

CHAPTER XXXIII

For two years Michael sang his way over the United States, to fame for himself and to fortune for Jacob Henderson. There was never any time off. So great was his success, that Henderson refused flattering offers to cross the Atlantic to show in Europe. But off-time did come to Michael when Henderson fell ill of typhoid in Chicago.

It was a three-months' vacation for Michael, who, well treated but still a prisoner, spent it in a caged kennel in Mulcachy's Animal Home. Mulcachy, one of Harris Collins's brightest graduates, had emulated his master by setting up in business in Chicago, where he ran everything with the same rigid cleanliness, sanitation, and scientific cruelty. Michael received nothing but the excellent food and the cleanliness; but, a solitary and brooding prisoner in his cage, he could not help but sense the atmosphere of pain and terror about him of the animals being broken for the delight of men.

Mulcachy had originated aphorisms of his own which he continually enunciated, among which were:

"Take it from me, when an animal won't give way to pain, it can't be broke. Pain is the only school-teacher."

"Just as you got to take the buck out of a broncho, you've got to take

the bite out of a lion."

"You can't break animals with a feather duster. The thicker the skull the thicker the crowbar."

"They'll always beat you in argument. First thing is to club the argument out of them."

"Heart-bonds between trainers and animals! Son, that's dope for the newspaper interviewer. The only heart-bond I know is a stout stick with some iron on the end of it."

"Sure you can make 'm eat outa your hand. But the thing to watch out for is that they don't eat your hand. A blank cartridge in the nose just about that time is the best preventive I know."

There were days when all the air was vexed with roars and squalls of ferocity and agony from the arena, until the last animal in the cages was excited and ill at ease. In truth, since it was Mulcachy's boast that he could break the best animal living, no end of the hardest cases fell to his hand. He had built a reputation for succeeding where others failed, and, endowed with fearlessness, callousness, and cunning, he never let his reputation wane. There was nothing he dared not tackle, and, when he gave up an animal, the last word was said. For it, remained nothing but to be a cage-animal, in solitary confinement, pacing ever up and down, embittered with all the world of man and roaring its bitterness to the

most delicious enthrillment of the pay-spectators.

During the three months spent by Michael in Mulcachy's Animal Home, occurred two especially hard cases. Of course, the daily chant of ordinary pain of training went on all the time through the working hours, such as of "good" bears and lions and tigers that were made amenable under stress, and of elephants derricked and gaffed into making the head-stand or into the beating of a bass drum. But the two cases that were exceptional, put a mood of depression and fear into all the listening animals, such as humans might experience in an ante-room of hell, listening to the flailing and the flaying of their fellows who had preceded them into the torture-chamber.

The first was of the big Indian tiger. Free-born in the jungle, and free all his days, master, according to his nature and prowess, of all other living creatures including his fellow-tigers, he had come to grief in the end; and, from the trap to the cramped cage, by elephant-back and railroad and steamship, ever in the cramped cage, he had journeyed across seas and continents to Mulcachy's Animal Home. Prospective buyers had examined but not dared to purchase. But Mulcachy had been undeterred. His own fighting blood leapt hot at sight of the magnificent striped cat. It was a challenge of the brute in him to excel. And, two weeks of hell, for the great tiger and for all the other animals, were required to teach him his first lesson.

Ben Bolt he had been named, and he arrived indomitable and

irreconcilable, though almost paralysed from eight weeks of cramp in his narrow cage which had restricted all movement. Mulcachy should have undertaken the job immediately, but two weeks were lost by the fact that he had got married and honeymooned for that length of time. And in that time, in a large cage of concrete and iron, Ben Bolt had exercised and recovered the use of his muscles, and added to his hatred of the two-legged things, puny against him in themselves, who by trick and wile had so helplessly imprisoned him.

So, on this morning when hell yawned for him, he was ready and eager to meet all comers. They came, equipped with formulas, nooses, and forked iron bars. Five of them tossed nooses in through the bars upon the floor of his cage. He snarled and struck at the curling ropes, and for ten minutes was a grand and impossible wild creature, lacking in nothing save the wit and the patience possessed by the miserable two-legged things. And then, impatient and careless of the inanimate ropes, he paused, snarling at the men, with one hind foot resting inside a noose. The next moment, craftily lifted up about the girth of his leg by an iron fork, the noose tightened and the bite of it sank home into his flesh and pride. He leaped, he roared, he was a maniac of ferocity. Again and again, almost burning their palms, he tore the rope smoking through their hands. But ever they took in the slack and paid it out again, until, ere he was aware, a similar noose tightened on his foreleg. What he had done was nothing to what he now did. But he was stupid and impatient. The man-creatures were wise and patient, and a third leg and a fourth leg were finally noosed, so that, with many men tailing on to the ropes, he

was dragged ignominiously on his side to the bars, and, ignominiously, through the bars were hauled his four legs, his chiefest weapons of offence after his terribly fanged jaws.

And then a puny man-creature, Mulcachy himself, dared openly and brazenly to enter the cage and approach him. He sprang to be at him, or, rather, strove so to spring, but was withstrained by his four legs through the bars which he could not draw back and get under him. And Mulcachy knelt beside him, dared kneel beside him, and helped the fifth noose over his head and round his neck. Then his head was drawn to the bars as helplessly as his legs had been drawn through. Next, Mulcachy laid hands on him, on his head, on his ears, on his very nose within an inch of his fangs; and he could do nothing but snarl and roar and pant for breath as the noose shut off his breathing.

Quivering, not with fear but with rage, Ben Bolt perforce endured the buckling around his throat of a thick, broad collar of leather to which was attached a very stout and a very long trailing rope. After that, when Mulcachy had left the cage, one by one the five nooses were artfully manipulated off his legs and his neck. Again, after this prodigious indignity, he was free--within his cage. He went up into the air. With returning breath he roared his rage. He struck at the trailing rope that offended his nerves, clawed at the trap of the collar that encased his neck, fell, rolled over, offended his body-nerves more and more by entangling contacts with the rope, and for half an hour exhausted himself in the futile battle with the inanimate thing. Thus tigers are broken.

At the last, wearied, even with sensations of sickness from the nervous strain put upon himself by his own anger, he lay down in the middle of the floor, lashing his tail, hating with his eyes, and accepting the clinging thing about his neck which he had learned he could not get rid of.

To his amazement, if such a thing be possible in the mental processes of a tiger, the rear door to his cage was thrown open and left open. He regarded the aperture with belligerent suspicion. No one and no threatening danger appeared in the doorway. But his suspicion grew. Always, among these man-animals, occurred what he did not know and could not comprehend. His preference was to remain where he was, but from behind, through the bars of the cage, came shouts and yells, the lash of whips, and the painful thrusts of the long iron forks. Dragging the rope behind him, with no thought of escape, but in the hope that he would get at his tormentors, he leaped into the rear passage that ran behind the circle of permanent cages. The passage way was deserted and dark, but ahead he saw light. With great leaps and roars, he rushed in that direction, arousing a pandemonium of roars and screams from the animals in the cages.

He bounded through the light, and into the light, dazzled by the brightness of it, and crouched down, with long, lashing tail, to orient himself to the situation. But it was only another and larger cage that he was in, a very large cage, a big, bright performing-arena that was all

cage. Save for himself, the arena was deserted, although, overhead, suspended from the roof-bars, were block-and-tackle and seven strong iron chairs that drew his instant suspicion and caused him to roar at them.

For half an hour he roamed the arena, which was the greatest area of restricted freedom he had known in the ten weeks of his captivity. Then, a hooked iron rod, thrust through the bars, caught and drew the bight of his trailing rope into the hands of the men outside. Immediately ten of them had hold of it, and he would have charged up to the bars at them had not, at that moment, Mulcachy entered the arena through a door on the opposite side. No bars stood between Ben Bolt and this creature, and Ben Bolt charged him. Even as he charged he was aware of suspicion in that the small, fragile man-creature before him did not flee or crouch down, but stood awaiting him.

Ben Bolt never reached him. First, with an access of caution, he craftily ceased from his charge, and, crouching, with lashing tail, studied the man who seemed so easily his. Mulcachy was equipped with a long-lashed whip and a sharp-pronged fork of iron.

In his belt, loaded with blank cartridges, was a revolver.

Belying closer to the ground, Ben Bolt advanced upon him, creeping slowly like a cat stalking a mouse. When he came to his next pause, which was within certain leaping distance, he crouched lower, gathered himself for the leap, then turned his head to regard the men at his back

outside the cage. The trailing rope in their hands, to his neck, he had forgotten.

"Now you might as well be good, old man," Mulcachy addressed him in soft, caressing tones, taking a step toward him and holding in advance the iron fork.

This merely incensed the huge, magnificent creature. He rumbled a low, tense growl, flattened his ears back, and soared into the air, his paws spread so that the claws stood out like talons, his tail behind him as stiff and straight as a rod. Neither did the man crouch or flee, nor did the beast attain to him. At the height of his leap the rope tightened taut on his neck, causing him to describe a somersault and fall heavily to the floor on his side.

Before he could regain his feet, Mulcachy was upon him, shouting to his small audience: "Here's where we pound the argument out of him!" And pound he did, on the nose with the butt of the whip, and jab he did, with the iron fork to the ribs. He rained a hurricane of blows and jabs on the animal's most sensitive parts. Ever Ben Bolt leaped to retaliate, but was thrown by the ten men tailed on to the rope, and, each time, even as he struck the floor on his side, Mulcachy was upon him, pounding, smashing, jabbing. His pain was exquisite, especially that of his tender nose. And the creature who inflicted the pain was as fierce and terrible as he, even more so because he was more intelligent. In but few minutes, dazed by the pain, appalled by his inability to rend and destroy the man

who inflicted it, Ben Bolt lost his courage. He fled ignominiously before the little, two-legged creature who was more terrible than himself who was a full-grown Royal Bengal tiger. He leaped high in the air in sheer panic; he ran here and there, with lowered head, to avoid the rain of pain. He even charged the sides of the arena, springing up and vainly trying to climb the slippery vertical bars.

Ever, like an avenging devil, Mulcachy pursued and smashed and jabbed, gritting through his teeth: "You will argue, will you? I'll teach you what argument is! There! Take that! And that! And that!"

"Now I've got him afraid of me, and the rest ought to be easy," he announced, resting off and panting hard from his exertions, while the great tiger crouched and quivered and shrank back from him against the base of the arena-bars. "Take a five-minute spell, you fellows, and we'll got our breaths."

Lowering one of the iron chairs, and attaching it firmly in its place on the floor, Mulcachy prepared for the teaching of the first trick. Ben Bolt, jungle-born and jungle-reared, was to be compelled to sit in the chair in ludicrous and tragic imitation of man-creatures. But Mulcachy was not quite ready. The first lesson of fear of him must be reiterated and driven home.

Stepping to a near safe distance, he lashed Ben Bolt on the nose. He repeated it. He did it a score of times, and scores of times. Turn his

head as he would, ever Ben Bolt received the bite of the whip on his fearfully bruised nose; for Mulcachy was as expert as a stage-driver in his manipulation of the whip, and unerringly the lash snapped and cracked and stung Ben Bolt's nose wherever Ben Bolt at the moment might have it.

When it became maddeningly unendurable, he sprang, only to be jerked back by the ten strong men who held the rope to his neck. And wrath, and ferocity, and intent to destroy, passed out utterly from the tiger's inflamed brain, until he knew fear, again and again, always fear and only fear, utter and abject fear, of this human mite who searched him with such pain.

Then the lesson of the first trick was taken up. Mulcachy tapped the chair sharply with the butt of the whip to draw the animal's attention to it, then flicked the whip-lash sharply on his nose. At the same moment, an attendant, through the bars behind, drove an iron fork into his ribs to force him away from the bars and toward the chair. He crouched forward, then shrank back against the side-bars. Again the chair was rapped, his nose was lashed, his ribs were jabbed, and he was forced by pain toward the chair. This went on interminably--for a quarter of an hour, for half an hour, for an hour; for the men-animals had the patience of gods while he was only a jungle-brute. Thus tigers are broken. And the verb means just what it means. A performing animal is broken. Something breaks in an animal of the wild ere such an animal submits to do tricks before pay-audiences.

Mulcachy ordered an assistant to enter the arena with him. Since he could not compel the tiger directly to sit in the chair, he must employ other means. The rope about Ben Bolt's neck was passed up through the bars and rove through the block-and-tackle. At signal from Mulcachy, the ten men hauled away. Snarling, struggling, choking, in a fresh madness of terror at this new outrage, Ben Bolt was slowly hoisted by his neck up from the floor, until, quite clear of it, whirling, squirming, battling, suspended by his neck like a man being hanged, his wind was shut off and he began to suffocate. He coiled and twisted, the splendid muscles of his body enabling him almost to tie knots in it.

The block-and-tackle, running like a trolley on the overhead track, made it possible for the assistant to seize his tail and drag him through the air till he was above the chair. His helpless body guided thus by the tail, his chest jabbed by the iron fork in Mulcachy's hands, the rope was suddenly lowered, and Ben Bolt, with swimming brain, found himself seated in the chair. On the instant he leaped for the floor, received a blow on the nose from the heavy whip-handle, and had a blank cartridge fired straight into his nostril. His madness of pain and fear was multiplied. He sprang away in flight, but Mulcachy's voice rang out, "Hoist him!" and he slowly rose in the air again, hanging by his neck, and began to strangle.

Once more he was swung into position by his tail, jabbed in the chest, and lowered suddenly on the run--but so suddenly, with a frantic twist of his body on his part, that he fell violently across the chair on his

belly. What little wind was left him from the strangling, seemed to have been ruined out of him by the violence of the fall. The glare in his eyes was maniacal and swimming. He panted frightfully, and his head rolled back and forth. Slaver dripped from his mouth, blood ran from his nose.

"Hoist away!" Mulcachy shouted.

And again, struggling frantically as the tightening collar shut off his wind, Ben Bolt was slowly lifted into the air. So wildly did he struggle that, ere his hind feet were off the floor, he pranced back and forth, so that when he was heaved clear his body swung like a huge pendulum. Over the chair, he was dropped, and for a fraction of a second the posture was his of a man sitting in a chair. Then he uttered a terrible cry and sprang.

It was neither snarl, nor growl, nor roar, that cry, but a sheer scream, as if something had broken inside of him. He missed Mulcachy by inches, as another blank cartridge exploded up his other nostril and as the men with the rope snapped him back so abruptly as almost to break his neck.

This time, lowered quickly, he sank into the chair like a half-empty sack of meal, and continued so to sink, until, crumpling at the middle, his great tawny head falling forward, he lay on the floor unconscious. His tongue, black and swollen, lolled out of his mouth. As buckets of water were poured on him he groaned and moaned. And here ended the first

lesson.

"It's all right," Mulcachy said, day after day, as the teaching went on.

"Patience and hard work will pull off the trick. I've got his goat. He's afraid of me. All that's required is time, and time adds to value with an animal like him."

Not on that first day, nor on the second, nor on the third, did the requisite something really break inside Ben Bolt. But at the end of a fortnight it did break. For the day came when Mulcachy rapped the chair with his whip-butt, when the attendant through the bars jabbed the iron fork into Ben Bolt's ribs, and when Ben Bolt, anything but royal, slinking like a beaten alley-cat, in pitiable terror, crawled over to the chair and sat down in it like a man. He now was an "educated" tiger. The sight of him, so sitting, tragically travestyng man, has been considered, and is considered, "educative" by multitudinous audiences.

The second case, that of St. Elias, was a harder one, and it was marked down against Mulcachy as one of his rare failures, though all admitted that it was an unavoidable failure. St. Elias was a huge monster of an Alaskan bear, who was good-natured and even facetious and humorous after the way of bears. But he had a will of his own that was correspondingly as stubborn as his bulk. He could be persuaded to do things, but he would not tolerate being compelled to do things. And in the trained-animal world, where turns must go off like clockwork, is little or no space for persuasion. An animal must do its turn, and do it

promptly. Audiences will not brook the delay of waiting while a trainer tries to persuade a crusty or roguish beast to do what the audience has paid to see it do.

So St. Elias received his first lesson in compulsion. It was also his last lesson, and it never progressed so far as the training-arena, for it took place in his own cage.

Noosed in the customary way, his four legs dragged through the bars, and his head, by means of a "choke" collar, drawn against the bars, he was first of all manicured. Each one of his great claws was cut off flush with his flesh. The men outside did this. Then Mulcachy, on the inside, punched his nose. Not lightly as it sounds was this operation. The punch was a perforation. Thrusting the instrument into the huge bear's nostril, Mulcachy cut a clean round chunk of living meat out of one side of it. Mulcachy knew the bear business. At all times, to make an untrained bear obey, one must be fast to some sensitive portion of the bear. The ears, the nose, and the eyes are the accessible sensitive parts, and, the eyes being out of the question, remain the nose and the ears as the parts to which to make fast.

Through the perforation Mulcachy immediately clamped a metal ring. To the ring he fastened a long "lunge"-rope, which was well named. Any unruly lunge, at any time during all the subsequent life of St. Elias, could thus be checked by the man who held the lunge-rope. His destiny was patent and ordained. For ever, as long as he lived and breathed,

would he be a prisoner and slave to the rope in the ring in his nostril.

The nooses were slipped, and St. Elias was at liberty, within the confines of his cage, to get acquainted with the ring in his nose. With his powerful forepaws, standing erect and roaring, he proceeded to get acquainted with the ring. It certainly was not a thing persuasible. It was living fire. And he tore at it with his paws as he would have torn at the stings of bees when raiding a honey-tree. He tore the thing out, ripping the ring clear through the flesh and transforming the round perforation into a ragged chasm of pain.

Mulcachy cursed. "Here's where hell coughs," he said. The nooses were introduced again. Again St. Elias, helpless on his side against and partly through the bars, had his nose punched. This time it was the other nostril. And hell coughed. As before, the moment he was released, he tore the ring out through his flesh.

Mulcachy was disgusted. "Listen to reason, won't you?" he objurgated, as, this time, the reason he referred to was the introduction of the ring clear through both nostrils, higher up, and through the central dividing wall of cartilage. But St. Elias was unreasonable. Unlike Ben Bolt, there was nothing inside of him weak enough, or nervous enough, or high-strung enough, to break. The moment he was free he ripped the ring away with half of his nose along with it. Mulcachy punched St. Elias's right ear. St. Elias tore his right ear to shreds. Mulcachy punched his left ear. He tore his left ear to shreds. And Mulcachy gave in. He had to.

As he said plaintively:

"We're beaten. There ain't nothing left to make fast to."

Later, when St. Elias was condemned to be a "cage-animal" all his days, Mulcachy was wont to grumble:

"He was the most unreasonable animal! Couldn't do a thing with him. Couldn't ever get anything to make fast to."