

Nothing up my Sleeve

By THURSTON *the* MAGICIAN

At breakfast in a side-show tent with Lano, the Human Pin-cushion; Thardo, the Mexican Knife Thrower, and Mlle. de Leon, the Circassian Beauty, who doubled as snake charmer, Howard Thurston, aspiring young magician, became The Wizard of the North—an impressive title for an untried trouper who was shortly to be going from house to house advertising performances by a company that could not afford to pay for handbills. But it was the start of a career—a career that moved forward considerably when Thurston won the right to call himself "The Man That Mystified Herrmann."

II

WHEN I left home that time I went to Cleveland where Sells Brothers' Circus was playing. Entering the grounds I passed a lot where two tents were almost concealed in a forest of banners flaming with colors. As I stood looking at the pictures that advertised the GREAT LONDON SIDE SHOW, I was fascinated.

I peeked in at the entrance of the smaller tent. The Tattooed Lady, in a dingy Mother Hubbard, her hair down her back, was frying sausages on a gasoline stove, while a little man, in pink tights and a Prince Albert coat, was cooking flapjacks on a spider. As he caught my eye he smiled and gave the pan a sudden jerk, sending the cake high into the air. It flopped over once and the little man caught it very expertly. I couldn't hold back a word of admiration. The little man waved an arm toward me.

"Hullo," he called. "Come in."

Such was my meeting with Lano, the Human Pincushion, whose picture on the banner outside represented a fierce-looking brigand seven feet high, whose body bristled with hatpins and knives and skewers of many kinds. But in reality, as I came to know, he was the gentlest and kindest of men, and our friendship became very strong.

At breakfast, I sat between Thardo, the Mexican Knife Thrower, and Mlle. de Leon, the Circassian Beauty, who doubled in the rôle of snake charmer. The proprietors of the show, Jim Berry and Tom Hurd, sat at the ends of the table, which was a knock-together affair, consisting of advertising signs laid across hurdles used in the trained animal act. Pop Samuels, owner of the trained animals, sat opposite me. His wife, the Tattooed Lady, and Lano waited on the table. In a huge chair on a platform decorated with red velvet and tinsel, Hattie Bone, the "largest and fattest woman in the world," sat in solitary state. "Coffee," the Skeleton Dude, waited on her.

They all welcomed me as a fellow professional when I explained that I was a magician. After breakfast Jim Berry and Tom Hurd produced an advertising banner similar to those outside and unrolled it on the ground. The picture represented a magician, with long goatee and mustachios, producing bowls of fire, cages of doves and aquariums of goldfish out of the empty air. In big black letters under the picture was written: ANDERSON, WIZARD OF THE NORTH. Jim Berry's gruff voice broke the spell.

"Well, son, what do you think of it?"

"Some class to that," said Tom Hurd. "Nothing too good for the Great London, if I do say it myself."

My heart was pounding, but finally the great question popped out. Mr. Berry slapped me on the back.

"Guessed it the first time. The Great London is looking for a real live Wiz-

If you can deliver the goods, it's six a week and cakes and that banner flung to the breeze in every burg we show. Are you on?"

I brought my little bag of tricks and gave a trial performance in the main tent between the morning and the afternoon shows. The whole company watched the exhibition and applauded heartily. When I took a doll out of Tom Hurd's hat, Hattie Bone laughed so that she shook like a load of hay. When I finished Jim Berry said:

"Your act's O. K., son. Your salary starts at Nelsonville, tomorrow."

I have tried to recollect the first performance of the Wizard of the North, but beyond the memory that my table was a soap box covered with red cloth and my magic wand the stump of an old whip borrowed from Pop Samuels, my mind, so far as my début as a professional magician is concerned, is a blank.

A Bid for Business

But what followed I have not forgotten. A hard life! The show began at 9:30 in the morning and did not end till dark. Sometimes we gave between thirty and forty performances a day. We slept and ate in the tent.

Sometimes when business was not good, we turned the Wild Man loose with a large bone of raw meat in his hand. He ran through the fair grounds, howling and brandishing his food, the whole company of freaks in pursuit, Tom Hurd in the lead cracking his long whip, and Jim Berry and myself firing blank cartridges. After covering the ground of rival attractions the Wild Man dou-

bled on his trail and allowed himself to be caught, curiously enough, in front of our own tent. Which brought all the people to our part of the grounds.

When the Fair season ended we played the small halls in the Pennsylvania towns. Business went from bad to worse and salaries were few and far between. What money we did take in Jim Berry spent for drink, and Tom Hurd lost heart and became indifferent.

Winter added to our misery. We went to the mountains, and the nights and mornings were bitterly cold. Finally, conditions became so desperate that Pop Samuels, Thardo, Lano and myself decided that we could get along without the managers, as we were giving the greater part of the show and receiving no pay for our work. So we held a council of war and I was elected manager of a new organization and was also appointed a committee of one to notify Hurd and Berry that we would give one more week free, after which we would try to get along without the assistance of the managers and Big Hattie Bone.

Saturday morning, the day of separation, arrived. We were in a little mountain town and the day was so cold that our breath almost turned to ice on our lips. Each performer packed his belongings and the wagons were ordered, two for the managers and one for the "rebels," as Jim Berry called us. Not one of the new organization had any money.

At last the two drays, loaded with the managers' goods, moved down the street, Big Hattie Bone hurling curses.

At three in the afternoon I ordered the teams to drive to the nearest vil-

lage. We stopped near a schoolhouse.

As we had no advertising bills, the whole troupe went from house to house and store to store to invite the people to come to our entertainment.

The first performance under the new management was not a great success, and we had to camp in the schoolhouse overnight and give the show the next night in order to pay our drivers and engage new wagons to carry us to the next town.

Financial Difficulties

In this way we traveled on for three months. A heavy snow was on the ground, and the days and nights were bitterly cold.

At last Spring came. We were all ambitious to play under canvas again. So I advertised for a tent, and eventually we made arrangements with a showman to use his tent and seats in return for a half interest in the show.

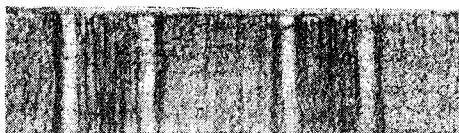
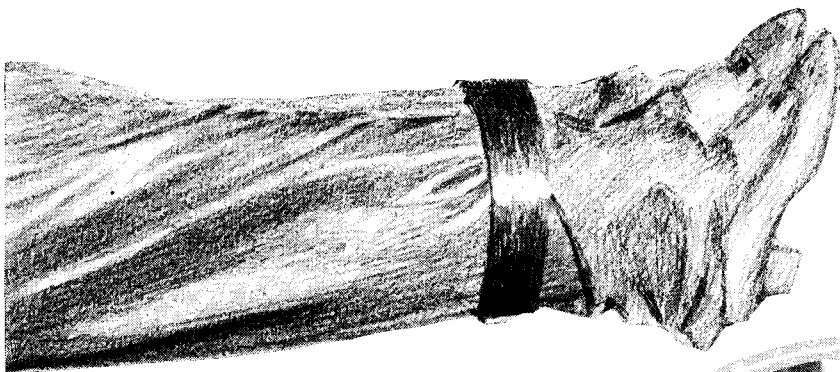
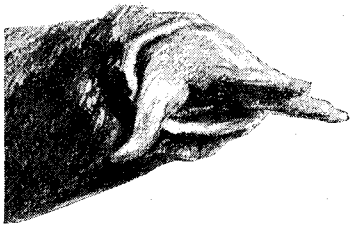
On the first day of May our partner arrived and I felt as Napoleon must have felt when he was made First Consul. We went to bed early that night so as to be up bright and early for the grand parade. I remember how delightfully warm it was under the tent, on which the sun had been shining all day. But that night it started to rain, and it rained all next day. There was no parade and no show. The next day it rained; and for almost three weeks the rain fell continually. In all that time we gave only four performances.

At length we arrived in Williamsport, Pa. The rain ceased and we prepared to give our show. The six wagoners



Drawing by
B. J. Rosenmeyer
from photographs

Howard Thurston performing the always-mystifying levitation illusion which is a feature of his performances



we had hired for the week, and who were to be paid by the day, had not received any money, and were threatening trouble. Our partner had bought the tent on a small payment and a promise of future installments, which, however, had not been made, and the original owner came to collect. We promised to pay what we could from the proceeds of the next day's performance.

But the next day the floods descended and with the rain came the sheriff to attach the show. He tacked up a card advertising the whole outfit for sale at auction the following day.

I racked my brain to find a way out, but every avenue of escape was blocked by the burly figure of the sheriff. After dinner I took a brisk walk with Lano to town. I had formed a plan.

At the railroad station I sent the following message:

Harry Davis
Pittsburgh, Pa.:

Can offer you for immediate engagement the following acts, Pop Samuels with fifty small trained animals; Thardo, Contortionist and Mexican Knife Thrower; Lano, Sword Swallow, Glass Eater, Fire King and Human Pincushion; Mlle. de Leon, Tattooed Lady and Snake Charmer. Also the World's Greatest Magician. Joint salary one hundred and fifty per week. Kindly arrange by wire for our tickets and transportation of baggage. Answer immediately.

That afternoon was endless. I paced up and down outside the tent peering

of whisky and I sent Lano to get the liquor and send a collect message to Harry Davis.

WILL COME ON MIDNIGHT TRAIN STOP NECESSARY FOR YOU TO ARRANGE RAILROAD TRANSPORTATION AT YOUR END

The night was cold. A drizzling rain fell outside. A big lantern was hung with a rope from the middle of the tent, and we sat around a trunk playing poker with the sheriff. After every jack-pot Thardo would pull out a bottle and pass it around. We did nothing more than moisten our lips, for every drop of that liquor was more precious than attar of roses; but the sheriff, who was cold, took long, generous swigs, which, however, had no appreciable effect on him. It was plain that we had underestimated his capacity, and the success of our plan began to look dubious. A clock somewhere in the village tolled the hour of ten. The sheriff yawned and threw down his hand.

Then he started on his round of the tent to see that none of the baggage had been tampered with. Mrs. Samuels leaned swiftly toward me, and whispered:

"I'll have that 'boob' dead to the world in ten minutes."

He accepted a tin cup of hot toddy and we went to bed. It was not long before the sheriff was snoring lustily. Stealthily we sneaked out of the tent, bundled the animals and our belongings onto the wagon and away we skipped.



An impromptu performance for a young and enthusiastic group of friends

through the gray drizzle for a messenger.

Seven o'clock came and still no message. The sheriff closed the tent and settled himself comfortably inside for a long night watch, and we all sat around the table—waiting. At eight o'clock the messenger came. I eagerly opened the envelope. I could feel the sheriff's eyes fixed on me suspiciously, as I read the words:

ALL O K OPEN MONDAY

I took Lano, Thardo, Pop Samuels and his wife to one side and told them of my plan to get the sheriff drunk. We had just enough to buy two pint bottles

When we reached Pittsburgh, Mr. O'Connor, manager of Harry Davis' Museum, was at the station to meet us. He had liberally advertised the "Country Circus." The front of the Museum was plastered with huge placards blazoning the wonders of our performance in dazzling adjectives and still more dazzling pictures. Mrs. Samuels, as Tattooed Lady and Snake Charmer, was assigned to the Curio Hall; as was Coffee, the Skeleton Dude; and Lano, the Human Pincushion. Thardo went back to heaving knives at the Tattooed Lady.

When the Great Country Circus disbanded we organized The Great New York Circus, but it was not destined to

have a brilliant career. One morning in Long Island City, in August, 1894, the manager informed us that there would be no matinee and that we could go to New York for the day. When I returned, the tent had vanished—everything but my little table with its velvet cover. Old Pop had saved my apparatus and my cherished dress suit which I had bought from the museum people at Pittsburgh. He told me that the tent and baggage had been attached and were stored in another part of the city.

Touring the Far West

I ferried back to New York that night. The next day I answered an advertisement in The Mirror to join, as a magician, the side show of the Sells Brothers' Circus. The show had the usual variety of freaks. We played through the South that winter, but as business was bad the show closed.

In a little Georgia town I met Sam Meinhold. He and I visited small towns throughout the state doing our own advertising and giving the whole show ourselves, Sam playing the zither, and I performing tricks. In this way we spent the winter of 1894-95. We saved enough money to open a Fair Ground Show. We bought a tent, engaged some freaks, and patterned our show after the Great London Side Show. Our business was good during the Fair season, then we worked up north into Minnesota.

Business became bad, and at Duluth the show was attached for debts. I obtained an engagement in a Dime Museum in Minneapolis. This was followed by an engagement in Butte, Mont., at sixty dollars a week, and life looked rosy again.

I stayed at Butte for a month, and then went to Great Falls. A manager of a concert hall at Boulder, up near the Canadian line, offered me two weeks at seventy dollars a week.

Arriving at Boulder I inquired for the theater. To my surprise a frame building, two stories high, in front of which hung a sign "Theater and Saloon," was pointed out, and I learned that in the daytime the theater was used as a pool parlor and also as a poker and faro joint. In the evening before the curtain went up, the pool tables were removed and the gambling paraphernalia was placed at the sides of the hall.

Men surged around roulette wheels, card tables and faro layouts, struggling with one another to place their bets. Scattered through the hall were a score of painted women, smoking, drinking and playing as eagerly as the men.

While I was setting the stage for my act there was a sudden fusillade of pistol shots, and a bullet pinged through the curtain, smashing a goblet in my hand. The affray was over almost as soon as it had begun and, peering through the peephole, I saw a man being carried out.

At ten o'clock the room was cleared, chairs were arranged in rows and the curtain was raised. With a feeling of uneasiness I stood in the wings. Conjur-ing is a nervous business under the best of conditions, and it does not improve the quality of the work to have a glass shot out of your hand before going on the stage. My opening number was catching playing cards out of the air, and my fingers trembled so that it was with the greatest difficulty I manipulated the cards. As soon as the curtain went down there was another fight, and this exciting program was kept up during the entire two weeks' engagement.

At Boulder I became an inventor of illusions. At the opening performance, with my fingers trembling, expecting at every (Continued on page 71)

A Taste for Red

By Nevis Shane

*Lack of personality—that was her trouble.
She did all she could about it. And the re-
sult was a surprise*



Illustrated by
Oscar Howard

Anne attacked a fresh bush. "I reckon there's no one about," she mumbled

"TOMORROW," said Mrs. J. Cavendish Sherrill to her daughter Anne, "is your birthday."
"Yes, Mother," said Anne.
"And," said Mrs. J. Cavendish Sherrill, "you will be twenty-five."
"Yes, Mother," said Anne.
"That," said Mrs. J. Cavendish Sherrill, "makes it just seven years since your debut."
"Yes, Mother," said Anne.
"In which time," said Mrs. J. Cavendish Sherrill, "you have never been engaged."
"No, Mother," said Anne.
"Nor," said Mrs. J. Cavendish Sherrill, "even rumored engaged."
"No, Mother," said Anne.
"For pity's sake," cried Mrs. J. Cavendish Sherrill, in exasperation, "can't you find anything but 'yes' and 'no' to say?"
"No, Mother," said Anne.
Her mother looked at her. Anne recognized that look. It was the "what-have-I-ever-done-that-I-should-be-inflicted-with-such-a-daughter?" look. So far, Anne had not been able to reply to that look. So far, Anne had not been able even to speculate as to why her mother—the Mrs. J. Cavendish Sher-

rill—had been inflicted with such a changeling sort of offspring as Anne Tabitha Sherrill.
"You're hopeless," sighed Mrs. Sherrill.
Anne was silent. There was no necessity of saying "yes, Mother" in this case. Anne's hopelessness was a tacit understanding of long duration.
"It isn't as if you were actually bad-looking," reflected Mrs. Sherrill.
Indeed, there had been a time when Mrs. Sherrill had thought Anne was going to be a beauty. She had anticipated, watched, studied—but the quality of Anne's beauty eluded definite analysis. It was elusive, fluctuating, exasperating, changing in response to a mood as a landscape changes in response to the wind.

ANNE had not been entirely unaware of that potential loveliness. Had been cognizant of the fact that beauty might have been hers had she only claimed it positively; if, instead of that negative, tormenting shyness, she had only asserted her own confidence in it with some of the assurance of, well, Lilas Terhune, for example. Lilas, whose nose was too short, and whose eyes were

too shrewd, and whose mouth was too small, but who charmed all men by her vivid gayety, her warm, carnal coloring. Men have a crude taste for red.
But Anne—yes, Anne could have been, as Mrs. Sherrill stated, worse-looking. It wasn't that... It was... it was...
"What you lack," said Mrs. Sherrill decisively, "is personality."
"It," murmured Anne.
"What?" said her mother impatiently.
"It," murmured Anne, "must be my personality."
"Well, isn't that what I just said?" demanded her mother.
"Yes, dear," said Anne. "I was simply agreeing with you."
Mrs. Sherrill moved her cabinet-bathed, Swedish-massaged, French-girdled, and calorie-limited body restlessly.
"There you are!" she declared. "You agree with me! That's an example of your lack of individuality. You aren't positive enough—not assertive enough. You agree with a person, or you remain silent. You never take an aggressive stand and maintain it. Now, tomorrow—"
"Is my twenty-fifth birthday," interrupted Anne, "and I've been out seven years, and I've not been engaged, nor

even rumored engaged, and what am I going to do about it?—All that's been said, Mother."

"Anne," returned her mother quietly, "it is not to the credit of a woman of my wealth, my influence, my reputation, and my social standing to have a daughter as palpably unattractive to the masculine contingent as you are."

The girl stared at her. As long as she had known her mother—as well as she felt she knew her mother—there were still times when her mother's stark brutality left her bewildered and even frightened.

She said, with an effort: "Perhaps I'd better go away—disappear—"

"Don't be ridiculous!" said Mrs. Sherrill.

"Besides," said Mrs. Sherrill, "it wouldn't do any good—people would speculate and some vile scandal-sheet 'rumor' the reason—"

"Then perhaps," said Anne, "you might have me psychoanalyzed. Perhaps you might buy me a new personality."

MRS. SHERRILL frowned. She disliked most humor, but she abhorred levity. Only Anne wasn't being deliberately facetious.

She said again: "I could be psychoanalyzed. I've read there are men—psychoanalysts, I believe—who make a specialty of developing personality—"

"Oh, keep still," requested her mother impatiently. "I want to think."

Anne kept still.

"I could take you to Europe," said Mrs. Sherrill finally. "And—"

"But you've taken me to Europe every year since I was fourteen," Anne pointed out.

Mrs. Sherrill's delicate nostrils flared slightly. By which one realized Mrs. Sherrill was annoyed.

"Your money," said she deliberately, "would attract any number of titled foreigners, to whom you could be rumored engaged, then—"

"That's out," said Anne, quiet but positive.

"Nothing," said Mrs. Sherrill, also quiet but positive, "is out that might establish you as a social success."

Anne was silent. But this time silence meant neither admission nor consent.

Mrs. Sherrill reflected. She said finally: "This is January. We can sail next week for the Riviera, spend the winter in Cannes, go to Rome for Easter, to Paris for early Spring, and take a house in London for the season. Or—"

She paused and regarded Anne intently.

"Or—" prompted Anne quietly.

"Or, if you object to this program, you can avoid it by giving me the assurance that you will be engaged—publicly engaged—by June. And to a man of some importance. Not a fortune-hunter. That gives you five months—"

ANNE bit her lips. She had a sudden wild terror that she was going to cry. She wanted so horribly to cry—She said suddenly: "I've never been in love—that's why I've never become engaged. I could have been engaged lots of times."

But Anne was always a bad liar. Still, she hadn't ever been in love—that is, literally. At least that much was true.

Mrs. Sherrill rose gracefully to her five-feet-three-inches of slim elegance.

She smiled acridly, said acridly: "No doubt. But, unfortunately, only you are cognizant of this fact. Unfortunately, you have kept your light hidden beneath the bushel of your modesty. However, now is the time for you to discard that charming reticence—"

She went out (Continued on page 20)