

# The Training of Performing Animals.

BY E. A. BRAYLEY HODGETTS.



CHARLES JAMES FOX defined genius as "an infinite capacity for taking pains." If this be a true definition, we must accord to the trainers of

animals a front place among the geniuses of the world. There is assuredly no profession in which more patience and painstaking work are required. We see the results from before the footlights. It gives us a moment's pleasure, and we think no more about its difficulties. What that result may mean we do not care. The weeks and months, and sometimes years, which it may have cost to produce that result we cannot be expected to take into account. The band plays, the trainer stands before us, smiling and graceful, no sign of care or anxiety upon his countenance. The animals go through their performances; there is no hitch, no difficulty: all is easy, well rounded off. So far from being astounded, we ask for more; like the audience which hissed Grimaldi, we want a new feature. Nevertheless, some of the more curious amongst us do occasionally ask ourselves how these results are brought about. The sensitive murmur the mystic word "cruelty," shudder, and put the whole matter out of their minds.

This notion that animals are taught to perform tricks by dint of cruelty, by blows and starvation, is among the most illogical fallacies of the day. We have learned that it is easier to teach children by kindness than by blows, yet we assume that monkeys must be flogged into a condition of abject fear before they can be got to do anything. We know that the whip is of but little use in the training of dogs, and yet we imagine that bears are taught to dance on red-hot sheets of iron.

On the other hand, the answer which the trainer invariably makes to our inquiries is scarcely satisfying. "Patience, patience, always patience," this is his formula, his magic; but it does not convince us. We cannot believe that a fox can be taught to jump over a duck by patience. Yet that is the only way: it is a laborious, an unromantic, prosaic method, but, nevertheless, it is the only one. Perhaps it would be more correct to say "patience and firmness, with a judicious mixture of kindness and severity."

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Just as revolutions are not made with rose-water, wild beasts cannot be made tractable without the occasional exercise of a little severity. But there is a great difference between severity and cruelty.

Take, for instance, the Siberian bears of M. W. Permané; they are the most amiable, friendly, and playful creatures in the world—to look at them with their master. But approach them by yourself when that master's back is turned, and you will have cause to regret your indiscretion, and will for the future make it your rule in life never to talk to a bear without being introduced. Bears are proverbially ill-mannered animals. These Siberian bears are really beautiful to look at. They have the most lovely coats, the most happy faces, and the most ungainly walk. To see them standing on a swing and "talking" to their master is really killing fun. The way they will sit down at a table and drink stout out of bottles is an edifying sight for any total abstainer to see. But perhaps the climax of comicality is reached when one of these unwieldy creatures has a lady's straw hat tied to his head and walks round the stage on M.



M. PERMANÉ'S SWINGING BEAR.



M. PERMANÉ'S LADY BEAR.

Permané's arm, trying hard to kiss him all the time, and waddling about with all the gracefulness of any mature maiden lady of uncertain age among my acquaintances. That bear will shake hands with M. Permané like a thoroughly good fellow, but if you were to try to shake hands with him you would find his heartiness a little trying.

"How do you manage to train those bears?" I asked M. Permané, after witnessing the performance.

"By kindness," he said, "kindness!"

I looked at him; I did not wink, because I respected myself too much. "You do not mean to say so!" was all I said. I had just seen a specimen of the docility of one of these gentle creatures: he had stripped about half a yard of skin off the arm of a too trusting maiden lady.

"Yes," M. Permané continued; "it took me six months to train that one. You see, you have to catch your bears young. They get untrustworthy as they grow older. It is no use ill-treating them; you must be kind and gentle with them, but you must let them know that you are the master."

Presently I had an opportunity of observing how they were made aware of this fact. One

of the bears became refractory, and manifested a strong disposition to run a-muck generally, but a few smart blows across his snout with a rattan speedily brought him to his senses. He shook his head after each blow, and uttered a strange, low, whining moan, but he reformed his conduct and became less bearish.

M. Permané, I also discovered, was in the habit of keeping his bears in good humour by feeding them perpetually during the performance with such delicacies as pleased their bearish palate. It was quite clear that the pleasures of anticipation—or, shall we say, hope?—had much to do with their training. But even hope is not a sufficient incentive unless the bear learns to know his master and to understand that the master can force him to do what he wants.

For this reason the bear must be caught young. M. Permané generally starts upon cubs about twelve months old. With these he romps about as though they were children, but he never allows them to get the better of him. As soon as the bear gets too old and begins to feel his strength, he can no longer be trusted, and has to be got rid of. Some bears will never learn anything at all, those that do learn all their tricks in play. The

Russian bear is not only very intelligent, but exceedingly quick in his movements. There is a trick which one of these bears performs which it took M. Permané three months to teach. The bear gets on a see-saw, mounts a globe, which is hardly big enough for his four huge paws, and walks himself up the tilting plank on it, and then repeats the process backwards.

M. Permané teaches them this particular feat by placing the globe in a little hollow and then making the bear stand on it. The bear thus gets used to feeling it move under him. Then, little by little, he is made to move it in a groove on the level, and afterwards he has to work it up an inclined plane. And so, by slow stages, the clumsy cub becomes a skilled mountebank.

At no time are bears quite safe. They are so huge and strong, that even in play they often nip and hurt their trainer, but they occasionally turn on him in earnest, and if one has turned on M. Permané twice he gets rid of him. Performing bears are consequently expensive; their keep costs a good deal, so does their carriage from place to place, and then they have to be frequently replaced. But they are intelligent, and

understand when they are being talked to. I have seen a bear look quite sorrowful and penitent after a scolding.

If bears are treacherous so are monkeys, but they are also affectionate and grateful. M. Nivin, the Hungarian, who is perhaps one of the finest trainers of monkeys in the world, always gets hold of his monkeys before they have changed their teeth, and nurses them through their teething. They are generally so grateful for his care that they will do anything for him afterwards. Nevertheless, even then they are sometimes treacherous, and M. Nivin showed me several nasty bites which he had had from one of his little pupils. When they are vicious they have to be thrashed, to make them understand the moral obliquity of their conduct. Monkeys differ: some are intelligent and learn quickly; some will never learn. The most difficult thing to teach a monkey is to make mistakes. This is very perplexing to the monkey mind.

Take, for instance, the "Blondin" monkey. This animal walks along a horizontal bar with his head in a sack. Before performing his trick, he is taught to throw the sack on the ground several times, and the difficulty is to make him understand when he is to refuse to do the trick and when he is to do it. There is always a look of anxiety on the monkey's face, which plainly betrays his uncertainty while he is throwing off the sack. By dint of great patience, however, he is eventually made perfect.

These monkeys are very amusing. I was looking at

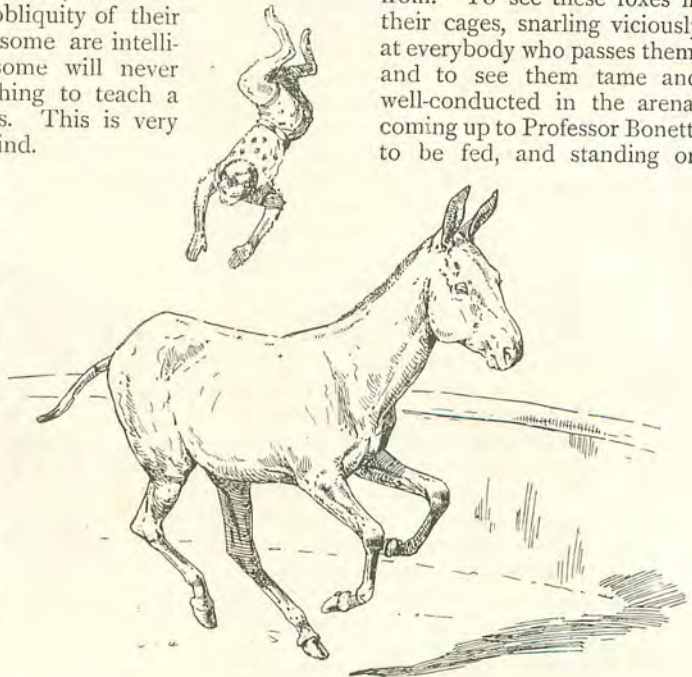


THE "BLONDIN" MONKEY.

M. Gris's baboon, which rides a donkey, jumps through hoops, turns somersaults on the donkey's back, falls off, and climbs up again by the donkey's tail, all while the donkey is cantering round the arena. M. Nivin was talking to me at the time.

"You see that baboon," he said; "he is not doing a quarter of what he does during rehearsal. But he knows perfectly well that his master cannot thrash him before the audience, and so he can afford to be lazy. Monkeys are very human!" Perhaps the most amusing monkey is Clown Ruffin's jockey-monkey, who rides the porcine wonder. The way that monkey sticks on to the little pig's back, while the latter keeps squeaking as though it was being murdered, and jumps over miniature fences, is a sight for the gods. Occasionally the jockey falls off, but he gets on again in a jiffy, and the pig continues squeaking and jumping as if for its very life.

The most remarkable of animal trainers is, without doubt, Professor Bonetti, whose troupe of educated foxes, geese, ducks, fowls, ravens, and dogs are marvellous. His foxes jump over hurdles and through hoops, they jump over ducks and fowls, they feed with these birds, whom it is their nature to feed on, and they run about the arena with fox-hounds, whom they usually run away from. To see these foxes in their cages, snarling viciously at everybody who passes them, and to see them tame and well-conducted in the arena, coming up to Professor Bonetti to be fed, and standing on



THE BABOON CIRCUS-RIDER.



THE JOCKEY-MONKEY.

their hind-legs, like dogs, are two very different sights. One would scarcely believe them to be the same animals.

Professor Bonetti makes them ride a tricycle in the company of dogs and ravens, and winds up his performance with a triumphal procession, in which dogs and foxes are harnessed to a car and draw the feathered tribe round the arena. Foxes are particularly stupid animals to train, but Professor Bonetti makes them do what he likes. His watchword is patience. It took him six months to train these foxes. His methods are simple, but laborious. He is the original trainer of cats and mice and canaries, and has told me that the methods he applied in training them are the same as those he now uses with his foxes and his ducks.

Perhaps a short history of Professor Bonetti's beginnings may be interesting. He is a Dutchman, and was born at Amsterdam. His parents put him into a draper's shop to be a salesman. One day he read in Buffon's Natural History that cats, owing to their stupidity and obstinacy, could not be taught tricks. This surprised the young shop-assistant, who, instead of "penning stanzas when he should engross," was in the habit of spending all the time he could spare in a loft surrounded by a numerous company of cats, with whom he

used to play, and whom he used to teach, in spite of Buffon, to perform the most remarkable feats imaginable. His employer, it must be confessed, had little sympathy with young Bonetti's tastes, and one fine morning turned him neck and crop out of his business. His parents found him another employer, but he was an unprofitable servant, and it soon became clear that his destiny had not singled him out for the walk of life for which his parents had intended him.



PROFESSOR BONETTI'S TROUPE.

In a large granary in Amsterdam he devoted himself to the training of cats. Mice and rats abounded in this place, and here one day he caught a litter of eight young rats,



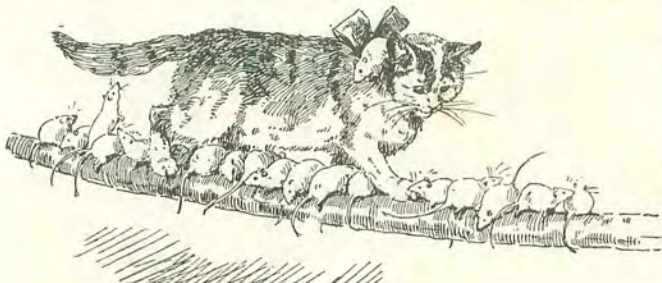
ONE OF PROFESSOR BONETTI'S FOXES.

each no bigger than his little finger, and only about twelve days old.

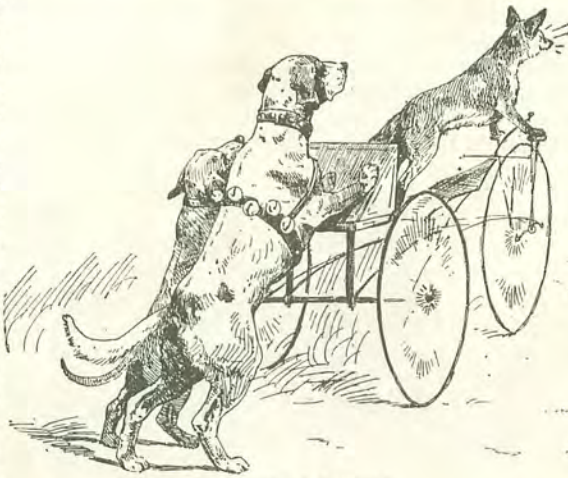
These gave him an idea. He introduced them to his cats, and gradually the formal acquaintance ripened into confidence and friendship. Of course, on their first introduction, the cats betrayed their natural propensities, and made a grab at the little rats, but Professor Bonetti restrained them, and after a time they got to behave quite frankly and unaffectedly towards each other. Use is second nature.

The professor now increased his happy family by the addition of a canary. But the introduction of the bird was a work of difficulty. After a time the canary got confidence in the professor, and finally it got confidence in the cats, but it took time. Professor Bonetti never loses patience. Cats are intensely stupid, and will not understand what is expected of them. Nevertheless, to strike them or to seize them irritably only makes them more obstinate. When a cat once makes up its mind not to do anything, nothing on earth will induce the animal to do it.

Professor Bonetti never beats his pupils, but he also never allows them to beat him.



CAT AND MICE.



FOX RIDING A TRICYCLE.

He gently, but resolutely, insists upon their going through the tricks he wishes them to learn, and he never gets out of temper. One of the most difficult tricks to teach a cat is to make it jump through a hoop covered with paper.

The method adopted is to make it first jump across a band of paper, and to increase the size of this band day by day until the cat has to jump through it. The professor then takes a hoop covered with paper, in which he makes a hole, through which he makes the cat jump. Each succeeding day the hole is made smaller until it reaches the vanishing



A TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION.

point, and the cat makes a hole of its own. This one trick Professor Bonetti has often worked at for as long as five months. The jump through the flames is taught on the same principle, and takes just as much time.

Having taught his cats and mice and canaries, and brought them up to perfection, Professor Bonetti commenced to exhibit them in 1882.

Since then he has done much in the way of the training of animals, but his last performance with foxes is the most remarkable of its kind. Yet the methods adopted in training these wild animals are in principle the same as those

employed in the education of his cats. Violence and cruelty are of no use, they only confuse and frighten the animals.

much as children are taught to read. When once the initial difficulty of teaching them to do anything is overcome, nothing is surprising. And yet some of their tricks we shall never cease to marvel over. Take, for instance, Professor Leoni Clarke's "Baldwin"



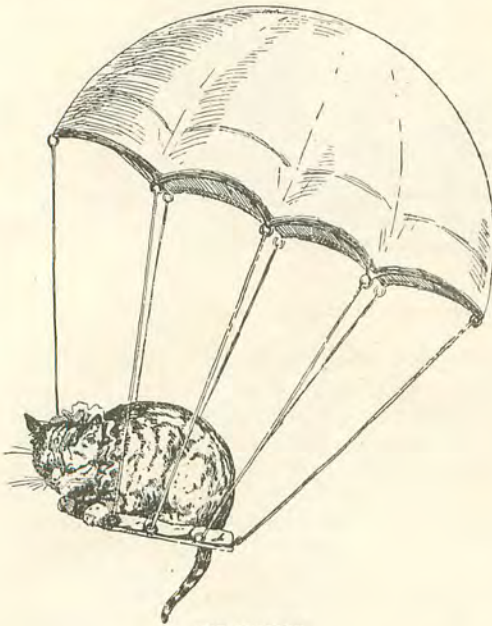
THE "BALDWIN" KITTEN  
CLIMBING UP TO THE PARACHUTE.



"HOME, SWEET HOME."

Patience and firmness are essential. As with bears, so with monkeys, foxes, cats, and any other animals, the general idea is always the

kitten, which climbs up to the roof of the theatre or circus where the performance takes place, gets into a parachute of itself, and then drops down, to be caught by Professor Clarke. To see that kitten slowly climb the rope, and stop every now and then to pause, is most thrilling. There can be no doubt of its unwillingness to ascend, and when it reaches the top it hesitates before getting into the parachute; it seems to reflect and ask itself whether it would not be wiser to climb down again rather than trust itself to that apparatus; but it overcomes its natural unwillingness and gets in with an air of heroic determination which is most pathetic. That "Baldwin" kitten

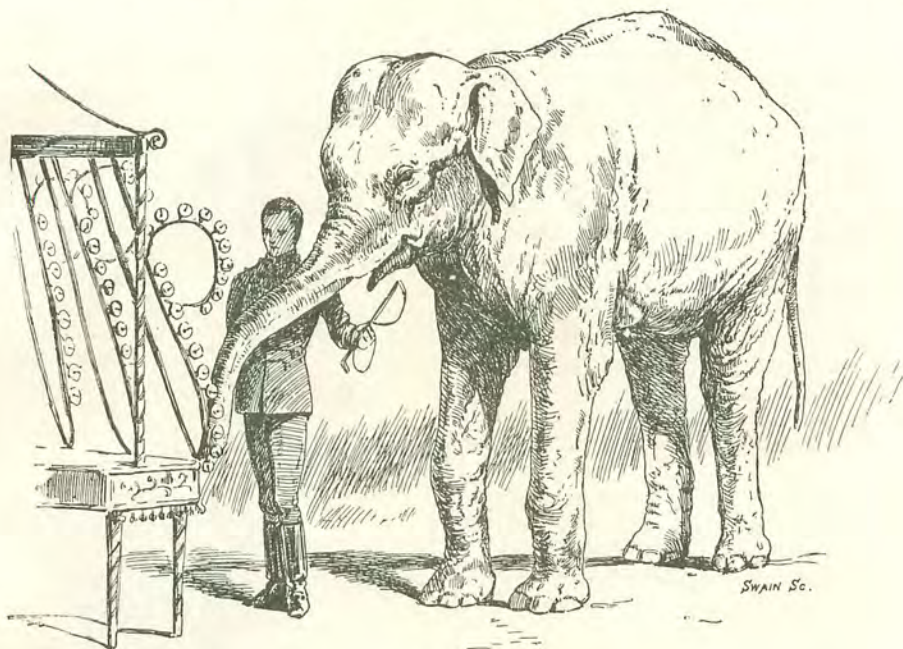


THE DESCENT.

same. First accustom the animal to its trainer, let it feel confidence in him, and feel that he is master, and then commence the tricks slowly and gradually. It must not be expected that an animal can be taught a trick all at once; they must be taught very



A GAME OF SKITTLES.



PLAYING THE BELLS.

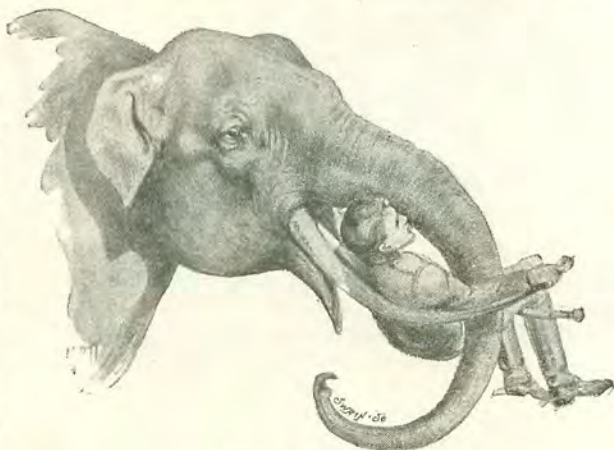
M.D.H.

is one of the prettiest animal performers I have seen. No cruelty would have succeeded there. Professor Clarke's musical cats, who play "Home, Sweet Home" on sleigh-bells, are perhaps more cultured, but they are certainly less pathetic. The same may be said of his rats, who take their seats in a train and enjoy the excitement of a railway accident.

If cats are too obstinate to stand punishment, elephants are too big. How are elephants to be punished? Their skins are too thick, their bodies are too huge, they are too powerful, and they are too conscious of their power. Elephants can only be trained by kindness, but they are eminently sagacious animals; they understand and appreciate kindness, they resent deception. There seems no limit to what an elephant can be taught. He can be taught to play instruments, to sit on a chair, to carry his keeper on his tusks, to stand on his hind legs and on his head; but one thing he will not do, he will not walk through fire.

You can teach nearly all animals to jump through burning hoops, and walk under flaming arches, except an elephant. The training of these mammoths is, for all that,

conducted on the same principle as the training of bears and cats. They must be caught young, they must learn to know and love their trainer. They must never witness an exhibition of temper, and they must feel



CARRYING THE KEEPER.

that their trainer is their master, and will insist upon their doing what he wishes them to do. This, indeed, is the whole secret of the training of performing animals.

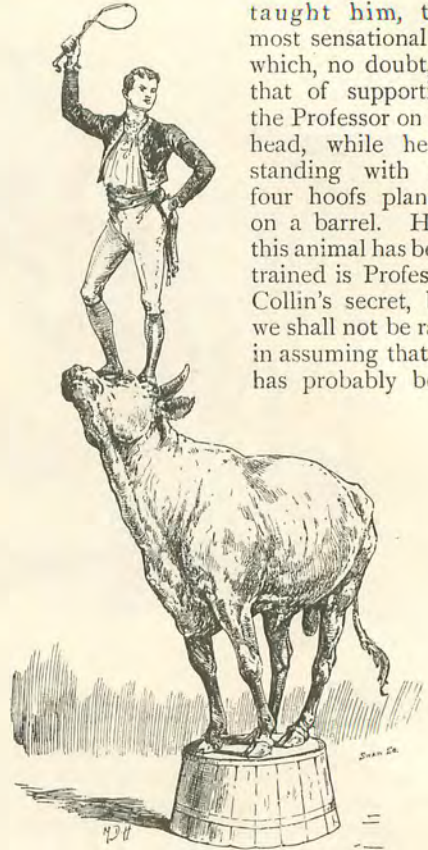
When we turn from animals which, though often wild and stupid, are not absolutely

untractable, and look at the performances of such furious brutes as bulls and lions, we find that the same rules hold good here. Cruelty with a lion will avail nothing. While he is wrestling with his keeper he must know that that keeper is in his power. Nor will starvation do ; for if the animal be ravenous, not even the keeper will be safe. The king of beasts is not dainty, and will make his meal off the first quarry he can find. The lion must be captured when a cub, he must be fed by his keeper, whom he must be accustomed to regard as his playmate as well as his master, and while he must not be under-fed, he must as certainly not be too well fed, or he will get unmanageable, and moreover, like a bear, he is not to be trusted after he has attained a certain age.

Professor Collin's bull is another instance of the triumph of mind over brute force. It is beautiful to see this handsome and noble animal performing the tricks his trainer has



A WRESTLING LION.



PROFESSOR COLLIN'S BULL.

taught him, the most sensational of which, no doubt, is that of supporting the Professor on his head, while he is standing with his four hoofs planted on a barrel. How this animal has been trained is Professor Collin's secret, but we shall not be rash in assuming that he has probably been

guided very much by the same rules which have been followed with so much success by Professors Bonetti and Permané, and, in fact, by all trainers of animals.

The results obtained by these trainers prove conclusively that with patience and determination all things are attainable. They also teach us another and equally important lesson, namely, that cruelty to animals does not pay. Bearing this in mind, we shall be able to watch the performances of educated animals without a pang, and our admiration for their trainers will only be heightened.