ALL IS READY FOR THE BIG SHOW TO OPEN.

Busy Scenes at Winter Quarters

Of Robinson Circus at Terrace Park,

Which Will Open on April 27,

Either at Columbia or in Saengerfest Hall—Some of the New Features.

Twelve miles out on the Pan-handle, in some of the prettiest country in the Miami Valley, there is a busy beehive. A large plant, covering 25 acres, and employing nearly 500 people, is just beginnig to run at full blast, and from early morning till late at night the rat-tat-tat of the hammer and the buzz of the saw, intermingled with the sharp commands of teamsters to their horses and the creaking of heavy wagons loaded to the capacity with goods and merchandise of all descriptions, are heard above the rustling of the trees bending beneath brisk winds. Now and then, in this great plant, stranger sounds are heard, as of jungle beasts roaring in anger, or birds from another clime uttering their plaintive notes of fear at the uproar. If you chance by the place at certain hours of the day you will hear the most terrific music, as of a hundred horns, yet all in discord. The plant is the winter quarters of John Robinson's Ten Big Shows, and the terrific music is made by the latest and biggest feature, the elephant brass band, members of which have been playing together only a few weeks and are not yet in harmony.

In less than three weeks, on the 27th of this month, the big show will open, either at Columbia or in the Saengerfest Hall. As was stated in THE ENQUIRER some time ago, Mr. Robinson has been endeavoring to come to terms with the present owners of the big hall for a series of seven shows, covering four days. Both sides are now in a position to compromise, and it is possible that the contract will be made to-day. The floor of the big hall has been torn out, and it is in ideal condition for a circus, and would seat more people than the ordinary main-tent used by the shows.

BUSTLE OF PREPARATION.

It is because the opening is so near at hand that everything is bustle at the Robinson barns at Terrace Park. There is no let-up in the circus business, and the performers have been at it practicing ever since the show came in, early in the year. But, in addition to the performers, scores of other employes are on the grounds and at work, and the scene presented is one of the busiest imaginable.

There is every facility in the winter quarters for practicing the feats performed in the circus in summer. A regular ring laid in a warm and comfortable barn is used during the off season. The work when seen here is more keenly appreciated than in the show, the humming of the band and the excitement being dispensed with, for the precautions taken by the riders show that there is considerable danger attached to their exercises.

No matter how experienced he or she may be no ring rider practices without the "mechanic." This consists of a rope attached to a belt around his waist and to a revolving crane, which may be raised or lowered by an attendant as the horse rears or bounds forward. With this around his waist no rider need fear a bad fall or being trampled under the horse's feet, since, if he slipped, he would instantly be jerked high in the air, out of reach of the flying steeds. In order to get the horses used to music ringmen keep up a continual beating on drums, large and small, and once a day a small brass band plays its worst in their ears.

PRACTICING BAREBACK RIDING.

More than 40 riders will be connected with the big shows next year, and thus only a few of their tricks may be described. Miss Kittie Kruger and Miss Blanche Hilliard were riding yesterday afternoon. Each does an act with four horses, beginning with bareback riding on a single steed and ending by straddling all four. In addition to riding her four dapple grays, Miss Hilliard comes to the climax by carrying another rider on her back. She is the only equestrienne in this country who accomplishes this feat.

An interesting insight into animal nature may be gained in every barn of the Robinson winter quarters, but none is more interesting than that of the ring horses. These all bring high prices and are fine specimens of horse flesh. They are spirited, as a matter of course, and can be trained only through love. When the time comes for Miss Hilliard to practice her four dapple grays are brought to the ringside with their simple trappings on and held for their turn.

Miss Hilliard rides King, a huge horse with a broad back and an even gait. She does the ordinary bareback feats on this single horse, while the others prance about the entrance to the ring, eager to get in. The drums are beating, and after five minutes of rapid work all four horses are excited, and it takes a man each to hold the three outside the ring.

Finally, as she passes the group, Miss Hilliard motions to the ring man and calls sharply.

TRAINING THE HORSES.

"Gold Dust!" she cries, looking into the eager eye of the beast and motioning her hand. With distended nostrils he bounds forward, and, leaping past old King, starts tearing around the ring. She stoops and catches his reins as he passes, and in a minute has pulled him back and is riding double, a foot on the back of each horse. On the next round she calls another horse, and finally the last, and, catching them as they pass, ends by riding all four, letting them slip and catching them again with the greatest of ease. Around and around they go, rearing as they pass the music and kicking up the sawdust in glee. At last, when the act is done and she leaps lightly down among them, they crowd around the rider to rub their noses on her shoulder, and old King snorts proudly to let the world know that it is he that carries his mistress, and that the others are only geldings, introduced to make a show. The pride the beasts take in the act, and the eagerness they evince to get into the ring, is not the least interesting part of the programme.

A hundred yards from the ring barn is another training ground, a huge tent with a ring for the elephants. Here a regular school is held twice a day, and the scholars, if somewhat heavy and dull, are persevering and patient beyond description. The Robinsons have eight elephants this year, and they bid fair to make good the boast of being the best trained herd in the country. They range all the way from the largest, old Mary, a huge beast that has been with the show for 20 years, down to the baby elephant who does the clown act. They do everything that elephants have ever done in the ring, and in addition introduce the new big feature, the only original elephant brass band.

THE ELEPHANT BAND.

This unique organization gives two concerts a day, and if the harmony furnished is strained in points there is no lack of enthusiasm on the part of the musicians, who perform with great gusto and combine for the most ear-splitting climaxes the mind of a Sousa ever conceived. There are seven players, each having a huge brass horn made for the purpose. They sit in a regular semi-circle, each with a music stand in front of him and spectacles on his nose. The spectacles are not needed, for the notes on the music are as big as your hat and could be read across the great tent. But it adds a musical air and looks scholarly.

These elephants are in charge of Jim Buckley, an old trainer famous in tent show circles. Mr. Buckley acts as conducter, and the band having duly tuned up and tried their mouthpieces, he strikes his stand sharply with his baton for attention. Immediately the players assume the air of the greatest interest and the baby elephant, who acts as clown, can only be restrained from striking up a lively rigolette at once by threats of expulsion and punishment. The older members of the band affect high indignation at his lack of manners, and gazing attentively at the conductor, swell their sides in anticipation of the opening bars. When the baton sweeps down they burst forth in unison, each blowing his hardest and trying to outdo his neighbor. The air is filled with music, loud if not sweet, and the musicians sway backward and forward on their seats and flap their ears in delight at the harmony they produce. For three minutes there is a touching exchange of elephant soul. When finally the piece is concluded (encores are not allowed) they resign their horns with the greatest reluctance and the clown is pulled across the ring still pulling at his cornet and emitting muffled squeaks of notes of his favorite airs.

The band then turn themselves into a troop of acrobats. They stand upon their heads and walk on their hind legs. They waltz and walk on pegs and turn about on tubs. They form pyramids and lie down as if dead. There is apparently no end to their versatility and infinite enjoyment of the exercises, and at the end they sit down to a grand banquet which the clown mars by pulling off the table cloth and spilling the dishes on the floor just as the feast is about to open. On being reprimanded for which he backs over into the farthest corner of the ring and crouching sullenly as if at bay, trumpets his defiance to trainers in general and Mr. Buckley in particular. The elephants are the great card of the bill, and should make a great hit.

THE CIRCUS MENAGERIE.

Of all the things that go to make up a circus the menagerie is perhaps the most expensive. But it is indispensible and well worth the cost in the interest taken by all patrons, especially in the country districts. The Robinson menagerie will compare favorably with any in the world, and has been collected at enormous expense and trouble. It contains all the carnivora seen at the Zoo, with many not seen there. The collection of birds number, of course, only those from other lands, but there are many rare specimens in it. Birds cost more than animals, often, and two condors, from the Andes, who died last week, represented a loss of $500. The herbivora comprise as new specimens this year a herd of Philippine buffalos, a gnu, a tapir and a chamois. These animals are all carefully housed during the winter in stables built partly underground, for warmth. They are fed as nearly as possible on the food nature intended for them, and few die. The cost of maintenance all winter is great, but the beasts are all expensive, and the slightest exposure is often fatal.

The Robinsons have a score of lions and a half dozen tigers, to say nothing of leopards and smaller felines. Prof. Leroy, for many years with Bostock, trains these. He rides in the lion's cage in the parade and does an act in the bill. Many of the lions have been raised by the Robinsons, and five or six are the cubs of old Nell, a toothless lioness, now more than 30 years old. She has been with the show nearly all her life, and was purchased by the original John Robinson in Africa, where she was taken in the forest. There is a sad story about old Nell. Her days are shortening and in a few days she will watch her cubs play for the last time.

OLD NELL'S DAYS ARE NUMBERED.

She was sleeping when THE ENQUIRER reporter and artist entered the carnivora. Stretched out on the floor of her cage, she measured seven feet, and her silky hair shone in the sunlight like gold. Nell has always been a pet and is as gentle as a house cat.

"Get up, Nellie!" said the keeper, stroking her head with his hand. She opened her eyes, blinked lazily and rose slowly and painfully. When she yawned it could be seen that only a few of her teeth were left, and that these were decayed and yellow. She is frightfully thin, and walked across the cage with a weary air. Two of her cubs, half grown, were playing in an opposite cage, rolling a croquet ball about and bounding from side to side in high fettle. Nell looked at them for a minute with a pitiful expression in her soft brown eyes, and then seeking the farthest corner of the cage, lay wearily down again. She looked fixedly at the keeper, but would not advance for his caresses, although she beat her tail sympathetically against the bars when he called to her.

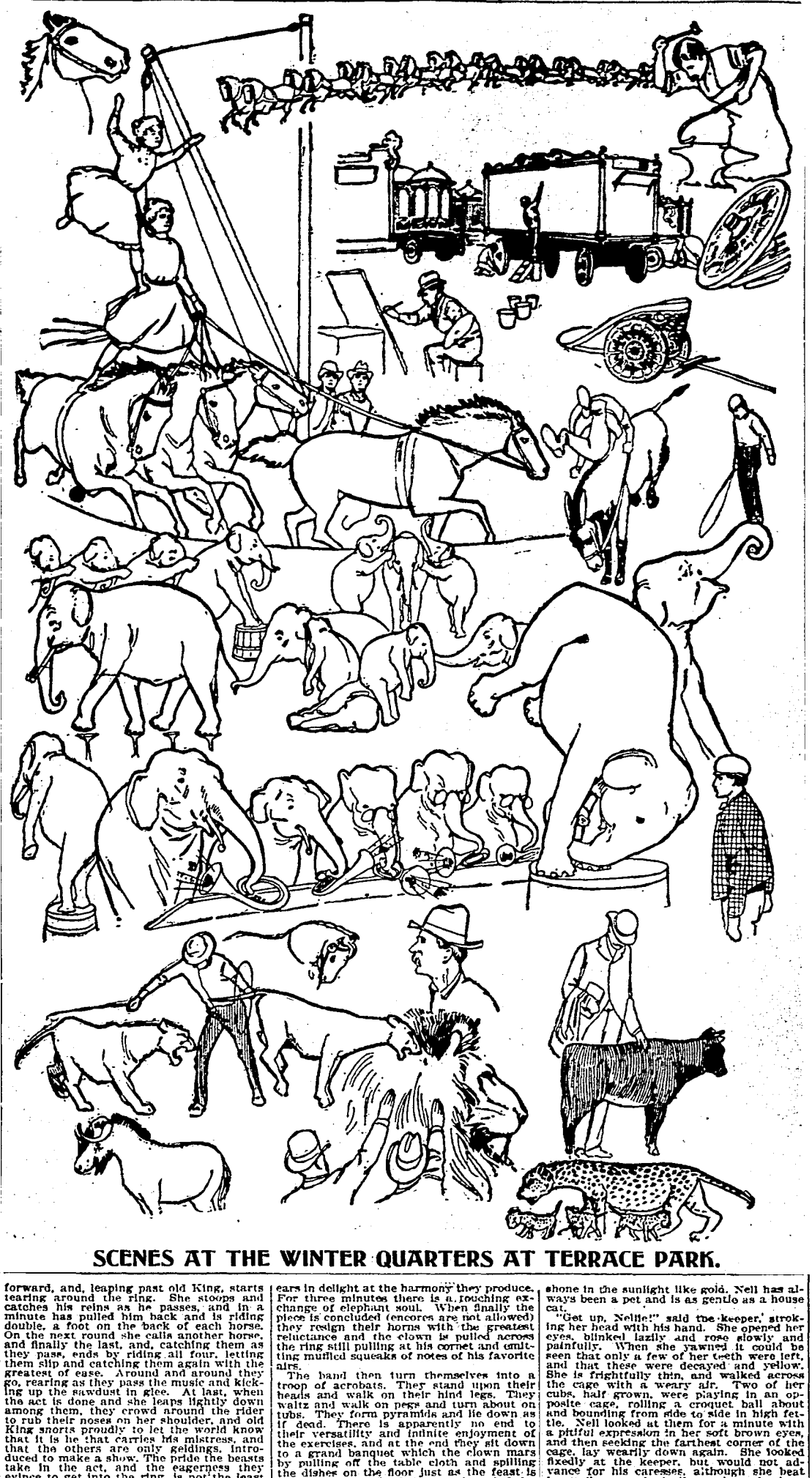
"Old Nell's teeth are gone, and she cannot eat enough to keep her alive," said the trainer. "She is a misery to herself, and at Mr. Robinson's orders she is to be chloroformed in a few days. Everybody about the plant hates to part with her, she has been here so long and is such a favorite."

WHEN THE BIG SHOW STARTS.

Off 100 yards from the training barns are the stables where the hundreds of horses are kept and the scores of wagons painted for the season. Skilled artists are busy here gilding and silvering and hand-painting the cars and cages. The team of 20 dun horses that is to draw the band wagon stand in a long row, switching their white tails and sighing for the open air and the pasture lands. The herd of camels that draw another great wagon sit quietly chewing their cuds—patient beasts of burden, as helpful as they are gentle.

The great plant on the Pan-handle will grow busier as the days go on and one bright spring morning they will harness up the neighing horses and lead the elephants out into the road and steal down into the city before folks are fairly awake. The Robinson show always starts the season here and invariably walks to the first stand. If the show is given in Saengerfest Hall the procession will walk, elephants and all, to the hilltops. If not, they will stop at Columbia, where regularly every spring all the small boys in the First Ward get up before daylight to watch for the coming of the show.

King Solomon and his wives will again be the spectacular end of the bill and rehearsals will begin in a West End hall in a few days. About 200 girls participate, with soldiers and dignitaries to suit. The route for the big shows is settled to a stand and all over the country storekeepers are figuring on prices and farmers are counting their bushels of grain and bales of hay, and yokels are saving up their nickels in anticipation of the coming of the clown and the bands and the gay equestriennes in their beautiful tights. The circus is still the greatest attraction the country people know, and Robinson's has for many years been known as one of the greatest on the road.



SCENES AT THE WINTER QUARTERS AT TERRACE PARK.