

CHAPTER XXVI

Number Eighteen was a big compartment or cage in the dog row, large enough with due comfort for a dozen Irish terriers like Michael. For Harris Collins was scientific. Dogs on vacation, boarding at the Cedarwild Animal School, were given every opportunity to recuperate from the hardships and wear and tear of from six months to a year and more on the road. It was for this reason that the school was so popular a boarding-place for performing animals when the owners were on vacation or out of "time." Harris Collins kept his animals clean and comfortable and guarded from germ diseases. In short, he renovated them against their next trips out on vaudeville time or circus engagement.

To the left of Michael, in Number Seventeen, were five grotesquely clipped French poodles. Michael could not see them, save when he was being taken out or brought back, but he could smell them and hear them, and, in his loneliness, he even started a feud of snarling bickeringness with Pedro, the biggest of them who acted as clown in their turn. They were aristocrats among performing animals, and Michael's feud with Pedro was not so much real as play-acted. Had he and Pedro been brought together they would have made friends in no time. But through the slow monotonous drag of the hours they developed a fictitious excitement and interest in mouthing their quarrel which each knew in his heart of hearts was no quarrel at all.

In Number Nineteen, on Michael's right, was a sad and tragic company. They were mongrels, kept spotlessly and germicidally clean, who were unattached and untrained. They composed a sort of reserve of raw material, to be worked into established troupes when an extra one or a substitute was needed. This meant the hell of the arena where the training went on. Also, in spare moments, Collins, or his assistants, were for ever trying them out with all manner of tricks in the quest of special aptitudes on their parts. Thus, a mongrel semblance to a cooker spaniel of a dog was tried out for several days as a pony-rider who would leap through paper hoops from the pony's back, and return upon the back again. After several falls and painful injuries, it was rejected for the feat and tried out as a plate-balancer. Failing in this, it was made into a see-saw dog who, for the rest of the turn, filled into the background of a troupe of twenty dogs.

Number Nineteen was a place of perpetual quarrelling and pain. Dogs, hurt in the training, licked their wounds, and moaned, or howled, or were irritable to excess on the slightest provocation. Always, when a new dog entered--and this was a regular happening, for others were continually being taken away to hit the road--the cage was vexed with quarrels and battles, until the new dog, by fighting or by non resistance, had commanded or been taught its proper place.

Michael ignored the denizens of Number Nineteen. They could sniff and snarl belligerently across at him, but he took no notice, reserving his companionship for the play-acted and perennial quarrel with Pedro. Also,

Michael was out in the arena more often and far longer hours than any of them.

"Trust Harry not to make a mistake on a dog," was Collins's judgment; and constantly he strove to find in Michael what had made Del Mar declare him a ten strike and the limit.

Every indignity, in the attempt to find out, was wreaked upon Michael. They tried him at hurdle-jumping, at walking on forelegs, at pony-riding, at forward flips, and at clowning with other dogs. They tried him at waltzing, all his legs cord-fastened and dragged and jerked and slacked under him. They spiked his collar in some of the attempted tricks to keep him from lurching from side to side or from falling forward or backward. They used the whip and the rattan stick; and twisted his nose. They attempted to make a goal-keeper of him in a football game between two teams of pain-driven and pain-bitten mongrels. And they dragged him up ladders to make him dive into a tank of water.

Even they essayed to make him "loop the loop"--rushing him down an inclined trough at so high speed of his legs, accelerated by the slash of whips on his hindquarters, that, with such initial momentum, had he put his heart and will into it, he could have successfully run up the inside of the loop, and across the inside of the top of it, back-downward, like a fly on the ceiling, and on and down and around and out of the loop. But he refused the will and the heart, and every time, when he was unable at the beginning to leap sideways out of the inclined trough, he fell

grievously from the inside of the loop, bruising and injuring himself.

"It isn't that I expect these things are what Harry had in mind," Collins would say, for always he was training his assistants; "but that through them I may get a cue to his specially, whatever in God's name it is, that poor Harry must have known."

Out of love, at the wish of his love-god, Steward, Michael would have striven to learn these tricks and in most of them would have succeeded. But here at Cedarwild was no love, and his own thoroughbred nature made him stubbornly refuse to do under compulsion what he would gladly have done out of love. As a result, since Collins was no thoroughbred of a man, the clashes between them were for a time frequent and savage. In this fighting Michael quickly learned he had no chance. He was always doomed to defeat. He was beaten by stereotyped formula before he began. Never once could he get his teeth into Collins or Johnny. He was too common-sensed to keep up the battling in which he would surely have broken his heart and his body and gone dumb mad. Instead, he retired into himself, became sullen, undemonstrative, and, though he never cowered in defeat, and though he was always ready to snarl and bristle his hair in advertisement that inside he was himself and unconquered, he no longer burst out in furious anger.

After a time, scarcely ever trying him out on a new trick, the chain and Johnny were dispensed with, and with Collins he spent all Collins's hours in the arena. He learned, by bitter lessons, that he must follow Collins

around; and follow him he did, hating him perpetually and in his own body slowly and subtly poisoning himself by the juices of his glands that did not secrete and flow in quite their normal way because of the pressure put upon them by his hatred.

The effect of this, on his body, was not perceptible. This was because of his splendid constitution and health. Wherefore, since the effect must be produced somewhere, it was his mind, or spirit, or nature, or brain, or processes of consciousness, that received it. He drew more and more within himself, became morose, and brooded much. All of which was spiritually unhealthful. He, who had been so merry-hearted, even merrier-hearted than his brother Jerry, began to grow saturnine, and peevish, and ill-tempered. He no longer experienced impulses to play, to romp around, to run about. His body became as quiet and controlled as his brain. Human convicts, in prisons, attain this quietude. He could stand by the hour, to heel to Collins, uninterested, infinitely bored, while Collins tortured some mongrel creature into the performance of a trick.

And much of this torturing Michael witnessed. There were the greyhounds, the high-jumpers and wide-leapers. They were willing to do their best, but Collins and his assistants achieved the miracle, if miracle it may be called, of making them do better than their best. Their best was natural. Their better than best was unnatural, and it killed some and shortened the lives of all. Rushed to the springboard and the leap, always, after the take-off, in mid-air, they had to encounter an assistant who stood underneath, an extraordinarily long buggy-whip in

hand, and lashed them vigorously. This made them leap from the springboard beyond their normal powers, hurting and straining and injuring them in their desperate attempt to escape the whip-lash, to beat the whip-lash in the air and be past ere it could catch their flying flanks and sting them like a scorpion.

"Never will a jumping dog jump his hardest," Collins told his assistants, "unless he's made to. That's your job. That's the difference between the jumpers I turn out and some of these dub amateur-jumping outfits that fail to make good even on the bush circuits."

Collins continually taught. A graduate from his school, an assistant who received from him a letter of recommendation, carried a high credential of a sheepskin into the trained-animal world.

"No dog walks naturally on its hind legs, much less on its forelegs," Collins would say. "Dogs ain't built that way. They have to be made to, that's all. That's the secret of all animal training. They have to. You've got to make them. That's your job. Make them. Anybody who can't, can't make good in this factory. Put that in your pipe and smoke it, and get busy."

Michael saw, without fully appreciating, the use of the spiked saddle on the bucking mule. The mule was fat and good-natured the first day of its appearance in the arena. It had been a pet mule in a family of children until Collins's keen eyes rested on it; and it had known only love and

kindness and much laughter for its foolish mulishness. But Collins's eyes had read health, vigour, and long life, as well as laughableness of appearance and action in the long-eared hybrid.

Barney Barnato he was renamed that first day in the arena, when, also, he received the surprise of his life. He did not dream of the spike in the saddle, nor, while the saddle was empty, did it press against him. But the moment Samuel Bacon, a negro tumbler, got into the saddle, the spike sank home. He knew about it and was prepared. But Barney, taken by surprise, arched his back in the first buck he had ever made. It was so prodigious a buck that Collins eyes snapped with satisfaction, while Sam landed a dozen feet away in the sawdust.

"Make good like that," Collins approved, "and when I sell the mule you'll go along as part of the turn, or I miss my guess. And it will be some turn. There'll be at least two more like you, who'll have to be nervy and know how to fall. Get busy. Try him again."

And Barney entered into the hell of education that later won his purchaser more time than he could deliver over the best vaudeville circuits in Canada and the United States. Day after day Barney took his torture. Not for long did he carry the spiked saddle. Instead, bare-back, he received the negro on his back, and was spiked and set bucking just the same; for the spike was now attached to Sam's palm by means of leather straps. In the end, Barney became so "touchy" about his back that he almost began bucking if a person as much as looked at it.

Certainly, aware of the stab of pain, he started bucking, whirling, and kicking whenever the first signal was given of some one trying to mount him.

At the end of the fourth week, two other tumblers, white youths, being secured, the complete, builded turn was performed for the benefit of a slender, French-looking gentleman, with waxed moustaches. In the end he bought Barney, without haggling, at Collins's own terms and engaged Sammy and the other two tumblers as well. Collins staged the trick properly, as it would be staged in the theatre, even had ready and set up all the necessary apparatus, and himself acted as ringmaster while the prospective purchaser looked on.

Barney, fat as butter, humorous-looking, was led into the square of cloth-covered steel cables and cloth-covered steel uprights. The halter was removed and he was turned loose. Immediately he became restless, the ears were laid back, and he was a picture of viciousness.

"Remember one thing," Collins told the man who might buy. "If you buy him, you'll be ringmaster, and you must never, never spike him. When he comes to know that, you can always put your hands on him any time and control him. He's good-natured at heart, and he's the gratefulest mule I've ever seen in the business. He's just got to love you, and hate the other three. And one warning: if he goes real bad and starts biting, you'll have to pull out his teeth and feed him soft mashes and crushed grain that's steamed. I'll give you the recipe for the digestive dope

you'll have to put in. Now--watch!"

Collins stopped into the ring and caressed Barney, who responded in the best of tempers and tried affectionately to nudge and shove past on the way out of the ropes to escape what he knew was coming.

"See," Collins exposted. "He's got confidence in me. He trusts me. He knows I've never spiked him and that I always save him in the end. I'm his good Samaritan, and you'll have to be the same to him if you buy him.--Now I'll give you your spiel. Of course, you can improve on it to suit yourself."

The master-trainer walked out of the rope square, stepped forward to an imaginary line, and looked down and out and up as if he were gazing at the pit of the orchestra beneath him, across at the body of the house, and up into the galleries.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he addressed the sawdust emptiness before him as if it were a packed audience, "this is Barney Barnato, the biggest joker of a mule ever born. He's as affectionate as a Newfoundland puppy--just watch--"

Stepping back to the ropes, Collins extended his hand across them, saying: "Come here, Barney, and show all these people who you love best."

And Barney twinkled forward on his small hoofs, nozzled the open hand,

and came closer, nozzling up the arm, nudging Collins's shoulders with his nose, half-rearing as if to get across the ropes and embrace him. What he was really doing was begging and entreating Collins to take him away out of the squared ring from the torment he knew awaited him.

"That's what it means by never spiking him," Collins shot at the man with the waxed moustaches, as he stepped forward to the imaginary line in the sawdust, above the imaginary pit of the orchestra, and addressed the imaginary house.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Barney Barnato is a joshier. He's got forty tricks up each of his four legs, and the man don't live that he'll let stick on big back for sixty seconds. I'm telling you this in fair warning, before I make my proposition. Looks easy, doesn't it?--one minute, the sixtieth part of an hour, to be precise, sixty seconds, to stick on the back of an affectionate joshier mule like Barney. Well, come on you boys and broncho riders. To anybody who sticks on for one minute I shall immediately pay the sum of fifty dollars; for two whole, entire minutes, the sum of five hundred dollars."

This was the cue for Samuel Bacon, who advanced across the sawdust, awkward and grinning and embarrassed, and apparently was helped up to the stage by the extended hand of Collins.

"Is your life insured?" Collins demanded.

Sam shook his head and grinned.

"Then what are you tackling this for?"

"For the money," said Sam. "I jes' naturally needs it in my business."

"What is your business?"

"None of your business, mister." Here Sam grinned ingratiating apology for his impertinence and shuffled on his legs. "I might be investin' in lottery tickets, only I ain't. Do I get the money?--that's our business."

"Sure you do," Collins replied. "When you earn it. Stand over there to one side and wait a moment.--Ladies and gentlemen, if you will forgive the delay, I must ask for more volunteers.--Any more takers? Fifty dollars for sixty seconds. Almost a dollar a second . . . if you win. Better! I'll make it a dollar a second. Sixty dollars to the boy, man, woman, or girl who sticks on Barney's back for one minute. Come on, ladies. Remember this is the day of equal suffrage. Here's where you put it over on your husbands, brothers, sons, fathers, and grandfathers. Age is no limit.--Grandma, do I get you?" he uttered directly to what must have been a very elderly lady in a near front row.--"You see," (to the prospective buyer), "I've got the entire patter for you. You could do it with two rehearsals, and you can do them right here, free of charge, part of the purchase."

The next two tumblers crossed the sawdust and were helped by Collins up to the imaginary stage.

"You can change the patter according to the cities you're in," he explained to the Frenchman. "It's easy to find out the names of the most despised and toughest neighbourhoods or villages, and have the boys hail from them."

Continuing the patter, Collins put the performance on. Sam's first attempt was brief. He was not half on when he was flung to the ground. Half a dozen attempts, quickly repeated, were scarcely better, the last one permitting him to remain on Barney's back nearly ten seconds, and culminating in a ludicrous fall over Barney's head. Sam withdrew from the ring, shaking his head dubiously and holding his side as if in pain. The other lads followed. Expert tumblers, they executed most amazing and side-splitting fails. Sam recovered and came back. Toward the last, all three made a combined attack on Barney, striving to mount him simultaneously from different slants of approach. They were scattered and flung like chaff, sometimes falling heaped together. Once, the two white boys, standing apart as if recovering breath, were mowed down by Sam's flying body.

"Remember, this is a real mule," Collins told the man with the waxed moustaches. "If any outsiders butt in for a hack at the money, all the better. They'll get theirs quick. The man don't live who can stay on

his back a minute . . . if you keep him rehearsed with the spike. He must live in fear of the spike. Never let him slow up on it. Never let him forget it. If you lay off any time for a few days, rehearse him with the spike a couple of times just before you begin again, or else he might forget it and queer the turn by ambling around with the first outside rube that mounts him.

"And just suppose some rube, all hooks of arms and legs and hands, is managing to stick on anyway, and the minute is getting near up. Just have Sam here, or any of your three, slide in and spike him from the palm. That'll be good night for Mr. Rube. You can't lose, and the audience'll laugh its fool head off.

"Now for the climax! Watch! This always brings the house down. Get busy you two!--Sam! Ready!"

While the white boys threatened to mount Barney from either side and kept his attention engaged, Sam, from outside, in a sudden fit of rage and desperation, made a flying dive across the ropes and from in front locked arms and legs about Barney's neck, tucking his own head close against Barney's head. And Barney reared up on his hind legs, as he had long since learned from the many palm-spikings he had received on head and neck.

"It's a corker," Collins announced, as Barney, on his hind legs, striking vainly with his fore, struggled about the ring. "There's no danger.

He'll never fall over backwards. He's a mule, and he's too wise. Besides, even if he does, all Sam has to do is let go and fall clear."

The turn over, Barney gladly accepted the halter and was led out of the square ring and up to the Frenchman.

"Long life there--look him over," Collins continued to sell. "It's a full turn, including yourself, four performers, besides the mule, and besides any suckers from the audience. It's all ready to put on the boards, and dirt cheap at five thousand."

The Frenchman winced at the sum.

"Listen to arithmetic," Collins went on. "You can sell at twelve hundred a week at least, and you can net eight hundred certain. Six weeks of the net pays for the turn, and you can book a hundred weeks right off the bat and have them yelling for more. Wish I was young and footloose. I'd take it out on the road myself and coin a fortune."

And Barney was sold, and passed out of the Cedarwild Animal School to the slavery of the spike and to be provocative of much joy and laughter in the pleasure-theatre of the world.