Michael, Brother of Jerry

By

Jack London

MICHAEL, BROTHER OF JERRY

FOREWORD

Very early in my life, possibly because of the insatiable curiosity that was born in me, I came to dislike the performances of trained animals. It was my curiosity that spoiled for me this form of amusement, for I was led to seek behind the performance in order to learn how the performance was achieved. And what I found behind the brave show and glitter of performance was not nice. It was a body of cruelty so horrible that I am confident no normal person exists who, once aware of it, could ever enjoy looking on at any trained-animal turn.

Now I am not a namby-pamby. By the book reviewers and the namby-pambys I am esteemed a sort of primitive beast that delights in the spilled blood of violence and horror. Without arguing this matter of my general reputation, accepting it at its current face value, let me add that I have indeed lived life in a very rough school and have seen more than the average man's share of inhumanity and cruelty, from the forecastle and the prison, the slum and the desert, the execution-chamber and the lazar-house, to the battlefield and the military hospital. I have seen horrible deaths and mutilations. I have seen imbeciles hanged, because, being imbeciles, they did not possess the hire of lawyers. I have seen the hearts and stamina of strong men broken, and I have seen other men, by ill-treatment, driven to permanent and howling madness. I have

witnessed the deaths of old and young, and even infants, from sheer starvation. I have seen men and women beaten by whips and clubs and fists, and I have seen the rhinoceros-hide whips laid around the naked torsos of black boys so heartily that each stroke stripped away the skin in full circle. And yet, let me add finally, never have I been so appalled and shocked by the world's cruelty as have I been appalled and shocked in the midst of happy, laughing, and applauding audiences when trained-animal turns were being performed on the stage.

One with a strong stomach and a hard head may be able to tolerate much of the unconscious and undeliberate cruelty and torture of the world that is perpetrated in hot blood and stupidity. I have such a stomach and head. But what turns my head and makes my gorge rise, is the cold-blooded, conscious, deliberate cruelty and torment that is manifest behind ninety-nine of every hundred trained-animal turns. Cruelty, as a fine art, has attained its perfect flower in the trained-animal world.

Possessed myself of a strong stomach and a hard head, inured to hardship, cruelty, and brutality, nevertheless I found, as I came to manhood, that I unconsciously protected myself from the hurt of the trained-animal turn by getting up and leaving the theatre whenever such turns came on the stage. I say "unconsciously." By this I mean it never entered my mind that this was a programme by which the possible death-blow might be given to trained-animal turns. I was merely protecting myself from the pain of witnessing what it would hurt me to witness.

But of recent years my understanding of human nature has become such that I realize that no normal healthy human would tolerate such performances did he or she know the terrible cruelty that lies behind them and makes them possible. So I am emboldened to suggest, here and now, three things:

First, let all humans inform themselves of the inevitable and eternal cruelty by the means of which only can animals be compelled to perform before revenue-paying audiences. Second, I suggest that all men and women, and boys and girls, who have so acquainted themselves with the essentials of the fine art of animal-training, should become members of, and ally themselves with, the local and national organizations of humane societies and societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

And the third suggestion I cannot state until I have made a preamble. Like hundreds of thousands of others, I have worked in other fields, striving to organize the mass of mankind into movements for the purpose of ameliorating its own wretchedness and misery. Difficult as this is to accomplish, it is still more difficult to persuade the human into any organised effort to alleviate the ill conditions of the lesser animals.

Practically all of us will weep red tears and sweat bloody sweats as we come to knowledge of the unavoidable cruelty and brutality on which the trained-animal world rests and has its being. But not one-tenth of one per cent. of us will join any organization for the prevention of cruelty to animals, and by our words and acts and contributions work to prevent

the perpetration of cruelties on animals. This is a weakness of our own human nature. We must recognize it as we recognize heat and cold, the opaqueness of the non-transparent, and the everlasting down-pull of gravity.

And still for us, for the ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent. of us, under the easy circumstance of our own weakness, remains another way most easily to express ourselves for the purpose of eliminating from the world the cruelty that is practised by some few of us, for the entertainment of the rest of us, on the trained animals, who, after all, are only lesser animals than we on the round world's surface. It is so easy. We will not have to think of dues or corresponding secretaries. We will not have to think of anything, save when, in any theatre or place of entertainment, a trained-animal turn is presented before us. Then, without premeditation, we may express our disapproval of such a turn by getting up from our seats and leaving the theatre for a promenade and a breath of fresh air outside, coming back, when the turn is over, to enjoy the rest of the programme. All we have to do is just that to eliminate the trained-animal turn from all public places of entertainment. Show the management that such turns are unpopular, and in a day, in an instant, the management will cease catering such turns to its audiences.

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CHAPTER I

But Michael never sailed out of Tulagi, nigger-chaser on the Eugenie. Once in five weeks the steamer Makambo made Tulagi its port of call on the way from New Guinea and the Shortlands to Australia. And on the night of her belated arrival Captain Kellar forgot Michael on the beach. In itself, this was nothing, for, at midnight, Captain Kellar was back on the beach, himself climbing the high hill to the Commissioner's bungalow while the boat's crew vainly rummaged the landscape and canoe houses.

In fact, an hour earlier, as the Makambo's anchor was heaving out and while Captain Kellar was descending the port gang-plank, Michael was coming on board through a starboard port-hole. This was because Michael was inexperienced in the world, because he was expecting to meet Jerry on board this boat since the last he had seen of him was on a boat, and because he had made a friend.

Dag Daughtry was a steward on the Makambo, who should have known better and who would have known better and done better had he not been fascinated by his own particular and peculiar reputation. By luck of birth possessed of a genial but soft disposition and a splendid constitution, his reputation was that for twenty years he had never missed his day's work nor his six daily quarts of bottled beer, even, as he bragged, when in the German islands, where each bottle of beer carried ten grains of quinine in solution as a specific against malaria.

The captain of the Makambo (and, before that, the captains of the Moresby, the Masena, the Sir Edward Grace, and various others of the queerly named Burns Philp Company steamers had done the same) was used to pointing him out proudly to the passengers as a man-thing novel and unique in the annals of the sea. And at such times Dag Daughtry, below on the for'ard deck, feigning unawareness as he went about his work, would steal side-glances up at the bridge where the captain and his passengers stared down on him, and his breast would swell pridefully, because he knew that the captain was saying: "See him! that's Dag Daughtry, the human tank. Never's been drunk or sober in twenty years, and has never missed his six quarts of beer per diem. You wouldn't think it, to look at him, but I assure you it's so. I can't understand. Gets my admiration. Always does his time, his time-and-a-half and his double-time over time. Why, a single glass of beer would give me heartburn and spoil my next good meal. But he flourishes on it. Look at him! Look at him!"

And so, knowing his captain's speech, swollen with pride in his own prowess, Dag Daughtry would continue his ship-work with extra vigour and punish a seventh quart for the day in advertisement of his remarkable constitution. It was a queer sort of fame, as queer as some men are; and Dag Daughtry found in it his justification of existence.

Wherefore he devoted his energy and the soul of him to the maintenance of his reputation as a six-quart man. That was why he made, in odd moments

of off-duty, turtle-shell combs and hair ornaments for profit, and was prettily crooked in such a matter as stealing another man's dog. Somebody had to pay for the six quarts, which, multiplied by thirty, amounted to a tidy sum in the course of the month; and, since that man was Dag Daughtry, he found it necessary to pass Michael inboard on the Makambo through a starboard port-hole.

On the beach, that night at Tulagi, vainly wondering what had become of the whaleboat, Michael had met the squat, thick, hair-grizzled ship's steward. The friendship between them was established almost instantly, for Michael, from a merry puppy, had matured into a merry dog. Far beyond Jerry, was he a sociable good fellow, and this, despite the fact that he had known very few white men. First, there had been Mister Haggin, Derby and Bob, of Meringe; next, Captain Kellar and Captain Kellar's mate of the Eugenie; and, finally, Harley Kennan and the officers of the Ariel. Without exception, he had found them all different, and delightfully different, from the hordes of blacks he had been taught to despise and to lord it over.

And Dag Daughtry had proved no exception from his first greeting of "Hello, you white man's dog, what 'r' you doin' herein nigger country?" Michael had responded coyly with an assumption of dignified aloofness that was given the lie by the eager tilt of his ears and the good-humour that shone in his eyes. Nothing of this was missed by Dag Daughtry, who knew a dog when he saw one, as he studied Michael in the light of the lanterns held by black boys where the whaleboats were landing cargo.

Two estimates the steward quickly made of Michael: he was a likable dog, genial-natured on the face of it, and he was a valuable dog. Because of those estimates Dag Daughtry glanced about him quickly. No one was observing. For the moment, only blacks stood about, and their eyes were turned seaward where the sound of oars out of the darkness warned them to stand ready to receive the next cargo-laden boat. Off to the right, under another lantern, he could make out the Resident Commissioner's clerk and the Makambo's super-cargo heatedly discussing some error in the bill of lading.

The steward flung another quick glance over Michael and made up his mind. He turned away casually and strolled along the beach out of the circle of lantern light. A hundred yards away he sat down in the sand and waited.

"Worth twenty pounds if a penny," he muttered to himself. "If I couldn't get ten pounds for him, just like that, with a thank-you-ma'am, I'm a sucker that don't know a terrier from a greyhound.--Sure, ten pounds, in any pub on Sydney beach."

And ten pounds, metamorphosed into quart bottles of beer, reared an immense and radiant vision, very like a brewery, inside his head.

A scurry of feet in the sand, and low sniffings, stiffened him to alertness. It was as he had hoped. The dog had liked him from the start, and had followed him.

For Dag Daughtry had a way with him, as Michael was quickly to learn, when the man's hand reached out and clutched him, half by the jowl, half by the slack of the neck under the ear. There was no threat in that reach, nothing tentative nor timorous. It was hearty, all-confident, and it produced confidence in Michael. It was roughness without hurt, assertion without threat, surety without seduction. To him it was the most natural thing in the world thus to be familiarly seized and shaken about by a total stranger, while a jovial voice muttered: "That's right, dog. Stick around, stick around, and you'll wear diamonds, maybe."

Certainly, Michael had never met a man so immediately likable. Dag Daughtry knew, instinctively to be sure, how to get on with dogs. By nature there was no cruelty in him. He never exceeded in peremptoriness, nor in petting. He did not overbid for Michael's friendliness. He did bid, but in a manner that conveyed no sense of bidding. Scarcely had he given Michael that introductory jowl-shake, when he released him and apparently forgot all about him.

He proceeded to light his pipe, using several matches as if the wind blew them out. But while they burned close up to his fingers, and while he made a simulation of prodigious puffing, his keen little blue eyes, under shaggy, grizzled brows, intently studied Michael. And Michael, ears cocked and eyes intent, gazed at this stranger who seemed never to have been a stranger at all.

If anything, it was disappointment Michael experienced, in that this delightful, two-legged god took no further notice of him. He even challenged him to closer acquaintance with an invitation to play, with an abrupt movement lifting his paws from the ground and striking them down, stretched out well before, his body bent down from the rump in such a curve that almost his chest touched the sand, his stump of a tail waving signals of good nature while he uttered a sharp, inviting bark. And the man was uninterested, pulling stolidly away at his pipe, in the darkness following upon the third match.

Never was there a more consummate love-making, with all the base intent of betrayal, than this cavalier seduction of Michael by the elderly, six-quart ship's steward. When Michael, not entirely unwitting of the snub of the man's lack of interest, stirred restlessly with a threat to depart, he had flung at him gruffly:

"Stick around, dog, stick around."

Dag Daughtry chuckled to himself, as Michael, advancing, sniffed his trousers' legs long and earnestly. And the man took advantage of his nearness to study him some more, lighting his pipe and running over the dog's excellent lines.

"Some dog, some points," he said aloud approvingly. "Say, dog, you could pull down ribbons like a candy-kid in any bench show anywheres. Only thing against you is that ear, and I could almost iron it out myself. A

vet. could do it."

Carelessly he dropped a hand to Michael's ear, and, with tips of fingers instinct with sensuous sympathy, began to manipulate the base of the ear where its roots bedded in the tightness of skin-stretch over the skull. And Michael liked it. Never had a man's hand been so intimate with his ear without hurting it. But these fingers were provocative only of physical pleasure so keen that he twisted and writhed his whole body in acknowledgment.

Next came a long, steady, upward pull of the ear, the ear slipping slowly through the fingers to the very tip of it while it tingled exquisitely down to its roots. Now to one ear, now to the other, this happened, and all the while the man uttered low words that Michael did not understand but which he accepted as addressed to him.

"Head all right, good 'n' flat," Dag Daughtry murmured, first sliding his fingers over it, and then lighting a match. "An' no wrinkles, 'n' some jaw, good 'n' punishing, an' not a shade too full in the cheek or too empty."

He ran his fingers inside Michael's mouth and noted the strength and evenness of the teeth, measured the breadth of shoulders and depth of chest, and picked up a foot. In the light of another match he examined all four feet.

"Black, all black, every nail of them," said Daughtry, "an' as clean feet as ever a dog walked on, straight-out toes with the proper arch 'n' small 'n' not too small. I bet your daddy and your mother cantered away with the ribbons in their day."

Michael was for growing restless at such searching examination, but Daughtry, in the midst of feeling out the lines and build of the thighs and hocks, paused and took Michael's tail in his magic fingers, exploring the muscles among which it rooted, pressing and prodding the adjacent spinal column from which it sprang, and twisting it about in a most daringly intimate way. And Michael was in an ecstasy, bracing his hindquarters to one side or the other against the caressing fingers. With open hands laid along his sides and partly under him, the man suddenly lifted him from the ground. But before he could feel alarm he was back on the ground again.

"Twenty-six or -seven--you're over twenty-five right now, I'll bet you on it, shillings to ha'pennies, and you'll make thirty when you get your full weight," Dag Daughtry told him. "But what of it? Lots of the judges fancy the thirty-mark. An' you could always train off a few ounces. You're all dog n' all correct conformation. You've got the racing build and the fighting weight, an' there ain't no feathers on your legs."

"No, sir, Mr. Dog, your weight's to the good, and that ear can be ironed out by any respectable dog--doctor. I bet there's a hundred men in

Sydney right now that would fork over twenty quid for the right of calling you his."

And then, just that Michael should not make the mistake of thinking he was being much made over, Daughtry leaned back, relighted his pipe, and apparently forgot his existence. Instead of bidding for good will, he was bent on making Michael do the bidding.

And Michael did, bumping his flanks against Daughtry's knee; nudging his head against Daughtry's hand, in solicitation for more of the blissful ear-rubbing and tail-twisting. Daughtry caught him by the jowl instead and slowly moved his head back and forth as he addressed him:

"What man's dog are you? Maybe you're a nigger's dog, an' that ain't right. Maybe some nigger's stole you, an' that'd be awful. Think of the cruel fates that sometimes happens to dogs. It's a damn shame. No white man's stand for a nigger ownin' the likes of you, an' here's one white man that ain't goin' to stand for it. The idea! A nigger ownin' you an' not knowin' how to train you. Of course a nigger stole you. If I laid eyes on him right now I'd up and knock seven bells and the Saint Paul chimes out of 'm. Sure thing I would. Just show 'm to me, that's all, an' see what I'd do to him. The idea of you takin' orders from a nigger an' fetchin' 'n' carryin' for him! No, sir, dog, you ain't goin' to do it any more. You're comin' along of me, an' I reckon I won't have to urge you."

Dag Daughtry stood up and turned carelessly along the beach. Michael looked after him, but did not follow. He was eager to, but had received no invitation. At last Daughtry made a low kissing sound with his lips. So low was it that he scarcely heard it himself and almost took it on faith, or on the testimony of his lips rather than of his ears, that he had made it. No human being could have heard it across the distance to Michael; but Michael heard it, and sprang away after in a great delighted rush.