

**Horse-taming ... as practised by the Red Indians of North America /
[Alexander John Ellis].**

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HORSE - TAMING:

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION, IN TWO RECENT EXPERIMENTS MADE
IN ENGLAND, OF THE EXPEDITIOUS METHOD OF TAMING HORSES, AS PRACTISED
BY THE RED INDIANS OF NORTH AMERICA;

COMMUNICATED BY

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HORSE-TAMING:

THE ART OF TAMEING THE HORSE
BY J. H. B. HARRIS
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. H. B. HARRIS
AND A. H. HARRIS



HORSE - TAMING, &c.

THE object of the following pages is two-fold; first, to extract the account of the North American Indian method of Horse-taming, as given by Mr. Catlin, in his new work, entitled, "Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians, by Geo. Catlin; written during eight years travel amongst the wildest tribes of Indians in North America, in 1832, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, and 39. In 2 vols., with 400 illustrations, carefully engraved from his original drawings. London: Published by the Author, at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly. 1841. Large 8vo.," and to detail certain experiments which have been tried by the direction and in the presence of the Communicator; and, second, to urge gentlemen, farmers, stable-keepers, horse-trainers, horse-breakers, and all others who may be interested in the taming of horses, to try for themselves experiments similar to those here detailed, experiments which are exceedingly easy of trial, and will be found exceedingly important in result.

The first extract from Mr. Catlin's work relates to buffaloes, but as the method employed for horses is in its *essential* parts precisely the same as that for buffaloes, the latter has been prefixed by way of introduction.

The following passage occurs in Vol. 1, pp. 255, 6 :—

"In pursuing a large herd of buffaloes at the season when their calves are but a few weeks old, I have often been exceedingly amused with the curious manœuvres of these shy little things. Amidst the thundering confusion of a throng of several hundreds or several thousands of these animals, there will be many of the calves that lose sight of their dams, and being left behind by the throng and the swift-passing hunters, they endeavour to secrete themselves: when they are exceedingly put to it, on a level prairie, where nought can be seen but the short grass, eight inches in height, save an occasional bunch of wild sage, a few inches higher, to which the poor affrighted things will run, and, dropping on their knees, will push their noses under it, and into the grass, where they will stand for hours with their eyes shut, ima-

gining themselves securely hid, whilst they are standing quite straight upon their hind feet, and can easily be seen at several miles' distance. It is a familiar amusement for us accustomed to these scenes, to retreat back over the ground where we have just escorted the herd, and approach these little trembling things, which stubbornly maintain their positions with their noses pushed under the grass, and their eyes strained upon us as we dismount from our horses, and are peeping around them. From this fixed position they are sure not to move, until hands are laid upon them, and then for the shins of a novice we can extend our sympathy; or if he can preserve the skin on his bones from the furious buttings of its head, we know how to congratulate him on his signal success and good luck. In these desperate struggles for a moment, the little thing is conquered, and makes no further resistance. And I have often, in concurrence with a well-known custom of the country, held my hand over the eyes of the calf, and breathed a few strong breaths into its nostrils; after which I have, with my hunting companions, rode several miles into our encampment, with the little prisoner busily following the heels of my horse the whole way, as closely and affectionately as its instinct would attach it to the company of its dam.

"This is one of the most extraordinary things that I have met with in the habits of this wild country; and, although I had often heard of it, and felt unable exactly to believe it, I am now willing to bear testimony to the fact, from the numerous instances which I have witnessed since I came into the country. During the time that I resided at this post, in the spring of the year, on my way up the river, I assisted (in numerous hunts of the buffalo, with the Fur Company's men,) in bringing in, in the above manner, several of these little prisoners, which sometimes follow for five or six miles close to our horses' heels, and even into the Fur Company's fort, and into the stable where our horses were led. In this way, before I left for the head waters of the Missouri, I think we had collected about a dozen, which Mr. Laidlaw was successfully raising with the aid of a good milch cow, and which were to be committed to the care of M. Chouteau, to be transported by the return of the steamer to his extensive plantations in the vicinity of St. Louis. The fate of these poor little prisoners, I was informed on my return to St. Louis, a year afterwards, was very disastrous. The steamer having a distance of 1,600 miles to perform, and being a week or two on sand bars, in a country where milk could not be procured, they all perished but one, which is now flourishing in the extensive fields of this gentleman."

The Communicator has had no opportunity of verifying the above statement, but from the result of his experiments on horses, he feels no doubt of its truth, and he recommends it to the serious consideration of all persons who are engaged in the very troublesome duty of *driving calves* to or from market, or to the slaughter-house. What labour might be saved by a minute's breathing time!

The following extracts refer immediately to horse-taming. They are taken from vol. 2, pp. 58-60 :—

“The usual mode of taking the wild horses is by throwing the *laso*, whilst pursuing them at full speed, and dropping a noose over their necks, by which their speed is soon checked, and they are ‘choked down.’ The *laso* is a thong of raw hide, some 10 or 15 yards in length, twisted or braided, with a noose fixed at the end of it, which, when the coil of the *laso* is thrown out, drops with great certainty over the neck of the animal, which is soon conquered.

“The Indian, when he starts for a wild horse, mounts one of the fleetest he can get, and coiling his *laso* on his arm, starts off under the ‘full whip,’ till he can enter the band, when he soon gets it over the neck of one of the number; when he instantly dismounts, leaving his own horse, and runs as fast as he can, letting the *laso* pass out gradually and carefully through his hands, till the horse falls for want of breath, and lies helpless on the ground; at which time the Indian advances slowly towards the horse’s head, keeping the *laso* tight upon its neck, until he fastens a pair of hobbles on the animal’s two fore feet, and also loosens the *laso* (giving the horse chance to breathe), and gives it a noose round the under jaw, by which he gets great power over the affrighted animal, which is rearing and plunging when it gets breath; and by which, as he advances, hand over hand, towards the horse’s nose, he is able to hold it down, and prevent it from throwing itself over on its back, at the hazard of its limbs. By this means he gradually advances, until he is able to place his hand on the animal’s nose and over its eyes, and at length to breathe in its nostrils, when it soon becomes docile and conquered; so that he has little else to do than to remove the hobbles from its feet, and lead or ride it into camp.

“This ‘breaking down,’ or taming, however, is not without the most desperate trial on the part of the horse, which rears and plunges in every possible way to effect its escape, and it becomes covered with foam; and at last yields to the power of man, and becomes his willing slave for life. By this very rigid treatment the poor animal seems to be so completely conquered that it makes no further struggle for its freedom, but submits quietly ever after, and is led or rode away with very little difficulty. Great care is taken, however, in this and in subsequent treatment, not to subdue the spirit of the animal, which is carefully preserved and kept up, although they use them with great severity, being, generally speaking, cruel masters.

* * * * *

“When the bugle sounded for a halt, and all were dismounted, Beatte, and several others of the hunters, asked permission of Colonel Dodge to pursue a drove of horses, which were then in sight, at a distance of a mile or more from us. The permission was given and they started off, and by following a ravine, approached near to the unsuspecting animals, when they broke upon them and pursued them for several miles in full view of the regiment. Several of us had good

glasses with which we could plainly see every movement, and every manœuvre. After a race of two or three miles, Beatte was seen with his wild horse down, and the band and the hunters rapidly leaving him.

“Seeing him in this condition, I galloped off to him, as rapidly as possible, and had the satisfaction of seeing the whole operation of ‘breaking down,’ and bringing in the wild animal. * * *

When he had conquered the horse in this way, his brother, who was one of the unsuccessful ones in the chase, came riding back, and leading up the horse of Beatte, which he had left behind, and after staying with us a few minutes, assisted Beatte in leading his conquered wild horse towards the regiment, where it was satisfactorily examined and commented on, as it was trembling and covered with white foam, until the bugle sounded for marching, when all mounted; and with the rest, Beatte, astride of his wild horse, which had a buffalo skin girted on its back, and a halter, with a cruel noose around the under jaw. In this manner the command resumed its march, and Beatte astride of his wild horse, on which he rode quietly and without difficulty until night; the whole thing, the capture and breaking, all having been accomplished within the space of one hour,—our usual and daily halt at mid-day.”

These are the extraordinary statements of Mr. Catlin, and the Communicator is not aware that there is any reason to doubt his veracity. The fact he relates is in itself simple, and exceedingly easy to be verified. It is not however every one, into whose hands Mr. Catlin’s very interesting work may fall, who has either the power or the inclination to experiment for himself. And the Communicator himself, had he not been very favoured by circumstances, might have been one of those who are satisfied with being aware of the fact, and are contented to take it upon the authority of others. He, however, heartily recommends his readers to take every possible opportunity of testing Mr. Catlin’s account by their own experiments, which they will find no less interesting than useful. His readers have no occasion to hunt for subjects over the never-ending expanse of an American prairie. The experiment may be conveniently and easily tried in the stable, and any young foal will furnish an appropriate subject.

The following is a detail of the experiments witnessed and directed by the Communicator :—

During a visit in the North Riding of Yorkshire, the volumes of Mr. Catlin first fell under the Communicator’s observation, and among other passages those just quoted struck him forcibly. Although he scarcely hesitated to comprehend the circumstances there detailed, under a well-known, though much disputed class of phenomena, he was nevertheless, anxious to verify them by actual experiment before he attempted to theorize upon them. And he now prefers to give the naked facts to the public, and leave his readers to account for them after their own fashion. It so happened that while staying with his brother-in-law F— M—, of M—Park, the Communicator had the pleasure of meeting W— F— W—, of B—, a great amateur in all matters relating to

horses. In the course of conversation the Communicator mentioned what he had read about horse taming, and the detail seemed to amuse them, although they evidently discredited the fact. The Communicator begged them to put the matter to the test of experiment, and M—, who had in his stables a filly, not yet a year old, who had never been taken out since she had been removed from her dam, in the preceding November, agreed that he would try the experiment upon this filly. The Communicator made a note of the experiments on the very days on which they were tried, and he here gives the substance of what he then wrote down.

EXPERIMENT THE FIRST.

SUBJECT—*A Filly, not yet a year old, who had never been taken out of the stable since she had been removed from her dam in the preceding November.*

Friday, Feb. 11, 1842.—In the morning, W. and M. brought the filly from the stable to the front of M.'s house. The filly was quite wild, and on being first taken out of the stable she bolted, and dragged W., who only held her by a short halter, through a heap of manure. W. changed the halter for a long training halter, which gave him such power over her that he was easily able to bring the little scared thing up to the front of the house. Both M. and W. seemed much amused, and laughingly asked E. (the Communicator) to instruct them in Catlin's method of taming horses. E. did so, as well as he could, quoting only from memory. The experiment was not tried very satisfactorily, but rather under disadvantages. The filly was in the open air, many strangers about her, and both the experimenters were seeking rather amusement from the failure, than knowledge from the success of their experiment. W. kept hold of the halter, and M., with considerable difficulty, for the filly was very restive and frightened, managed to cover her eyes. He had been smoking just before, and the smoke must have had some effect on his breath. When he covered her eyes, he *blew* into the nostrils, but afterwards, at E.'s request, he *breathed*; and, as he immediately told E., directly that he began to breathe, the filly, who had very much resisted having her eyes covered and had been very restive, "*stood perfectly still and trembled.*" From that time she became very tractable. W. also breathed into her nostrils, and she evidently enjoyed it, and kept putting up her nose to receive the breath. She was exceedingly tractable and well behaved, and very loth to start, however much provoked. The waving of a red handkerchief, and the presenting of a hat to her eyes, while the presenter made a noise inside it, hardly seemed to startle her at all.

Saturday, Feb. 12, 1842. This morning the filly was again led out to shew its behaviour, which was so good as to call forth both astonishment and praise. It was exceedingly tractable, and followed W. about

with a loose halter. Attempts were made to frighten it. M. put on a long scarlet Italian cap, and E. flapped a large Spanish cloak during a violent wind before its eyes, and any well broken-in horse would have started much more than did this yearling.

EXPERIMENT THE SECOND.

SUBJECT—*A Filly, three years old, coming four, and very obstinate ; quite unbroken-in.*

Saturday, Feb. 12, 1842.—While the last experiments were being tried on the yearling, W. espied B——, a farmer and tenant of M——, with several men, at the distance of some fields, trying, most ineffectually, on the old system, to break-in a horse. W. proposed to go down and show him what effect had been produced on the yearling. The rest agreed, and W., M., and E. proceeded towards B., W. leading the yearling. On their way they had to lead her over a brook, which she passed after a little persuasion, *without force*. One of the fields through which she had to pass contained four horses, three of which trotted up and surrounded her, but she did not become in the least degree restive, or desirous of getting loose. When the party arrived at the spot, they found that B. and his men had tied their filly short up to a tree in the corner of a field, one side of which was walled, and the other hedged in. W. now delivered the yearling up to M., and proposed to B. to tame his horse after the new method, or (to use his own phrase) to “puff” it. B., who was aware of the character of his horse, anxiously warned W. not to approach it, cautioning him especially against the fore feet, asserting that the horse would rear and strike him with the fore feet, as it had “lamed” his own (B.’s) thigh just before they had come up. W., therefore, proceeded very cautiously. He climbed the wall, and came at the horse through the tree, to the trunk of which he clung for some time, that he might secure a retreat in case of need. Immediately upon his touching the halter, the horse pranced about, and finally pulled away with a dogged and stubborn expression, which seemed to bid W. defiance. Taking advantage of this, W. leaned over as far as he could, clinging all the time to the tree with his right hand, and succeeded in breathing into one nostril, without, however, being able to blind the eyes. From that moment all became easy. W., who is very skilful in the management of a horse, coaxed it, and rubbed its face, and breathed from time to time into the nostrils, while the horse offered no resistance. In about ten minutes, W. declared his conviction that the horse was subdued ; and he then unfastened it, and to the great and evident astonishment of B., (who had been trying all the morning in vain to gain a mastery over it), led it quietly away with a loose halter. Stopping in the middle of the field, with no one else near, W. quietly walked up to the horse, placed his arm over one eye and his hand over the other, and breathed into the nostrils. It was

pleasing to observe how agreeable this operation appeared to the horse, who put up its nose continually to receive the "puff." In this manner W. led the horse through all the fields, in one of which were the four horses already mentioned, who had formerly been the companions of the one just tamed, and who surrounded it, without, however, making it in the least degree restive. At length W. and the horse reached the stable yard, where they were joined by C— W— C— C—, of S— Hall, and J— B—, son of B—, the farmer. In the presence of these, M., and E., W. first examined the fore feet, and then the hind feet of the horse, who offered no resistance, but while W. was examining the hind feet, leant its neck round, and kept nosing W.'s back. He next buckled on a surcingle, and then a saddle, and finally bitted the horse with a rope. During the whole of these operations, the horse did not offer the slightest resistance, nor did it flinch in the least degree. All who witnessed the transaction were astonished at the result obtained. The Communicator regrets only that he is not at liberty to publish the names at length. This experiment of biting was the last that W. tried, since the nature of the country about M— Park did not admit of riding's being tried with any prospect of safety. The whole experiment lasted about an hour. It should be mentioned that when J— B—, to whom W. delivered up the horse, attempted to lead it away, it resisted; whereupon E. recommended J. B. to breathe into its nostrils. He did so, and the horse followed him easily. The next day, B., who is severe and obstinate, began at this horse in the old method, and belaboured it dreadfully, whereupon the horse very sensibly broke away. This result is important, since it shews that the spirit is subdued, not broken.

These are all the experiments which the Communicator has as yet had the opportunity of either witnessing or hearing the results of, but they are to him perfectly satisfactory; the more so, that Mr. W., who made the experiments, was himself perfectly ignorant of any process of the kind, until informed of it at the actual time of making the experiment. It may be considered over hasty to publish these experiments in their present crude state, but the Communicator does so with a view to investigation. He will have no opportunity himself of making any experiments, as he is unacquainted with the treatment of horses, and neither owns any, nor is likely to be thrown in the way of any unbroken colts. But the experiment is easy for any horse owner, and would be best made in the stable, where the horse might easily be haltered down so as to offer no resistance. The method would, no doubt, be found efficacious for the subjugation and taming of *vicious* horses. The readers will, of course, have heard of the celebrated Irish Horse-charmers. They never would communicate the secret, nor allow any one to be with them while they were in the stable taming the horse. It is agreed, however, that they approached the head. The Communicator feels sure that the method they employed was analogous to that contained in these pages. Persons have paid high prices for having

their horses charmed; they have now an opportunity of charming horses themselves, at a very small expense of time and labour. Half an hour will suffice to subdue the most fiery steed—the wild horse of the prairies of North America.

The Communicator has no object but that of benefitting the public in the above communication. The method is not his own, nor has he the merit of having first published it; but he thinks that he is the first who has caused the experiment to be made in England, and the entire success of that experiment induces him to make the present communication, in the hope that he may benefit not only his countrymen by the publication of a simple, easy, and rapid method of performing what was formerly a long, tedious, and difficult process, but also the "pau beasties" themselves, by saving them from the pains and tortures of what is very aptly termed "*breaking-in*." Mr. Catlin, indeed, speaks of the horse's struggles' being severe, but they were the struggles of a wild horse, just caught on a prairie, and not of the domestic animal quietly haltered in a stable. The process as now presented is one of great humanity to the horse, as well as ease and economy to the horse owner. The only objections to it, are its novelty and simplicity. Those who have strength of mind to act for themselves, and not to dispise any means, however simple, or apparently childish, will have cause to rejoice over the great results at which they will arrive. But the great watchword which the Communicator would impress upon his readers, is: "Experiment!"

Magna est veritas et prævalebit.

A. J. E.

THE END.