

BARNUM'S FIRST FREAKS

Originals of the Early Side-Show

By HECTOR ROSENFELD

IN the world of amusement enterprises the circus "freak" alone seems certain of lasting popularity. The elevation of a giant, the size of a mid-gig, the figure of a human skeleton or a fat girl, are literally their fortunes. A play or a performance of any kind soon becomes monotonous, and loses its attraction—a "freak" never. It is now more than half a century since the first exhibition of freaks was collected and exhibited by P. T. Barnum. These celebrities were photographed as early as 1858. In their quaint, old-fashioned clothes they are figures of actual historic interest.

The original freaks in nearly every instance were native American products. The great drag-net which the showmen have since spread to gather freaks from all parts of the world had not yet been set. In comparison with the most cosmopolitan of modern freak shows, however, the original Barnum forces will be found to compare very favorably. And an absolute comparison is possible, for the various dimensions of the freaks, the height of giants and of midgigs, the weight of fat girls and fat boys, are carefully preserved in the annals of the circus, much the same as the past performances of horses are recorded at the race-track.

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Patrons of the circus of the last generation will remember the once famous Nova Scotia giantess, Annie Bates. Her figure looms up big in the memory of all survivors of the circus and museum audiences of half a century ago, for obvious reasons. Annie (the diminutive was always added to her name) was a sweet young thing, seven feet and eight inches in height and large in proportion at the time of her wedding, which was the season of her greatest popularity. Her's was a large, motherly figure; her nature was simple and wholesome. Her photograph suggests the matron at the head of a large family on a farm, rather than the great attraction at a side-show.

Annie traveled about the country for several years, and finally met her fate in the person of Captain Van Buren Bates of Kentucky. They were married in London, and on their wedding tour traveled on the continent. Bridal couples, it is said, are usually easy to recognize: certainly no young couple ever attracted more attention. The husband was a large man, measured by ordinary standards—only about eighteen inches shorter than the bride. In later years

the conventional size of houses and furniture proved so irksome to Annie that she built a home to fit her proportions, with furniture and everything to match.

The house stood for many years near Cleveland, Ohio. There was not a door in it which Annie need stoop to enter. She died in 1883, after traveling for ten years with Admiral Dot.

Every country in the world has been since ransacked to discover some giantess to replace the robust Annie, but without success. Ella Ewing is taller, but not nearly so ponderous, nor so pleasing.

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In discovering mere giants the showmen have been far more fortunate. Noah Orr, who was from Ohio, was for many years the tallest and bulkiest known giant in the world. His height was not remarkable in comparison with modern standards—he was a trifle over seven feet high—but his enormous bulk corrected the impression and challenged respect. He tipped the scales at five hundred sixteen pounds. He was well-proportioned, broad-shouldered and well set-up, and was employed for years to serve as a foil to the famous Mrs. Tom Thumb. The extremely ill-matched pair stood together at performances throughout the country for years. Subsequently he appeared with Admiral Dot in "Jack the Giant Killer." Orr amassed a considerable fortune, and finally retired to a farm that he had bought in the central part of New York state, where he died many years ago. Measured merely by

his extreme altitude, the tallest of the giants of the old days was the famous Baltimore giant. He rose to a height of seven feet one and a half inches. In recent years showmen have discovered and imported giants more than nine inches taller than the giants of fifty years ago, over whom the whole country marveled. Chang, the Chinese giant, was the forerunner of a number of these gigantic importations.

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What the giants have gained in height in the modern circus the midgigs have lost. There are several so-called midgigs connected with the same circus today who would have been dwarfed beside the little people of half a century ago. Public taste in these matters has become more critical, and yet the midgigs of a past generation attained a fame unrivaled in our day.

The name of Tom Thumb, for instance, is a household word. It is an interesting fact that although he was a "bouncing boy" at birth, tipping the scales at nine and a half pounds, he did not continue to grow naturally after he was seven months old. From that time on his growth was so slow that it was almost imperceptible. Even at the time of his first engagement with Barnum, in 1842, he was not more than two feet tall and weighed less than sixteen pounds. But at the time of his death, which was caused by a stroke of apoplexy, he weighed seventy pounds, and measured forty inches in height. His wife also added to her proportions with succeeding years, being a little shorter than her husband at her marriage, but increasing to his exact height in later life, weighing, however, only fifty pounds. Two years after his death, in 1883, she married Count Primo Magri, an Italian dwarf, but survived her first husband only five years.

Tom Thumb's unusual success seems to have been increased by his charming little personality. He was intelligent, active, full of pleasing little mannerisms and winning ways, and it is related of him that at the age of nineteen he had kissed one and a half million women.

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But, most noteworthy of all the incidents connected with the lives of these little people was their wedding, which took place in Grace church, New York, on February 10, 1863. No wedding has ever been seen in this fashionable church in which the costumes were more elaborate and the conventional details of the occasion more rigidly observed. It was described as the "grand marital event of the week, and one of a lifetime," for not only did it unite the two smallest people then known, but two other Lilliputians, Minnie Warren, sister of the bride, and Commodore Nutt, graced the occasion by acting as the attendants of the bridal couple. Then, the "immortal P. T. Barnum and other dignitaries" were present, and those comprising the congregation of the church were among society's elect, the women "in full opera costume," while the men wore "dress coats and white neck-cloths."

It must have been a sight worth seeing to behold the dainty little quartet upon the platform, three feet high, that had been erected in front of the altar to



Phineas T. Barnum



Wedding of Tom Thumb



Annie Bates and Hop-o'-My-Thumb



The Baltimore Giant



The Siamese Twins



Noah Orr and Mrs. Tom Thumb