

When Hannibal Finished the Bridge.

By H. I. Cleveland, in Youth's Companion.

Two things had come to a halt at the lower ford of the Rio del Norte—the construction of a traffic bridge and the "Imperial Americana Circus and Menagerie."

Waite, chief engineer of construction on the bridge, sat on the east bank of the river, looking moodily across the stream.

Suddenly his eyes snapped and his face glowed with color. On a path below him, which led to a pool where the nearby cattle were watered, there moved majestically a huge elephant. The animal was accompanied by an East Indian and a white boy, the latter possibly seventeen years of age.

In the path of the elephant was a heavy beam carelessly let slip from an upper bank by the peon laborers. The animal might have stepped over the obstruction, but the boy called:

"Up, Hannibal, up!"

Obediently lowering his head, Hannibal, the chief asset of the Imperial Americana Circus, slipped his brass-mounted tusks under the beam, poised the weight as if it were a feather, and then laid it to one side. This was done with such ease as to suggest an idea to Waite's mind. He ran down to the pool, where Hannibal was delightedly laving himself.

"Hey, boy, hey!" he called.

The boy looked up, and quietly replied:

"My name is Tom—Tom Ord."

Waite saw an expression of suffering in the lad's eyes, and said:

"I beg your pardon. I just had an idea; saw your elephant do a mighty clever thing with that beam. My name's Waite. I know you're with the circus at El Santo. Want to sell the beast?"

"We're broke, hungry and sick," answered Tom. "There's a chance the boss might sell you Hannibal."

"We air seek, varry seek," put in the East Indian.

Hannibal playfully squirted a torrent of water into the air. He had not enjoyed such a plunge in months. Occasionally he would stop in his play to wink solemnly at his two guardians.

Waite had little difficulty in drawing out their simple story.

The American enterprise had invaded Mexico by way of Laredo, knowing little as to the simplicity and small means of the native patrons it sought. At El Santo, a small village near the new bridge, the proprietor's resources gave out. The acrobats, unaccustomed to semitropical ways of living, were ill. The so-called menagerie, consisting—besides the venerable Asiatic elephant Hannibal—of a boa-constrictor, a few monkeys and a dozen trick and draft horses, was on the verge of starvation.

Tom Ord and Mahama, the East Indian, were in charge of Hannibal and all his performances. Tom, who had joined the circus in Kansas through love of adventure, was painfully gaining the knowledge that back of tinsel and glitter is always a reality of hard, grinding facts. His one joy on the dreary southward journey had been Hannibal, as smart and amiable a veteran of the ring as ever lived.

"See here!" exclaimed Waite. "You say that Hannibal will obey orders and is good-tempered. I'm tied up on this bridge work, have a heap of big timber to move right away, can't have a walking crane here for a month, and I can't wait."

"Now—" He stopped and began to figure busily with his pencil. "Yes, that's all right. My camp's up on the high land, and there's plenty of room in it for Hannibal and you and your friend from India. If you two can make him move timbers as he did that beam, I'll buy him outright,—that's what I was figuring about,—and put you and him to work to-morrow morning—fair wages, American grub and medicine, square deal all round. How does that strike you? Will your boss sell? Get that bully boy," nodding at happy Hannibal, "and let's find out."

With Waite thought was comrade of action, and two hours later Hannibal, Tom and Mahama passed under his control, while the wreck of the Imperial Americana Circus and Menagerie, provided with needed money, moved for the nearest railway connections with the United States.

The Del Norte is not an imposing

stream, but its bottoms are treacherous and the flood-times wild. The Salado, Salinas and San Juan have majesty in their flow through beautiful Nuevo Leon, but not the trickiness, the unexpected happenings of the humbler Del Norte. Hence there were many arguments at Monterey between dark-skinned Mexican planters and lanky, gray-eyed American contractors and builders, ending in the order for a broad and durable bridge at the lower ford.

Waite, four years graduated from college and two years a resident of Mexico, was given charge of the construction work. His skin had the pink of youth, and his eyes looked straight at obstacles. Sometimes when he was very tired,—when the sleeping peace and seeming indifference of this new-old land rose as if to grapple him at the throat, he would turn to a picture of his mother he carried in a worn and scarred water-proof case.

Waite sank caissons of steel filled with concrete through the quicksands and shifting silts of the Del Norte. Then he was ready for his superstructure, part wood and part steel. The parts of this were on hand, but not a walking crane to move them. That very day a rursale had brought him word from Monterey that the crane could not reach him for a month yet. The flood period was dangerously near, and to wait thirty days for a crane meant peril. He had derricks, but a crane would save much in time and labor.

The terror of the native Mexican workmen the morning following Hannibal's arrival was pitiful to behold. They fled in every direction. Manuel, their foreman, approached Waite, his teeth chattering.

"Senor," he gasped, making effort to use his best English, "dis debbil, dis dis—what shall I say—ees it to be wid us?"

"Manuel," replied Waite, "you and your men go to your regular work. You have the plans for the day. Hannibal is no devil; you'll see later he's a good angel. Let him alone; he'll not harm you."

Tremblingly and with many sighs the peons returned to their duties. As for Hannibal, his stomach full, his two beloved masters by his side, he rolled his small eyes over the busy scene and waited for orders.

They came fast in Waite's snappy way. To his great delight, he found that Mahama had done timber-work in Bombay with elephant teams, and knew just about what was expected of him.

Tom also grasped the situation quickly, and said to Waite:

"Every couple of hours I'll take Hannibal down to the pool and let him souse. An elephant can't work well when he's hot."

"Souse him all you want. He's a brick, and so are you. Yo, ho, we're going to finish that bridge!"

Over the Del Norte rang his shrill cry of joy. Its note of defiance to obstacles swept to the west bank and up into the Cordillera, where the puma and jaguar made their home. Small-shouldered, short-legged Mexican cattle and droves of mules on the rough uplands turned their heads to hear this challenge from the spirit of the New World.

As for Hannibal, Tom and Mahama, they bent to the great task before them. Cross-beams, stringers, uprights were scattered in every direction. The orders for Hannibal were to get them in place at the derricks, from which they could be readily advanced to the piers.

Tom shouted to him from one side, Mahama guiding from another, the animal lumbered to his duties with evident joy.

In his way he signified that he preferred this work to that of the circus. The sweep of fresh air was upon him, the water-pool was invitingly near, the incessant chatter of the jungle birds possibly brought back memories of his youth, when he had been free in the wastes of the Himalayan foot-hills. And some other recollection, something strangely disturbing, returned to him.

It was about noon of the first day's work that Hannibal, returning from the pool with Tom, suddenly stopped.

He jerked his massive head toward the line of mountains in the west, drew in a long whiff of air, waved his trunk fan-fashion, and softly whistled.

"What is it, old boy?" asked Tom.

Hannibal gave no heed. He was smelling the air driven in by an easy wind from the caves, ledges and forests on the mountainside. His little eyes had

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