

Training Quadrupeds and Educating Bipeds

By FRANCIS NEILSON

I

A SHORT TIME AGO I received a letter from a famous American general who fought all through the first World War. He told me that he was deeply disturbed at the way things were going and that he wondered if we were not heading for another general disaster. Among other pertinent things he said:

. . . If today we are making progress, it is very difficult to detect. Certainly we are not doing much to improve the breed of an animal called man.

My friend is not an anthropologist, and I doubt if he knows very much about that science, but his letter reminded me of the complaints that have come from leading anthropologists in recent years. They and the general seem to be of one mind about present conditions.

Our economists and sociologists are up a tree at present and know not whether to attempt to scale higher or descend to earth. They have placed themselves in the most invidious position and now, when everyone is crying in his heart for guidance, they seem to be tongue-tied. What have they done to improve the breed of the animal called man?

In looking through some books that have come from England during the past two years, I have searched in vain for a guidepost that would indicate to the people which road they should take. Our mentors and instructors seem to be affected with a palsy, and the war is not to blame for this because it was most noticeable twenty years ago. They have not advanced an ell since the old system of educating youths was abandoned.

When I read books written by our economists and sociologists, I am often surprised to find what a narrow view is taken of the activities of men and women in general. Two fields of human endeavor which contain striking examples of practical training and strict methods of education are overlooked or ignored by those to whom we turn for advice and guidance. Consider the theater and horse racing.

The educationists may say that these stand outside the purview of the schools and that a special knowledge is called for in each activity, which precludes the possibility of teachers treating these subjects from an economic or a sociological standpoint. That may be true, but the nearer we approach the bread and circus time, which we are told will soon be here, the more certain we should be that the preparations for the circus should be made well in advance. I see all the indications which convince me that the mind of the public is running increasingly in that direction.

II

FOR INFORMATION that would serve us in preparing for the return to Roman holidays we cannot look to the church. It seems to be bankrupt of ideas. Several years ago I was called to a meeting of ministers of the gospel to suggest what could be done to fill the empty benches of their churches. They called upon me because they had learned that at one time I was associated with the theater. "Would it be possible," they asked, "to start amateur theatrical societies which would attract the young and encourage them to perform the religious duties of the church?" I told them there were plenty of excellent religious plays that might be put into rehearsal as a test of what could be done. The trouble was that they were ministers of the gospel and not stage directors. They knew nothing about that business, and they wished me to tell them where they could find men or women who would, for

a small fee, start them going. I never heard how the movement progressed, but I imagine that it came to nothing.

There are hundreds of thousands of men, women and children busy, year in and year out, in the production of plays and movies. Think of all the trades that are called upon to supply the accessories required for the performance of a play! Electricians, carpenters, scenic artists, clothiers, and furniture-makers are only a few of the craftsmen who are required; besides, there are the machinists, the supernumeraries, and the actors! The economic pressure upon these people is severe. It is only the highly paid ones that escape hard times. Indeed, I know of nothing more pathetic than an actor or an actress who, in order to impress a manager, must keep up appearances when he finds it difficult to pay his room rent, to say nothing of appeasing his hunger. I have known scores of these people. Our economists and sociologists expend a great deal of ink telling us of the sufferings of laborers in other pursuits, but few touch upon the tribulations of those who wish to enter the temple of Thespis.

Here is a great field for our educationists to explore if they would wish to find some hints or suggestions about how the untrained is taught the intricate business of the stage. More often than not the raw recruit is nearly illiterate. He or she can read and write, but as for knowing anything about the art and history of the stage or what will be expected of him at rehearsal, most of them are quite ignorant. Imagine, then, what the trainer must do with the neophyte put into his charge! Rehearsals usually extend over a period of three or four weeks. In the movies, perhaps, they may run to two or three months. For this work there is no prolonged period of training comparable to the high school and then afterwards the college or university. What is done by our educationists in the establishments of learning must be accomplished in the

theater within a few weeks. And it is incumbent upon the stage director, acting in the interest of the men who are spending their money upon the production, to say whether an actor or an actress is competent to play the part. No one is encouraged to persevere when perseverance is not in his composition. The dullard is got rid of as quickly as possible, for he or she might easily ruin a scene and cause the failure of the play or the movie.

Training in the theater, therefore, is an entirely different practice from that which is in vogue in our schools and colleges. But this is not all. The auditor who goes to the box office and pays for his seat is the one who determines whether the show is worth the price. And these critics go in their millions, night and day, to pronounce judgment upon the productions that are offered to them. There is no sentiment in this channel of the people's activities. It is strictly a question of meritorious performance.

Many years ago I was called from London to New York to produce a play, the dramatization of a novel of probably the most popular writer of fiction of that time. I accepted the engagement on the condition that I would be away from London for only a month. That meant the rehearsals of the play would have to be done in eight or nine days. Fifty or sixty children of ages varying from five to twelve were required for the principal scene. Before leaving London, I cabled to the manager to go to an old friend of mine in New York, who some years previously had provided children for stage productions. I directed him to ask her to find for the piece little ones who had not been to children's schools of acting. Every day for three hours I worked with these boys and girls, and on the fourth day the manager came to me and asked if a certain famous American actress could see one of the rehearsals. I broke my rule of not permitting strangers to wit-

ness my work because one of my first engagements as a super had been carrying a torch in a play in which this lady became famous. After the rehearsal was over, she told me it was a revelation. The visitor asked if she might come to each rehearsal in which the children appeared.

It would not be fair to say they made a success of the play, because the adults were perfect in their parts. But those boys and girls taught me a lesson I have never forgotten. It was this: that little ones—who could scarcely read or spell and had been drawn from the districts of the poor—could rehearse without being self-conscious, and be trained to act the parts of characters from far superior environment and education. To put it in the words of the author of the piece, they behaved "like little ladies and gentlemen." This incident convinced me that the cultural line, which divides the child of the mean streets from that of the better-class home, is not so broad as some sociologists imagine. The effect produced by these children upon the audience was so great that the critics were unanimous in saying each one was a little genius. And this was done in nine days!

Some time ago I attended a meeting at which there were present fully a hundred of a great city's leading educationists. Toward the end of the proceedings, a wise, old, retired president of a university was asked to say a few words. He thanked them for inviting him to the conference, but he pleaded that he had very little to add, save the following: "Gentlemen, the trouble with you all is that you are engaged in a profession that has become a kind of crèche for helping incompetents to bridge over that period between the time when they are a trouble to their parents and the day when they must leave home."

In the theater incompetents are not tolerated. Although occasionally we may see performances by men, women and

children which do not meet with our approval, we have a feeling, as the play proceeds, that ninety per cent of the audience do not see the defects which appear large to the critic.

When the idea was originally promulgated that a child should be left to develop its character and to go its way untrained, an extraordinary change came over our system of education. Thirty years ago, when the first of these protagonists were busy finding wealthy people to support their experiments, I was often called upon to attend meetings and sometimes asked to give a few words of advice. My patronage was dropped (perhaps that was what I had hoped for at the beginning) when they understood that I was totally opposed to all the notions that they were spreading at meetings, in articles, and in pamphlets. One day an English lecturer invited me to hear his speech before a body of women at a well-known public forum. The guest was blunt—so much so that the audience was incensed long before he had finished his speech. I shall never forget his closing words. He told them of a great establishment in England in which there was a room that was called "the rogue's gallery." He described it vividly to them, and said there were rows and rows of photographs of men in stripes, and upon each image was a number. These were the greatest criminals that had passed through the hands of the police. And he believed that each and every one had been allowed to "develop his own character."

My experience with the stage and the methods employed in producing a play have often made me wonder why it is that people, from the age of ten or twelve upwards, can learn in a few weeks' time the exceedingly intricate technique of acting and the art of portraying rôles alien to their own nature but why, in our schools, progress is so slow, requiring eight or ten years to master the elements of education. What

magic is there about the stage that does not exist in the school-room? Does the difference lie here—that there is little or no attraction offered to the student in the class room and that, on the other hand, the stage offers him avenues of betterment and renown if he succeeds in satisfying the public? It may very well be that the child resents school as an interference with his recreation and that the stage provides an entertaining arena in which the pupil's natural desire for play is satisfied. Whatever is the cause of the difference, surely it is worth the while of the sociologist to discover it and search for a way to make the school a place that will woo children to it instead of repelling them.

III

THE OTHER FIELD that provides many lessons to which our instructors might give heed is that of breeding and racing bloodstock. A sensation was caused in racing circles the other day when the news came from England that Sir Eric Ohlson had been offered \$500,000 for his colt, Dante, who won the last British Derby. The price seemed to many of my racing friends out of all reason, and there was speculation as to the highest amount paid for a race horse. Several were mentioned, notably Call Boy and Solario. It certainly seems an enormous sum of money to pay for a three-year-old horse, but when one takes into consideration the incomes earned by great sires as stud fees, it is understandable. I presume the man who made the offer for Dante is the owner of that horse's father, Nearco, for which a very high price was paid.

The story goes that when an American syndicate approached Lord Derby with a view to purchasing his famous sire, Hyperion, the owner said that no amount of money would induce him to part with him, for he considered the horse not only a British asset but that his progeny meant everything to bloodstock breeding in his native country. It

should be well known that great horses have brought high prices and that many of them have well earned the sums expended upon them. Take two great strains—those of St. Simon and Bend Or. The earnings of these horses and their progeny run into millions.

"The Thoroughbred Record" produces a list of thirty-two yearlings bought in this country. The prices paid for them amounted to \$139,700. During the years they were racing these animals won prizes amounting to \$4,383,919. The British studs could produce lists that show even greater earnings.

Is it possible to imagine that a far-seeing man would offer, say, \$5,000 for the purchase of a John D. Rockefeller or a Henry Ford at the age of 12 or 16? We would have to put it at that age because men live about three times as long as horses. Certainly the prizes that Rockefeller and Ford have won are far greater in financial worth than anything horses have brought to individual owners. This reminds me of the question put by the wits: "Is a race horse of greater value than a man?" Although men in Christian countries are not now bought and sold in the slave marts, it cannot be denied that they are cheap enough in the labor markets. But no matter how low the wage they receive, they are proud of the fact that they are politically free. That men cannot be purchased as chattels, in Christian democracies, is an accepted political fact.

No, indeed, slavery is abolished. We fought a very bitter war to banish that system from our land. But now you can get all the men you want at fifty dollars a month—millions of them—to go out and kill their fellows.

It is easy for us to brush the argument aside and say, "Yes, but men are men, and horses are cattle. There is a distinctive difference between humans and animals." That is undoubtedly true in the abstract, but is it the rule in society today?

It seems to me that most men start with next to nothing, run all the risks of the strife in the labor market, and do not succeed until they have put in an apprenticeship of twenty or thirty years. Most of these men have had little or no education or home training. Because of the circumstances in which they have been placed, they have to pick up their learning as they go forward. Indeed, some of the men who, during the nineteenth century in this country and in Great Britain, piled up enormous fortunes, did not have a real chance to get any book learning until they were in their thirties or forties.

This question of men versus horses was discussed the other day by the president of a well-known college, who had come from a conference held at a university in an eastern state, at which there were many educationists present and where the problem of the future of education was seriously considered. The meeting was adjourned until the autumn because there was no agreement as to how it was possible to shake off the toils of the modern system and return to the definite orderliness which was the rule in the establishments of learning when the liberal arts formed the general basis of education for students.

That could not possibly happen in the world of bloodstock breeders. Not because notions and ideas of racing stock are stereotyped. Not by any means! Horse breeding is perhaps the most intricate and difficult study that I know of. For the sake of argument, let us at once put out of consideration those people who buy a horse and have no other idea than that of seeing it win. These people are not interested in breeding and, indeed, they scarcely know anything about it. The breeder must not only be familiar with pedigrees of all the great strains, but he has to know the temperament of the sires and mares that he would mate. The literature on this question alone would make a large library. And, in the

main, it is the work of professionals who have spent their lives at the studs. The care that is lavished upon the selection of a sire for a mare is unknown in the world of humans. Then when the foal comes, the hopes and desires of the breeder increase daily as he watches its growth. The expenditure of thought on its food, the quality of the milk of the mare, the attention given to it by the groom are all part of the routine of the day, for he has in mind every time he sees it the coveted prizes of the Classics. Then when the yearling stage is reached, the hour approaches when it is to be broken, to be trained. I wish it were possible for some of our modern instructors to visit a training stable and see what is done for a horse; how the chief, with his assistant, counsels the boys seated in the breaking-saddle, as to the way each animal should be handled; and how this performance is repeated over and over again with a patience that Job himself would envy. The characteristics of the young animal are gently wooed and adapted into those ways which are most likely to result in the winning of great prizes. The schooling of a horse for racing purposes is one of the most exacting educational processes in the whole field of training quadrupeds or bipeds.

Guiding the development of a horse from the time when it is a foal is an experience in education that is unknown in our world. It has been lost ever since the time when parents and teachers were caught by the idea of letting a child develop itself.

IV

ONE OF OUR SOCIOLOGISTS of a generation ago dismissed the "rabble of the race tracks" in a few short sentences. One of his remarks was: "Betting is a curse and the cause of much poverty." He did not know that many of the wealthiest bloodstock breeders would go far toward agreeing with his

remark. However, there is much more to horse racing than the sums bet by people who cannot afford to lose a dollar. I have known, and I know now, many breeders and owners who do not risk a dime on a race. One of the richest of French breeders and owners never bet more than ten francs on a horse. The great sums gambled away daily in this country come from people who know little or nothing about breeding stock. They are influenced in their choice of animals upon which they place their bets by the press racing tipsters. So great is the demand for the latest information about horses that some of the popular journals issue special editions every morning during week days. Yet, this problem of people betting when they can ill afford loss is one that cannot be dismissed summarily, because it affects countless thousands who seldom in a lifetime see a horse race.

A recent estimate of attendance at seven tracks and of the total sums wagered as shown on the totalisator indicated that for every one bettor witnessing a race there were a hundred who bet and were not present. To give an idea of the importance of horse-breeding as an industry, it should be sufficient to record the attendance and the sums wagered at ten tracks for one day during the summer of 1945. A few more than 177,000 people wagered no less than \$11,238,243. Multiply six racing days a week for ten such tracks and try to estimate the number of people interested in horse racing and the sums wagered, as registered by the totalisator. If that is not big business, what is it?

Surely it means that betting is an ingrained characteristic of man and that no amount of admonition and restriction will rid him of it. Hence, the desire of some people to abolish horse racing altogether. This was attempted with disastrous consequences in the United States, for other means of wagering were quickly devised and, worse still, the most questionable practices of the alternative were forced under

cover, with the result that bribery and corruption for protective purposes flourished as never before.

The campaign against racing brought about restrictive laws which forced many of our breeders and owners to transfer their establishments to England and France. The loss to trainers, jockeys, stable-men and boys, and all those trades contributive to racing was incalculable. Everything from oats to plates (shoes) was hit.

Therefore, the economist and sociologist should realize that horse breeding and racing are two great industries that cannot be maintained unless the man in the street can freely "back his fancy."

It is not enough for us to regard this peculiar problem as one merely of the breeding of horses and the evils that arise from losses suffered by the millions who bet. It goes much deeper. To me, it seems to be another manifestation of the desire in most of us to escape for a while the utter drabness and monotony of life in the town. I have spoken to many working men and women about this, and the general idea in their minds is that the frivolities of the radio and the movie begin to pale and do not yield the excitement and thrills of expectancy they find in betting upon horses, whether they see the race or not. It is another form of escapism, and the hope that losses will be recouped another day spurs them on and carries them over the ditches of despondency. My waiter told me he has a fixed limit for his bets: eight dollars a week; and that he does not lose much. "It's worth it. Lots of fellows spend that much on the movies, beer, and the girls. You sure do get a kick out of a bet on a horse."

One of our best-known educationists came with me to the races and, although he knew nothing about "the game," he was amazed to see thousands of people avidly studying the racing papers before each race. What were they searching for? Information about the stables, the trainer, the breed-

ing, the jockey, speed trials, the weight to be carried, and the distance to be run. It was a revelation to him. Here he realized that thousands showed a desire to be educated, a desire seldom expressed in the schools and colleges. He thought it was a severe and a sad commentary on our system of educating bipeds to win civic and industrial races for themselves.

V

WHEN THE AVERAGE CHILD is considered by its parents to have a higher value than a horse, we may hope that the next generation will begin to retrace the forsaken paths which were tried and tested for long centuries and served to lead to excellent results. Parents today seem to labor under the delusion that a child requires little or no training and that, if it goes to school, it will be educated. I am sure this is so with the majority of parents with whom I come in contact. Indeed, I know few couples who are sufficiently well educated to help a child who shows the slightest desire to learn essential things. The children I have seen during the past thirty years, who have succeeded in college and at the university in becoming notable students, received no assistance whatever from their parents. And in the case of two who have done well, they admit that, looking back, they are sure they could have dispensed with half the years they spent at school and perfected themselves in their studies at home. There is nothing truer than the saying that, with those who succeed, most of their time, for the ten or fifteen years after they leave an educational establishment, is spent in learning how to forget what they were taught. It is, after all, the education you get for yourself that counts save, of course, in the sciences and the arts.

I do not remember a single one of the ten or a dozen precocious children in music who have been assisted by my friends who got in school anything that helped him to become

a pianist or a fiddler. And, yet, there are three or four, who have had no schooling worth talking about, because they had to give so much practice to the instrument they were learning to play, but who have become fairly well-read men and women. Indeed, music is one of the arts that induces study, not only of its history but of the composers and their times. The art itself opens up the vistas that must be explored.

For the mass, nothing better will ever be devised than the old apprentice system—whether it be cobbling, cabinet-making, weaving, spinning, the blacksmith's trade, or any of the manufacturing crafts. The lads of long ago completed more before they were sixteen than the vast majority of our men and women do in taking a full course through colleges and universities. The training itself is an education. The two go together. And, when I was a youth, the night school was infinitely more attractive than the day school because, after working in a shop for ten or twelve hours it was such a relief to wash up, take the evening meal, and go to class. Apprenticeship and the evening schools combined served better than any other system with which I am familiar.

Can we not learn something of value from the theater and the race track? In both spheres the training of temperament and character is essential. Indeed, success in either case is impossible without guiding and molding the traits of the individual actor and individual horse if the great prizes are to be won. A horse left to develop its own character would never see a race track. An aspirant for the honors of the stage would never see a first night if he did not follow the instructions of the producer of the piece. Discipline in these two fields develops character; it does not injure it in any way.

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