Magazine Section

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For Young and Old

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Long Chances in the Animal Dealer's Game

By CHARLES MAYER

Charles Mayer, Who, When a Boy, Ran Away From Home to Join a Circus, Tells, in Seven Articles, of Thrilling Battles and Close Calls With Death Capturing Wild Animals for Menageries.

Illustrated by Will Crawford

FOURTH ARTICLE.

Elephants are easily trained and they once get the idea of what is required of them, they will do it over with little variation. They get certain kind of work and it usually becomes a habit with them. In fact, they can form habits more quickly than any other animals I have ever seen.

Circus horses are large lumber and elephants are used for rolling logs into position for the saws. Dealing with their heads, they run logs up two inclined skids to the platform. Two elephants do the work. A third elephant acts as a relief. The boss need not be an exceptionally intelligent animal, he is simply taught that the log must go up the skids in a certain way and that the pushers must be kept even. The trunk he carried a few links of the chain, which he tugs as a signal for one elephant falls behind this gives him a tap with the chain when the log is on the platform—the pushers turn and plod back to their places. The boss elephant is unimpressed, by his authority. The others show no resentment as he swings the chain on them. At the whistle blows, the elephants know that it is time to stop work and eat. It makes no difference if I have a log within a fraction of an inch of the platform—the boss halts his anchor chain and gets out of the way, and the pushers step to one side, letting the log crash down.

Then, without the least excitement, they turn for the sheds. Because they obey signals so implicitly, the engineer steps out, and, finding time comes, and looks up down the runway to see if the chain crew has a log on the platform before he pulls the lever.

The great weight and bulk of elephants sometimes make difficult the problem of handling and especially of working them. They are usually driven over the side of the ship in slings, but that method takes much time and labor, not to speak of very real trouble. I did not evolve a better one, however, until the refusal of the captain of one of the British India Steam Navigation company's ships to take a consignment of elephants for me put my ingenuity to the test.

I was under contract to send fifteen large elephants to Madras, and had arranged with the company's agent at Singapore for three ships and five each. The animals and the remainder of the Trengganu herds I was anxious to see them loaded, for I was still sick with the fever the doctors had told me that the best thing I could do was to get into the country and recuperate, and I delay in disposing of the animals was a great sacrifice of either time or health.

The first five elephants, together with attendants and food, were walked up the skids at Tanjong-Pagar, the docks at Singapore, to be put on board. At the last moment the chief officer came with the message that the captain refused to take them.

I went to the captain's cabin and found a stout, red-faced and apparently good-natured Englishman. He was just out of his bath, wearing pajamas and idling about in his shirt until the ship was ready to get under way. I thought it a good time to approach him, and I took care to be quite calm and cool about it, though I was raging inside.

I showed him my receipt and the bill of lading given me by the agent. I told him that the agent was not the owner of the ship; he didn't care a particular about the agent had made, long as he was captain, he'd run his ship and suit himself, and he should go to the devil, for all he cared. And, moreover, he'd not carry those elephants for anyone. I ended my position and told him that he would mean a great financial loss to me if I failed in my contract to deliver the elephants.

"Look here, Mayer," he said, "I've had elephants at Calcutta and I've had a lot of trouble with them. If I load these elephants, it means that I have to rig up extra gear, and I won't do it."

"Captain," I replied, "I'll load these elephants without using a foot of rope. I'll put them anywhere you say, and you won't have to rig up a bit of gear. And I'll unload them at Madras in the same way. Will you give me the word?"

"I don't think you can do it," he answered, "but I'm enough of a sportsman to give you a chance."

That was all I wanted. I got out before he could ask me how I was going to work, for I couldn't have told him.

The elephants were to go in the bow and they had to be taken there through a seven-foot passage from midships. The smallest of the elephants measured fully seven feet and the largest more than eight. I de-

At last we got the elephant into the passage. It was a tight fit.

cided that we might as well try the largest first, and I asked that the electric bulbs be removed from the ceiling.

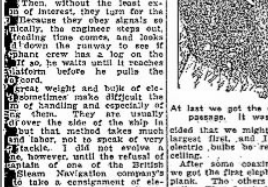
After some coaxing and prodding, we got the first elephant up the gangplank. The others followed obediently. Then I asked the chief officer to clear the cabins along the passage, for I was afraid that someone might open a door and frighten the elephant. A frightened, stampeded eight-foot elephant in a seven-foot passage would give Singapore enough excitement to last for a year. The chief officer sent the people from the cabins and locked the doors.

The elephant balked at sight of the passage. I was at his head, talking to him and coaxing him, and two attendants were behind, prodding. We made him kneel and then urged him forward. At last we got him into the passage. It was a tight fit. His sides scraped the walls. I paused at the thought of what would happen if he suddenly became afraid. He would try to stand up, of course, and then, wedged in, he would begin to kick and plunge his way out; and the other four, who were close behind him, would do the same. "And then, good-bye, steamship," I said to myself. Slowly we made our way forward, with the five elephants balking along on their knees. I stayed close to the head of the first, talking to him and petting him. Finally we came to the end of the passage, and I drew the first deep breath in fifteen minutes. I took the venture simply as a matter of course, and I didn't say anything to the captain or anyone else of what my emotions had been in that passage; but all packed at no need of words.

I washed and went to the captain's cabin for breakfast, while the men secured the elephants in their quarters.

The captain said, "Mayer, that was the quickest and slickest thing I've ever seen, but what am I going to do with those animals at Madras?"

I told him that there were no docks at Madras and that all freight was unloaded into lighters. So I answered, "My men will attend to them."



He leaped like a flash of lightning. * * * The Chinese saw him coming and s

When the ship reached Madras, the attendants opened the doors and simply hushed the elephants overboard. They hit the water with a great splash and a roar and came up blowing like whales. They were swimming, of course, for elephants swim better than any other land animals I have ever seen. The attendants approached them in rowboats, and jumping on their backs, rode them to shore. By the time they reached land they had completely recovered from the excitement of falling overboard.

The captain returned to Singapore, enthusiastic over this new way of handling elephants, and I had the pleasure of shipping my last consignment to Madras on the ship. He advised me never to take an agent's word for what the captain of a ship will or will not do, and, after that experience, I always saw the captain first. I never spent second.

By the time I had disposed of the last of the elephants, I was so sick with the fever that I could not leave my bed. I was dangerously ill and I began to realize that I should be lucky if I escaped with my life.

Mr. Lambert, who had been my friend ever since I landed at Singapore in search of Anderson, secured a cabin passage for me on a steamer bound for Europe and took charge of the offices of my animal house in Orchard road. When it was time to go on board the steamer, my Chinese cook boy carried me. He is the only Chinese I have ever seen shed a few tears and, as his cheeks as he carried me up the gangplank, and to my cabin, he thought that he should never see me again. Neither thought to myself, but I figured that if I died I'd drop one into the Red sea, which is the last resting place of so many people who have stayed too long in the tropics, I should recover and live to return.

All and the cooks waited faithfully for me during the next year, while I traveled in Europe and Africa, recuperating and gathering new commissions for animals. And, when I came back, they were on the dock to welcome me.

Though my health was much improved by the voyage, I did not feel able to resume the active business of collecting, and so I concentrated my efforts upon my animal house and made it the largest place of its kind. I had a menagerie of the handsomest, best-housed stiff, who had a large number of native collectors working for them and much of the trading fell upon me, and I had no difficulty in disposing of all the animals shipped to me from the jungles by our various agents. My largest market was Australia, where I sent a shipment of horses and Singapore without any of the risk of trade-jealousies. I made the acquaintance of Hagenbeck of Germany and Cross of England, and, because of my Singapore duty, I sent comparatively few of my animals to the United States.

Mr. Anderson, who was European adviser to the king of Siam and who had been created a Siamese nobleman, sent for me and offered me a commission that kept me busy for the rest of my stay in the East. The king of Siam was in the habit of making presents of white elephants to foreign rulers. It became my work to select the animals and supervise all details of shipment. I was also interested in the king's hobby hunts, especially for tuskers to be used in the teak forests. The driving of these creatures into the stockade, and on elephants, instead of on foot, as in Trengganu, is a spectacle to see. I, as he and condition, and so I did not take an active part in the drive.

The voyage between Bangkok and Singapore I stopped off many times at Trengganu, who was the principal and steady stream of animals to me at Singapore. I was known to the native throughout the peninsula as Tuan Gajah—Mr. Elephant—and I was amused to find myself the hero of my self-made legend. My fame grew with my success. I became my own agent and I had been created a Siamese nobleman. I was the biggest man in the animal business, and I had $2500 clear profit in my pocket.

At my animal house I found a letter from Mr. La Seuf, the director of the Perth zoological gardens, saying that he was anxious to get a few rare animals and asking what I could do for him. I did not want to go into the animal business again, but I was afraid of a return of the fever; but I replied that I would see what could be done, and I sent out word to all my native agents. Both Jir, Au Seut and his father, who was director of the gardens at Melbourne, were great friends of mine, and their gardens had been my best market for animals. Quite naturally, I wanted to do everything I could to help them, and so when word came from an agent in Trengganu that some rhinoceroses had been located there, I packed up my kit and started for Trengganu.

At Trengganu the sultan welcomed me, and I spent several days with him, telling him what was happening in the world and discussing his problems. His problems were largely financial. He never some money and knowing that he had something in the treasury, I asked why he did not pay his debts.

He thought for a time and then replied that, when he died, if he had those people, they will forget about the sultan of Trengganu. If I don't pay them, they will never forget me."

The conversation turned to the subject of prisoners, and on my way to the palace I had passed the cages where the prisoners were kept. Many of them were starving to death, for, unless their friends or relatives cared for them, they got no food.

"Why don't you feed them?" I asked.

"Why should I?" he replied. "If I feed them, my whole country will want to go to jail."

Finally, after he had satisfied his craving for excitement, he gave me my official permit to go into the interior and to force labor. I started out for the upper end of his state, bordering on Lower Siam. At the mouth of the River Dime, I found that my agent va gathered a crew of ten men and went up the river as far as we could. When the weeds became so thick that we could not force the boats through, we took to the jungle and began cutting our way to the mud puddle where the rhinoceroses came to wallow.

We took great precautions in approaching the puddle, for once a rhinoceros gets the scent of a hunter, he is off through the jungle as fast as he can go. The hunter, who spots his animal only about, has an easy time of it but the collector, who must capture, has a more difficult job. He must work and build his trap at the very spot frequented by the animal and he must do so without arousing suspicion. A rhinoceros seldom charges when he sees a man, and his charge is not dangerous, for he is shortsighted and cannot gauge his direction accurately. Most often, he runs, and it is almost impossible, even when the collector can find him again, to charge the brute him back to the trap.

No animals were at the puddle when we arrived, and I had a good opportunity to examine the location. Then we withdrew and I told them how we should go about making the capture. We made camp, building platforms between the trees for living quarters, and I detailed some of the men to the ground in a circle, each measured twenty by fifteen feet, with meshes ten inches square. I felt that we had a good chance of getting a rhinoceros in a net trap and should save several months of labor if that we could do so. When the net was ready we put it in position at a likely looking supposed, on the ground, where the animal would step into it. And half suspended, so that he would catch it with his head and bring it down about him.

Then we turned our attention to making pits. As I have explained before, a heavy animal is prone to injure himself in falling into a square pit, such as the natives generally dug, and, of course, an injured animal would have been of no use to me. Hence the four pits that we dug were made wedge-shaped, instead of square. They were six feet wide at the top and tapered to four feet at the bottom; they were eight feet deep and ten feet long, with the approach tapered down so that there would be the least possible chance that the beast would injure himself in falling.

Over the tops of the pits we built platforms of bamboo poles, and covered them with rugs and leaves, taking care to leave no traces of our work. We then began a drive that took up a whole day of hard labor and we were constantly on the alert for fear one of the natives might surprise us. Lookouts were already stationed to catch the sounds of the rhinoceros as they crashed through the jungle, coming to their bath.

One morning a native came running with the news that a rhinoceros was trapped. We gathered our arms and hurried off to the puddle. There, grunting and fighting, lay a two-ton rhinoceros, buried in sand and helpless. When he saw us he became furious, squirming in the pit and the surrounding with his feet and grunting.

I divided my crew, putting half at building a cage of heavy timbers and the others at digging away the ground in front of the beast. By the time the cage was put together and bound securely with rattan, we had an incline running down to the pit, with two feet of earth walling the rhinoceros in. Then we placed sides on the incline and let the cage slide down. A native, who

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Since I didn't want him to change his mind, I paid him for one month, and he signed a receipt, which I wrote in my pith helmet.