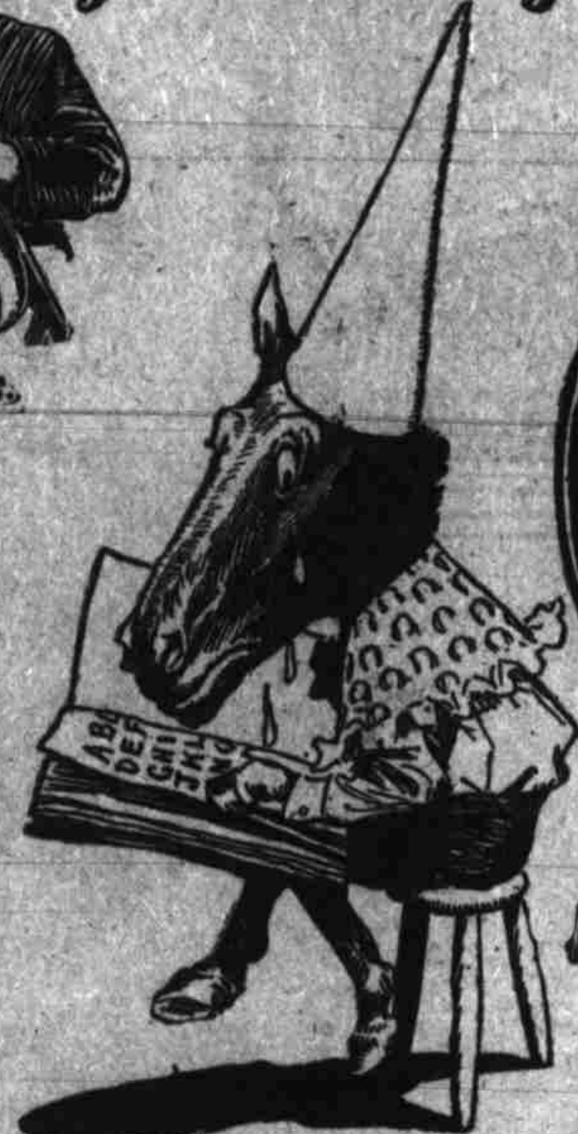
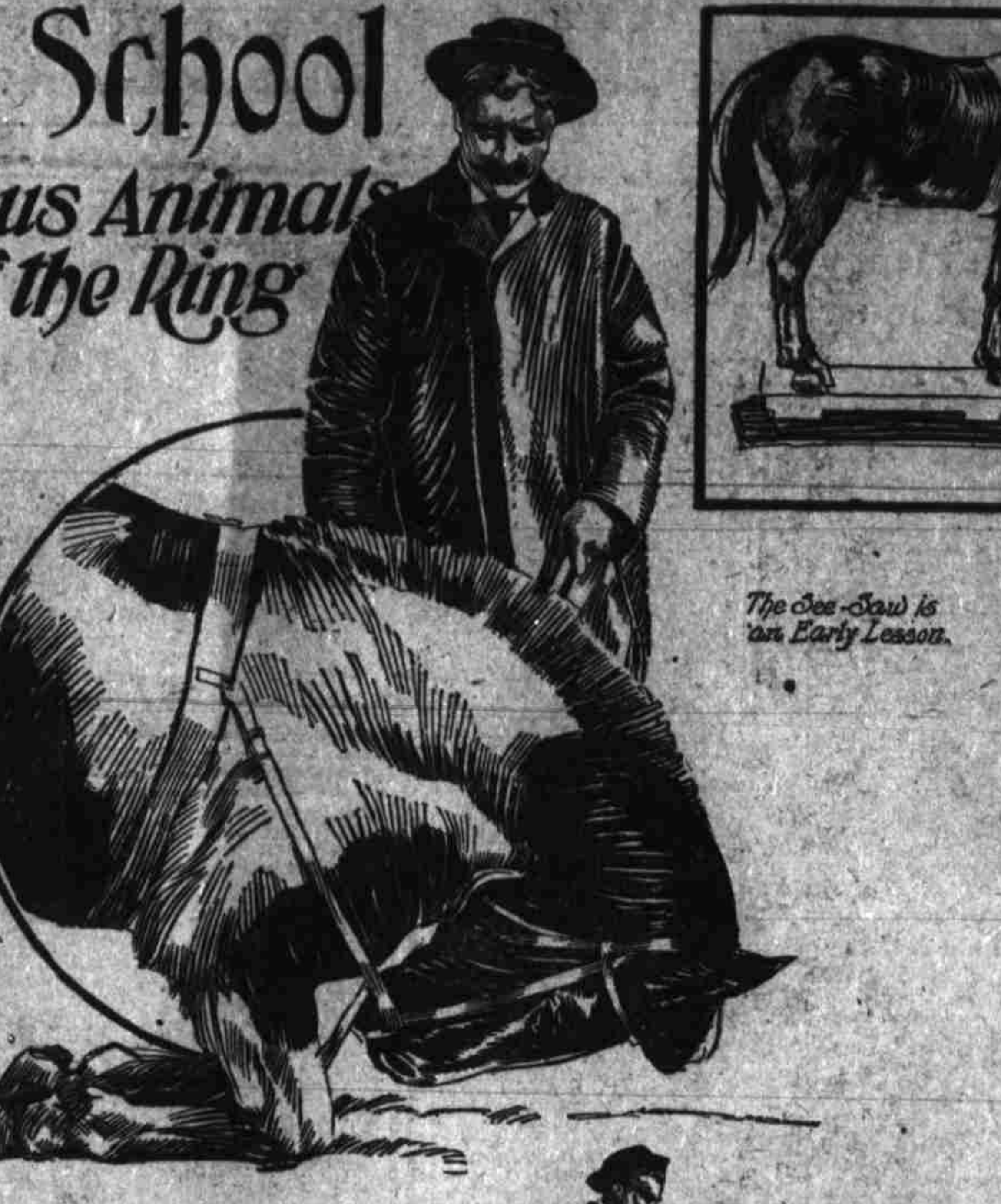
Where Horses Go to School

Training Circus Animals for Tricks of the Ring

Pretending to Be Sleepy and Snoring.





The See-Saw is an Early Lesson.

WITH the return of spring the circus tent will soon again be spread in the land, containing its wonders of menagerie cage and performance ring.

Soon the small boy, as well as his father and big brother, will be watching with breathless interest the marvelous tricks of the trained animals.

There is the trained ring horse or pony, for instance. What really wonderful tricks he performs! How cleverly he sets a table and rings the dinner bell, opens a chest and brings any object for which his master asks, or walks to a blackboard and does "sums" as readily as a schoolboy!

In fact, the horse is really a schoolboy of the equine sort—graduated after a long and tedious series of lessons. During all the long winter he has been going to school, under the care of a patient teacher.

Trick horses begin by learning the A, B, C's of ring performances just as children begin their lessons, at the bottom of the ladder. They perform tricks correctly, not through any thought processes of their own, but because they learn to do mechanically certain things taught by the trainer.

This school period is no pleasanter to a horse than to the average child. The animal is punished when unruly, and must keep at a lesson day after day until it is entirely mastered.

Some horses are bright and learn readily, others are just as stupid as they can be. Some again—like little boys and girls—get stubborn and have to be petted and caressed until they get over their ill temper.

IN CONDUCTING his school for horses, the trainer must be as careful and patient as the teacher of little humans. Kindness does far more than punishment in promoting progress.

Horses are fond of sweetmeats. They have a weakness for sugar. Indeed, this is as great a passion with the colt as with the little girl or boy who works over the most puzzling arithmetic problem upon promises of a box of candy.

The trainer knows his pupil's failing, and just as he punishes him when he refuses to learn, so he rewards him when he is obedient and willing. There are few horses, knowing a lump of sugar is in store for them, that do not try their utmost to accomplish the most difficult lesson.

Therefore, one of the most important secrets of horse-training is to have a pocketful of sugar.

If you go to a circus this summer, watch closely and you will see the trainer reach into his pocket and stealthily slip something into the horse's mouth after he has done his "stunt."

There is scarcely any limit to the tricks which horses may be taught. Perhaps the most difficult for a horse to learn are mathematical problems and "mouth tricks." So many various movements must be mastered in the accomplishment of these that success means a long and tedious job for the trainer.

One of the easiest things to teach a horse is to walk a rope, provided the rope is strong.

However, the trainer begins with the first letters of the equine alphabet—the simplest tricks. Horses are usually trained while the circus is occupying winter quarters. New colts are taught each season, so if any of the old favorites die there are others to take their places.

Take a young colt, wild, unmanageable, and put him under an efficient trainer; by spring he will be able to go into the ring, tell the secrets of his age, race the clowns, fire cannons and do other dare-devilish things that send thrills through the audience.

TAUGHT THEIR OWN NAMES FIRST

"The first thing we do," said one of the best-known equestrian directors in the country, "is to teach the horse his name. We usually train the horses that are born with us; the animals are generally called by the name of the town where they are born. Thus the names of our pupils may be Columbus, Marietta, Philadelphia, Providence, Memphis, and so on.

"Any kind of a horse can be trained. As a rule, we do not try to select any one breed. Some horses are naturally bright; others dull, insufferably dull.

"When we begin teaching a new horse we select a quiet spot for the ring. There must be few distractions. We teach each horse separately; when several have accomplished a trick, we take them in groups."

First of all, the pupil is led into a ring and a string tied to his bit. He is to be taught his name.

"Here, San Francisco," the trainer calls, pulling the string, and drawing the horse toward him. When he utters the command the trainer assumes a certain posture, holding the whip in his hand. As the horse approaches he drops the whip.

This is done over and over again. Gradually the horse learns that when the trainer assumes this posture and utters the name he is expected to go to him. He finally does it without the use of the string.

Teaching the animal to reverse is the second lesson. He is led about the ring, reversing on his hind legs. At first the trainer leads him, uttering the command "change" every time he turns him around. After a time the horse learns to trot about the ring, turning around at every command of "change."

If the trick is done well, he receives sugar. If not, he receives a blow of the whip. It is not long before he knows the movements he must describe to receive his sweetmeat.

From the first, the horse must be impressed with the fact that the trainer is master. Horses, like people, have contrary spells and cranky days. Sometimes they will learn a trick, and two weeks afterward will refuse to do it. They make up their minds that they will not behave, and the trainer is compelled to whip them, and severely, too. If the animal thinks he has the advantage, the trainer might as well give up the job.

After punishing the horse the trainer must let him know he does not hold any grudge. As soon as he is over his spell of ill temper and performs the trick he is rewarded with sugar. Good trainers always pet and caress the horses encouragingly after their lesson.

A horse will learn his name and perform the initial tricks in probably two weeks. By that time, unless he is cantankerous by nature, he will grow to love the man with the whip who gives him confections and flatters him.

Then he is given a more difficult lesson in pedestal work. Really hard work begins.

The trainer must be a man with infinite patience. He must study the nature of the horse—each one requires different treatment. One thing is carefully observed by all directors—the same posture and gesture must always accompany the same command, as the horse learns what he is required to do by the position, the command and tone of the trainer.

Now, to teach the horse to mount a pedestal. The trainer brings the pedestal to the animal. Of course the pupil does not understand what he is expected to do. The trainer therefore leads him to the pedestal and places his foot on the first step.

"Mount!" He repeats the word several times, placing the horse's foot on the step each time. This is done day after day. Slowly the horse begins to know what he is to do when he sees the trainer approach with the pedestal, and upon hearing the sharp command "Mount!" places his foot on the step. The trainer at each command strikes the same attitude, and points to the pedestal with his whip.

MANY PEDESTAL TRICKS

There are many pedestal tricks. The most familiar is where a number of horses mount stairs, facing each other, and form a pyramid. After each animal has learned to mount the pedestal separately, several are brought into the ring, and with the use of lines they are taught to mount one after the other. In time they become accustomed to concerted movement and act together at a command. There is no thought on the part of the horses. They learn that when the trainer raises his whip they are to go up; that when he drops it they are to descend.

With every trick the trainer assumes a different attitude; every command is uttered in a slightly changed tone of voice. The horse learns to take the smallest cue—the lifting of a finger, a frown, a smile, the raising or dropping of a whip, a step forward, a step backward.

Imagine the time and labor required to teach a horse a series of tricks; with what patience and care the trainer must teach every movement and series of manoeuvres required.

A common trick for the horse is to roll a ball. Now, if you were to place a ball before a horse, how would you go about teaching him to roll it with his nose?

It's easy. The trainer takes the horse's head and places it against a chair. Uttering a low command, "Snoot!" he pushes the horse's head against the chair, and it topples over. He picks up the chair, uttering the same command, and upsets it again with the horse's head. This is done over and over again, day after day, until the horse pushes over the chair whenever he hears the command. After this, a ball is substituted for the chair. Instead of falling, the ball rolls, and the horse naturally follows it.

Of course, you have seen a horse chasing a clown about the ring. How the clown runs, dodging the champing, pawing beast that pursues him! Why, you think, the horse is really mad, he hates the clown. Not at all.

A clown enters the ring where the colt is being trained. The trainer simply takes a line, and as the clown runs pulls the horse after him. The faster the clown goes the harder the trainer pulls on the line. This simple lesson is repeated again and again. After each performance the horse gets his sugar. In time he becomes so accustomed to running after the fleeing clown that he will do so mechanically.

When the horse has become proficient in tricks of this sort he is promoted to the high school. Mouth tricks are the algebra and geometry of his senior year.

All tricks, such as drawing with chalk, picking up objects and making grimaces are classed under this head. This is where horse training becomes a science.

We have seen horses go to a chest, and from a miscellaneous collection of bells, bottles, handkerchiefs and other articles, pick out article after article as they were called for. Or you have seen horse-mathematicians go to a blackboard and multiply, add or subtract.

TEACHING THE DIFFICULT TRICKS

To teach the horse to pick up a handkerchief whenever it is dropped is difficult. Some cannot be taught to do this.

As the first step the animal must learn to hold the handkerchief in his mouth. It must be forced between his teeth. When it is taken away the horse is petted. This is done until the horse opens his mouth and takes the handkerchief when handed to him.

When he does this, the handkerchief is held a little distance away. He begins to reach for it. It is then lowered, little by little, as long as he follows it with his head. When he follows it to the floor, the trainer dangles it before him and drops it to the ground, caressing him if he picks it up.

Now a real handkerchief is brought into play. The trainer assumes a different attitude and utters his command in another tone of voice as he teaches the horse to pick up the real material. The animal learns to distinguish the cues—not the hues—and finally picks up any handkerchief upon command. A fairly intelligent horse can be taught to pick up a handkerchief in half a day.

Rolling a Ball with Nose.

A horse which has learned to hold a handkerchief hardly objects to holding a piece of chalk. Then come his lessons in mathematics.

He is taken to a blackboard, chalk is placed between his teeth. He is commanded to draw, for example, the figure "four." The trainer takes his head, and by moving it gently draws the figure as he gives the command. This is repeated until the horse mechanically makes a similar motion of his head upon hearing this command. He is taught to write other figures, a different command and a different cue being given for each one. Then come combinations.

"Multiply four times four!"

The horse, having learned to associate this command with a series of motions of his head, goes to the board and writes 16.

"Subtract 10 from 35!"

The trainer changes his posture, lowers his tone of voice. The horse recognizes the command as calling for another series of headshakes against the blackboard, and writes 25.

A horse must have intelligence to learn to distinguish one command from another, but there it ceases in mathematics. Horses are very observant animals and readily see cues and changes of positions which are not noticed by the spectator.

Take the horse that goes to a box and selects articles.

"Bring me a bell!"

The horse goes to the box, lifts the lid with his nose and brings forth a bell. After that he is commanded to bring a bottle, a handkerchief, a tin can.

When the animal is trained the bell is placed in one corner of the box, the bottle in another, the handkerchief in another, the can perhaps in the middle. And the position of each article is never changed.

First of all the horse is led to the box, his head pressed against the lid, and he is taught to open it by force. He is then taught to hold the bottle in his mouth just as the handkerchief. He begins to follow the bottle and becomes familiar with the corner where it is placed. So with the tin can, the bell or whatever articles may be selected.

When he hears the request for the bottle he goes to the box and—creature of habit that he is—reaches to the corner where he is sure to find the article. The trainer always gives commands in the same succession. Nothing at all remarkable about it. The horse merely follows his custom and uses no judgment whatever.

You are probably wondering how horses can correctly stamp the number of days a week with their feet. How they look at a party of visitors in a tent where they are being trained and stamp the correct number of persons in the party!

By hitting the paw of the young horse with a whip the trainer gets him to stamp his foot. Every time the stick worries him he begins to stamp.

"How old are you?" the trainer asks, giving him a little rap. He begins to paw the ground. When he has kicked two or three times the trainer raises his bit and distracts his attention. He stops pawing. By constant practice he learns to stamp his foot a certain number of times at each command without the use of the whip.

When you see a horse "look sleepy," close his eyes, stretch his neck and yawn, don't believe him. He goes through this performance because the trainer has forced him to do so after a certain command. This is one of the difficult tricks to teach a horse.

"How do you walk when the ladies ride?" asks the trainer. He takes the new pupil and leads him around the ring, hitting his legs lightly so that he raises them and trips along daintily. When he asks him to walk as though a gentleman were on his back, the trainer strikes his leg sharply with the whip. The animal rears and kicks. He soon learns to know the difference between the two commands.

Thus hundreds of other tricks are taught. There is no secret about it at all, no mysterious influence exerted on the horses by trainers.

It is long and hard work—work requiring untiring patience. That is all.

What is really remarkable is the perception of the horses; how they note the fine distinction between cues.

By training, a practically worthless horse may become valuable. Some of the poorest breeds make the best performers. The horses learn to love their masters, and one of the best incentives to good work is to favor performers with sugar and caresses. Every trainer knows the value of making his horses jealous.

High Prices for Shoes

FEW of us, perhaps, ever have an opportunity to scan a pair of shoes which cost $50 or more. Yet as much as $1000 is paid for a pair; and there are men in the large cities who never pay less than $50 for their shoes. And there are shoemakers who devote themselves exclusively to this grade of work.

The ordinary observer, however, sees nothing in these expensive shoes that distinguishes them from such as are generally sold for $5 or $6. The difference between them is not one of quality, but one of manner in the making. The high-price shoe, of course, calls for a specially made last, which is shaped with the greatest care.

While the cost of making these shoes is really considerable, the prices are fixed principally by a mental "sizing" of the customer. Some shoemakers charge very rich customers with troublesome feet $200 for the first pair, and $50 for each pair subsequently made on the same lasts; and there are makers who charge one set of customers these prices and another set $10 or $15 for similar shoes and service.

English Song Birds for the Pacific Coast.

Dr. Charles McCutcheon.

WHEN Dr. Charles McCutcheon, a prominent physician of Tacoma, Wash., was a boy in England he loved to lie in the meadows and hedgerows listening to the song of the skylark, the linnet and the goldfinch.

More than anything else since he settled in this country has he missed the sweet tones of these songsters of the English fields.

Like an inspiration came the thought some months ago, Why not import a number of these song birds of the old country, and, in time, fill the meadows, fields and forests of the Pacific coast with the bird melody of the British Isles!

Just the thing, promptly decided the physician, and that is why he has undertaken to stock Washington and Oregon with the feathered singers that he loved in his childhood.

BEING enthusiastic over his plan, Dr. McCutcheon went to England himself, accompanied by Mrs. McCutcheon, to select birds for colonization along the Pacific.

When he started from Liverpool on his return he had five dozen skylarks, four dozen linnets and three dozen goldfinches. But the ocean voyage and the long and more trying train journey across the continent proved too much for most of them.

Reaching Tacoma, the doctor found only forty skylarks, six linnets and one goldfinch alive. Instead of being dismayed by this misfortune, he has written for additional shipments of these birds, and has also included blackbirds and throstles.

The birds he brought over were kept in an ill-ventilated portion of the extreme forward part of the ship. The motion of the vessel there was pronounced, and this, with other untoward conditions, the doctor thinks, caused the large death rate. Many of the birds were in such a reduced state that they died a few days after arriving. Those that lived are now well, active and apparently ready to tackle the task of colonising the Pacific coast States.

Climatic conditions in western Washington and Oregon, Dr. McCutcheon asserts, are as well adapted to the propagation of the feathered songsters as is the climate of England, Ireland and Scotland. He is confident the skylarks will soon become accustomed to their new environments and will surprise people by the rapidity with which they spread over the Pacific coast and Rocky Mountain States.

"I believe," he said, "that if we can protect the nesting larks and linnets from the small boy, and the old birds from the man with the shotgun, our forests and fields will soon be well stocked with them.

"All the varieties of birds I am importing are hardy fellows, well able to take care of themselves amid new surroundings. The skylark is especially dear to me, and I hope to be able, at any rate, to stock this Puget Sound region with them.

THE ONE TOUCH NEEDED

"While the Pacific coast is one of the most favored regions of the world, all of us who love country life know there is a great lack of singing birds here. Our forests are desolations of silence. The fields are still. Singing birds make a psychological change in a landscape that inspires and lifts.

"They are to the field, the forest, the orchard and the garden the one grand touch of nature, and as the earth grows more enlightened their singing will be found as necessary in the ethical development of the race as is their appetites in the elimination of tree pests and field insects."

Dr. McCutcheon started with a few bullfinches also, but all these died except one. This was a fine, hardy fellow that stood the trip across the Atlantic splendidly and appeared ready to continue on around the globe. Somewhere in New York this bird was stolen.

As the doctor journeyed across the continent with his captives newspapers took note of the birds. Dispatches were cabled to Paris and London, and the experiment has occasioned a large amount of adverse comment in Great Britain. Many newspapers of England and Ireland strongly censure the example set by him, declaring that it may result in the wholesale catching of feathered songsters in those countries and the consequent depletion of the birds there.

FAMOUS FOR SONG AND FOOD

The skylark is a small bird with a sandy-brown plumage longitudinally streaked with a dusky hue. It has a high reputation as a dainty for the table, and was formerly caught in incredible numbers. Appreciation of its charm of song has now thrown protection about it. While the skylark is a migratory bird, it has never become a resident of the United States or Canada. Stragglers, however, have been found in Greenland and the Bermudas.

The song of the bird has made it world famous. Dr. McCutcheon a few days ago received a letter from a man in Ontario who confessed that he makes a trip across the Atlantic every spring in order to spend several weeks in England listening to the skylarks. He has made a study of the bird, and he writes that one lark, which he timed as it rose from an English meadow, sang twelve minutes and forty seconds without stopping.

As the bird begins its song, it rises perpendicularly on quivering wing. Singing, it continues its upward flight, and even after gaining an extraordinary elevation, so powerful is its voice that the wild joyous notes may be distinctly heard when the eyes can trace its course no longer. An ear well tuned to the song can tell by the notes whether the bird is stationary, ascending or on the descent. Approaching the ground, the song abruptly ends, and with a headlong dart the bird alights.

Bullfinches and goldfinches are allied to the sparrow family, though varieties of the finch are found in the Eastern States. Throstle is merely the English of thrush, of which there are nearly 450 varieties. Finding that the thrushes of the Eastern States do not follow civilization into the Northwest, Dr. McCutcheon hopes that the thrush of England and Ireland, imported there, may find the climate so nearly like the one they left as to induce rapid breeding.