

A STROLL THROUGH JAMRACH'S.

Down East, past the Tower, the Mint, and many huge warehouses, you enter St. George's Street, where Mr. Jamrach's live-stock establishment is located. It is in close proximity to St. Katharine's and the London Docks, and so is suitably placed, as it is from the captains and sailors of foreign vessels that Mr. Jamrach purchases a great number of his living wares.



Photo by Barnes and Son, Mile-End Road, E.
THE LATE CHARLES JAMRACH.

"Well, Mr. Jamrach, I've not come to purchase either an elephant or a mermaid," I remarked to the proprietor, who had come out of his office behind the front store, filled with cages containing ornithological specimens from all parts, to meet me.

"And I couldn't have supplied you if you had, for since the increased number of maritime trade routes not many elephants come to London, but are taken direct from Ceylon to New York, and, generally, I may say that there is no longer the trade here in wild animals that there used to be when London was the distributing port to almost all parts of the world."

"And, possibly, you have run out of mermaids?" I suggested jokingly, but, to my astonishment, he replied—

"We used to keep them when they fetched £4 a-piece, but now we can't get more than £1 for them. Frank Buckland burst up the trade when he exposed the method of their manufacture by the Japanese from a fish and a monkey-skin cleverly united; so we no longer make them a 'leading article,'" he smilingly added.

"The Japanese are remarkably ingenious."

"Not only that, but they possess infinite patience. The telescope fish is a case in point. It is a fish of immense length, with a double, fan-like tail, and produced by breeding on the principle of artificial selection. However, they are quite common in Germany now."

"And do you know how they get white Java sparrows?"

"They select a pair of greyish birds and keep them in a white cage in a white room, and they are attended by a person dressed in white. The mental effect on a series of generations of birds results in completely white birds. They breed the domestic cock with enormously long tails after the same principle. They first select a bird with a good tail, giving him a very high perch to stand on; then with weights they drag the tail downwards, carrying on the same system with the finest specimens of his descendants till a tail almost as long as a peacock's is produced at last. And how marvellous they are in the fertilisation of plants! Did you ever see one of their dwarf trees, perhaps fifty years old, and yet not more than an inch or two high?"

"Now tell me what have we around us in these cages, Mr. Jamrach. Point out the plumaged celebrities, please."

"Well, this Praslin parrot from Madagascar is rare, and no doubt you'll admire this beautiful bronze-winged pigeon from Australia. That Australian chough from Adelaide is rather scarce, so are these piebald jays from Brazil. A beautiful songster is yonder spectacled thrush from Siam, and that little mynah is a representative of the breed the natives of India teach to repeat their prayers for them." And as we chatted over this amusing fact a whole cage of laughing jackasses insisted on sharing in our mirth.

"And what is this little black bird, with the prismatic colours on its feathers?"

"That's a green glossy starling. Look here, Charlie; take out the red-crested Malacca parrot, and show the gentleman."

So forthwith Mr. Charles Darge plunged a bare arm into the cage, and, in spite of the most malicious bites, brought out a splendid cockatoo.

"And you don't mind being bitten?" I remarked, addressing the man.

"Well, I've been too many years with the animals to mind a pinch or two; besides, my flesh never festers," he replied with a grin.

"And you, Mr. Jamrach?"

"No; I have not come to much harm. Perhaps the worst bite I ever got was in the hand from a snake, an anaconda. The fang remained buried in my hand quite eighteen months, when it worked itself out. No, we don't do much in snakes. There's too great a glut in the market. They don't fetch an eighth of the price they used to; besides, the poisonous ones are nasty things to deal in. How do they remove the venom fangs? Why, they insert a stick covered with red flannel, and when the beast bites it, burying its fangs in the wood,

these are broken off with a slight wrench. Now we will move on to the curio room, after you've looked at these monkeys and lemurs."

In the curio room there was such a miscellany of carved ivories, bronzes, china, shells, idols, stone implements, native weapons, &c., that no attempt at enumeration could be made. However, mention of seventeen exquisitely beautiful Japanese figures, denoting the Trades and the Muses, must not be omitted, especially as they possessed the peculiarity that the heads, bodies, and limbs represented various animals, most ingeniously designed. Then there was a fine wood-carving, illustrating the legend of the philosopher who, having acquired the faculty of separating his spirit from his body, permitted it to wander so far that it completely lost trace of its original tenement, but at length, effected reincarnation by entering the body of a cripple beggar it chanced to find in a ditch. But still more interesting is the black stone figure of Krishna, discovered in the bed of a river in India, where it had been hidden at the time of one of the Mohammedan invasions to save the god's nose from the mutilation to which it would inevitably have been subjected. But as time was speeding onwards we left this interesting collection, well worth a week's examination, to visit the carnivora and other quadrupeds, which are kept in a separate building. On the way thither I begged some account of the origin of the firm.

"My grandfather really started the business in this way. Being Harbour Commander in Hamburg, his duties frequently took him on board ships entering the port, and so numerous opportunities arose of making purchases from the captains and sailors of animals, curios, and shells. These my grandfather used to traffic away, in Russia especially, sending my late father, Charles Jamrach—who died, you may remember, eighteen months ago—on such commissions. On one occasion business brought my father to London, and, finding the enormous number of ships trading with the Port of London, he established himself here as an agent for my grandfather. But trade is not what it was then. There are not nearly so many collectors now: excellent prices used to be obtained, for instance, in shells, in which my father was a great connoisseur."

By this we had arrived at the dépôt of wild animals and of large birds of various kinds, confined in rough wooden cages, lining the walls and filling up a good deal of the central area of the room. A large goat, the aoudad of the Atlas Mountains, now shedding its coat, first attracted my attention; then came a Manchuria deer, which Mr. Jamrach suggested would make a fine cross with our red deer. This one was in the "velvet" stage, which gave occasion to my conductor to explain that deer differ from antelopes in that the latter do not shed their horns. Presently I came on cages of emus, some great American herons, and a few South American buzzards, great eagle owls, and crested screamers, with a sharp spur on the head of each wing, from Buenos Ayres. Quite a colony of deer succeeded, and I noticed especially a Persian and a Dorcas gazelle, with a pair of Chinese roe deer.

"Occasionally, I suppose, you receive very rare specimens?"

"Oh, yes, and very lately a young deer, without horns, was sent to me which I was convinced was quite unique, but Dr. Bartlett assured me that it was only an ordinary sambur deer from India. I was inclined to think it might be a very dark Père David deer, which also has a tail like a horse, and which was first seen over a wall in the Emperor of China's park. But mine was darker than that variety. I sent it to Professor Milne Edwards, of Paris, and he has purchased it for £40, and declares it a new species. I am sorry it has gone out of the country; unfortunately, our own Zoological Gardens Society have no great spirit of enterprise. Recently I sold a pair of Brahmin cattle to a landed proprietor for £200. That is a rock kangaroo, which will easily leap 20 ft. high. This one is the red kangaroo—that is, one of the fighting sort that they have at the Aquarium. Ascending to a higher floor, we arrived at the pumas, leopards, &c. I am doing a brisk trade in pumas. I sent six away last month to India, as the natives make a lot of money by exhibiting the large cat capable of killing the giant coypu rat. Yes, that's a leopard, and here's a black jackal from the Cape, and that is a hyena. Those are chow-chow dogs, the ones they eat in China."

During our conversation several telegrams arrived, and the last summoned Mr. Albert Jamrach to Tring to see Mr. Walter Rothschild that evening; so I took my departure.



Photo by C. Fröhlich, Antwerp.

MR. ALBERT E. JAMRACH.