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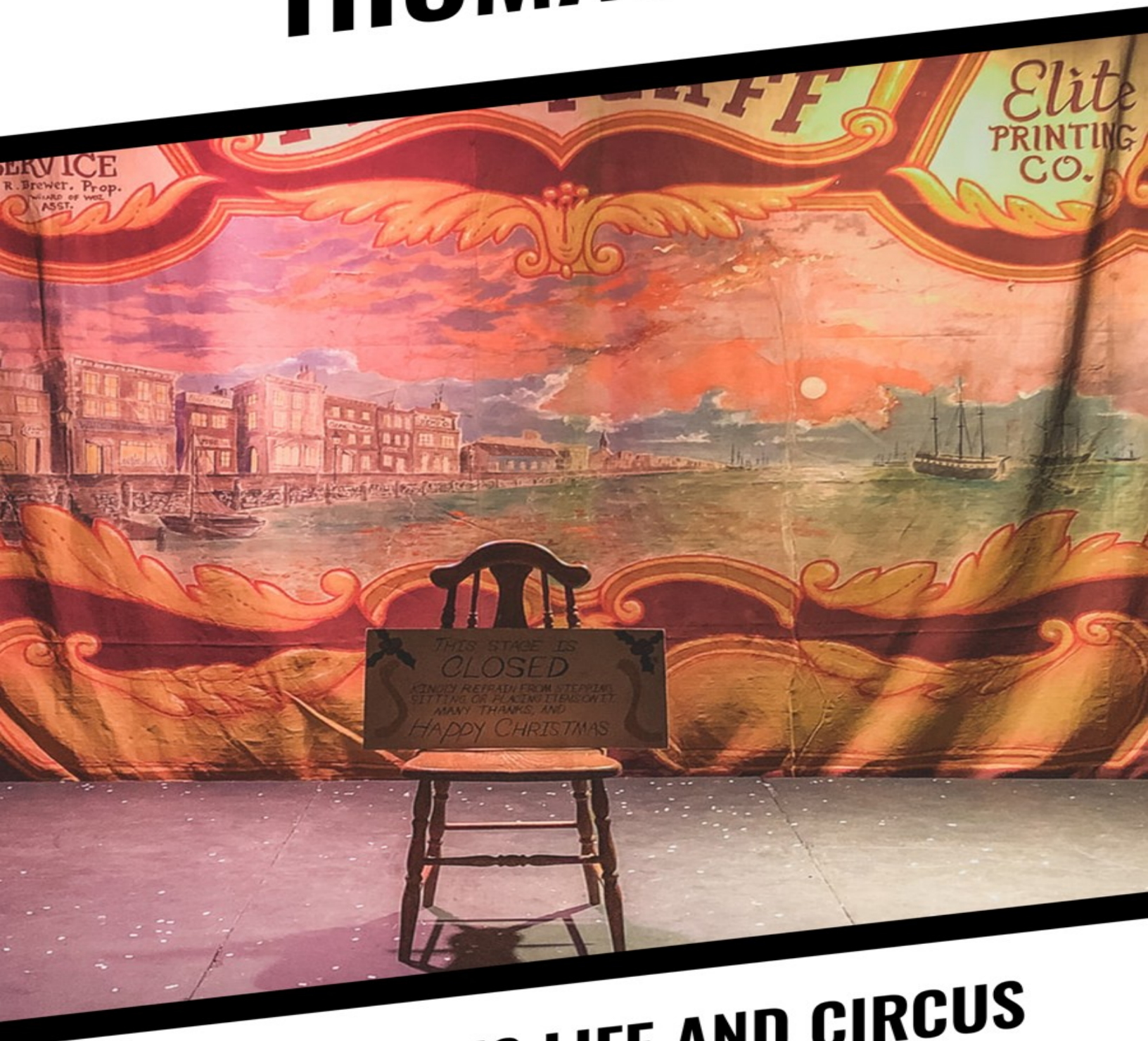
THOMAS FROST



CIRCUS LIFE AND CIRCUS CELEBRITIES

Thomas Frost

Circus Life and Circus Celebrities

Sharp Ink Publishing
2022
Contact: info@sharpinkbooks.com

ISBN 978-80-282-3368-6

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PREFACE.

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There are probably few persons who do not number among the most pleasant recollections of their youth their first visit to a circus, whether their earliest sniff of the saw-dust was inhaled in the building made classical by Ducrow, or under the canvas canopy of Samwell or Clarke. In my boyish days, the cry of ‘This way for the riders!’ bawled from the stentorian vocal organs of the proprietor or ring-master of a travelling circus, never failed to attract all the boys, and no small proportion of the men and women, to the part of the fair from which it proceeded. Fairs have become things of the past within twelve or fifteen miles of the metropolis; but ever and anon a tenting circus pitches, for a day or two, in a meadow, and the performances prove as attractive as ever. The boys, who protest that they are better than a play, —the young women, who are delighted with the ‘loves of horses,’—the old gentlemen, who are never so pleased as when they are amusing their grandchildren,—the admirers of graceful horsemanship of all ages,—crowd the benches, and find the old tricks and the old ‘wheezes,’ as the poet found the view from Grongar Hill, ‘ever charming—ever new.’

What boy is there who, though he may have seen it before, does not follow with sparkling eyes the Pawnee Chief in his rapid career upon a bare-backed steed,—the lady in the scarlet habit and high hat, who leaps over hurdles,—the stout farmer who, while his horse bears him round the ring,

divests himself of any number of coats and vests, until he finally appears in tights and trunks,—the juggler who plays at cup and ball, and tosses knives in an endless shower, as he is whirled round the arena? And which of us has not, in the days of our boyhood, fallen in love with the fascinating young lady in short skirts who leaps through ‘balloons’ and over banners? Even when we have attained man’s estate, and learned a wrinkle or two, we take our children to Astley’s or Hengler’s, and enjoy the time-honoured feats of equitation, the tumbling, the gymnastics, and the rope-dancing, as much as the boys and girls.

But of the circus *artistes*—the riders, the clowns, the acrobats, the gymnasts,—what do we know? How many are there, unconnected with the saw-dust, who can say that they have known a member of that strange race? Charles Dickens, who was perhaps as well acquainted with the physiology of the less known sections of society as any man of his day, whetted public curiosity by introducing his readers to the humours of Sleary’s circus; and the world wants to know more about the subject. When, it is asked, will another saw-dust *artiste* give us such an amusing book as Wallett presented the world with, in his autobiography? When are the reminiscences of the late Nelson Lee to be published? With the exception of the autobiography of Wallett, and a few passages in Elliston’s memoirs, the circus has hitherto been without any exponent whatever. Under the heading of ‘Amphitheatres,’ Watts’s *Bibliotheca Britannica*, that boon to literary readers at the British Museum in quest of information upon occult subjects,

mentions only a collection of the bills of Astley’s from 1819 to 1845.

Circus proprietors are not, as a rule, so garrulous as poor old Sleary; they are specially reticent concerning their own antecedents, and the varied fortunes of their respective shows. To this cause must be ascribed whatever shortcomings may be found in the following pages in the matter of circus records. Circus men, too, are very apt to meet a hint that a few reminiscences of their lives and adventures would be acceptable with the reply of Canning’s needy knife-grinder,—‘Story! God bless you! I have none to tell, sir.’ There are exceptions, however, and as a rule the better educated members of the profession are the least unwilling to impart information concerning its history and mysteries to those outside of their circle. To the kindness and courtesy of several of these I am considerably indebted, and beg them to accept this public expression of my thanks.
T. FROST.

Long Ditton, *Oct. 1st, 1873*.

CHAPTER I.

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Beginnings of the Circus in England—Tumblers and Performing Horses of the Middle Ages—Jacob Hall, the Rope-dancer—Francis Forcer and Sadler’s Wells—Vauxhall Gardens—Price’s Equestrian Performances at Johnson’s Gardens—Sampson’s Feats of Horsemanship—Philip Astley—His Open-air Performances near Halfpenny Hatch—The First Circus—Erection of the Amphitheatre in Westminster Road—First Performances there—Rival Establishment in Blackfriars Road—Hughes and Clementina.

Considering the national love of everything in which the horse plays a part, and the lasting popularity of circus entertainments in modern times, it seems strange that the equine amphitheatre should have been unknown in England until the close of the last century. That the Romans, during their occupation of the southern portion of our island, introduced the sports of the arena, in which chariot-racing varied the combats of the gladiators, and the fierce encounters of wild beasts, is shown by the remains of the Amphitheatre at Dorchester, and by records of the existence of similar structures near St Alban’s, and at Banbury and Caerleon. After the departure of the Romans, the amphitheatres which they had erected fell into disuse and decay; but at a later period they were appropriated to bull-baiting and bear-baiting, and the arena at Banbury was known as the bull-ring down to a comparatively recent period. An illumination of one of the Anglo-Saxon

manuscripts in the Harleian collection shows one of these ancient amphitheatres, outside a town; there is a single musician in the arena, to whose music a man is dancing, while another performer exhibits a tame bear, which appears to be simulating sleep or death; the spectators are sitting or standing around, and one of them is applauding the performance in the modern manner, by clapping his hands.

But from the Anglo-Saxon period to about the middle of the seventeenth century, the nearest approximation to circus performances was afforded by the ‘glee-men,’ and the exhibitors of bears that travestied a dance, and horses that beat a kettle-drum with their fore-feet. Some of the ‘glee-men’ were tumblers and jugglers, and their feats are pourtrayed in several illuminated manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. One of these illuminations, engraved in Strutt’s *Sports*, shows a boy leaping through a hoop; another, in the Cottonian collection, represents a juggler throwing three balls and three knives alternately. What is technically called ‘the shower’ is shown in another illumination of mediæval juggling; and that there were female acrobats in those days appears from a drawing in one of the Sloane collection of manuscripts, in which a girl is shown in the attitude of bending backward. One of the Arundel manuscripts, in the British Museum, shows a dancing bear; and other illuminations, of a later date, represent a horse on the tight-rope, and an ox standing on the back of a horse.

Strutt quotes from the seventh volume of the *Archæologia*, the following account of a rope-flying feat

performed by a Spaniard in the reign of Edward VI. ‘There was a great rope, as great as the cable of a ship, stretched from the battlements of Paul’s steeple, with a great anchor at one end, fastened a little before the Dean of Paul’s house-gate; and when his Majesty approached near the same, there came a man, a stranger, being a native of Arragon, lying on the rope with his head forward, casting his arms and legs abroad, running on his breast on the rope from the battlement to the ground, as if it had been an arrow out of a bow, and stayed on the ground. Then he came to his Majesty, and kissed his foot; and so, after certain words to his Highness, he departed from him again, and went upwards upon the rope, till he came over the midst of the churchyard, where he, having a rope about him, played certain mysteries on the rope, as tumbling, and casting one leg from another. Then took he the rope, and tied it to the cable, and tied himself by the right leg a little space beneath the wrist of the foot, and hung by one leg a certain space, and after recovered himself again with the said rope, and unknit the knot, and came down again. Which stayed his Majesty, with all the train, a good space of time.’

Holinshed mentions a similar feat which was performed in the following reign, and which, unhappily, resulted in the death of the performer. In the reign of Elizabeth lived the famous Banks, whom Sir Walter Raleigh thought worthy of mention in his History of the World, saying that ‘if Banks had lived in older times, he would have shamed all the enchanters in the world; for whosoever was most famous among them could never master or instruct any beast as he did.’ The animal associated with the performer so eulogized

was a bay horse named Morocco, which was one of the marvels of the time. An old print represents the animal standing on his hind legs, with Banks directing his movements.

Morocco seems to have been equally famous for his saltatory exercises and for his arithmetical calculations and his powers of memory. Moth, in *Love's Labour Lost*, puzzling Armado with arithmetical questions, says, 'The dancing horse will tell you,' an allusion which is explained by a line of one of Hall's satires—

'Strange Morocco's dumb arithmetic.'

Sir Kenelm Digby records that the animal 'would restore a glove to the due owner after the master had whispered the man's name in his ear; and would tell the just number of pence in any piece of silver coin newly showed him by his master.' De Melleray, in a note to his translation of the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, says that he witnessed the performance of this animal in the Rue St Jacques, in Paris, to which city Banks proceeded in or before 1608; and he states that Morocco could not only tell the number of francs in a crown, but knew that the crown was depreciated at that time, and also the exact amount of the depreciation.

The fame which Banks and his horse acquired in France, brought the former under the imputation of being a sorcerer, and he probably had a narrow escape of being burned at a stake in that character. Bishop Morton tells the story as follows:—

'Which bringeth into my remembrance a story which Banks told me at Frankfort, from his own experience in France among the Capuchins, by whom he was brought into suspicion of magic, because of the strange feats which his

horse Morocco played (as I take it) at Orleans, where he, to redeem his credit, promised to manifest to the world, that his horse was nothing less than a devil. To this end he commanded his horse to seek out one in the press of the people who had a crucifix on his hat; which done, he bade him kneel down unto it, and not this only, but also to rise up again and to kiss it. And now, gentlemen (quoth he), I think my horse hath acquitted both me and himself; and so his adversaries rested satisfied; conceiving (as it might seem) that the devil had no power to come near the cross.'

That Banks travelled with his learned horse from Paris to Orleans, and thence to Frankfort, is shown by this extract; but his further wanderings are unrecorded. It has been inferred, from the following lines of a burlesque poem by Jonson, that he suffered at last the fate he escaped at Orleans; but the grounds which the poet had for supposing such a dreadful end for the poor horse-charmer are unknown.

'But 'mongst these Tiberts, who do you think there was?
Old Banks, the juggler, our Pythagoras,
Grave tutor to the learned horse; both which,
Being, beyond sea, burned for one witch,
Their spirits transmigrated to a cat.'

These itinerant performers seem to have divided their time between town and country, as many of them do at the present day. Sir William Davenant, describing the street sights of the metropolis in his curious poem entitled *The Long Vacation in London*, says—

'Now, vaulter good, and dancing lass
On rope, and man that cries, Hey, pass!
And tumbler young that needs but stoop,
Lay head to heel to creep through hoop;

And man in chimney hid to dress
Puppet that acts our old Queen Bess;
And man, that while the puppets play,
Through nose expoundeth what they say;
And white oat-eater that does dwell
In stable small at sign of Bell,
That lifts up hoof to show the pranks
Taught by magician styled Banks;
And ape led captive still in chain
Till he renounce the Pope and Spain;
All these on hoof now trudge from town
To cheat poor turnip-eating clown.’

About the middle of the seventeenth century, some of these wandering performers began to locate themselves permanently in the metropolis. Jacob Hall, the rope-dancer, was scarcely less famous as an acrobat, being clever and alert in somersaults and flip-flaps, performing the former over naked rapiers and men’s heads, and through hoops. He is mentioned by contemporary memoir writers as the first lover of Nell Gwynne, who appears, however, in a short time to have transferred her favours to Harte, the actor. In 1683, one Sadler opened the music-house at Islington which, from the circumstance of a mineral spring being discovered on the spot, became known by the name of Sadler’s Wells, which it has retained to this day. It was not until after Sadler’s death, however, that rope-dancing and acrobats’ performances were added to the musical entertainments which, with the water, were the sole attraction of the place in its earliest days. The change was made by Francis Forcer, whose son was for several years the principal performer there. Forcer sold the establishment to Rosamond, the

builder of Rosamond’s Row, Clerkenwell, who contrived, by judicious management, to amass a considerable fortune.

Of the nature of the amusements in Forcer’s time we have a curious account in a communication made to the *European Magazine* by a gentleman who received it from Macklin, the actor, whom he met at Sadler’s Wells towards the close of his life. ‘Sir,’ said the veteran comedian, ‘I remember the time when the price of admission here was threepence, except a few places scuttled off at the sides of the stage at sixpence, and which were usually reserved for people of fashion, who occasionally came to see the fun. Here we smoked and drank porter and rum-and-water as much as we could pay for, and every man had his doxy that liked; and, although we had a mixture of very odd company, —for I believe it was a good deal the baiting-place of thieves and highwaymen,—there was little or no rioting.’

During the period between Rosamond’s management and the conversion of the place into a theatre for dramas of the kind for which the Adelphi and the Coburg became famous at a later day, the entertainments at Sadler’s Wells consisted of pantomimes and musical interludes. In Forcer’s time, according to the account said to have been given by Macklin, they consisted of ‘hornpipes and ballad singing, with a kind of pantomime-ballet, and some lofty tumbling; and all done by daylight, with four or five exhibitions every day. The proprietors had always a fellow on the outside of the booth to calculate how many people were collected for a second exhibition; and when he thought there were enough, he came to the back of the upper seats, and cried out, “Is Hiram Fisteman here?” That was the cant word agreed upon

between the parties to know the state of the people without: upon which they concluded the entertainment with a song, dismissed the audience, and prepared for a second representation.'

Joseph Clark, the posturer, was one of the wonders of London during the reigns of James II. and William III., obtaining mention even in the Transactions of the Philosophical Society, as having 'such an absolute command of all his muscles and joints that he could disjoint almost his whole body.' His exhibitions do not seem, however, to have been of a pleasing character, consisting chiefly in the imitation of every kind of human deformity. He could produce at will, and in a moment, without padding, the semblance of a Quasimodo or a Tichborne Claimant, his 'fair round belly, with good capon lined,' shift his temporary hump from one side to the other, project either hip, and twist his limbs into every conceivable complication. He could change his form so much as to defy a tailor to measure him, and imposed so completely on Molins, a famous surgeon of that time, as to be regarded by him as an incurable cripple. His portrait in Tempest's collection shows him shouldering his leg, an antic which is imitated by a monkey.

There was a famous vaulter of this time, named William Stokes, who seems to have been the first to introduce horses in the performance; and in a book called the *Vaulting Master*, published at Oxford in 1652, boasts that he had reduced vaulting to a method. The book is illustrated by plates, representing different examples of his practice, in which he is shown vaulting over one or more horses, or

leaping upon them; in one alighting in the saddle, and in another upon the bare back of a horse. It is singular that this last feat should not have been performed after Stokes's time, until Alfred Bradbury exhibited it a few years ago at the Amphitheatre in Holborn. It is improbable that Bradbury had seen the book, and his performance of the feat is, in that case, one more instance of the performance of an original act by more than one person at considerable intervals of time.

May Fair, which has given its name to a locality now aristocratic, introduces us, in 1702—the year in which the fearful riot occurred in which a constable was killed there—to Thomas Simpson, an equestrian vaulter, described in a bill of Husband's booth as 'the famous vaulting master of England.' A few years later a bill of the entertainments of Bartholomew Fair, preserved in Bagford's collection in the library of the British Museum, mentions tight-rope dancing and some performing dogs, which had had the honour of appearing before Queen Anne and 'most of the quality.' The vaulters, and posturers, and tight-rope performers of this period were not all the vagabonds they were in the eye of the law. Fawkes, a posturer and juggler of the first half of the eighteenth century, started, in conjunction with a partner named Pinchbeck, a show which was for many years one of the chief attractions of the London fairs, and appears to have realized a considerable fortune.

The earliest notice of Vauxhall Gardens occurs in the *Spectator* of May 20th, 1712, in a paper written by Addison, when they had probably just been opened. They were then a fashionable promenade, the entertainments for which the

place was afterwards famous not being introduced until at least a century later. In 1732 they were leased to Jonathan Tyers, whose name is preserved in two neighbouring streets, Tyers Street and Jonathan Street; and ten years later they were purchased by the same individual, and became as famous as Ranelagh Gardens for musical entertainments and masked balls. Admission was by season tickets only, and it is worthy of note that the inimitable Hogarth, from whose designs of the four parts of the day Hayman decorated the concert-room, furnished the design for the tickets, which were of silver. Tyers gave Hogarth a gold ticket of perpetual admission for six persons, or one coach; and the artist's widow bequeathed it to a relative. This unique relic of the departed glories of Vauxhall was last used in 1836, and is now in the possession of Mr Frederick Gye, who gave twenty pounds for it.

Hogarth's picture of Southwark Fair introduces to us more than one of that generation of the strange race whose several varieties contribute so much to the amusement of the public. The slack-rope performer is Violante, of whom we read in Malcolm's *Londinium Redivivus* that, 'soon after the completion of the steeple [St Martin's in the Fields], an adventurous Italian, named Violante, descended from the arches, head foremost, on a rope stretched thence across St Martin's Lane to the Royal Mews; the princesses being present, and many eminent persons.' Hogarth shows another performer of this feat in the background of his picture, namely, Cadman, who was killed in 1740, in an attempt to descend from the summit of a church-steeple in Shrewsbury. The circumstances of this sad catastrophe are

set forth in the epitaph on the unfortunate man's gravestone, which is as follows:—

'Let this small monument record the name
Of Cadman, and to future times proclaim
Here, by an attempt to fly from this high spire
Across the Sabrine stream, he did acquire
His fatal end. 'Twas not for want of skill
Or courage to perform the task, he fell:
No, no—a faulty cord, being drawn too tight
Hurried his soul on high to take her flight,
Which bid the body here beneath good night.'

The earliest advertisement of Sadler's Wells which I have been able to find is one of 1739, which states that 'the usual diversions will begin this day at five o'clock in the evening, with a variety of rope-dancing, tumbling, singing, and several new entertainments of dancing, both serious and comic; concluding with the revived grotesque pantomime called *Happy Despair*, with additions and alterations.' An advertisement of the following year introduces Miss Rayner as a performer on the tight rope, who in 1748 appeared in conjunction with a younger sister. The acrobats of the latter period were Williams, Hough, and Rayner, the latter probably father or brother of the fair performers on the *corde elastique*.

The New Wells, at the bottom of Leman Street, Goodman's Fields, were opened at this time, and introduced to the public a French rope-dancer named Dugée, who also tumbled, in conjunction with Williams, who had left the Islington place of entertainment, and another acrobat named Janno. Williams is announced in an advertisement of 1748 to vault over the heads of ten men. The admission here was by payment for a pint of wine or punch, which was

the case also at Sadler’s Wells at this time; but in an announcement of a benefit the charges for admission are stated at eighteen-pence and half-a-crown, with the addition that the night will be moonlight, and that wine may be obtained at two shillings per bottle.

Twenty years later, we find announced at Sadler’s Wells, ‘feats of activity by Signor Nomora and Signora Rossi, and many curious and uncommon equilibres by Le Chevalier des Linges.’ In 1771 the rope-dancers here were Ferzi (sometimes spelt Farci) and Garmon, who was, a few years later, a member of the first company formed by the celebrated Philip Astley for the Amphitheatre in the Westminster Road.

The first equestrian performances ever seen in England, other than those of the itinerant exhibitors of performing horses, were given on the site of Dobney’s Place, at the back of Penton Street, Islington. It was then a tea-garden and bowling-green, to which one Johnson, who obtained a lease of the premises in 1767, added such performances as then attracted seekers after amusement to Sadler’s Wells. One Price, concerning whose antecedents the strictest research has failed to discover any information, gave equestrian performances at this place in 1770, and soon had a rival in one Sampson, who performed similar feats in a field behind the Old Hats.

About the same time, feats of horsemanship were exhibited in Lambeth, in a field near Halfpenny Hatch, which, it may be necessary to inform your readers, stood where a broad ditch, which then ran through the fields and market gardens now covered by the streets between

Westminster Road and Blackfriars Road, was crossed by a swivel bridge. There was a narrow pathway through the fields and gardens, for the privilege of using which a halfpenny was paid to the owners at a cottage near the bridge. In one of these fields Philip Astley—a great name in circus annals—formed his first ring with a rope and some stakes, going round with his hat after each performance to collect the loose halfpence of the admiring spectators.

This remarkable man was born in 1742, at Newcastle-under-Lyme, where his father carried on the business of a cabinet-maker. He received little or no education, and after working a few years with his father, enlisted in a cavalry regiment. His imposing appearance, being over six feet in height, with the proportions of a Hercules, and the voice of a Stentor, attracted attention to him; and his capture of a standard at the battle of Emsdorff made him one of the celebrities of his regiment. While serving in the army, he learned some feats of horsemanship from an itinerant equestrian named Johnson, perhaps the man under whose management Price introduced equestrian performances at Sadler’s Wells,—and often exhibited them for the amusement of his comrades. On his discharge from the army, he was presented by General Elliot with a horse, and thereupon he bought another in Smithfield, and commenced those open-air performances in Lambeth which have already been noticed.

After a time, he built a rude circus upon a piece of ground near Westminster Bridge which had been used as a timber-yard, being the site of the theatre which has been known by his name for nearly a century. Only the seats were roofed

over, the ring in which he performed being open to the air. One of his horses, which he had taught to perform a variety of tricks, he soon began to exhibit, at an earlier period of each day, in a large room in Piccadilly, where the entertainment was eked out with conjuring and *ombres Chinoises*—a kind of shadow pantomime.

One of the earliest advertisements of the Surrey side establishment sets forth that the entertainment consisted of ‘horsemanship by Mr Astley, Mr Taylor, Signor Markutchy, Miss Vangable, and other transcendent performers,’—a minuet by two horses, ‘in a most extraordinary manner,’—a comical musical interlude, called *The Awkward Recruit*, and an ‘amazing exhibition of dancing dogs from France and Italy, and other genteel parts of the globe.’

One of the advertisements of Astley’s performances for 1772, one of the very few that can be found of that early date, is as follows:—

‘Horsemanship and New Feats of Activity. This and every Evening at six, Mr and Mrs Astley, Mrs Griffiths, Costmethopila, and a young Gentleman, will exhibit several extraordinary feats on one, two, three, and four horses, at the foot of Westminster Bridge.

‘These feats of activity are in number upwards of fifty; to which is added the new French piece, the different characters by Mr Astley, Griffiths, Costmethopila, &c. Each will be dressed and mounted on droll horses.

‘Between the acts of horsemanship, a young gentleman will exhibit several pleasing heavy balances, particularly this night, with a young Lady nine years old, never performed before in Europe; after which Mr Astley will carry her on his

head in a manner quite different from all others. Mrs Astley will likewise perform with two horses in the same manner as she did before their Majesties of England and France, being the only one of her sex that ever had that honour. The doors to be opened at five, and begin at six o'clock. A commodious gallery, 120 feet long, is fitted up in an elegant manner. Admittance there as usual.

'N.B. Mr Astley will display the broad-sword, also ride on a single horse, with one foot on the saddle, the other on his head, and every other feat which can be exhibited by any other. With an addition of twenty extraordinary feats, such as riding on full speed, with his head on a common pint pot, at the rate of twelve miles an hour, &c.

'☞ To specify the particulars of Mr Astley's performance would fill this side of the paper, therefore please to ask for a bill at the door, and see that the number of fifty feats are performed, Mr Astley having placed them in acts as the performance is exhibited. The amazing little Military Horse, which fires a pistol at the word of command, will this night exhibit upwards of twenty feats in a manner far superior to any other, and meets with the greatest applause.'

An advertisement issued at the close of the season, in 1775, announces 'the last new feats of horsemanship, four persons on three horses, or a journey to Paris; also, the *pynamida* on full speed by Astley, Griffin, and Master Phillips.' This curious word is probably a misprint for 'pyramids.'

In this year, Richer, the famous harlequin, revived the ladder-dancing feat at Sadler's Wells, where he also joined in the acrobatic performances of Rayner, Garmon, and

Huntley, the last being a new addition to the *troupe*. Other ‘feats of activity’ were performed by the Sigols, and Ferzi and others exhibited their evolutions on the tight-rope. The same names appear in the advertisements of the following year, when rivals appeared in vaulting and tight-rope dancing at Marylebone Gardens.

‘As Mr Astley’s celebrated new performances at Westminster Bridge draws near to a conclusion,’ says one of the great equestrian’s advertisements of 1776, ‘it is humbly requested the present opportunity may not escape the notice of the ladies and gentlemen. Perhaps such another exhibition is not to be found in Europe. To the several entertainments of the riding-school is added, the Grand Temple of Minerva, acknowledged by all ranks of people to be extremely beautiful. The curtain of the Temple to ascend at five o’clock, and descend at six, at which time the grand display will be made in a capital manner, consisting of rope-vaulting on full swing, with many new pleasing additions of horsemanship, both serious and comic; various feats of activity and comic tumbling, the learned little horse, the Roman battle, *le force d’Hercule*, or the Egyptian pyramids, an entertainment never seen in England; with a variety of other performances extremely entertaining. The doors to be opened at five, and begin at six precisely. Admittance in the gallery 2*s.*, the riding school 1*s.* A price by no means adequate to the evening’s diversion.’

Having saved some money out of the proceeds of these performances, Astley erected the Amphitheatre, which, in its early years, resembled the present circus in Holborn more than the building subsequently identified with the

equestrian triumphs of Ducrow. Chinese shadows were still found attractive, it seems, for they constitute the first item in one of the programmes of 1780, in which year the Amphitheatre was opened. Then came feats of horsemanship by Griffin, Jones, and Miller, the clown to the ring being Burt. Tumbling—'acrobatics' had not been extracted from the Greek dictionary in those days—by Nevit, Porter, Dawson, and Garmon followed; and it is worthy of remark that none of the circus performers of the last century seem to have deemed it expedient to Italianize their names, or to assume fanciful appellations, such as the Olympian Brothers, or the Marvels of Peru. After the tumbling, the feat of riding two and three horses at the same time was exhibited, the performer modestly concealing his name, which was probably Philip Astley. Next came 'slack-rope vaulting in full swing, in different attitudes,' tricks on chairs and ladders, a burlesque equestrian act by the clown, and, lastly, 'the amazing performance of men piled upon men, or the Egyptian pyramid.'

About the same time that the Amphitheatre was opened, the Royal Circus, which afterwards became the Surrey Theatre, was erected in Blackfriar's Road by the elder Dibdin and an equestrian named Hughes, who is described as a man of fine appearance and immense strength. The place being unlicensed, the lessees had to close it in the midst of success; but a license was obtained, and it was re-opened in March, 1783. Burlettas were here combined with equestrian performances, and for some time a spirited competition with Astley's was maintained. The advertisements of the Circus

are as curious for their grammar and strange sprinkling of capitals as for their personal allusions. A few specimens culled from the newspapers of the period are subjoined:—

No. 1.—‘The celebrated Sobieska Clementina and Mr Hughes on Horseback will end on Monday next, the 4th of October; until then they will display the whole of their Performances, which are allowed, by those who know best, to be the completest of the kind in Europe. Hughes humbly thanks the Nobility, &c., for the honour of their support, and also acquaints them his Antagonist has catched a bad cold so near to Westminster bridge, and for his recovery is gone to a warmer Climate, which is Bath in Somersetshire. He boasts, poor Fellow, no more of activity, and is now turned Conjuror, in the character of ‘Sieur the Great.’ Therefore Hughes is unrivalled, and will perform his surprising feats accordingly at his Horse Academy, until the above Day. The Doors to be opened at Four o’clock, and Mounts at half-past precisely. H. has a commodious Room, eighty feet long. N. B. Sobieska rides on one, two, and three horses, being the only one of her Sex that ever performed on one, two, and three.’

No. 2.—‘Hughes has the honour to inform the Nobility, &c., that he has no intention of setting out every day to France for three following Seasons, his Ambition being fully satisfied by the applause he has received from Foreign Gentlemen who come over the Sea to See him. Clementina and Miss Huntly ride one, two, and three horses at full speed, and takes Leaps surprising. A little Lady, only Eight Years old, rides Two Horses at full gallop by herself, without the assistance of any one to hold her on. Enough to put any one in fits to see her. H. will engage to ride in Twenty

Attitudes that never were before attempted; in particular, he will introduce his Horse of Knowledge, being the only wise animal in the Metropolis. A Sailor in full gallop to Portsmouth, without a bit of Bridle or Saddle. The Maccaroni Tailor riding to Paris for new Fashions. This being Mr Pottinger's night, he will speak a Prologue adapted to the noble art of Riding, and an Epilogue also suited to Extraordinary Leaps. Tickets (2*s.*) to be had of Mr Wheble, bookseller, Paternoster-row, and at H.'s Riding School. Mounts half-past four.'

No. 3.—'Hughes, with the celebrated Sobieska Clementina, the famous Miss Huntly, and an astonishing Young Gentleman (son of a Person of Quality), will exhibit at Blackfriars-road more Extraordinary things than ever yet witnessed, such as leaping over a Horse forty times without stopping between the springs—Leaps the Bar standing on the Saddle with his Back to the Horse's Tail, and, *Vice-Versa*, Rides at full speed with his right Foot on the Saddle, and his left Toe in his Mouth, two surprising Feet. Mrs Hughes takes a fly and fires a Pistol—rides at full speed standing on Pint Pots—mounts pot by pot, higher still, to the terror of all who see her. H. carries a lady at full speed over his head—surprising! The young gentleman will recite verses of his own making, and act Mark Antony, between the leaps. Clementina every night—a commodious room for the nobility.'

The excitement of apparent danger was evidently as much an element of the popular interest in circus performances a century ago as at the present day.

Colonel West, to whom the ground on which the circus was erected belonged, became a partner in the enterprise, and invested a large amount in it. On his death the concern became very much embarrassed, and struggled for several years with a load of debt. Hughes was succeeded as manager by Grimaldi, a Portuguese, the grandfather of the famous clown whom some of us remember at Covent Garden; and Grimaldi, in 1780, by Delpini, an Italian buffo singer, under whose management the novel spectacle of a stag-hunt was introduced in the arena.

Sadler's Wells continued to give the usual entertainment, the advertisements of 1780 announcing 'a great variety of singing, dancing, tumbling, posturing, rope-dancing,' &c., by the usual very capital performers, and others, more particularly tumbling by Rayner, Tully, Huntley, Garmon, and Grainger, 'pleasing and surprising feats of strength and agility' by Richer and Baptiste, and their pupils, and tight-rope dancing by Richer, Baptiste, and Signora Mariana, varied during a portion of the season by the last-named *artiste's* 'new and extraordinary performance on the slack wire, particularly a curious display of two flags, and a pleasing trick with a hoop and three glasses of wine.'

Astley's soon became a popular place of amusement for all classes. Horace Walpole, writing to Lord Stafford, says:—

'London, at this time of the year [September], is as nauseous a drug as any in an apothecary's shop. I could find nothing at all to do, and so went to Astley's, which, indeed, was much beyond my expectation. I do not wonder any longer that Darius was chosen King by the instructions he gave to his horse; nor that Caligula made his Consul. Astley

can make his dance minuets and hornpipes. But I shall not have even Astley now: Her Majesty the Queen of France, who has as much taste as Caligula, has sent for the whole of the *dramatis personæ* to Paris.'

Among the expedients to which Astley occasionally had recourse for the purpose of drawing a great concourse of people to the Surrey side of the Thames was a balloon ascent, an attraction frequently had recourse to in after times at Vauxhall, the Surrey Gardens, Cremorne, the Crystal Palace, and other places of popular resort. The balloon was despatched from St George's Fields on the 12th of March, 1784, 'in the presence,' says a writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 'of a greater number of spectators than were, perhaps, ever assembled together on any occasion;' and he adds that, 'many of the spectators will have reason to remember it; for a more ample harvest for the pickpockets never was presented. Some noblemen and gentlemen lost their watches, and many their purses. The balloon, launched about half-past one in the afternoon, was found at Faversham.' This ascent took place within two months after that of the Montgolfiere balloon at Lyons, and was, therefore, probably the first ever attempted in this country; while, by a strange coincidence, the first aerostatic experiment ever made in Scotland was made on the same day that Astley's ascended, but about an hour later, from Heriot's Gardens, Edinburgh.

Horace Walpole writes, in allusion to a subsequent balloon ascent, and the excitement which it created in the public mind,—