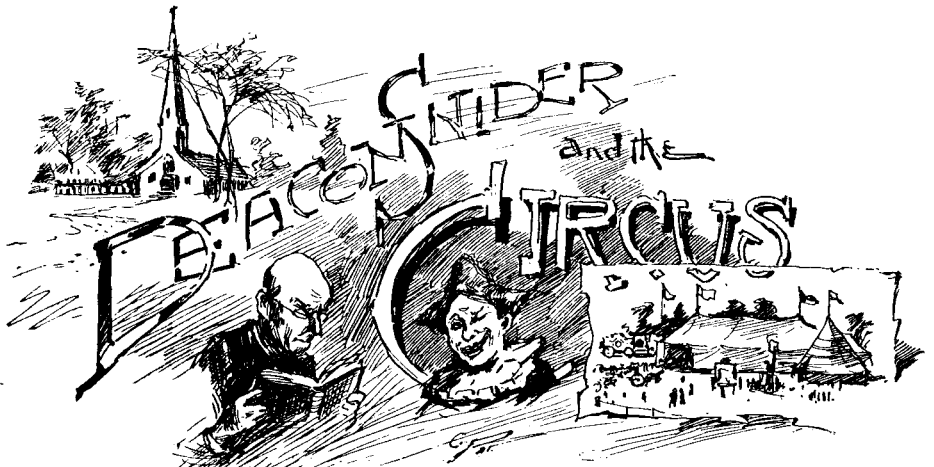




I.

"CIRCUSES," said Deacon Snider, "circuses is sin. They is Sodom an' Gomorry."

This was a part of the Deacon's discourse as he led class meeting that dreamy old time Sunday afternoon in a rural Canadian lake district settlement.

A sea of faces looked up at him in a vague way of half conscious assent, for most of them were either asleep or wished that they were.

Old Deacon Purdy leaned back on his bench at the rear of the building, his straw hat, which he always wore, summer or winter, on his head, and a bright coloured handkerchief over his face, fast asleep, still holding tightly his wife's hand, and she, a funny looking little woman, with a pensive innocent face, surrounded by a few grey hairs, peeping out of an old poke bonnet, stared right ahead at Deacon Snider in a dreamy way, as if wondering if it were not heaven and he the Arch-angel Michael.

The afternoon drowsed calmly on. Not a breeze stirred on the old meeting house or out of it, where far away, north and south, a dusty, tire-worn, ancient-looking, brown road wound up hill and down, out to the ends of the world. Back of the meeting house a few bees (more toil-loving than their human fellows) stole the honey from some rose bushes that had run wild on the old deserted looking graves; and out around, under the trees, the horses, attached to the different vehicles, pawed

lazily at the ground or nibbled at the dried grass available to their noses.

Inside Deacon Snider continued getting deeper and deeper into the ruts of his discourse, ever and anon rising in a spasmodic effort to extricate himself.

Sleepier and sleepier grew the afternoon. The whole world, earth and air, seemed lazy, like the good believers who attended the South Concession meeting-house.

The pensive stare on the little woman's face gradually widened and deepened into vacancy. Her eyes drooped, and she, too, slept. There was a small boy, with a keen eye for mischief, who sat near the rusty old iron stove at the door, and whose curiosity was generally interested in the flies that kept alighting on the bald head of an old "brother," who dozed in front of him. One would alight and run over the shining surface, rub his hind legs, like a grass-hopper, for a moment, and then fly off. Then another would come and do the same thing and go off too.

Now all this was usually soporific to the small boy, but, like the deacon, he too was interested in the circus, though in another way. The words Sodom and Gomorrow and sin had no terrors for him, but, boy-like, the subject affected him to a large extent, and for once the Deacon had an alert listener, who gazed and gazed and revolved in his mind how he was going to enlarge his small hoard of cash so as to attend the side-show also.

The Deacon had droned down to a low minor key preparatory to a higher flight of denunciation, when suddenly, from among the aforesaid bees, a large gentleman of