

# LIFE AT THE ZOO

*NOTES AND TRADITIONS  
OF THE REGENT'S PARK GARDENS*

BY  
C. J. CORNISH

*With Illustrations  
from Photographs by GAMBIER BOLTON, F.Z.S.  
and from Japanese Drawings*

Fourth Edition



LONDON  
SEELEY AND CO. LIMITED  
ESSEX STREET, STRAND  
1896

## ‘JAMRACH’S’

“JAMRACH’S,” the ancient and original centre of the wild-beast trade in London, lies in what is now called St. George Street, but was until late years known as Ratcliffe Highway, not many minutes’ walk beyond the Tower. It existed when the King’s lions were kept in the Tower itself, and was established thirty years before Sir Stamford Raffles conceived the notion of the Zoological Society. The shop itself is almost the oldest building in the street, far older than the docks and their lofty warehouses opposite, and dating back as far as some of the later work in the Tower itself. The main bulk of the traffic from the docks which line the river for miles below rolls past its doors, which open to receive the ship-captains’ ventures of birds and wild beasts, armour and “curios,” idols and fetishes, mummy and Dyak skulls, weapons and snake-skins, and the odd zoological *bric-à-brac* which are part of the minor stock-in-trade of the “naturalist” salesman. The front of the shop in which these are displayed looks like an old picture. Time and varnish, with the dust

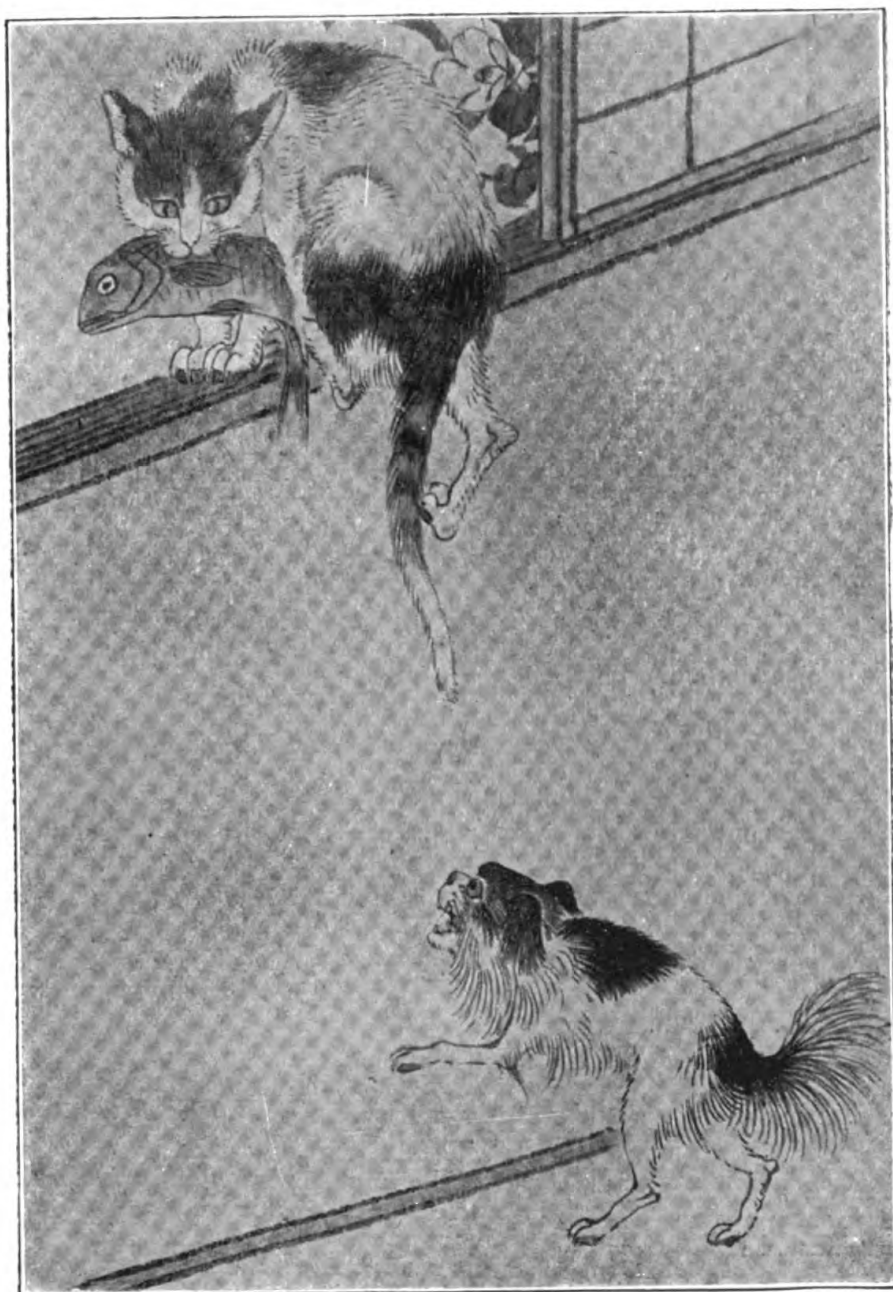
of the docks, have given a rich mellow colour both to frame and contents, in curious contrast to the brilliant hues of the parrots and lories which fill the cages in the adjacent window. In the little office at the back the steady traffic in wild beasts has gone on for a hundred years, between the Jamrachs and the ship-captains in the first instance, and later with the buyers employed by Zoological Gardens and menageries. Frank Buckland, Van Amburgh, and Mr. Bartlett, and most of the great circus and menagerie proprietors, have sat in the old Windsor chairs, and discussed the merits of new purchases, or schemes for the capture of rare and valuable animals.

Few even of the most ancient business houses of that most picturesque and characteristic part of London, the City, and the eastern wards which cluster round the Tower, have retained their old form so entirely as this. Some of the old back parlours and lobbies are still provided with the racks of blunderbusses and bayonets, which the traditions of the Gordon Riots suggested as a terror to daylight robbers, and a guarantee of security to timid depositors. Others keep upon their walls the charters and firmans granted to adventurous merchants by sultans and chieftains whose territories are now well-regulated provinces of the British Empire. But the trade of Jamrach's has this peculiarity, that it always deals in commodities which as a rule disappear before advancing civilization, and must be drawn from

beyond the ever-encroaching limits of common commerce; from the regions where the half-armed savage still robs the cubs of the Gætulian lioness, and barter his barbaric spoils for the wares of the civilized West. So in the old room at Jamrach's, the barbaric settings have gathered almost without intention round the spot which the *nexus* of commerce links with the rough outside edge of the white man's world, and the dusty shields and assegais, the bolas and bows, the matchlock and two-handed swords of the rhinoceros-hunting Arabs, are mingled with sharks' and crocodiles' skulls, scalps and tomahawks, wampum and Indian relics, and whatever in the unnumbered lumber of the world of savage sport and warfare corresponds to the tamer accessories of the "gun-room" in our English country houses. The place of the favourite dog before the fire, to continue the simile, is of course taken by some foreign pet which is the favourite of the moment. At the time of the writer's first visit to this naturalist's sanctum the goddess of the hearth was a lovely little Japanese pug puppy. The little creature was covered with the long silky black and white hair which in the Japanese pug, like the Japanese bantam, takes the place of the shorter and less elegant covering of the Western breed. It was carefully clothed in a neatly-fitting flannel jacket, and apparently had all the fondness for English habits which distinguishes the cultivated classes of modern Japan. It sat up and begged, and wagged its tail like an educated little

British dog, and carefully measuring the appreciation and temper of its visitor, suddenly dropped ceremony and bounded into his lap. There, after an apologetic wriggle, it curled itself up, and its master discussed the present and future of the animal trade.

A great revival in this ancient industry has recently taken place, and at the time of the writer's visit Carl Hagenbeck, the largest owner of wild beasts in the world, and exhibitor of the model Zoological Gardens at the World's Fair, was making a rapid inspection of the stock of animals on view, in order to make purchases for his new gardens in New York. In most forms of live-stock buying, the necessary acquaintance with the points of two or three species is sufficiently difficult to master. In the present case it was necessary not only to judge the merits of the animal, but to identify the species with certainty. But once among the stalls and cages, the "deals" for a dozen different species were made in less time and with less discussion than a Berkshire farmer would feel due to the merits of a litter of pigs. The "stables," as the wild-beast store is called, lie away from the shop and the main street, up a narrow court, like those which run back from the north of Fleet Street. Up this passage every animal must be either driven or carried before it can be deposited in safe quarters in the store, and though its length and want of breadth lend themselves to blocking the escape of any creature which might succeed in breaking out, it must offer considerable difficulties to the transit of a large iron



JAPANESE PUG AND CAT. *From a Japanese Drawing*





cage, or of a refractory camel or elephant. The lower storey of the "stables" resembles a large, well-warmed London cow-house, with antelopes, deer, or kangaroos tethered to the walls and mangers, or stalled in loose-boxes, instead of Alderneys and shorthorns. An immense aoudad,<sup>1</sup> with wild yellow eyes, horns curving in an almost complete circle, and a thick shaggy beard continued into a fringe down its chest, and sweeping the ground between its feet, occupied the first loose-box. Most of the other pens were vacant, as a large shipment had left that day for the United States.

A steep flight of steps leads to the second and third storeys, in which the animals are stored, not for exhibition, but just as they have come from the ships in the docks close by. There are no fixed rows of cages for the carnivora, or wooden pens for the large birds and harmless quadrupeds, because the former are delivered in their sea-cages, and the latter have grown used to confinement, and are either tethered or confined by wattle hurdles in corners or against the walls. The gallery is warm and dark, an important element in the comfort of the nervous, night-feeding animals, and of the more savage *felidæ*, lighted only by one or two gas-jets, and redolent of sweet-scented clover-hay. The floor is encumbered with boxes of various dimensions, with all kinds of inmates, from squirrels and civet cats to pumas and panthers. The small size of the box or cage in which a large leopard or panther will live in fairly good health for several

<sup>1</sup> The Barbary sheep.



weeks makes their transport an easy matter. They curl up like a cat in a basket, and if kept quiet and in the dark, do not greatly suffer in condition. The semi-darkness, and the position of the boxes on the floor, make it difficult to see the full beauty of the prisoners within. Nor is it desirable to approach the roughly-constructed cages too closely. The animals at Jamrach's are not the half-domesticated creatures of the Lion House at the Zoo, but the wild and savage denizens of tropical jungles, captured but not yet cowed, or even reconciled to the proximity of man. As parts of the fronts as well as the sides and backs of the cages are boarded over, the visitor naturally seeks a view from a point somewhat close to the bars—an approach which is at once converted into a sudden movement in retreat, as the animal inside appears to *explode*. A crash of claws upon the bars, a sharp, throat-splitting blast of growls, and a glimpse of white teeth and yellow-green eyes in the darkness, is the instantaneous expression of the panther's dislike to intrusion. If the shutters are removed, and the light admitted, the beautiful creature shrinks slowly backward and downward, its soft and elastic body slowly contracting and flattening with the fluid suppleness of a python's folds. A pretty pair of young African cheetahs in another box spat and bared their teeth with a show of high resentment which would not have discredited wild beasts of a far larger growth, and maintained a bickering sputter of repugnance and hostility till the offending gaze

was withdrawn. Two large and richly-coloured Patagonian pumas, a pair of leopards, and several striped hyenas, and small jungle and civet cats occupied the same gallery. Of these, the pumas were perfectly tame, as safe to caress and as willing to be petted as a cat. They do not even catch the infection of ill-temper from other animals; and the writer observed a puma arching its back and rubbing its face against an attendant's hand, quite unmoved by the hostile growls of the leopard, its neighbour. These pumas had probably been domesticated for some time, and a certain proportion of the fiercer animals which arrive at the docks must have been in captivity for some time previous to shipment. Men who habitually deal with wild animals are quick to see the difference between the savage and the half-tamed beast. Van Amburgh, the celebrated lion-tamer, is said to have called at Jamrach's to purchase a leopard. He soon selected one from the boxes, and when asked how he would like it to be sent, produced a steel chain and collar from the pocket of his greatcoat. He then opened the box, dragged the leopard out, put on the collar, and hauled it down the passage and into a four-wheeled cab, in which he drove off to Astley's with his purchase. The strange medley of animal forms in the upper chambers, the gleam of green and yellow eyes in their dusky recesses, and the juxtaposition of creatures whose natural instinct is inveterately hostile, with others which are their common prey, give to the

chance menagerie at Jamrach's a character quite distinct from any exhibited collection. The creatures are there for sale, not for show, and meantime are kept as quiet and as close together as due attention to health permits. The leopards' room was shared by an African black-buck from the Cape, a black-tailed jackal, various kangaroos and wallabies, and a pair of demoiselle cranes. On another storey were a happy family of monkeys, lemurs, and Chinese dogs, a pair of cassowaries, a viscacha, foxes large and small, "native companion" cranes, a brown Tasmanian opossum, coatimundis, a beautifully-marked civet cat, and two small Siamese porcupines. This list, though apparently no bad nucleus for a Zoological Garden, is only a fraction of the number which is usually stored in the depôt by the docks. There is a sudden and unprecedented increase in the demand for wild animals at present, not only for the Continent, but for the United States. The stocks in most of the European Zoological Gardens have decreased of late—a shrinkage partly caused by the closure of the Soudan by the Dervishes. In America the popularity of the great menagerie at the World's Fair has created a sudden demand for wild animals of all kinds. Circuses and private menageries are competing with the Zoological Gardens and scientific societies for rare and interesting animals, and the demand for America is far greater than for the continent of Europe. After five or six years of neglect, there is such a "boom" in the wild-beast trade as is hardly

remembered. Until the expeditions which Hagenbeck and others have despatched into Central Africa, *vid* Berbera, and into Borneo and the West Coast of Africa, return, there is little to fall back upon but the average supply which arrives without system and in chance ships. A single purchase by an agent from the Philadelphia Zoological Gardens included a leopard, a hyena, a pair of cheetahs, a Bornean bear, antelopes, emus, and other birds. Other Zoological Gardens are being laid out and built in New York and the cities of the West; but it may be doubted whether, even from Jamrach's, the inhabitants will readily be found to occupy them.

The frailness of the cages in which many of the animals arrive from their sea voyage is matter for some surprise. They are nearly always wooden boxes hardly stronger than a sound packing-case, with a front of strong iron rails. The secret of their safe carriage lies in their own stupidity. Like a lobster in a pot, they always endeavour to escape from the front, springing towards the light, and it is precisely at this point that the strongest part of the case, the iron bars, blocks the way. When the last black leopard arrived at the Zoo, as a present from the Duke of Newcastle, who had purchased it at Singapore when on a tour round the world, it was soon shifted from its travelling cage into the fine new den it was to occupy in the Lion House. As it was known to be a violent and savage creature, an inner lining of steel netting about eight inches across the mesh had been fixed inside the

vertical bars. The leopard on being turned into the den at once made a violent spring towards the light, and pitching head-foremost against the netting screen, bulged it out to the exact contour of its face. It never seems to occur to these creatures that they could easily gnaw their way through the wooden sides of their temporary prisons and escape, like the hyena which recently maintained itself for a week in the hold of a large cargo steamer, and was kept in a good temper by joints of prime New Zealand mutton, until on the unloading of the vessel the hyena was captured in the congenial cavern in which it had taken up its residence.

The well-known escape of the tiger which the elder Mr. Jamrach recaptured in the street, was partly due to the weakness of a cage. An Indian tiger had been brought up from the docks, and was about to be transferred to a larger den in the "stables." This animal showed more judgment than most of its kind, for it used its back in the fashion of a lever, and burst the rear of the cage. It then trotted down the narrow passage, and into the main street, then known by its old name of Ratcliffe Highway. The only person who waited its approach was a little boy of eight years old, who had put out his hand to touch it. The tiger patted him with his paw, and of course the child fell on the pavement, though the blow was so gently given that the child was stunned but not injured. The tiger then picked him up by the loose part of his jacket, and was trotting off with him,



exactly like a cat carrying a mouse, when Mr. Jamrach the elder came running up in pursuit. He at once sprang on the tiger's back, and grasping its throat with both hands drove his thumbs into the soft part below the jaw. The tiger dropped the child, and Mr. Jamrach literally "drove it home" like some domestic animal, only with a crowbar instead of a stick.

The courage and readiness of Mr. Jamrach's attack can hardly be over-estimated. The creature was an absolutely new arrival, as to whose temper nothing but the worst could be imagined after so prompt an escape and the attack on the child. The native coolness and indifference to human powers of resistance of the tiger could hardly be better illustrated than by the unabashed impudence with which this tiger, after months of captivity by human beings, after being fed, moved hither and thither, lowered into ships and hoisted on to quays, by men whom it was powerless to injure, picked up the first nice little boy it met after two minutes of freedom, and trotted off to make a meal of him in a city of four millions of people.

Mr. Jamrach has been good enough to give the writer details of another and less well-known tiger escape, which took place on the North-Western Railway near Weedon Station about fifteen years ago. The tiger was being sent to a dealer in Liverpool, and was in a cage fastened to the bottom of an open truck. The cage was amply strong, but another

train, loaded with huge iron girders that had been improperly packed, and projected from the sides of the trucks, passed that in which the tiger was traveling, and one of the girders struck the cage and smashed it to pieces. The tiger was unhurt, but the cage fell to pieces round it, and left it sitting on the truck like a pigeon when the "trap" is pulled. The tiger at once bounded off, and by a strange chance alighted almost in the middle of a flock of sheep. It knocked down half-a-dozen, and after making a meal off one of these, trotted off up the line. "The news soon spread," writes Mr. Jamrach, "and caused the greatest consternation everywhere. Fortunately a troop of soldiers happened to be quartered at Weedon, and these were called out and packed away in a railway train, which followed up the tiger at a slow rate, and out of the railway carriage the soldiers potted away at the tiger until they killed him. My father always considered he had a good claim against the Railway Company for damages, but did not follow it up, and consequently was a heavy loser."

The most troublesome arrival to recapture which ever escaped from the "stables" in London was a large baboon. It contrived to get clear of its cage over-night, and opened the window of the room in which it was confined. Thence it leapt on to the roof of a house opposite; "crawling over the tiles," says a writer to whom Mr. Jamrach told the story, "it ensconced itself among the chimneys, pleased with the warmth, and chattered defiance at its pursuers.



Then a grand commotion ensued among the neighbours. Letters and messages of horror and entreaty poured in to Mr. Jamrach; he was even threatened with legal proceedings. All sorts of methods were tried to catch the fugitive; but an ape's feet are more at home on narrow ledges and steep inclines than feet cased in boot-leather. For days the baboon kept his liberty, consoling himself for the chilliness of the nights by abundant frolics during the day. Little wonder if the children were afraid to go to bed at the top of the house, or if the servant-girls looked up nervously from their toilets at any sound on the tiles outside, fearing to see the face of that 'odious creature' glaring in through the glass pane. There could be no rest till he was caught and caged. Eventually he was enticed into a room through an open window, and a blanket having been thrown over him, he was caught and carried home in triumph."

The panic caused by a big monkey at large is almost equal to that which follows the escape of some really dangerous beast. Only in the present year a large mandrill owned by a lady was pursued and shot without mercy in Essex, as a precaution against "its well-known ferocity."

"The most interesting side of our profession," says Mr. Jamrach, "is the possible arrival of *new creatures*, animals never seen alive in Europe, or new to our experience." The chance of such an event is never quite absent. Even in 1894 he received a strange deer from Japan. He sent this at once to Professor

Milne Edwards at the Jardin des Plantes of Paris, who pronounced it to be a new species.

The prices of rare animals, often differing little in general appearance from common species, are high enough at present to make the wild-beast trade a lucrative business. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the pursuit of this profession, or even the business of owning and exhibiting wild beasts, is solely a matter of sale and barter, or mere money-making. In all connected with the sale or management of wild animals with whom the writer is acquainted, there is a genuine naturalist's appreciation in the creatures they deal in, often existing side by side with something of that pride in maintaining animals in good condition which they share in common with the whole race of breeders of prize cattle, race-horse trainers, masters of hounds and huntsmen, down to the labourers with their pigs. From the highest to the lowest, they seem to know most of what is going on, not only in the different menageries of England, but also on the continents. The masters and owners will meet one another often in the course of business, and the men pay cross visits to rival establishments, and discuss the latest additions or losses. We seldom fail to see at a circus or exhibition of performing animals the well-known faces of some of the keepers at the Zoo; and when going round the houses at the Gardens, the best-known owners of circuses, the lion-tamers or elephant-trainers of the ring, may often be seen musing in front of the

cages and taking stock of their inmates. A Suffolk villager in London nearly always chooses the meat-market at Smithfield as the first place in which to spend a happy day; and a wild-beast keeper goes naturally for change of scene to another wild-beast menagerie.