

"GENERAL TOM THUMB."

BY MARY SHEARS ROBERTS.

In Arthur's court Tom Thumb did live,
A man of mickle might;
The best of all the Table Round,
And eke a doughty knight;
His stature but an inch in height,
Or quarter of a span;
Then think you not this little knight
Was proved a valiant man?

FROM King Arthur's court to Barnum's American Museum is a long step; and yet some of the lines of this ballad of the olden time apply almost as well to the famous Connecticut dwarf, "General Tom Thumb."

There have been smaller dwarfs, but none brighter or more intelligent than our tiny Yankee, who was never more than three feet tall. He was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1832, or thereabouts, of "poor but honest parents." His real name was Charles S. Stratton; and although his relatives always called him Charley, he was known to the world at large as the one and only "General Tom Thumb."

Under the management of Mr. P. T. Barnum, our small hero traveled all over and all around the earth, making two colossal fortunes, one for himself and one for his manager.

Tom Thumb—our Tom Thumb—began his public career at an early age. When Mr. Barnum first saw the midget he was not two feet high, and weighed less than sixteen pounds. Mr. Barnum wrote of him: "He was the smallest child I ever saw who could walk alone; he was a perfectly formed, bright-eyed little fellow, with light hair and ruddy cheeks, and he enjoyed the best of health." He was very shy, but after some coaxing he was induced to talk, and his answers were so clever that the great showman determined to secure the prodigy for his museum in New York. On Thanksgiving day, 1842, he was ready to make his first public appearance. His performances were

so successful that his salary jumped to seven, then to twenty-five, and finally to fifty dollars a week; and on January 18, 1844, he set sail for Europe to try his fascinations on kings and queens and princes.

Fifty years ago a voyage across the Atlantic was a much more important event than it is now; and you may rest assured that Mr. Barnum made great capital of this nineteen days' journey. The party consisted of the manager, the General, his parents, his tutor, and a French naturalist; and a brass band escorted them to Sandy Hook. This fact was duly heralded in the London newspapers, to which was added the statement that "on leaving New York, the dwarf was escorted to the packet by no less than ten thousand persons!"

Soon after arriving in London, Mr. Barnum and his charge called at the office of the "Illustrated London News." The first portrait of Tom Thumb taken in England appears in that journal, dated February 24, 1844. There are two cuts. In the first he is seen standing on a chair by a table which serves to emphasize his diminutive size. The second picture is very good, and is called "The American Dwarf at the Princess Theater." He is represented as being on the stage before the footlights, parodying the walk and manner of Napoleon.

Tom Thumb's performances at the Princess Theater made such a "hit" that Mr. Barnum next engaged Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, whither thronged many visitors of rank and fashion.

The American minister, the Hon. Edward Everett, was very kind to his countrymen, and it was at his house that Mr. Barnum met a certain Mr. Murray, master of the Queen's household.

On the day following, one of the Queen's Life Guards appeared before Mr. Barnum with

a note containing an invitation from the Queen to General Tom Thumb and his guardian, Mr. Barnum, to appear at Buckingham Palace on a specified evening.

In retiring from the royal presence, Mr. Barnum attempted to follow the example set by the lord in waiting by backing out. The gallery was of great length, and the gentlemen with long strides made rapid progress; but Tom Thumb's short legs left him far behind—or before. Seeing that he was losing ground, he turned and ran a few steps, then resumed the process of "backing." Again losing ground, he repeated the performance, to the great amusement of the royal spectators.

Of course this visit to the Queen was duly advertised by Mr. Barnum, and increased the wish to see the dwarf. The Queen soon sent another summons, and the General, with his guardian, made a second visit to the palace, being received in the Yellow Drawing-Room.

A third visit was soon paid to Buckingham Palace, and this time the Queen's uncle, Leopold, King of the Belgians, was present, and was greatly amused, asking many questions; and Queen Victoria, desiring the General to sing, inquired what song he preferred.

"Yankee Doodle," was the prompt reply.

All present laughed heartily, and her Majesty said: "That is a very pretty song, General; sing it, if you please"; and he did.

The British public was now fairly excited. From March 20 to July 20 the levees of the little General at Egyptian Hall were continually crowded.

Three hundred children belonging to the military school of the Duke of York, at Chelsea, paid a visit to Egyptian Hall. Tom, of course, went through his customary program, but before they left he proposed they should all join in singing the national hymn, "God Save the Queen," which they did with great enthusiasm. The children of the Royal Hospital School at Greenwich were also permitted to appear in a body before the General.

One afternoon, attired in a court dress, consisting of a handsomely embroidered velvet coat, short breeches, white satin vest, white silk stockings, pumps, wig, cocked hat, and dress sword, he went to Marlborough House,

the residence of Queen Adelaide, widow of William IV.

"Why, General," said the Queen Dowager, "I think you look very smart to-day."

"I guess I do," he answered contentedly.

Before he left, the Queen took him up on her lap, saying: "I see you have no watch; will you permit me to give you one?"

"I should like it very much," was the answer; and a few weeks after, he was again invited to Marlborough House, where many children of the nobility were present, and Queen Adelaide gave him a beautiful but tiny watch and chain.

He received many other presents from various people, and these were all placed under a glass case and exhibited at the receptions. The Duke of Wellington frequently looked in upon the little man; and on one occasion, when the small General, with folded arms and knitted brow, was strutting up and down, imitating Napoleon, the big general, Wellington, laughingly inquired: "Of what are you thinking, my little man?"

"I am thinking, sir, of the battle of Waterloo," was the prompt reply, the little features never losing their serious expression.

On August 31 of this same year there appeared in the "Illustrated London News" the picture of a carriage, or "dress chariot," built to suit the General, at a cost of nearly two thousand dollars.

The body of the coach was twenty inches high and eleven inches wide, and it was completely furnished, in the latest style. The body was blue, picked out with white, and the wheels were blue and red—the American colors. A pair of Shetland ponies drew this coach, and two boys were the coachman and footman.

Mr. Barnum now began his preparations for exhibiting his star in France, but before starting he made a flying visit to Scotland. At Edinburgh some beautiful Scotch costumes were soon completed for the General, who soon learned several Scotch dances and songs. He readily learned, also, to mimic the Highland dialect, and his Scotchman became one of his best impersonations. The party traveled sometimes by railway, but more frequently by post; and along with the rest of

the "properties" went the little sofa, the carriage, and the Shetland ponies. In February, 1845, the entire retinue crossed the Channel and arrived at the French capital, where, as "Tom Pouce," our small friend created as great a sensation as he had done in London.

Louis Philippe was King of the French, and before Tom had made any public appearances in Paris, Mr. Barnum received from the King a special command to appear at the Tuileries.

Decked out in full court finery, they arrived at the palace at the hour appointed, and were received most cordially by the King, the Queen, and a dozen or more princesses and duchesses. The editor of the French "Journal des Débats" was also present, and in describing the visit he speaks of the "inconceivable idolatry of the English," who had caused to be made expressly for the dwarf more jewels, trinkets, and snuff-boxes than his small hands could carry. The Queen of England had outdone all others by giving him a jeweled card-case. He showed it to the King, and drawing therefrom a dozen Lilliputian visiting-cards, he presented them to the royal family, beginning with

Minnie Ware
Cannock Chase Pitt

the King, the Queen, and the Duchesse d'Orléans, and ending with the Duc de Chartres. All

noticed his charming manner in acknowledging the applause for his performances, and in quitting the salon he backed out easily, and presented only his face to the royalties—quite a contrast to his first exit from a royal presence.

The King gave him a large pin of emeralds

and diamonds, and as it had been made for a person of ordinary size, it might almost have served as a sword for Tom. He attempted to fasten it in his scarf, and in so doing he was

obliged to displace a brooch given him by the celebrated dancer, Fanny Elssler. Fanny and Tom were great friends, and with good reason.

Charles S Stratton
Known as
General Tom Thumb

Mrs Charles S Stratton
Madras
Dec 3rd 1870
India

It seems that Tom, who hated a crowd, and was very shy when not before the footlights, was walking in the street, when some one recognized him and called him by name. A multitude soon collected and followed him till he lost all patience. While wondering how he could escape from his tormentors, he caught a glimpse of Fanny Elssler, who, dressed in the height of fashion, carried an enormous muff. Tom ran after her as fast as he could, and soon caught up with her. She, with ready wit, took in both the situation and the dwarf by lift-

ing him from the pavement and cramming the greater part of him into her muff. It was all

done so quickly that but few of his pursuers knew how he had disappeared.

But to return to the Tuileries. One dance before the king was greatly applauded. It was not a polka nor a waltz nor a mazurka; it was invented by Tom Pouce himself, and no one but he could dance it.

The editor of the journal was greatly amused, but he declared that what he liked best of all was Tom Pouce when he was simply the gentleman. "He takes out his watch, looks to see what time it is, offers you some lozenges, a pinch of snuff, or a cigar, all appropriate to his size. He is always amusing, but never more inimitable

than when he imitates nothing at all—when he simply seats himself on a gilded sofa, crosses his legs, and looks at you with a keen, half-serious air. His originality costs him no effort; he has only to show himself; there is no one like him."

Tom Thumb finished his evening by a brilliant exhibition in his Scotch costume. His cap, or bonnet, surmounted by a feather, was a present from the English Queen. He handled his claymore with skill and grace. The gay plaid of the Highlanders floated from his shoulders, and the kilt showed his vigorous little legs and tiny feet.

The King was very courteous, and conversed familiarly with Mr. Barnum, whose head was never turned from business by any condescensions of royalty. The Longchamp races were soon to come off, and Mr. Barnum well knew that on such an occasion all the fashionable turnouts in Paris would be displayed in the Champs-Élysées and the Bois de Boulogne, and

with his usual quick insight he asked the King if the General's carriage might be permitted to appear in the avenue reserved for the court and the diplomatic corps. The King smiled, and

seemed amused; but he spoke to one of the officers present, and turning to Mr. Barnum, replied courteously:

"Call on the prefect of police to-morrow afternoon, and you will find a permit ready."

The Longchamp day arrived, and you may be sure that Tom Thumb and his carriage were in line. This time he had four ponies, and these, together with the fine, powdered coachman, footman, and bright liveries, attracted more attention than all the



GENERAL TOM THUMB. (FROM A DAGUERRETYPE.)

gilded chariots and trappings of royalty. This was truly a great day for the little General.

The courtiers and nobles smiled and were amused. The people shouted at the top of their lungs, "Vive Tom Pouce!" And when the time arrived for Tom Pouce to hold his first levee, the Salle des Concerts, in the Rue Vivienne, could not accommodate the crowds.

The first day's receipts were five thousand five hundred francs, and seats were secured two months ahead. It seemed as if the Parisians had taken leave of their senses. There were pictures of Tom Pouce in all the illustrated papers, and the newspaper "Figaro" had a cut representing a huge mastiff running away with the dwarf's ponies and carriage in his mouth. Statuettes of the General were in half the shop windows, and his form was represented in sugar, in chocolate, and in gingerbread. A statue of Tom Pouce, as large—or rather as small—as life, adorned the front of the "Café Tom Pouce," on one of the boulevards, and his



PART OF A POSTER USED TO ADVERTISE THE DWARF.

features were seen on porcelain, on plaster, and on paper. Songs about him were written and sung; eminent artists asked permission to paint his portrait; all the great actors and actresses came to his levees, and praised and admired him; and presents from all quarters were showered upon him. The box-office receipts were so great that each night Mr. Barnum was compelled to hire a cab to carry home the silver received during the day. The dwarf, with his father and Mr. Barnum, occupied handsome apartments in the Boulevard des Italiens, and I think that Mr. Stratton, who was a carpenter, must have felt very much as Aladdin did when he became possessed of the wonderful lamp.

The visits to the Tuileries were repeated, and the General received a special invitation to the performances at St. Cloud in honor of the King's birthday; and we are assured that Louis Philippe even went so far as to request the dwarf to personate in full costume Napoleon Bonaparte. This was, however, not mentioned in the newspapers.

For four months the General continued his levees in the Salles des Concerts, and after his evening performances he appeared at the Vaudeville Theater in a play called "Le Petit Poucet," written expressly for him, and in which he was able to speak his lines in French, having made rapid advancement in that language.

This piece had a run of seventy nights, and then Mr. Barnum started off with his charge on a tour through France.

In the fall the General returned to Paris, London; and at Surrey, after his performance on a small stage, he was put in a balloon, which, secured by ropes, was passed around and, like a person of the greatest importance, he went to St. Cloud to take leave of the King



GENERAL TOM THUMB AND HIS WIFE.



COMMODORE NUTT AND HIS WIFE.

and Queen, who received him cordially and gave him many presents. He then departed for London, and began his receptions again at Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly.

His success on the Continent added to his popularity. He had greatly improved in his acting, and he had made additions to his impersonations, which were truly remarkable. One moment he was Napoleon Bonaparte, with a cocked hat, epaulets, and an air of deep reflection; the next he was a Scotch Highlander, in kilt and plaid. A Roman gladiator, Hercules with uplifted club, Ajax defying the lightning, Frederick the Great, and Yankee Doodle followed one another in rapid succession.

Tom Thumb himself, about this time, came near flying away. He did not take to himself wings, but he did take himself to a balloon which was kept at the Zoölogical Gardens, Surrey. Between the afternoon and evening receptions at Egyptian Hall he frequently appeared at some place in the suburbs of

the grounds just above the people's heads. In this position he could be seen by all. About forty men were employed to manage the ropes and to prevent the balloon from rising; but one day a sudden gust of wind tore the ropes from their hands. More by good luck than by good management, the balloon was caught as it started on its upward flight.

Three years passed from the time of Tom Thumb's leaving New York to his return. He had visited every place of importance in England, Scotland, France, and Belgium. For over two years he and Mr. Barnum had been equal partners; and when, in February, 1847, the General landed on his native shores, he had become a richer, if not a larger, dwarf.

On arriving at New York, Tom immediately commenced a four weeks' engagement at the museum, and drew more visitors than had ever been seen there before.

The party now started out to make a tour of the United States. They traveled north,



GENERAL TOM THUMB. (FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.)

south, east, and west, and everywhere the golden shower continued to fall.

In 1848 Tom might have been seen in New York, playing in the comic opera, "Bombastes Furioso," at the old Broadway Theater; and fifty years have passed since he danced a horn-pipe at the Park Theater for Mrs. John Drew, well-known to the theater-goers of to-day.

In the year 1856 Mr. Barnum, owing to unfortunate investments, lost his entire fortune. His friends rallied round him, and he received the following characteristic letter from his little friend:

JONES'S HOTEL, PHILADELPHIA, May 12, 1856.

MY DEAR MR. BARNUM: I understand your friends, and that means "all creation," intend to get up some benefits for your family. Now, my dear sir, just be good enough to remember that I belong to that mighty crowd, and I must have a finger (or at least a "thumb") in that pie. I am bound to appear on all such occasions in some shape, from "Jack the Giant-Killer," upstairs, to the doorkeeper down, whichever may serve you best; and there are some feats that I can perform as well as any other man of my inches. I have just started out on my Western tour, and have my carriage, ponies, and assistants all here, but I am ready to go to New York, bag and baggage, and remain at Mrs. Barnum's service as long as I, in my small way, can be useful.

. . . Hoping that you will be able to fix up a lot of magnets that will attract all New York, and volunteering to sit on any part of the loadstone, I am, as ever, your little but sympathizing friend,

GENERAL TOM THUMB.

Hoping to renew his former successes, in 1857 the energetic showman again sailed for England. Tom Thumb accompanied him, and soon Mr. Barnum began to retrieve his fallen fortunes.

The General continued his exhibitions in different European cities, while Mr. Barnum made trips here, there, and everywhere, until, in 1861, we find them all back in America.

In December of this year Mr. Barnum received at the museum a visit from a wonderfully small dwarf named George Washington Morrison Nutt.

Mr. Barnum immediately conferred upon him the title of "Commodore," and procured for him ponies, miniature coachman and footman, and a little carriage that when closed resembled an English walnut. General Tom Thumb was at that time traveling in the South and West. He had grown quite stout, and, singularly enough, Commodore Nutt bore a striking resemblance to the General as he looked a few years before. Many thought that General Tom Thumb and Commodore Nutt were one and the same.

On the principle, I suppose, that two dwarfs are better than one, and to refute the unbelievers, Tom Thumb's Western engagement was brought to a close, and the two mites were exhibited together at the museum. Advertisements headed "The Two Dromios," and "Two Smallest Men and Greatest Curiosities Living," drew many visitors; and soon after Mr. Barnum heard of another dwarf, a very pretty little woman calling herself Lavinia Warren. Her home was at Middleboro, Massachusetts, and Mr. Barnum soon made an engagement with her which was to last for several years. Lavinia had a sister, smaller than herself, named Minnie, and she too was soon persuaded to join the group of midgets; and Tom Thumb, Commodore Nutt, Lavinia and Minnie Warren formed as marvelous a quartet as one could

wish to see, and their exhibitions were attended by as many people as the museum could accommodate.

On February 10, 1863, Miss Lavinia Warren and General Tom Thumb were made man and wife at Grace Church in New York. Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren acted as best man and bridesmaid. And these two were also married somewhat later.

General Tom Thumb and wife held a large reception at the Metropolitan Hotel. The bride and groom, on their wedding-tour, went to Washington and visited President Lincoln, and then settled down to private life, the General having made enough money to warrant his retiring from business.

Tom Thumb had been too long accustomed to the excitement of a public life to care for retirement. In a few months he made business arrangements with Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren, and the four soon found themselves again in the show business.

On June 21, 1869, the "General Tom Thumb Company," as it was called, started from New York on a three years' tour around the world.

This journey of the four midgets was really most remarkable. They traveled 55,487 miles, gave 1471 entertainments in 587 different cities and towns, in many latitudes and climes, and never lost a day nor missed a single performance through accident or illness; and they coined money all the way.

From this time on we hear of Tom Thumb sometimes quietly resting in his home in Bridgeport, sometimes giving entertainments in various cities. He and his wife were frequently seen in New York, and were present in 1881, when Mr. Barnum opened his "Greatest Show on Earth," at Madison Square Garden.

Tom Thumb died in Middleboro, Massachusetts, on July 15, 1883. He was laid to rest in the beautiful Mountain Grove Cemetery of his native town. A slender shaft of marble, surmounted by a life-size statue of himself, marks his resting-place, while near by is the massive monument of granite over the grave of his old friend and manager, Mr. Barnum.