

Among Trick Dogs

By F. E. P.

THE matinee was over; the reluctant audience had dispersed from under the cool canvas roofing into the hot glare of an August sun. The large tent was nearly empty, but a few entranced children still lingered to pat or gaze upon the clever canine performers, or wait their chance of a ride on the back of the trick pony—Prince.

A baby girl of four occupied the coveted position at the moment, her fair curls tossed over the small, flushed face, her blue eyes shining, two fat hands tight grasping the bridle, two fat little legs thrust out on either side. The pleased mother, the eager group of waiting children, the big, white Newfoundland dog sitting on his haunches in idle watching, the fresh odoured sawdust in the ring catching the fleckings of sunshine through the tent edgings, the slight

lift of the canvas roof, the changing lights and shadows, made an artistic moment in a hot August afternoon.

In the smaller 'stable' tent the canine performers, off duty until evening hours, were indulging in rolls, barks, yelps and restless arguments indicative of their dissatisfaction with the heat, and therefore with one another. The ponies, some dozen or more in number, and quiet as is their kind, stood munching their supper, and eyeing the restless dogs with a calm superiority. The attendants moved about busied with their duties,—which when the thermometer ranges within the nineties are neither few nor agreeable. But as both dogs and ponies had done their part bravely, it was not for the men to flinch.

It was a very amusing and interesting entertainment that these clever animals provided for their audience. Under their trainer's direction the dogs climbed ladders, jumped through hoops, rode the ponies, turned somersaults, leaped kangaroo fashion on two feet, walked a rope, and disported themselves as skillful gymnasts. One clever Spitz stood with his feet set firm on the four legs of a reversed chair, while the professor lifted the latter high in the air. Another made his way to the top of two perpendicular ladders, set apart the length of his body. This he accomplished by raising



The Clever Dog

front and back legs alternately. They played prayer meeting, hiding their faces most decorously in their paws until the trainer's 'amen' gave them relief; they impersonated a McGinty family, mother, father

and baby. They vaulted high above the professor's up-lifted hands.

The clown dogs were excellent in their rôles, going to sleep, hiding when sought, peeping at prayer meeting, riding the ponies, and showing thorough disobedience.

The ponies, by many clever excellent tricks, gave pleasant variety to the show. Perhaps the trick par excellence was that of the pretty pure white Shetland—a rare fellow, for whom Professor Norris is vainly trying to find a mate—who descended the steep ladder backward. When we remember how difficult it is to induce a horse to go down even a gangway in forward position, the patient teaching for this trick is appreciated.

In addition to the ponies, a monkey, goat and peacock, all tricksters, added their quota of fun to the entertainment, which yet may be considered as first and chiefly a dog show.

"My brother and I have been brought up to this business of animal trick training," said the



young trainer. "My father was in it before us; only he confined his attention to horses. We find that trained dogs are more attractive to the public, as a rule, so have given our chief attention to them.

"No! I cannot say that we have any one method of training, nor yet any sure one. We usually try any proposed new trick for a month. If by that time we have made no headway, we give it up, or at least lay it aside for a while. We are careful never to tire the dogs and thus disgust them with any trick.

"When the trick is learned they are to be fairly well relied upon. A dog rarely refuses a trick unless he is sick, or exceptional weather, like this, for instance, has made him fretful; then we make allowances.

In reply to a further question, Professor Norris good-naturedly chatted on.

"We have about seventy animals in the troop," he said. "We like to keep the number up, as there is always one or more off duty. Just now we have a monkey and dog on the sick list, while this pony"—he laid his hand on a pretty little sorrel, which an attendant was leading—"has gone lame this afternoon. No, the life is not hard, but accidents will happen. Trick dogs may be counted on for ten years of public life. We have one or two now in our troop over twelve years, and there is no sign of falter in them yet. We usually begin their training at two years. We travel winter and summer, with perhaps two months off. But this coming winter, I think we shall be able to lay up for the entire winter, and get up some new tricks. How do we invent tricks? Oh, I hardly

know; if we find a dog teachable, we just lead him on from one thing to another.

"Now, the most difficult trick of the afternoon," continued the young professor, "was the series of somersaults turned by that little poodle. Yes, and that erect jumping on the hind legs. Dogs are naturally averse to these motions, and it is difficult to teach them. The pony that descends the ladder backward,—a most difficult trick also,—is a pure white Shetland, the only one we know of. We would pay a good price for a mate if we could find one. They are very rare."



"The clown dogs? Yes, they require most patient and careful training; since they have to be taught to act simply at certain times, and must simply watch, rather than obey the word of command. We require dogs of unusual intelligence for clowns.

"It is a mistake to imagine that thoroughbred dogs are the best tricksters. We find the ordinary mongrel about the best. The Esquimaux and Russian poodle varieties are very intelligent; and the latter are pretty animals, which is also an advantage. We breed our dogs, and certainly the offspring of a trick dog starts with a higher degree of intelligence in that direction than one new to the business. We find that they are more easily taught, and do better than others. It is a matter of heredity.

"This," pointing to a St. Bernard, "promises to be a valuable fellow; he is only seventeen months old and already weighs two hundred pounds.

We have not begun his training yet. He will be valuable for the heavy work in the ring. This Portuguese cattle dog is also valuable.

"What are the needful qualifications for a trick trainer and manager of such a show? Well, I hardly know," said the professor, smiling. "Patience of course and tenacity of purpose; good judgment also, and general executive ability; pretty much the same qualities that go to make a man successful in any other business.

"To the audience, the work in the ring may seem easy; but it is really very exhausting. The dogs are susceptible and the mood I am in influences them. I always like to go into the ring feeling fresh and bright; because I know the animals will respond more readily, and all their tricks are performed with a zest which 'takes.' Nothing has worse effect upon an audience than to have friction between trainer and animal. Women and children especially dislike to see the slightest suggestion of force or severity exhibited; so that I really prefer missing a trick in the ring to compelling a dog to perform it by any show of severity.

"When we have two performances per day, my brother and I conduct them alternately, so that neither of us have to appear in the ring, both at matinee and evening. But we like the work—which means much. A good show pays, but it must be good, or the public soon discover it, concluded the Professor.

