

An Evening with Rufus Somerby's Show

Everybody knows Rufus Somerby, the veteran showman who has been bringing entertainments to the provinces every summer, for some years past; and who has always been welcome, and drawn large audiences in every place he has visited? In fact not to know "Uncle Rufe" as he rather likes to be called, is, if not exactly to proclaim oneself unknown, at least to announce that one is very much of a back number, shopworn, and frayed around the edges. Like the late Phineas T. Barrum, Mr. Somerby is one of the institutions of



the age, and in personal appearance he is not unlike the famous Phineas. His broad brimmed hat of gray felt, his flowing, curly gray locks, and his semi-clerical white tie and gray clothes, together with the demurely benevolent expression of his fresh colored face, suggesting more the staid Quaker elder, than the shrewd and enterprising showman, who is so thoroughly master of the business in which he has been engaged for so long.

I first made the acquaintance, if not exactly of Mr. Somerby, at least of his shows, some years ago, when he was travelling in Canada with his Parlor Musee and Japan-



ese Village, and I was so impressed then with his wonderful enterprise, and the amount of entertainment furnished by him, in proportion to the fee charged, that, with human nature's love of a bargain, I have always made it a point since, to "take in" every show that Manager Somerby brings to New Brunswick.

I don't believe he ever brings the same entertainment twice, and I know he rather prides himself upon having a novelty for his patrons each time he returns, and always giving them something they cannot get elsewhere, and probably this is one secret of his success, and one reason why he invariably plays to crowded houses.

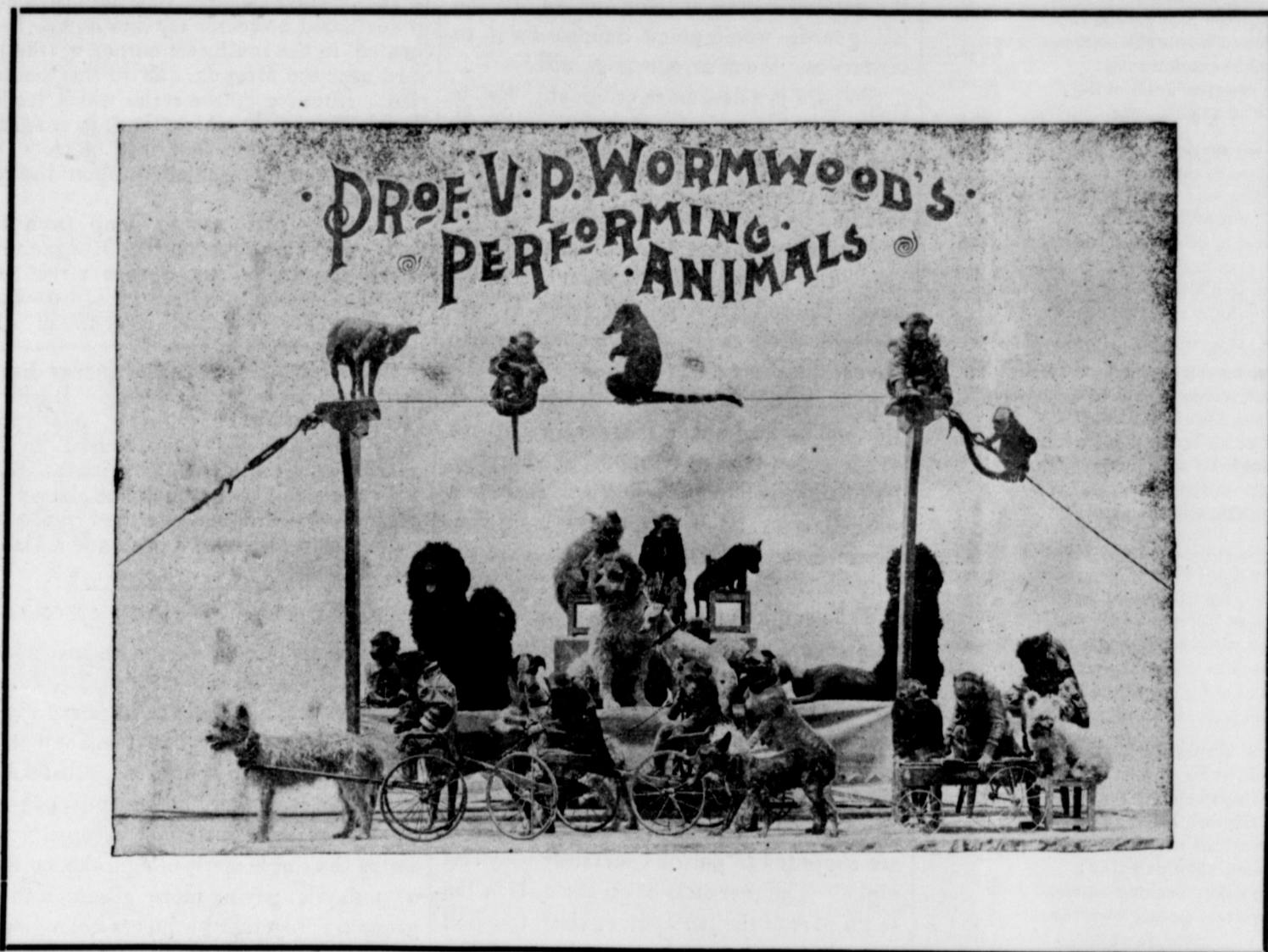
Since his parlor musee—Japanese village—and Prince Tinymite—trip he has treated the citizens of the maritime provinces to Professor Bristol's trained horses, Professor Gkator's performing horses, and various other wonders. And it may give some idea of his phenomenal success as a showman,



when I say that during his last tour, no less than 76 thousand people paid their admission fee, at his ever ever hospitable doors, in the city of St. John, during the short space of one month, while in sober, staid Halifax 71 thousand sight seers thronged his spacious halls in the same space of time. During the last day of his exhibition in St. Andrew's rink, in our own city, eight thousand people did homage to

Manager Somerby, and his "unparalleled show;" and it may truthfully be said that "Uncle Rufe" keeps open house, whenever he visits Canada.

This year he seems to have excelled himself in the line of novelties giving his Canadian friends something so unique in the line of entertainment, that he has succeeded in adding a very substantial branch to the



invisible laurel wreath which, in the eyes of his admirers, surrounds his gray sombrero.

Mr. Somerby has been exhibiting in

yourth, when the travelling companion of an Italian nobleman, who was making a pedestrian tour of the country, with an organ for amusement, and a monkey for company—turned and rent the band that fed him. In other words, nearly tore my little frock off my back, while I was endeavouring to give him a lunch of raisins. remember it was all his noble master

ed dogs, of various accomplishments and nationalities grouped about on chairs and benches. After concluding his part, the first actor retires gravely to a seat, when his place is taken by another gentleman of his race, who possesses a much stronger if less amiable character, and is evidently the villain of the piece, but who goes through some skillful trapeze swinging.

wonderful act by standing on her master's hands and gradually raising her hind feet in the air until she stands erect on the forefeet alone. It is certainly the most surprising exhibition of trained muscles, that I have ever seen, and the small size of the actor makes her strength seem the more wonderful.

Whether Mr. Somerby employs a monkey tailor to clothe his troupe or not, I am unable to say, but they are all decorously arrayed in garments of modern cut and fit, and when two of the elderly gentlemen have a difference of opinion which ends in a challenge, and throw aside their coats to settle the dispute with their fists, one so far forgets himself in his excitement as to remove too many garments, and stands in modest confusion before the audience arrayed only in a white cotton shirt, the thoroughly correct fit of which is almost an excuse for its display. After a round in which Marquis of Queensbury tactics are ignored, London prize ring rules at a discount, honors are declared even and the combatants resume the garments of civilization. A Roman standing race in which a clever monkey rides the two poodles, and concluded his act by carrying another monkey on his back and turning somersaults a la circus rider, while his steeds are in motion, is another interesting feature of the entertainment, and the fat pug, who sits gravely on her hind legs and holds a monkey on her head, deserves the applause she calls forth. It would be difficult to do justice in writing, to all the clever performances of these little creatures. To the monkeys who ride bicycles, with other monkeys on their shoulders, the dogs who climb two ladders at a time, one with their fore and the other with their hind feet, carrying monkeys on their backs meanwhile. The monkeys who trundle other monkeys in wheelbarrows, around the stage, and periodically spill their irate passengers out, the other monkeys who stand on their hands with their heels in the air on the top-most rung of a ladder, held by two dogs, and the dog who balances on the top of a ladder up which a monkey is climbing. The dog acrobat who walks a wire blindfolded carrying a monkey on his back, while another clown monkey follows closely and endeavors to drag the rider off by the tail. All these must be seen in order to be fully appreciated. One little Scotch terrier is an adept at waltzing keeping excellent time to the music, and a monkey convulses the audience with her skirt dancing. Four monkeys of ancient and decidedly Hibernian appearance driving a pair of dogs hitched to an express wagon much the worse for wear personate four old farmers coming into town on a "spree" and wind up the scene by upsetting their vehicle and getting a bad spill; and a trained ant eater supposed to be the only trained animal of the kind in the world, does the ball rolling act, and walks a wire carrying a monkey on his back.

A monkey physician is called in to attend a patient who lies in bed, and after administering a tonic takes the invalid away

land, to the shrill note of the smallest terrier, the cracking of the trainer's whip, and the chattering of the monkeys.

Amusing as all the features of the entertainment are the numbers which do not appear on the programme form no small share of it, and the antics of the performers who are not "on" are ludicrous in the extreme. The infant monkey who enjoys the freedom of the stage and roams at his own sweet will amongst the other actors, walks over his mama, pulls her ears and tail, and tyrannizes over her as much



as a human baby would do, while the other younger members of the family enjoy their time in exhaustive research—that is to say they explore the cracks of the floor, consume with relish all the dust they can find, and make scientific experiments with the electric lights.

There are other and more important numbers not on the programme either, and this is due to the fact that is a sort of amiable bad of Manager Somerby's, to give the public more than he advertises; to reserve something unexpected for them at the last moment. It is only on this account that the absence of any special mention of the wonderful skill of Prof. Glenfield, the ven-

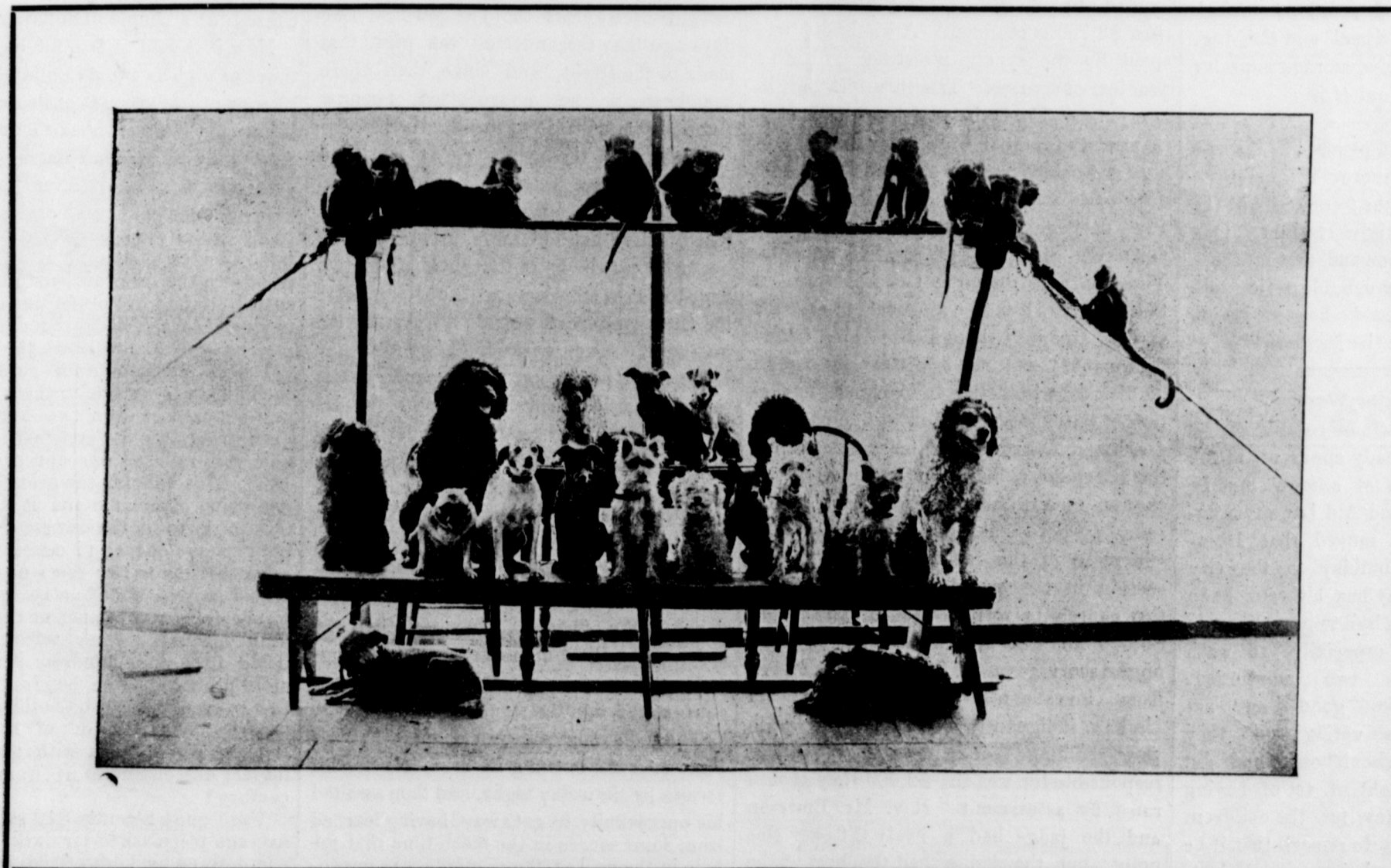


triloquist, can be explained. The Professor deserves more than a passing reference, as he is one of the best ventriloquists I ever heard, and who gives a whole show of his own, assisted by his "talking family."

It may not be out of the way to suggest to Professor Wormwood—as one speaking from the audience' point of view, that it would be a decided improvement to have the music softer, during the performance of the animals' tricks, as people naturally like to know what is going on, and if they are able to hear the trainer's explanation of the trick being performed, it assists them very materially in appreciating it. It is sometimes a little difficult to understand by intuition, just what phase of life is being represented, and as the trainers voice was almost inaudible above the very loud music, some confusion resulted; but of course these small drawbacks are but spots on the sun, as it were.



Briefly stated, Somerby's Monkey Theatre is all that the manager claims for it. It is unique and wonderful and affords an evening of continuous merriment interspersed with many startling surprises.



my way. I happened to be in a neighbouring town on business, early this week; and seeing the familiar name of "Somerby" embellishing every available space, I concluded that the opportunity I had been waiting for had come, and the evening found me an interested spectator at the famous monkey theatre.

Now to begin with, I don't like monkeys! I think I can safely say that of all animals the monkey is about the only one which is utterly destitute of attraction for me. This indifference to the charms of the playful "monkey" probably had its origin on the day, far back in my early

an imaginary kitchen, with hot dishes. Supper over, and the table cleared away, the family retire decorously to chairs, while the waiter removes his coat, disclosing thereby a white cotton shirt relieved by "galluses," of very brilliant scarlet—and proceeds to indulge in a little recreation in the shape of wire walking, using his hands as a means of locomotion while his feet move gracefully in the air. In this position he also descends a ladder, and performs several other feats, in the presence of an appreciative stage audience, composed of some twenty monkeys of all ages and sizes, and about the same number of train-

believe Professor Wormwood claims the possession of the only dog in the world performing this trick, but as I have not seen the whole world, personally, nor yet the trained dogs it contains, I cannot speak positively on the subject. To me, by far the most wonderful trick was the performance of a tiny, fragile looking Italian greyhound who supports her entire weight by her chin, her hind feet, and finally by the very tips of her toes, holding her body in a state of absolute rigidity with the fore, and hind feet stretched out perfectly straight, and her toes merely resting on her master's fingers. This little creature finishes her

in a carriage presumably to the hospital. An especially athletic monkey climbs up to the highest point attainable and executes a leap for life by springing into his master's arms. The concluding act is the most exciting; four dogs hitched to miniature trotting sulkeys, and driven by four monkey jockeys engage in a wild race in which not only the jockeys, and the canine spectators become frantic with excitement, but even the horses themselves forget their characters and talk vociferously, the curtain falling upon a chorus of barks in every imaginable tone, from a deep bass of the large Newfoundland-