

THE PASSING OF THE ONCE POPULAR SIDESHOW FREAK



This Old Familiar Scene So Common in the Circus of Yesterday Is Rapidly Passing and Is Now a Rarity.

Y ES," said Mike, the midget, as he jangled a handful of pennies in an Automatic Vaudeville Arcade.

"We are passing. Each year pushes us a little further into poverty and obscurity. For with us freaks obscenity is poverty. Get your pennies here! Pennies, pennies!" Stopping he changed a few dimes and nickels into pennies that the visitors might drop them in the slots and see the latest prizefight or hear the newest rag.

"Now look at me. You wouldn't think that once I had my picture on canvas standing by a seven-foot giant, would you? Fact, though, I was pulled so small that I looked like a foot, but I didn't care—it brought me the money. I used to get scented letters from women—most of them small, but some of them big; I mean the women. The big ones called me their doll, and I said I was cute.

"And I have shaken hands with Princes, and written my autograph for a King. It was the Amir of Balkhistan, his title was a king just the same. Pennies! That machine's out of order. Why don't you try 'Bridget and the Polkeman'?"

"Now I get \$12 a week from 11 o'clock in the morning till 11 at night. It's these things—automatic prizefights and moving pictures—that have sent me to the wall. The public is tired of freaks; it wants to hear the boy soprano and watch the girl contortionist spin around on her neck, and go to moving pictures.

"I'm not blaming the public, only it's hard on old-time freaks. It takes a tough-nosed freak now to be able to earn his living in the profession. Here you receive pennies for a nickel today."

"The whole story is told in Mike—once he had a beard far and wide as the mythical ridget, now making change in a penny arcade. Or rather not quite all the story, for Mike is more successful than most of the misshapen human beings who were forced to exhibit themselves for a living. The rest of them have gone back to their home town, to the farm, or are living with kindly relatives. Where the museum once stood and flourished the moving picture house now opens its doors early in the morning and closes them late at night.

"The passing of the freak from public exhibition has come about gradually. One by one the freaks have been eliminated. The fat woman was the first to go. On every museum platform for years she sat, the smallest ones were first taken off, leaving only the big ones. Then the tattooed man and the tattooed lady had to seek other employment. In their wake followed the albinos, the living skeletons, and armless and legless wonders.

"These able to hold on longest were exceptional freaks such as two-headed boys, the woman with the horse's mane growing between her shoulders, the elastic-skinned man, the three-legged boy, the elephant-footed man and the lion-faced boy.

"The freaks passed their lives between their boarding house and the museum. It was always a cheap lodging house, usually filled with low-salaried theatrical people, where the landlady knew them and their ways and tried to protect them from the public as much as possible. Each season they would always go to the same boarding house until it became home. At first the museum managers had quarters on the top floor of the museum so that the human curios would not have to go out on the street at all. As the freaks became of less value they had to resort to the boarding houses.

"Dwelling in a world apart, housed always by themselves, some strange romances occur. The human pin cushion was the tattooed lady just as ardently as any Leander, and the living skeleton courted his heart to the fat woman as eloquently as any Romeo. Love roams the museum just the same as it does the studio. But it must be said that now and then the contriving hand of the press agent can be detected back of the scenes.

"Miss Emma Scholler, a Louisiana widow, fell in love and married D. W. Coffey, the skeleton dude, twenty-two times. Each new city they would go to the papers would take up the strange courtship, with photographs of the lovers and early the living skeleton was sending his sweetheart not to have to go out on the street at all. Her curiosity was at its height, arrangements for the marriage would be made in the museum, admission doubled. Twenty-two times the adamant bride was stood up and blushed under a flowing veil and showered with rice and flowers—and lived an old maid.

"Strange as it may seem, the bearded lady always has lovers aplenty. She rarely ever spends more than six seasons on the platform—more than that she is museum—without falling a victim to the wiles of Cupid, the convivial cut-up, Annetta Anderson, who had a heart to do a Cabinet officer proud, was the wife of a museum lecturer.

"Even Miss Grace Gilbert, who achieved more fame than any other bearded lady, was laid low by the feathered shaft. For fourteen years she had been exhibited all over the world as the bearded lady. Giles E. Calvin, a farmer living in Kalamazoo County, Michigan, and who had known her, since they were tots, had been sending her love notes and little nothings for months, but to all these she remained cold, just like a story-book heroine.

Finally he began following her show from town to town, pleading his case between acts. At last she gave in, and they secured their license at South Bend, Ind. When they appeared before City Judge Farabaugh for the reading of the marriage service the groom, nineteen years younger and smooth shaven, was wearing a long ulster which almost completely concealed his trousers. The Judge looked from one to the other in doubt, then plucked boldly in:

"Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?" he asked.

"Judge," came the indignant answer, "I am to be the wedded wife. He is the husband!"

The Judge could only cover up his confusion by saying, "This ceremony should be one of solemnity and in keeping with the serious step you are taking."

The happy couple are now living on Giles's farm in Michigan, with only a

No Longer an Attraction, These Once High-Salaried Exhibits Find It Hard to Earn a Living—What Has Become of Famous Favorites.

show the migration of human anatomical curiosities began. From out of the museum into the grades and professions where their misfortunes are their assets—Mike changing pennies, the tattooed man exhibiting safety razors in a show window, the albino selling newspapers—the freaks have gone.

finds employment the year around, sometimes with a circus, sometimes at the Hippodrome, and is often booked in vaudeville. With a spotted leopard's skin over his shoulder he has played the gladiator and after a quick change of costume has come out as Peter Pan with Gertrude Hoffmann in a burlesque.

And they say that this queer couple in their little flat are as happy as two mice in a queen's wardrobe.

"I know I am a freak," said Jerry, "but I have got over caring. I am glad every morning when the sun comes up and sorry every evening when the electric lights go on. Besides, when a man's got a

Where once a good freak commanded \$200 a week he now can scarcely get on at \$30. It now takes a prodigy of more than passing novelty to draw more than \$25 a week. The Tocci twins—boys with two heads, four arms, and two legs—drew \$500 a week for years. A regular scale of prices now regulates the pay received by freaks. A living skeleton receives usually about \$18 a week, a bearded lady, \$12; a fat woman, \$8, and a Circassian beauty, \$7.

In the cities they can no longer find profitable employment. Most of those who are still keeping up a professional life are to be found under the show tent of the circus. The outer districts, where the picture show and the mechanical piano have not filled the entertainment wants of the public, are now the havens of refuge of the freaks.

Petty jealousies enter into the lives of

was at the height of its glory. Barnum was the ultimate in the way of proclaiming and making known a freak. With him, causing a freak to be talked about the world over was an art. Other showmen had known about Charles S. Stratton, the little man who was only 23 inches tall and weighed only 51 pounds, but none of them saw in him the famous Tom Thumb. Barnum put him under contract, changed his name to General Tom Thumb, and made him immortal. Craftily Barnum set about making Tom Thumb fall in love, he himself sending flowers to Miss Lavina Warren in Tom Thumb's name. Finally they became engaged, and every paper in America had it. So great was Tom Thumb's fame and popularity that it is said he was kissed by nearly a million women.

So great a believer was Barnum in the advertising value of freaks that if he could not get an unusual one he would not hesitate to make one. It is said that "Zip, the What Is It," who was herded far and wide as the last surviving member of the Aztec race, was nobody more or less than an illiterate negro with a queerly shaped skull.

He made fame, too, for the Siamese twins. There have been other twins just as remarkable, but they did not have Barnum for a backer. The Siamese twins—so-called, although their father was a Chinaman—drew \$500 a week for years. Chang, who was half an inch shorter than his brother, Eng, had six children—one more than Eng—and all were healthy, normal children. Leaving the stage, they went to New York and lived on a farm under the prosaic name of Banker.

An unusual freak, not so revolting as many shown in the museum, was "Lionel, the Lion-faced Boy." His name was most appropriate for his whole face bore a striking resemblance to that of a lion. The child at birth had its features entirely covered with silky hair. The German physicians were so superstitious about it that the Military Governor had to intercede to save the child's life. The boy had a cat's eye and could see quite well after night. His nose was almost entirely obscured—the name hanging to L's shoulder was that only his lower lip was visible.

The passing of well-known freaks is often marked by tragedy. Charles H. Perry, a famous living skeleton, was recently found dead in a hut on the outskirts of Providence, R. I., where he had been living a hermit's life. Although one inch over six feet, he weighed only eighty pounds. On examination at the earlier part of his life, he was an absolute replete during his later years.

Sprague, another famous living skeleton, died in poverty in Chicago. "General Pennant," a midget only two feet and one inch tall, was found dead in a small bedroom in East Fourteenth Street, New York, poor and despondent. He was a Japanese and he was buried without his real name being known. Marcel Minot, twenty-seven inches tall, died in Chicago in lowly conditions. The skin-skinned man, who could draw the elastic of his forehead down over his face like a veil, died from consumption due to exposure on a dirty museum stage. "Jo-Jo," the Dog-faced Boy," died in Parker of pneumonia. On account of the peculiar formation of his face and the fact that his body was entirely covered by tow-colored hair he was likened to a Russian dachshund. His real name was Theodore Petersoff.

It is good to know that now and then a public curiosity leaves an easy life in his wandering days. Ella Ewing, the Missouri saintess, died in her native State in a house built after her own plans, with even the best eight feet long, where she takes care of her parents from money made on exhibition. Viola La Porte, who gave up her job in a paper box factory to become a Circassian Girl, bought a house in St. Louis for which she paid outright \$12,000.

Generally freaks are born that way, but in many cases they have become so later. Miss Stella Ewing, known as the ossified woman, was normal until she was twenty years old, when her body began to harden from a severe attack of rickets. Mrs. Wilkins, the woman at Hamilton, Ohio, who had a horn in the middle of her forehead, had attained her height before the horn began to grow. When it was five inches long she struck it against a bar, breaking off an inch. "The Blue man" became so from silver nitrate administered to cure him of locomotor ataxia. Peter Peters was old enough to take her own bones began to soften and become brittle.

Is it not just as well that the freak is passing? Is it not a healthier sign of the public mind that it is no longer interested in the sad misfortunes of others? The plea of the museum proprietor that exhibiting the ossified man is educational can not be defended. No good ever came of staring at the front-boy, or of questioning the ossified man. In some countries public exhibition of freaks is prohibited. Nothing but morbid curiosity ever sent the public to the dime museum where on one platform could be seen human anomalies from all over the world. Much better is it that a clean moving picture hall where the entertainment is healthful and instructive should supplant the dime museum.

But as Mike the midget would say, "It is sure hard on us freaks!"



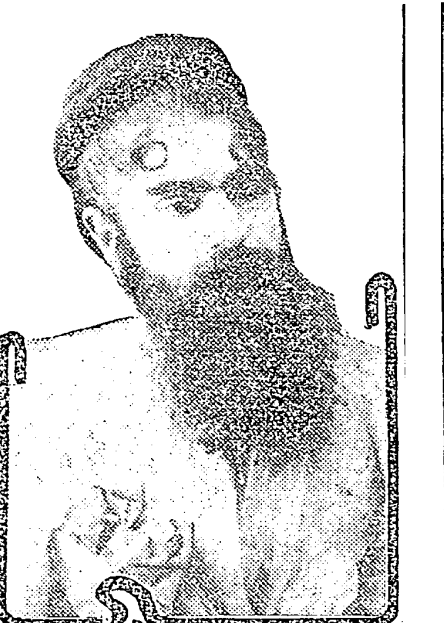
A Human Pin Cushion.



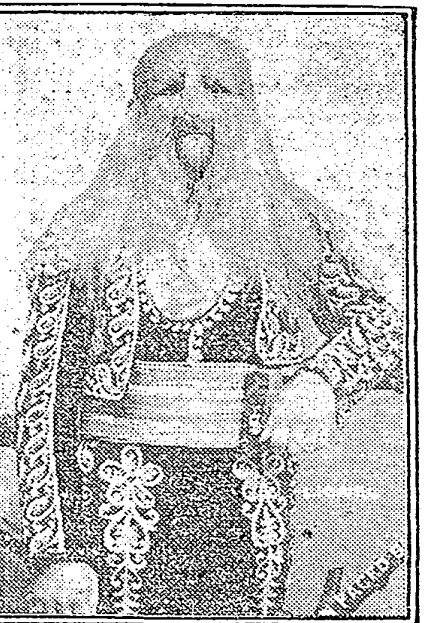
The Girl with the Rubber Skin.



One of the Famous Fat Women.



The Bearded Lady.



The Boy with the Lion's Mane.

ribbon or two and a few posters to tell that once the wife was the queen of the museum.

The seclusion of the farm is preferred to the squalor by retiring freaks. When Capt. and Mrs. Bates, the Kentucky giants, left the stage they went back to his farm in Kentucky. The Captain was seven feet two and one-half inches in height, but the pride of his life was his wife, who overshadowed him by a full three inches.

At the advent of the moving picture

Europe, slower to take up entertainment novelties, is the last stamping ground for them. There they still can make a comfortable living, and there they still may be found in some out-of-the-way museum.

It is only the exceptional freak that can get "work" in this country. Jerry Simpson, a professional dwarf, is one of the fortunate. He is scarcely 3 feet high, but with the strength of two men, for he can put up a 250-pound man with one arm. His head, neck, and torso are normal, but his legs are short and gnarled. He

Brought up on a farm in Wisconsin, he now lives in New York and takes an interest in politics, and on the whole is about the most normal freak imaginable. Of course, he is a baseball fan, and his memory for scores and batting averages is uncanny. There is nothing that does his soul more good than to be called "Jerry" by one of the diamond demigods—proving that he is mortal. Proud of all though, he is of his wife. She is a tall blonde, very sweetener, and pretty. She is one of the "profess," too, for she is a dancing girl.

good diction and a pretty wife, what else matters? Some dwarfs and freaks are grouchy and bitter, thinking that they didn't get a square deal in the universal shake-up of things, but I'd rather be a live dwarf than a dead Apollo. Especially when I have a dancing Venus for a wife."

For years wages have been going down for human freaks. As the public has lost interest in them for something more spectacular and musical, their value as drawing cards has steadily dropped off.

the freaks. Their professional and social standings are carefully guarded. Once one fat woman would not sit on the same platform with another obese lady because the obese lady was appearing in a dress too much décolleté. One dwarf was very haughty and proud over the fact that he was the only midget on the professional stage who had a mustache, and made the introducer call attention to it at every performance.

No longer can a freak attain such fame as in the days of Barnum, when the circus

FAMOUS SCULPTOR, MAD FOR MANY YEARS, RETURNS TO HIS ART

TWENTY-FIVE years ago Vincenzo Gemito was one of the most popular and successful sculptors in Europe. He began his work in Naples as a mere boy, and it was from the ragamuffins of his native city that he drew his first inspiration. His "Little Fisherman" and "The Water Vendor" were hailed with delight by connoisseurs throughout the world. Great things were expected of the sculptor, at that time not 30 years old.

Then, suddenly, he vanished from the public eye. Retiring to his villa beside the Bay of Naples, he plunged himself in mystery and silence. Years went by. He was totally forgotten. Those curious enough to ask what was the trouble were told that Vincenzo Gemito had gone mad.

Then, a few months ago, the sculptor suddenly came back into the world. "He is at work again!" The news spread like wildfire through Naples, and when Gemito reappeared there he was surrounded by a throng of his delighted fellow-citizens, among whom were scores of upstarts like those who had posed for his celebrated statues.

And now he is indeed at work again, as able as ever, as young in heart as he was

in the seventies, and the story of his "madness" is being told all over his native country.

It seems that, after his first statues, modeled from the street Arabs of Naples, won him fame, Gemito's work was brought to the attention of King Humbert and Queen Margherita of Italy. Desirous of encouraging the young genius, they ordered him to do a statue. There was great rejoicing in the sculptor's native city of Naples. To all his friends it seemed that he had attained the very pinnacle of success.

Unfortunately, the King and Queen turned over the matter of the statue to the Art Academy at Rome. The latter, instead of allowing Gemito to do what he pleased, ordered from him a group on an allegorical subject, similar to those of Benvenuto Cellini.

Gemito set to work. But the task was wholly beyond him. Where his strength lay was in the depiction of the types of his native city, of the naked, laughing little

boys playing about the beaches bordering the beautiful Bay of Naples. Among them he himself had spent uncounted hours, "learning all about the movement of every human muscle, just as others learn to read and sing," to quote the words of a French writer.

In vain he worked night and day trying to accomplish the new task. His free genius rebelled. He could not advance a step.

Instead of realizing that the fault was not his, he began to worry. He grew morbid. He decided that his hand had lost its cunning, that his day as a sculptor of genius was at an end almost before it had begun.

This, then, was the "madness" of Vincenzo Gemito. He turned over the allegorical group, in an incomplete state, to those who had ordered it, and hurried away, nervous and despondent, to his villa. And there he lay buried, without

daring to resume his work, while the years passed, one by one, changing him from a care-free youth to a gray and bearded old man.

Throughout his exile, however, a few faithful friends never forgot him. They kept at him incessantly, until at last they fanned the spark of genius to life again.

Suddenly, as if wrought upon by a miracle, Vincenzo Gemito came to life. Again he grasped the tools of his trade. And now Europe awaits once more masterpieces like the "Little Fisherman" and the "Water Vendor."

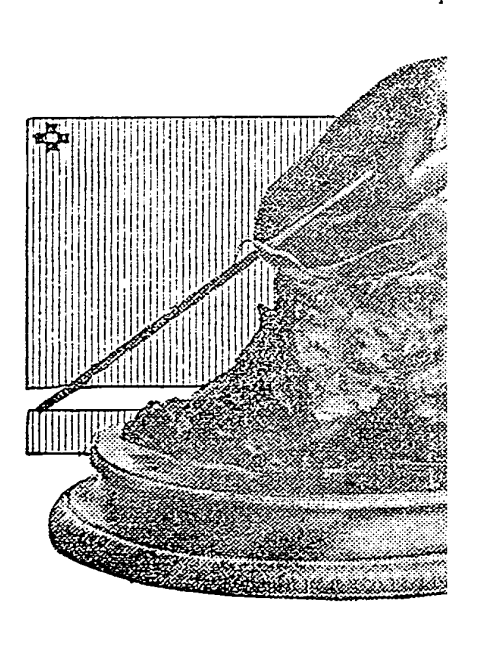
The new King of Italy has not failed to take an interest in this wonderful resurrection. He, too, like his father before him, has commissioned Gemito to execute a statue. But, unlike the fatal other time, there is to be no coercion of the artist's genius now.

The royal command is that he must do exactly as he pleases, turn out whatever strikes his fancy. So Gemito, overjoyed, feeling once more that the old power is

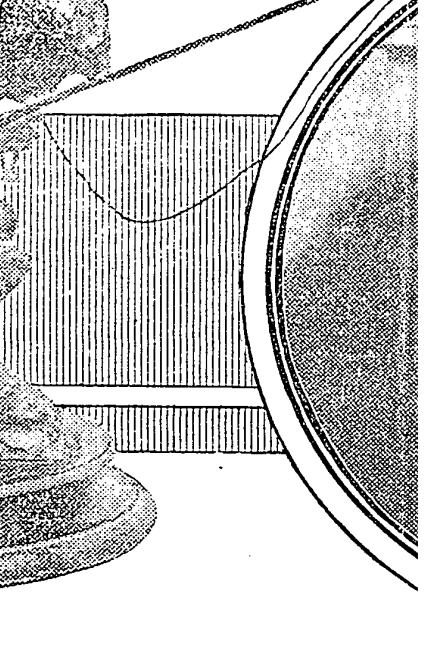
guiding his hand, has set to work with enthusiasm on a statue of Neptune, along with striking originality.

"It is not the classic, traditional Neptune," says a writer in L'illustration, "not the Neptune standing upright in the midst of the waves, calming them with a gesture, like the one which survived the catastrophe of Mesopotam. Instead, it is an entirely modern god, a god of great twin-screw ocean greyhounds, of torpedo boats, of steel cruisers and submarines. It is a Neptune—a god of winged feet, skimming over the waves, brandishing a trident like a trophy won in battle."

If it turns out to be a masterpiece, if this old man, after twenty-five years of living death as an artist, arouses once more the admiration of a continent as he did a generation ago, truth will once more have made good its claim to be stranger than fiction.



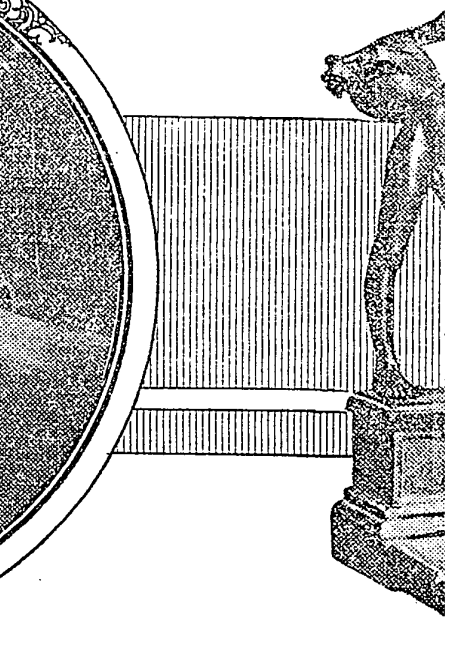
The Little Fisherman.



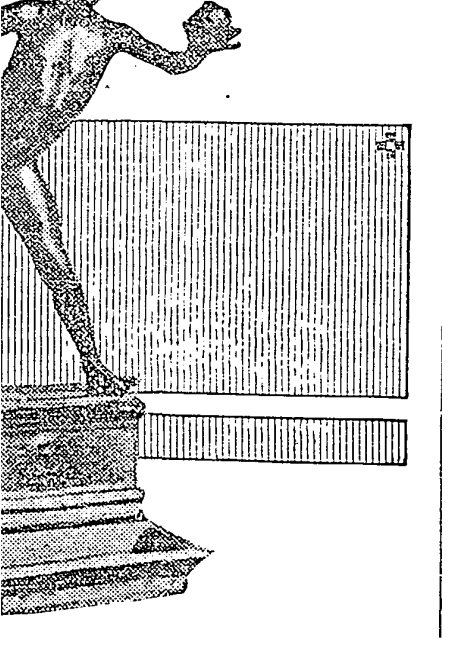
Vincenzo Gemito.



The Water Vendor—One of his Best Known Works.



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