamer of lions, like George; and I promised to ask the manager to give him a start.

When this afternoon the police caught him and carried him off, he cried very bitterly, and swore he would come back to us.

* * *

10.30 *a.m.*—"Scottie" sat by the tent-mouth with his head between his hands. I bid him good morning; he made no answer. The others were at breakfast.

"What's up with 'Scottie'?" I asked.

"He was drunk at the start this morning," Joe replied, curtly.

"I wasna," "Scottie" retorted sullenly. "I'd just had one single cognac."

"I felt downright sorry for that little French lad," Joe went on.

"Dirty little runaway beast. It just served him right. I couldn't abide 'im sneaking about the tent," Maggie burst out.

"Come, don't be funny," growled Joe.

Maggie swung round on her hay-truss, turning her back on him.

"Joe's that snappy," she explained to me tearfully.

"Snappy! so'd you be, if you'd seen the job I had to get that big brute (indicating Tim) on to the road this morning, and that darned Scotchman stumbling all over the shop half boozed."

"I wasna,

"I wasna, I tell yer. . . . It's a blasted lie," "Scottie" protested in a husky voice.

"Look yer here," Joe interrupted, "if yer can't keep a civil tongue in yer head, yer can jest clear out o' the tent."

The situation was growing strained. The heat was terrific; we were encamped in a small dusty square in a low quarter of the city, and before the first tent-peg had been driven in, the ground was swarming with roughs. There had been a lot of fighting, and the "boss" and Jim had been cursing themselves hoarse. Everyone, as George mildly expressed it, was "just a bit put out."

"Ain't it sickly, the 'eat in this tent?" Maggie remarked. "I feel that upset——," and she cast a sidelong glance in Joe's direction, but he went on scowling and munching his bread and butter.

"No, you don't care, you great selfish lout; you think of nothing but them stinkin' elephants, and getting yer own breakfast comfortable."

The "lieutenant" winked at me from his corner, and helped himself to some more bacon. Maggie was on the verge of tears, and Joe was desperately gulping down his breakfast.

"Come, Maggie, have a bite o' somethin'," he began, sheepishly, after a pause.

She shook her head violently.

"Give her time, Joe, old man," advised the "lieutenant."

A few minutes later Joe asked again.

"Ain't yer goin' to have nothin'?"

She dissented faintly.

Joe rose, and putting on his coat, moved towards the tent-mouth.

"Well, I'm going out," he exclaimed, with forced carelessness.

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"Because

"Because you've lost your temper with me, Joe, you needn't make yourself unsociable all round," Maggie called after him.

"I was going to get yer some fresh water. I see yer can's empty," he answered, reproachfully.

"Oh, there ain't no 'urry for that. Sit down and 'ave a fresh cup o' tea."

She faced round again, smiling through her tears, and filled up his cup, while the "lieutenant" went on winking and rolling himself a cigarette.

"An' Pimples," Maggie asked presently, "shall 'e 'ave this bit o' bacon what's left over?"

Joe shrugged his broad shoulders with an assumption of contemptuous indifference.

"Scottie," Maggie called, "'ere's a bit o' bacon for yer."

"I'm na goin' to tak' charity at my time o' life," the little man shouted, and, rising, strode defiantly out of the tent.

* * *

5.30 *p.m.*—The show was packed. The band was playing "Nancy Lee;" Quito, in his flesh-coloured tights, was cantering round the ring, and the children were roaring with laughter as Sam Giddens banged the boss over the head with a bladder.

For the last time I strolled through the tents. Outside the dressing-room I found "Jacko" kneeling on the ground, busy pasting the paper hoops; beside the tableaux the coons were fighting a gang of over-inquisitive dock-labourers, ousting them from the camp with a heavy volley of broken British oaths; and on the steps of the harness waggon the old doctor sat watching them, moodily puffing at his short black pipe. The "lieutenant" was waxing his coal-black moustache; Joe and "Scottie" were amicably harnessing

harnessing "Tim" to the lions' cage; within the elephant tent Maggie was boiling the water for tea, and laying the cloth on the piled trusses of hay.

One after another I bid them good-bye, strangely reluctant to leave them, childishly eager to prolong indefinitely this short moment of departure. The "lieutenant" and I promised to write regularly to one another, and we hurriedly arranged how we would meet again next year in the South.

Then I pushed my way through the crowd of loungers that surrounded the camp, and turned slowly away down the boulevard towards the railway station.

Twenty minutes later, as my train steamed out of the city, I could hear the distant wavering strains of the band, and I could see the sunlight glinting on the white, bulging canvas of the big show-tent.