

NATURALISTS' PORTFOLIO.

GIRL RESCUED BY A PONY.—A little girl, the daughter of a gentleman in Warwickshire, whilst playing some time ago on the banks of a canal which runs through his grounds, had the misfortune to fall in, and would in all probability have been drowned had not a little pony, which had been long kept in the family, plunged into the stream, and brought the child safely ashore without the slightest injury.

COAL IN INDIA.—The coal-bearing district of India is probably the fifth in area in the world, those of the United States, China, Australia, and Russia being respectively before it in size. The coal hitherto worked has been of inferior quality, marked by its great lamination and large quantity of ash. Some of the seams in the Damda district are of great thickness, reaching, with the partings, one hundred and fifty feet. The coal found in Assam is of better quality than other Indian coal yet worked.

THE AMERICAN BISON.—In 1830 the range of the American bison extended across the whole width of the United States territory into the British possessions on the north and Mexican Republic on the south. To the east it reached nearly to the line of the Mississippi Valley, to the west to the great mountain chains. Now the last refuges of the animal are limited to a couple of comparatively small circles. One of these lies far to the north, and is distributed between the territories of Montana and Dakota; the other far to the south, on the borders of New Mexico and Texas.

A TAME SPIDER.—According to a Paris paper, a showman in that city is rapidly making a fortune through the intelligence of a tame spider. This showman possesses one of those family watches still to be found in the rural districts of England, of the tea-saucer pattern. On the fingers representing the hours he sticks twelve live flies, and in the centre of the dial stands the spider. The showman calls out any number between one and twelve and the spider instantaneously darts upon the fly stuck upon the number so called out, decapitates it, and retires for further orders, on receiving which it attends to them punctually and returns to its lair in the centre of the dial as before.

OF TWO EVILS CHOOSING THE LEAST.—A French dog was taught by his master to execute various commissions, and among others to fetch victuals from the traiteurs in a basket. One evening when the dog was returning to his master thus furnished, two other dogs, attracted by the savoury smell of the petits pates that this messenger was carrying, determined to attack him. The dog placed his basket on the ground and set himself courageously against the first that advanced against him; but while he was engaged with the one, the other ran to the basket, and began to help himself. At length, seeing that there was no chance of beating both the dogs and saving his master's dinner, he threw himself between his two opponents, and without further ceremony quickly despatched the remainder of the food, and then returned to his master with the empty basket.

TRAINED OYSTERS.—Mr. Hamilton, of the New York Aquarium, has developed a new instance of the wonderful effect of kindness upon the lower orders of animals. In a small tank are kept some fine live oysters. They looked so lonely that Mr. Hamilton daily dropped some powdered fish and other tit bits that they are known to be fond of upon them. They showed no appreciation of this kindness for weeks, but one day as Mr. Hamilton was making his rounds he was surprised to see the shells of the oysters open at his approach, as if they expected to receive food. Reaching down he placed the food within the expanded shell of one of the bivalves which immediately closed. This was repeated until the oyster became so tame as to allow Mr. Hamilton to insert his fingers into its shell. A person who witnessed the operation thought that the oyster would not know the difference, he put his finger in. He tried it, and instantly the sharp jaws closed with a force that made the experimenter squirm with pain. But as soon as Mr. Hamilton touched the oyster it seemed to recognize him, and the imprisoned finger was released. The oysters endeavoured to follow their friend, propelling themselves with a jerking motion by quickly opening and shutting their shells.

A MOTHER WATCHING HER YOUNG.—The Abbe de la Pluche, in his Spectacle de la Nature, has the following instance of the far sighted watchfulness of a turkey-hen over her young. "I have heard," he says "a turkey-hen, when at the head of her brood, send forth the most hideous scream without being able to perceive the cause; her young one, however, as soon as the warning was given, skulked under the bushes, the grass, or whatever else seemed to offer shelter or protection. They even stretched themselves at full length on the ground, and continued motionless as if dead. In the meantime the mother, with her eyes directed upwards, continued her cries. On looking up in the direction in which she seemed to gaze, I discovered a black spot just under the clouds, but it soon appeared to be a bird of prey, though at first at too great a distance to be distinguished. I have seen one of these birds continue in this agitated state and her whole brood pinned down, as it were, to the ground for four hours together, whilst their formidable foe was taking its circuit, immediately over their heads. At last, when he disappeared the parent changed her note, and sent forth another cry which in an instant gave life to the whole trembling tribe, and they all flocked around her with expressions of pleasure, as if conscious of their happy escape from danger.

CAT CAPERS.—W. Gordon, Staples, M.D., C.M., R.N., has a book on cats, in which he tells how you can teach tricks to any intelligent pussy. There, for instance, is the common trick of jumping through your arms. Begin, he says, by holding your arms low between your legs; then hold them on one side and make her jump either way; raise your arms higher and higher, until, standing erect, you form a large P, and puss springs through the bend of it; and finally she may be taught to leap over your head—if you are not too tall. You can, with patience, teach her to go through a hoop—even covered with this tissue paper (at first this must be oiled, so as to be nearly transparent), or you can dip your hoop in methylated spirits of wine, and she will go through all the same. Many wonderful stories of cat sagacity are told by the surgeon—stories both pathetic and amusing. The doctor once, as he tells us, drowned a favourite animal, rather than leave it with people who would not take good care of it. There's devotion for you. He tells about one pussy who knew certain days in the week. A shopkeeper had a Tom tabby which he kept night and day in his shop, to keep off mice and rats. On Sundays, Tom was allowed to accompany his master home, a distance of nearly a mile, and to remain at home until the following Monday. Pussy got used to this; and as the shop was always kept open until ten o'clock on Saturdays, Tom regularly left the place and went home three hours before his master. On Monday morning, he was always ready to go back with him again. When he grew older, he tired of night duty. So, to avoid this, he would leave the shop when his master made signs of putting up the shutters. He would wait a convenient distance till his master came, but finding that he was always caught and carried back, he took to leaving the shop an hour before closing time. His master used to overtake him half way home, but never could lay hands on him.

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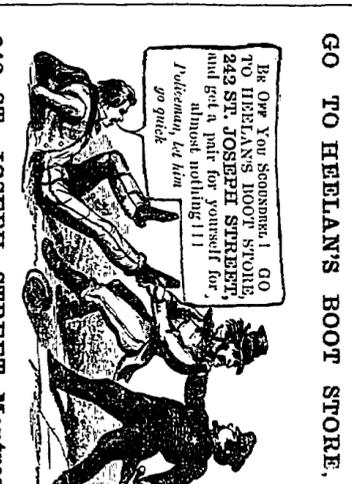
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