The Free Press Short Story

TIMOTHY'S CIRCUS

RAYY STANNARD BAKER

REMEMBER just how my Uncle Timothy Lucas looked when he came hobbling down the hill with the great news flashing in his faded

"Ze're goin' to have a circus," he said. His shoulders were thrown back, his chest was puffed out as if he had just taken a deep breath of joy, and the brush of scant gray whiskers on his chin bobbed excitedly as he talked. Even his shrill voice rang with a note of commanding importance.

Of course we all'followed Uncle Tim back up the road, greedily devouring every word he had to say. He ushered us around the corner of his old red barn.

"Thar!" he exclaimed, waving his hand like Balbos discovering the Pacific in the old geography.

The whole side of the barn was covered with colored posters still moist with paste. A huge centreplece represented fifteen great elephants standing in a half-circle with a diminutive man in top boots flourishing a whip in their faces. day." Around this impressive picture there were other and smaller posters trapes performers, clowns, trained horses, lions and tigers, and all of the other wonders that go to make up the charm of a travelling

"It's a great thing fer Doleyville." said Uncle Tim proudly; "it'll bring business to Doleyville. I tell you it's a great

Never before had a real circus deemed it worth while to stop at Dolevville, although we sometimes caught a glimpse of a dusty caravan on its way from Osceola through to West Ely.

After the glory of the posters had impressed tiself firmly on our minds Uncle Tim was ready with another piece of news. He declared that he was going to entertain the officers of the company, and that he had made a contract with them to supply the entire circus with hay and oats.

"It's goin' to take a mighty sight stuff to feed fifteen elephants," he said, drawing himself up with a little shake of importance.

Uncle Timothy was the proprietor-he and Aunt Nancy Lucas-of the only hotel in town. They called it the "Lucas House," and the wide, rickety red barn with the battered tin rooster on the cupola was the 'Lucas Livery, Feed and Sale Stable."

Ordinarily Uncle Tim was as mild and spologetic as any little man with vehemently energetic wife could But the circus acted on him like a tonic. He was a new man. He had talked with the circus managers face to face, and he spoke with a direct and telling authority which gave him new importance in our eyes. Aunt Nancy looked on Uncle Tim's enthusiasm with some akepticism, and when he decided to stock his barn with a new supply of hay and oats she

shook her head dublously.

said solemnly. easy superiority and revelled in circus briskly, turning his head neither to the desperate and in her anxiety to get away reminiscences. Indeed, he often grew left nor to the right even when his best from the ruins she bumped into Aunt had Doleyville been less anxious to enjoy | the village he seemed to realize that the every possible wonder of the circus in circus might escape him, and he broke advance it might have snuffed out Uncle into a run. Uncle Tim hobbled after Tim's eloquence, as Aunt Nancy some- him, and behind them streamed the times did.

There were those, especially among the ville, shouting with excitement. knowing young men; who expressed a lack of confidence in the posters. "If they advertise fifteen elephants,

like as not they haven't got more'n two." said Joe Hanley. "an' prob'bly the snakes are all stuffed." Uncle Tim happened to be near when

this suspicion was voiced, and he came shouldering through the crowd, his eyes ablaze with indignation. He held his old knotty cane aloft, and for a moment we expected to see Joe suffer.

"What are you tellin' such things for?" he demanded angrily. "Do you s'pose and made the air ring with his roars. they'd dare print pictures of things they It was a most stirring and unusual sight ain't got? Do you s'pose? What are for the town of Doleyville. they orderin' tons an' tons of hay an' As we approached some one blev phants an' hundreds of horses to eat or forty unkempt, ill-dressed men swarm-

"hippodrome" and the "galaxy of won- and before we realized what was going on ders" of which the posters made so much. | they were almost upon us.

On the day on which the circus was to arrive Uncle Tim appeared in his had not expected any such savage onblack Sunday suit with a rusty old top slaught, and with one accord we tumbled hat which he wore only at funerals or over one another, men and boys together. faintly. other state occasions. He stood near to get into the bushes. Uncle Tim folthe corner of his barn, one hand on lowed us. But the constable drew his his cane and the other thrust into his short body to its full height and threw coat in front. It was an impressive sight. back the flap of his coat, showing his Some of us who were younger went miles star. out on the dusty road and thronged in with the procession. As the head of it circus," he said, with a degree of coolness reached the village Joe Hanley darted that people told about long afterwards. toward Uncle Tim.

shouted, triumphantly. one elephant, and not a single tiger, ner citizens of Osceola ,where an exhibition giraffe, ner ostrich. I ain't seen the had been given on the preceding day. snakes, but I'll bet they're stuffed."

his sides, and his face paled. He watch- least two boys, we saw the elephanted until the elephant had swung past keeper wave his hook and give a sharp him and he was sure there was not another one in the procession. Then he ponderously out of the procession and said weakly, as if still trying to convince down the road toward town. In front of

"It's a mighty big one, anyhow."

But his spirit was broken. He didn't even appear to mind it when the circus men failed to remember him, and he measured out the oats and hay without enthusiasm. In the kitchen Aunt Nancy's eyes were snapping

"I knew these circuses couldn't be trusted," she said.

Uncle Tim didn't attend the performance; he had suddenly lost all interest in circuses. Moreover, he was busy with the guests whom the circus had brought to the hotel. It was a long time since the Lucas House had experienced such a run of business, and gradually, as Uncle Tim saw his profits mounting upward, partially he recovered his spirits. While the gay wagons were being repacked after the exhibition that afternoon he made out his bill against the circus for board and provisions. It ex-

"Til pay it directly," said the manager, "as sooon as we can balance up for the

little Uncle Tim out of his way most Tim he lived again, hurrying briskly unfeelingly, and the caravan wound slow- about making preparations for accommoly out of town. At this final stroke of ingratitude Uncle Tim's courage wholly failed him, and he hobbled homeward disconsolately, with Aunt Nancy yet to her success in capturing the elephant,

be reckoned with. "I knew it." she said, explosively. "I just knew it from the first. I said that circuses in general. these circuses couldn't be trusted. And now. Timothy."—she was most severe when she said "Timothy,"-"after bein' fooled like a ten-year-old-boy, are you goin' to let them go off owin' you more'n

fifty dollars?" "What can I do?" asked Uncle Tim swallowed a half-barrel of water.

Aunt Nancy was a masterful woman. Do!" she exclaimed. "I'll have 'em all arrested, that's what I'll do."

She marched Uncle Tim down the hurried consultation an attachment was day. and placed in the hands of George Anderson, the constable. The news of the threatened legal proceedings spread like a prairie fire, and the boys and men, who were just dispersing after watching around the door of the justice's court.

perspired profusely.

"Stand by there." he shouted. "Give s air." And then he bustled out through the crowd, carrying the attachment papers aloft in his hand.

Uncle Tim Lucas followed with downcast eyes and badgered expression of countenance. Behind him marched firmly set. As we parted to let them go by she seemed to us to be the most | had backed through it, pulling up the

"Can't no good come of circuses," she where the tracks of the elephant, as old and rickety, and when the rear wall But Uncle Timothy only laughed with tinct in the sand. At first he walked that, as nearly as I could learn, she grew oppressive in his new importance, and friends greeted him, but after leaving Nancy's precious chicken coop. Over it greater part of the population of Doley-

> At the first glimpse of a red wagon George Anderson slowed into a dignified walk, much to the gratification of Uncle Tim, who was nearly prostrated with the heat and the unusual excitement.

Much to our astonishment and we boys were not far from the constable's heels—the procession was standing still in the middle of the road. The elephant was swaying from side to side and scooping the burning sand over its mountainous shoulders, and the poor, disconlate lion lashed up and down in his cage

oats for if they ain't got difteen ele- sharply on a whistle. Instantly thirty the elephant. We felt that he was going ed out from among the wagons, each This was a clincher, and we all sided armed with a stout tent stake. They were unhesitatingly with Uncle Tim. We even led by a huge, black-bearded man with a speculated as to the many wonders which hoarse voice. They came charging down might be included in the unfamiliar the road on both sides of the procession,

We didn't wait to ask questions.

"I want to see the manager of this He was shown forward only to find What did I tell you, Uncle Tim?" he the sheriff of the county serving another "There's only attachment in behalf of certain outraged

After an hour's parley, during which Uncle Tim's hands dropped limply at every bush along the roadside hid at command. Gypsy turned and swung breatness of the circus: her marched Constable Anderson with

never-to-be-forgotten importance, and at Tim and a wide semi-circle of citizens. big and little.

It had been arranged that the elephant should be left in Doleyville until the circus reached the next town, where the manager said he was sure of getting enough money to satisfy all claims against him.

Back of Uncle Tim's livery stable was rickety old wagon shed, one side of which gaped open. It had a slant roof which sagged with age, and back of it stood Aunt Nancy's chicken coop, where she kept her davorite brahmas. Just in front of this shed Gypsy's keeper directed the driving of a stout post, to which he fastened the elephant's chain, afterward backing her under the low roof.

"All you've got to do," he said to deorge Anderson, who was the legal custodian of the great animal, "is to give her all she wants to eat and drink. She's as gentle as a kitten, and you needn't be afraid of her. To-morrow night or the next day, perhaps, the boss will send me over for her."

With this the keeper set out after the circus, and Doleyville was left with real live elephant in its possession. We boys had to pinch ourselves to realize that such a wonder had come to pass. We camped all about Uncle Tim's barn and on the side hill opposite, and we watched the great elephant swaying at laid down the order that no one was to go nearer than twenty feet except Uncle Tim and himself. To enforce this command he marched up and down in front But he didn't pay. He shouldered of the shed like a sentry. As for Uncle dating the biggest guest he ever had entertained. Even Aunt Nancy was warmed by the general interest and by although she still shook her head and mourned the untrustworthiness

> In the evening Uncle Tim brought out several great armfuls of hay and cast them into the shed. He also supplied a bushel basket of meal and two loaves of stale bread by way of dessert-which the elephant ate first. For drink Gypsy

> This seemed to us to be an enormous meal even for an elephant, and we watched her eating until it was so dark that she was only a moving shadow. '

It was a hot July might, and we didn't hill to the justice's office, and after a sleep well after the excitement of the Sometime toward morning we ssued for Gypsy, the circus elephant, heard a great commotion in the road out-

"The elephant's loose! The elephant's loose!" some one was shouting excitedly. When I reached Uncle Tim's barn it was just sunrise. The dew sparkled on the circus out of town, gathered excitedly the grass, and a soft mist hung over the river. Voices echoed everywhere George Anderson was a short, thick, through the town. Men and boys were round-headed man, and he puffed and running and calling, windows were opening and dishevelled heads popped out questioningly. At the Lucas House everything was in the wildest confusion. On the common in-front of the hotel stood Gypsy, blinking her little red eyes and flapping her great ears. When I first saw her she didn't seem to be doing anything particularly aggressive, but the Aunt Nancy, her head high and her lips evidences of her mighty strength were to be seen at the old wagon-shed. She post by which she was fastened as if it George made straight up the road. had been a turnip. The building was bir as half-bushel baskets, were still dis- went down the roof fell on her back. At went with a orash and out swarmed the chickens, cackling and squalling about her head. At this appalling disaster Gyp snorted vigorously, tore a way through the boards and trotted up the hill. She was dragging her heavy tie

post as a boy would drag a ball bat. On the hotel veranda stood a motley gathering of half-dressed guests. shouting and explaining. From their midst crept Uncle Tim, very pale, but with a determined look on his face. Evidently he felt that the safety of Doleyville rested upon his little shoulders, for he threw them back boldly.

"Needn't be skeered." he said in his high, quavery voice; "that's a tame elephant. Wouldn't hurt a fly." "Oh, get it away." called a terrifled

This appeal seemed to stir Uncle Tim's spirit to its depths. He faced about, and we saw him advance upon to certain death. His face was ghastly pale, and his legs shook. Every voice

"Here, Gypsy; here, Gyp," said Uncle Tim, soothingly; "good Gyp; come back." The elephant turned her great head. and her trunk ran about like a snake in the grass. For a moment Uncle Tim wavered, and then he advanced again, raising his cane.

"Good Gypsy, nice Gyp," he faltered

But the words died on his lips. Good Gyp raised her trunk, and her great mouth, with its red lining, opened like a gunny sack. She advanced a step toward Uncle Tim-probably to see if he had a peanut.

"Help! help!" he cried. His cane flew in one direction his hat rolled away in the other, and he ran ingloriously regardless of rheumatism and dignity.

Gypsy ambled along behind with her trunk stretched straight. Uncle Tim shot through the doorway of the little store next to the hotel and a moment later plunged full length among the barrels and boxes in the back yard. For a moment Gypsy seemed vastly surprised by this sudden disappearance. Her trunk swept along the store platform as if in search of the nearest which she

that Uncle .Tim must have had. Here respectful distance behind came Uncle she spied the grocer's window covered only by a thickness of faded blue netting. On a narrow shelf above the topper sash was a row of jars containing horehound drops and striped candy. Gypsy knew quite well what this was, and she crossed the sidewalk, breaking through the rotten planks at every step. Her trunk easily nipped the netting, and down came the candy. The jars were smashed on the doorsill like so many coconuts, and enough candy went down Gypsy's wide throat to make a whole school sick for

> many days. Then, after she had finished with the candy for the time being, we all noticed that her trunk kept nosing around the empty shelves as if she were looking for something.

By this time Uncle Tim had summoned enough courage to reappear—but at a prudent distance from the scene of action. He neeked round the corner of the hotel, well concealed by the crowd and then hastily withdrew his head. One of the town wits, who had no respect for age, seeing how Gypsy appeared to be looking for something, and how scared. Uncle Tim still was after his terrible experience, crept up behind Uncle Tim, who was now behind the house, out of sight and sound of the elephant, and yelled at the top of his lungs:

"Here she comes! Look out!" Uncle Tim didn't stop to look out. He didn't even turn round to see if the the end of her chain and curling and elephant was coming. He just ran as uncurling her trunk. George Anderson hard as he could away from the sound

(Concluded on Page Six)



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