

## **A Parrot That Had Been Trained to Fire a Cannon**

By Sir Samuel W. Baker

There are no people who surpass the natives of India in the training of elephants or other wild animals. For many ages the custom has prevailed among the native princes of that country of educating not only the elephant and the dog, but the leopard and the falcon to assist them in the chase.

The Gaekwar of Baroda, during my sojourn in his State, most kindly furnished me with opportunities of witnessing the excellent training of his falcons, hunting leopards, or cheetahs, and other animals.

We were also allowed to inspect the immense collection of jewels belonging to the Gaekwar. These were in such numbers and variety that I quite lost my respect for diamonds and rubies, although one of the former had actually been purchased for \$450,000.

The gold and silver batteries of field-guns were also exhibited. There are only four of these cannon, two of which are solid gold four-pounders, fitted with an internal tube of steel. The carriages are plated with gold, and the harness for the team of oxen is heavily ornamented with the same precious metal. Gold horns are fitted upon those of the oxen employed, and these animals are selected for their immense size and general perfection of appearance.

The silver guns, carriages, limbers, harness, etc., were precisely similar.

The most interesting artilleryman in his Highness's service was a small green parrot. This bird was one of many which had been trained to the various exercises of a field-gun, and it was exhibited by its native tutor in our presence.

A large table was placed in the arena where rhinoceros, buff aloes, and rams had been recently struggling for victory in their various duels, and a far more entertaining exhibition was exchanged for the savage conflicts.... Upon this table stood a model brass cannon about eight inches in length of barrel, and a calibre equal to a No. 12 smooth-bore gun. The rammer and sponger lay by the side of the small field-piece.

About a dozen green parrots were spectators, who were allowed to remain on perches, while the best-trained gunner was to perform in public before at least three thousand spectators, the Gaekwar, and his ministers, and friends, including ourselves, being seated in a raised structure similar to the grand stand of an English racecourse, which commanded the entire arena, the parrots being immediately beneath.

The gunner was placed upon the table, and at once took its stand by the gun, and, in an attitude of attention, waited for orders from its native master.

The word of command was given, and the parrot instantly seized the sponger in its beak, and inserting it within the muzzle without the slightest difficulty, vigorously moved it backwards and forwards, and then replaced it in its former position.

The order was now given "to load." A cartridge was lying on the table, which the bird

immediately took within its beak, and dexterously inserted in the muzzle; it then seized the rammer, and, with great determination of purpose and force, rammed the cartridge completely home, giving it several sharp taps when at the breech. The parrot replaced the rammer by the side of the sponger, and waited for further orders, standing erect close to the rear of the gun.

The trainer poured a pinch of priming powder upon the touch-hole, and lighted a small port-fire; this he gave to the parrot, which received it in its beak at a right angle, and then stood by its gun, waiting for the word.

"Fire!" ... At that instant the parrot applied the match, and the report of the cannon was so loud that most people started at the sound; but the pretty green gunner never flinched—the parrot stood by its gun quite unmoved. The trainer took the port-fire, which it had never dropped from its beak, and gave an order to sponge the gun, which was immediately executed, the bird appearing to be quite delighted at its success.

Source:

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