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THE HIGH-METTLED RACER

At Cooke's well-known travelling Circus there may be seen some remarkable performances with horses and small ponies that have been trained for the purpose. In London, at Hengler's Cirque, as it is called, there is a fine stud of horses, which commands general admiration. Without depreciating modern establishments of this kind, our recollections go back to Astley's Amphitheatre, near Westminster Bridge, as it used to be thirty to forty years ago, under the management of the late Mr Ducrow. The feats there performed by some of the horses were exceedingly wonderful. The animals seemed to possess a degree of human intelligence. They were accomplished actors. Their powers of simulation with a view to entertain spectators went far beyond what any one could expect whose knowledge is confined to the ordinary class of horses. We will mention a few particulars regarding the horses at Astley's as they occur to our memory.

One evening the performance represented a house on fire. All the inhabitants of the dwelling had managed to escape except a lady in an upper story. You saw her at a window throwing about her arms wildly, and screaming for help. Her appeals to the assembled crowd beneath were heart-rending. The firemen could not reach her, for the stair was seemingly in a blaze, and there was no fire-escape. The spectators in the theatre were wrought up to an agony, it being but too evident that the poor lady was doomed to perish by a painful and violent death. In the midst of the commotion, a horse which belonged to the lady rushed upon the stage. In its stable it had heard the screams of its mistress, and hastened to do its best to save her. Without saddle or bridle, it was seen to rush into the house, and to climb the stair amidst flames and volumes of smoke. It reached the apartment where the lady was. She mounted on its back, holding by the mane, and the horse descending the stair brought her safely to the ground. Prolonged shouts of applause rewarded the hazardous exploit. The whole thing was a beautiful piece of acting, evoking throughout sentiments of pleasure and admiration. Nothing but kindness and long training could have made the horse so clever in knowing what to do and to do it well. The feat was the more surprising as horses usually have a dread of fire which is not easily conquered. It will be understood that the fire had been so adroitly managed as to effect no injury on the theatre, and that there never had been any real danger.

On another evening at Astley's a still more remarkable piece of acting by a white horse named Prince, was offered for public entertainment. It was in a play called the High-mettled Racer. The play was in several successive acts, and designed to represent different stages of degradation in the career of a horse from youth to old age. The spectacle was painful but touching, and unfortunately in too many cases true to nature. We shall endeavour to describe some of the scenes.

When the piece opens, we have a view of an English country mansion. In front there are several mounted huntsmen in scarlet coats ready to set out on a fox-chase. They are waiting till a young lady comes out of the mansion to accompany them. We see the lady, who is properly equipped for riding, descend the steps at the doorway, and by the aid of a groom mount a young and beautifully shaped white horse that is in readiness for her. She speaks to it affectionately, and calls it her dear Prince. The elegant form of the animal, its proud bearing, its glossy coat, and the spirited way it prances about, excite general admiration. After a little galloping to shew its paces, the horse with its fair rider goes off with the huntsmen and hounds in pursuit of a fox – that was also a taught actor in its way – which leads the party through a variety of difficulties, such as climbing up rocks, leaping over hedges,

and so forth, till at length, when on the point of being run down, it dashes into the cottage of a poor old woman, who humanely gives it shelter. She takes up the fox lovingly in her arms, and saves it from seemingly impending destruction. That may be called the first stage in the horse's career, during which Prince was well attended to and happy.

At the beginning of next act, the horse is to appearance several years older, and is no longer fit for racing or hunting. The lady, its first owner, had from some circumstances been compelled to part with it. From its swiftness in running, it had been purchased to run at celebrated horse-races, at which it had on several occasions won prizes, and its sprightliness obtained for it the name of the High-mettled Racer. After this it was transferred from one owner to another, always in a descending scale, until poor Prince is seen in the condition of a cab-horse in the streets of London. It has somewhat the look of its former state, but is terribly broken down in figure and spirit. Its plump and glossy appearance is gone. It is dirty and dejected. It hangs its head droopingly down. Its ribs shine through its skin. Its joints are stiff. It stands on three legs, with the other leg resting on the point of the foot, just as we see cab-horses trying to rest their aching limbs when standing in a row for hire. What a wretched downcome from that which Prince had enjoyed in 'life's young dream!' There awaits it, however, a still lower depth of misery.

In the following act, Prince is reduced to the forlorn condition of drawing a sand-cart, when it can hardly draw its own legs after it. To appearance, it is half-starved. A child offers it a few straws, which it is glad to eat. It seems to be little better than skin and bone. The cart in which it is yoked belongs to a rude jobber whose object is to wring the utmost possible work out of the animal before selling it to be killed. A feeling of horror and compassion thrills through the spectators. They can hardly believe they are only looking at a play, for the simulation is perfect. Staggering along with its draught under the cruel urging of the whip, the moment arrives when Prince can go no further. Its unhappy span of life is terminated. It suddenly drops down under its weary load – to die, and be relieved of all its troubles. Unyoked from the cart, and relieved of its harness, there it is stretched out, with a crowd of idlers about it, seemingly at the last gasp, and offering in its fate a dreadful instance of undeserved cruelty to animals. 'Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.' Quite true; but, alas, inhumanity to man is nothing in comparison with the inhumanity which is recklessly exercised towards the horse.

There is a concluding scene in the life of the horse we have been describing, which must on no account be omitted. While lying in the street in its death-struggle, and when preparations were making to drag it off to the shambles, a lady who is passing recognises the dying animal as being her favourite horse Prince, which she had ridden years ago at the fox-chase. At the same time the poor beast faintly lifting its head, recognises its old mistress, and with failing eyes seems to implore her compassion. In a state of distraction, the lady kneels down, takes the horse's head in her lap, speaks to it consolingly, and once more calls it her dear Prince. Oh, what she would not do to revive the dying animal, and give Prince a new lease of existence! Just at this juncture, in the manner of the old plays, when something supernatural was required to get over a serious difficulty, a sylph-like being in the character of a benevolent fairy appears on the stage carrying a magic wand. Her mission, she says, being to redress wrong, she touches the dying horse with the wand and bids it rise. In an instant Prince starts up from its recumbent position, and to the delight and amazement of everybody, it is as fresh, plump, glossy, and beautiful as when it went out with the hounds in the fox-chase. The lady springs upon its back, and off Prince goes at a splendid gallop. The applause was, of course, immense!

Perhaps in the whole annals of horsemanship there was never demonstrated a more wonderful case of acting. The horse had all along been feigning for public amusement. It had feigned to be a cab-horse. It had feigned to be tired when it stood on three legs. It feigned to be dying when it dropped down in the sand-cart. The whole affair was a piece of simulation, and by means of some adventitious aid in discolouring the skin, the deception was complete. A hasty rub with a cloth puts

it all to rights; and instead of dying, Prince gallops off in the consciousness of having performed a brilliant piece of acting.

What we have narrated from recollection will assist in illustrating the natural intelligence of the horse, and the extent to which it can be educated by patient and gentle training. Harsh treatment would be all a mistake. Words kindly spoken, some small reward in the shape of a mouthful of what is agreeable – a trifling sweetmeat, for instance – will work wonders in forming the character of the horse, and teaching it to perform any required feat. We have always thought that an impressive moral lesson was conveyed in the play of the High-mettled Racer.

W. C.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS
CHAPTER XVII. – MRS TIPPER TO THE RESCUE

There was the gravest reason for anxiety respecting Lilian's future. Marian at her very best, and with the strongest motive for making herself agreeable to Lilian, had never been a companion for her; and now! Would it be possible for Lilian to remain at Fairview for even the three or four months until Philip's return? I had very grave doubts upon the point.

That Marian was better than she had appeared when she first became acquainted with her good fortune, I am bound to acknowledge. Although she had at first seen the question entirely from one point of view, it presently became evident that she was not lacking in a certain kind of good-nature, which, in my prejudice against her, I had not given her credit for being capable of. Evidently she now meant to be kind and considerate, and to act generously, according to her light. Indeed I think she flattered herself that nothing could be more amiable and generous than was her demeanour towards Lilian, the morning after the revelation had been made. If Lilian found her graciousness hard to bear, she did not blame Marian for it. She came to meet Lilian with a kiss, as the latter entered the breakfast-room, and was altogether a great deal more than usually affectionate in her morning greeting. Moreover, she made some effort to keep her delight, at the discovery which had been made, as much out of sight as possible.

As yet it was only in Marian's altered bearing towards the servants that the effect which the change in her position had upon her could be seen. She had many a time expressed her opinion that Lilian was not sufficiently dignified in her bearing towards her inferiors, and she was now shewing us what she considered to be the proper deportment of a mistress; though the effect was somewhat marred by their reception of it.

But it did me real good to see the fealty of one and all to Lilian. That Marian should at once pass to the head of the table was, I suppose, under the circumstances, to be expected; and neither Mrs Tipper nor Lilian appeared in the slightest degree annoyed by it; both, perhaps, too much absorbed to care where they sat. But I was somewhat amused to find that the arrangement of the breakfast things was swiftly altered; and so far as the replacing the urn, cups and saucers, and so forth went, where Lilian sat was made the head of the table. Marian looked very indignant and rather foolish; but she could not very well protest at that moment.

I am afraid I did a little enjoy witnessing her mortification, when Marian found that Lilian was treated with as much deference as though she were a queen, and invariably served before herself. Saunders, indeed, made quite a demonstration of obeying Lilian's slightest glance; whilst the new power was very indifferently waited upon by his subordinate. It was no use giving orders; Saunders was deaf and dumb and blind, so far as Marian was concerned. He could not, and would not, look over her indecent haste in stepping into his beloved young mistress's place; and as I afterwards found, he had made up his mind to leave Fairview immediately the change that had taken place was made known; and having Lilian to refer to for a character, was independent of Marian's patronage, and took delight in shewing that he was.

Lilian's past kindness to them was beginning to bear fruit amongst the servants. Every one in the house seemed desirous to prove their love and sympathy with her now. She had informed me that she meant to lose no time in putting Marian in possession, and very quickly proved that she was in earnest. As soon as we four were alone together in the morning-room, she quietly began, looking a great deal more self-possessed than the Lilian of yesterday:

'I do not know precisely what has to be done; but I suppose some legal form has to be gone through to put you in possession of – your – rights, Marian; I have therefore telegraphed for the

solicitor. He will tell you what has to be done; and I hope it may be got through as quickly as possible, for all our sakes.'

'Well, dear, I leave all that to you. I don't want to hurry you; no one could behave more kindly about it than you have, for I'm sure it must be dreadful to have to give up all – But there; of course you will live here with me,' added Marian, in an outburst of good-nature. 'I'll give you as much as you meant to give me, and' —

'Pray' —

'But I must say it, dear. I am not going to forget all your kindness to me. No one shall be able to say that I have not behaved generously.'

'I am sure you mean well,' returned Lilian, shrinking nervously under the generosity. 'But I do not as yet quite know what I shall do. Of course Auntie and Mary and I must be together, and we none of us mind being poor. Perhaps Mary and I could try opening a little school?' – with a glance towards me.

'We shall contrive to get on very well, dearie,' was my cheerful little rejoinder.

Marian was about to protest; but Lilian gravely went on: 'If I can in any way do without accepting your – kindness, you must excuse my saying that I prefer independence.'

No mention, I believe no thought of Arthur Trafford in connection with her future life. She seemed to realise that if he had not already deserted her he would do so very shortly: it was only a question of time.

'Oh, you mustn't talk like that, you know!' said Marian; 'you mustn't, really. It sounds like pride; and why should you be too proud to take an allowance, when I was not? At anyrate you must, and shall, take as much as Pa used to allow me – two hundred a year, you know;' with the air of feeling that she was acting very largely.

'Please excuse me now; I have something to attend to up-stairs,' said Lilian, moving towards the door. 'Come, Mary.'

I promptly rose to accompany her. Marian looked as though her good-nature was becoming exhausted.

'Oh, by-the-bye, stop a moment, Miss Haddon. I shall not be in need of a companion; at least, if I have one, I should like to choose for myself; so perhaps, under the circumstances, you will not require a long notice. You couldn't expect it; and' —

'I shall not require any notice whatever from you,' was my cheerful rejoinder. 'My engagement was with Miss Farrar.'

'You forget *I* am Miss Farrar.'

'You will very often have to put up with my forgetfulness upon that point while I remain at Fairview,' was my mental comment. But I gravely informed her that she need have no fears about my being troublesome in any way.

Mrs Tipper had been silent during our conversation, apparently thinking over some little plan of her own; but she rose at once to accompany Lilian and me, no way deterred by Marian's protests. For the first time I noticed a quiet dignity in her bearing, which sat extremely well upon her, as she said: 'My place is by the side of my dear Lilian.'

As I had expected, an early train brought Arthur Trafford, eager to recommence his efforts to persuade Lilian to fall in with his wishes; and perhaps not without hope that, now she had had time to realise what the giving up would really be, he would find her more plastic in his hands. As I have said, such as it was, his love was sincere – only one thing seemed worse than losing her; and he would not lose her without a desperate struggle. He came, prepared to exert all his powers of persuasion. Her firmness, or obstinacy as he chose to call it, had quite taken him by surprise, and he could not as yet believe in it, being more inclined to ascribe it to temper than to conviction. He met with a little rebuff in the outset, in her unwillingness to see him alone. He had been shewn into the library, where she was sitting with Mrs Tipper and me; and in reply to his invitation to go elsewhere, she had murmured

something about preferring to remain there. As he could not very well request Mrs Tipper and me to leave them, and we ourselves made no attempt to do so, having, in fact, exchanged a glance which meant not leaving Lilian without orders, he was obliged to put up with our presence.

He found her quite as unmanageable upon the one point as she had been the evening before; and in his disappointment and mortification, laid bare his own motives more than he was conscious of doing. And terrible as it was for her at the moment, I was even glad she should see him as he really was. Better that her love should be killed at one blow, since it had to be killed, than by the slow torture which a more gradual unveiling would have entailed.

As she shrank back, gazing at him with dilated eyes and white face, I knew that she had at last awakened to the truth. *This* was not the hero she had worshipped – a man whose capacity for doing great deeds only lacked opportunity for its development. He could not help shewing us what it was which he most felt the loss of.

Then he was impolitic enough to attack me before her; something more than insinuating that I was the marplot who had come between him and his happiness. In his heat, he could not perceive that if I were really what he accused me of being, he was paying Lilian a very bad compliment in declaring that she was completely under my influence.

'You cannot deny that you have encouraged her in this!' he angrily exclaimed, turning upon me. 'You dare not say that you have not!'

'I dare to say that I honestly think she has done what is right, and would do it though the whole world turned its back upon her; and I am proud to be considered her friend, Mr Trafford.'

'My only one!' sobbed Lilian, clinging to me.

'No, indeed. Every one who respects truth and unselfishness, must be your friend, dear Lilian.'

'I am sure Mrs Tipper will be more open to reason!' he hotly ejaculated, turning towards her, as she sat regarding him very attentively. 'You, madam, will not, I am sure, desire to see your brother's wishes so disregarded.'

But he had revealed himself to her as well as to us, and found Mrs Tipper also was on Lilian's side. Indeed she came out quite grandly. If, as I suspected, he had hitherto attributed her amiability to want of character, he could do so no longer. She was worthy of being Lilian's aunt; and not at all unlike her niece, allowing for the difference in early training. There was a grave quiet dignity in her tone and bearing as she expressed her entire approval of the step Lilian had taken, which appeared to quite take him by surprise.

'I thought you loved Lilian, Mrs Tipper.'

'I do love her, Mr Trafford; more than ever, since she has shewn me that not even her love for you can turn her aside from doing what she believes to be right.'

But its being right was just what he would not for a moment allow, and he again and again went over the same arguments, now pleading, now reviling, still unwilling to believe in the utter uselessness of it all. 'It was all very well now, in the first flush, of thinking she was doing a generous action; but how would it be by-and-by, when she found herself penniless and dependent upon the bounty of another, and that other Marian Reed? A nice thing to be patronised and walked over by a girl like that!' and so forth, in the one-sided, unreasoning way with which people who have a special end in view are apt to talk, basing his arguments upon the consequences which might ensue from the act, instead of upon the right or wrong of committing it.

'My dear Lilian will not be dependent upon Miss – Marian's bounty, nor will she be penniless or homeless, Mr Trafford,' said Mrs Tipper. 'I did not like to mention it until I was quite sure; but I have made inquiries, and Mr Markham tells me that the two hundred a year which was placed to my account was settled upon me by my brother after my husband's death. I recollect Jacob telling me, when I first came to live at Fairview, that he had made me independent; but I did not understand it as I do now. Of course my dear Lilian and Mary will share it with me.'

What a relief it was to hear this, for Lilian's sake. It had been so painful to think of her being obliged to be dependent upon Marian, even for a time. And how hearty, though at the moment only expressed by a look, was my gratitude to the dear little woman for her kindness and consideration for me. She did not know that I only needed her love. I had received fifty pounds for my salary, and that would more than suffice to keep me until Philip's return; but it did me real good to know that she was not aware of my prospects, when she so generously included me with Lilian in the offer of a home.

Lilian got through the pitiful scene with her quondam lover better, on the whole, than she had done the night before. His threat, once more used in the heat of the moment (I did not give him credit for seriously entertaining the idea, as yet), to the effect that her act would part them, was acquiesced in; not angrily, nor defiantly – with no attempt to conceal the pain it cost her, but acquiesced in. He might come again and again and threaten as he pleased; it would be no use now. Moreover, I had the comfort of believing that, bitter as the suffering was to her, it would not be of long duration. Though she as yet knew it not, he had not the power to shadow her future life. In truth he was likely to suffer a great deal more than she was. Say what he might, he estimated her more highly than he had ever done before. The very decision which he so complained of raised her in his estimation; whilst all the glamour was gone from him in her eyes now.

He left no stone unturned whilst it was still not too late, and brought his sister to assist him. Both, I saw, attributed a great deal of blame to me in the matter; and both were now candid enough to give more expression to their antagonism than they had previously done. But their antagonism I had no right whatever to complain of, since my estimation of them was not higher than theirs of me.

Mrs Chichester was in a somewhat awkward position. She had the gravest reasons for doing her best to further her brother's wishes, and was at the same time very desirous of keeping in Robert Wentworth's good graces. All her diplomatic powers were brought into play; and she had the mortification of perceiving that it was all to no purpose. It was almost amusing to see her assuring Mr Wentworth, with tearful eyes and clasped hands, that whatever others might think, she meant to uphold her dearest Lilian; in contrast with certain little speeches addressed to Marian, which occasionally met my ears. One thing was evident, she did not wish to get out of favour with the new power.

There was no fencing between the two men. A sharp hand-to-hand encounter for a few moments, and then friendship lay dead. Robert Wentworth had spoken his mind; and the other had declared that from thenceforth all friendship was over between them.

Arthur Trafford was in some measure perhaps to be pitied, at this crisis of his life. Enervated by a life of luxury and indolence, he probably lacked the power to put his shoulder to the wheel, and try to earn a living for himself and Lilian. Supposing the idea to have crossed his mind, and he was not so utterly worthless that it may not have done so, he must have realised what terribly uphill work it would be to commence the struggle for a livelihood at eight-and-twenty, and with no special aptitude or preparation for any profession. He had lost all: the girl he loved? her fortune, and his friend; and I will do him the justice to say that the loss of Robert Wentworth's friendship was no light trouble to him, though he himself had cast it off. He was a poorer man than I had imagined him to be; having, in fact, lived upon the principal of the small sum left him by his father, and depending upon his marriage with Lilian for future supply.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.