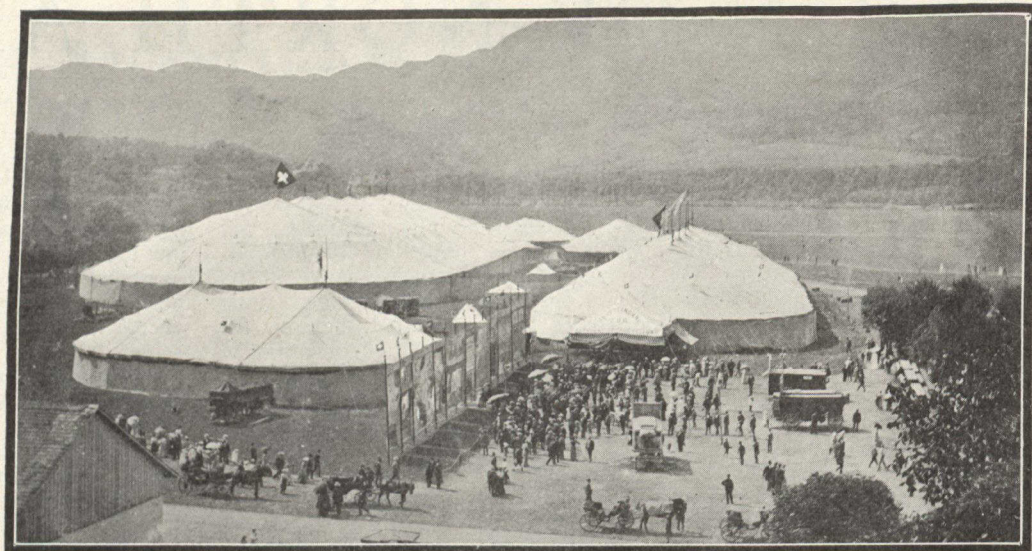




In Private Life.



The Circus which Roams Over the World.



In Professional Life.

EVOLUTION OF AN EQUESTRIENNE

By ROSE WENTWORTH

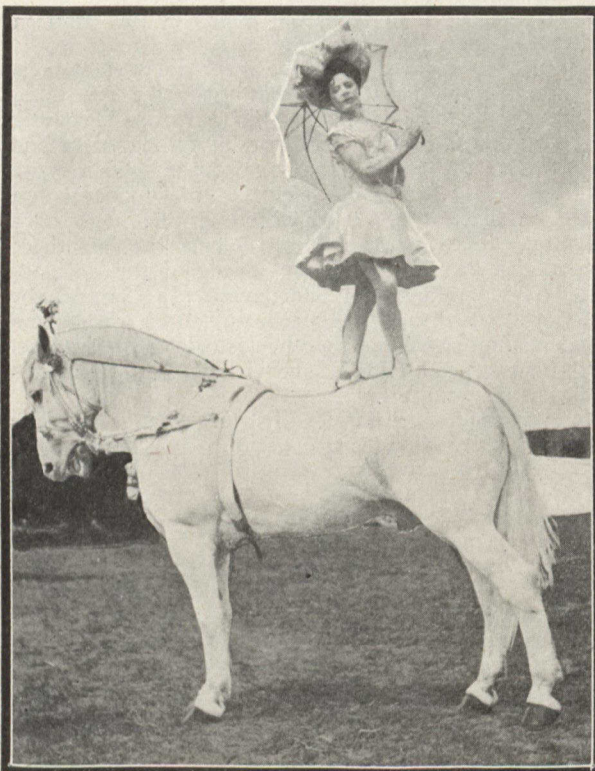


THOSE who see the ten-minutes or quarter-of-an-hour performance of the equestrienne have little idea of the long training and persevering work which go to the mastering of the art. For twelve years I have been engaged in these performances, almost exclusively, and now feel that the work has become almost second nature; yet, it has demanded a severe professional preparation.

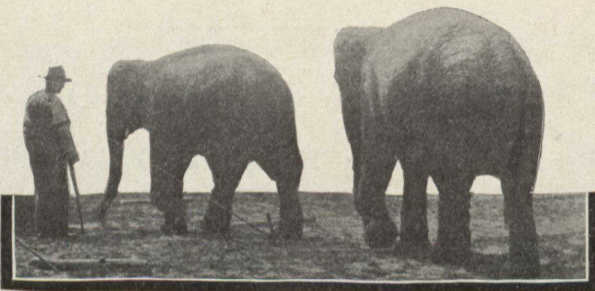
Fall River, Massachusetts, is my native town, but I am partly a Haligonian by training, for, when I was a small child, the family moved to Halifax where we lived for some years before going to London, England. There, I became interested in pantomime and, when a little girl friend of mine went on the stage and became one of the fairies in "Alice in Wonderland" and "Puss-in-Boots," I was determined to join her. At first, my parents were very much opposed to the work, but when I cried bitterly over the disappointment, my father, like most good American citizens, let me have my own way. So I became a member of the company—one of the tiniest. Consequently, most of my life has been spent upon the stage, and the work has always been my chief pleasure.

For years, dancing was my daily performance, and I appeared in the pantomime, not only in London, but in other English cities, becoming fairly familiar with the British audience. The English pantomime is the best in the world, but the United States excels in circus management. In England the greatest care and pains are taken in the production of these entertainments and hundreds of children will be included in dances or chorus. A good deal is said about such work being too severe for young people and the public seems to consider them wearied little victims. All I can say is, that, in the best companies, the children are well taken care of, a good matron is provided, rest and sleep are regarded as essential and education is by no means neglected. Every morning, some instruction is given and the little ones generally enjoy the life.

My best friend during my professional career was Mr. James A. Bailey of the Barnum and Bailey shows. His attention was attracted to my work in the course of a pantomime performance, and he engaged me for a great enterprise at the Olympia Theatre, London, which surpassed anything else of the kind I have seen. The dimensions of the stage may be judged from the fact that three hundred small dancers stood in line for the first row. Mr. Bailey, who was very quick to detect ability for a special line of work and was always willing to advance an ambitious performer, asked me to undertake one of the "illusions," as they are commonly called. My easy task was to lie on a mirror, which was so surrounded by several revolving



With Dolly, Her Favourite Horse.



The Women of the Circus at Afternoon Tea.

mirrors that it produced the illusion of diving.

Finally, Mr. Bailey suggested that I should take up equestrian work. The suggestion appealed to me at once, for I have always been fond of horses. I should say that such a feeling must exist before there can be any success in the work. No doubt, some people would consider the practice and training very trying; but, like every other vocation, it is a delight to those who feel that it is their chosen field. I never become tired of it and, although I have two performances a day, there is always a feeling of fresh interest in my part of the programme.

It has often been asked if the work is not dangerous. I have been injured more than once and come next to breaking my neck in the feat of turning somersaults while engaged in an equestrian act. But increasing confidence comes with each day's successful outcome and the thought of danger never enters my head as I go into the arena. The horses must be most carefully selected and trained for this class of circus work and there must be a kind of sympathy or understanding between horse and rider if there is going to be real art or magnetism in the performance. An audience is usually very quick to respond to any skilful or daring act in connection with the management of a horse. The world will always be interested in a horse—in the ring, at any rate—whatever may become of the horse as a useful, "driven" animal. So it is easy to feel encouraged to do one's best and to amuse and excite the public. No one who does not get a genuine thrill out of pleasing the crowd can succeed in the equestrian world. It has to be a kind of mutual entertainment.

My first equestrian performance was not exactly a pleasing occasion. It took place in Chicago and, so far as the mere performance was concerned, it was successful enough and I was not the least bit nervous. But the trouble came, because an older woman, an expert in equestrian acts, had displeased the management and I was called on to act as substitute. Naturally she was furious about a youthful newcomer taking her part and, after the performance, gave me a bad quarter-of-an-hour with her tongue. An angry *prima donna* was not a circumstance to her. Being a mere girl, I became frightened and cried so hard that the management consented to keep her two weeks longer, instead of dismissing her at once. However, taking the life altogether, there is a lot of friendliness and good feeling among the members of a show like Barnum and Bailey's. There are hard work, constant travel and the risks of the road; but, in a good company, everything is managed and arranged down to the smallest detail, and it is all a matter of method, from the time you reach a city until you leave in a special car.

The routine after arrival generally means a parade at ten o'clock in the morning, which lasts from an hour to an hour and a half. Then an afternoon performance comes, with a rest of several hours before it is time for the night show. The women usually spend a short time together with just the ordinary feminine amusements—afternoon tea,