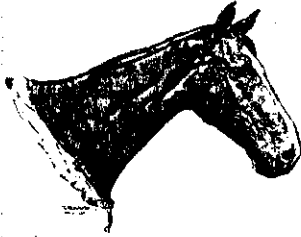


ISABELLA.

By DAVID GRAY.

Author of "Gallops."



"HAT'S all," said Mr. Parsons Scott. He waved his hand at the groom, directing him to take the horse which was loose in the paddock back to the stable.

"They are a good lot," observed Mr. Carteret. He had been putting in the morning inspecting Mr. Scott's hunters.

Parsons Scott had an office in town, at which an office-boy might sometimes be found. Scott's personal attention was devoted to the purchase, education, and sale of hunters. As a prudent grandparent had provided him with an income, he was able to live in the country with comfort and to maintain the town office and his horse business as well.

"I'm glad you like them," replied Scott, referring to Mr. Carteret's commendation of his horses. Carteret's opinion was able in this field.

"Yes," repeated Carteret; "they are a good lot. They are better than Harrington's and better than Brown's. But I really don't think there is anything that will do for me. As I told you, I want something like old Elevator—something that jumps exceptionally big and sure."

"The only other thing which I have is a mare that came yesterday from Canada," observed Scott. "I haven't had her out yet. I got her in a trade, and probably something is the matter with her; but they say she can jump. Bring out Isabella!" he called to the groom—"the new chestnut mare."

"Did you give her that name?" inquired Mr. Carteret.

"No," said Scott; "I shouldn't name a horse Isabella."

"I don't know," observed Mr. Carteret. "I thought you might be growing sentimental. It's a pretty name for a gentle mare."

"Stuff!" said Scott.

"Quite an animal," observed Mr. Carteret, as the mare trotted into the paddock. "Sporty-looking, isn't she? White blaze and stockings, and a piece out of her ear. She is uncommonly well made," he went on; "but her head is coarse, and she carries it too knowingly for a picture horse."

"Yes," said Scott. "I am sorry about the nick in her ear. It takes a hundred off her value. But she is a mare with a lot of character—the kind that can look out for herself and you, too."

Carteret nodded. "Turn her at the jump," he said to the groom. In the paddock there was a made jump, with wings, over which horses could be chased without a rider on their backs. The bars were about five feet high when Carteret spoke.

"That's too high to start with," said Scott. "She is just off the ear."

The groom, who had started to drive the horse, stopped.

"Let it down to four feet," Scott continued.

"Yes, sir," he said.

Before he reached the jump Scott called him back. Isabella was trotting leisurely into the wings of her own accord.

"Look!" said Scott.

The mare reached the jump, popped over it, gave a whisk of her closely docked tail, and began placidly to graze.

"That's a very remarkable horse," observed Carteret.

"She likes it," said Scott. "Put the bars up to six feet," he called.

The groom adjusted the bars and herded Isabella around in front of the wings again. She looked languidly at the jump, and started for it at a slow canter. She cleared it as easily as before, and went to cropping tufts of grass again.

Parsons Scott swelled visibly with pride. "She just plays over six feet," he said. "It's chocolate-drops for her, Carthy," he continued. "This is a horse."

"I think it is," said Mr. Carteret, rather humbly for him. "Let's try seven feet."

"Please, sir," said the groom, "we can't put the bars up no higher."

"Well, never mind," said Carteret.

"Scotty," he continued, "I think this one will do. I might as well tell

you the truth. I'm looking for something for a— He hesitated. "I'm looking for a lady's hunter, and I want a natural big jumper, something that can't make a mistake. If this mare is only sound—"

"She is sound," Scott broke in. "I might as well tell you the truth, too. She is a perfect lady's hunter. I got her somewhat reasonably because she kicked a man's buggy to pieces. He was an idiot who left her tied in a village street in fly-time. A traction-engine came past, and the buggy melted away. I shouldn't exactly guarantee her to drive, but you can see yourself she's gentle as a kitten. She's a perfect pet for a girl."

"I didn't say it was for a girl," observed Mr. Carteret.

Scott looked at him, but made no reply. He picked up a green apple that lay by the paddock fence and held it out to the mare. Isabella came forward



"Shall I take her over again?"

promptly and took it. "Look!" he said. "She'll eat out of your hand."

"That is very affecting," said Mr. Carteret.

"She will probably come round to driving in time," observed Scott. "Suppose we see her under saddle."

"I should like to see her under saddle," said Mr. Carteret.

Scott spoke to the groom, and he led Isabella into the stable. While they waited, the two sat on the top board of the paddock fence and discussed the question of price.

"I think that mare," observed Scott, "is easily worth a thousand dollars. She'd bring that on her jumping alone, and—"

"But I tell you that's too much," said Mr. Carteret; "My commission doesn't authorise me to spend so much; and yet, I want the horse."

"I was about to say," continued Scott, "when you interrupted me, that on account of the buggy affair I would sell her for exactly— He stopped. There

was a clatter in the stable, and some-saulting through the air out of the doorway shot Scott's groom, followed by Isabella, who trotted to a spot where the grass was tender and began to graze.

Scott jumped down from the fence. "What have you got under that mare's saddle?" he bawled at the groom.

"Nothing, sir," said the man, who was picking himself up.

"From the way he came off," observed Mr. Carteret, "there might be a spring-board, or almost anything of that kind."

Scott paid no attention to the joke. He went over to Isabella, who fed on, undisturbed at his approach. Taking the saddle off, he looked for nail-points and objects of a sharp or lumpy nature.

There was nothing there. Saddle and leather pad were in perfect repair.

"You must have done something to her," said Scott. "I'll ride her myself."

The groom acquiesced obediently. Scott mounted, and Isabella stood meekly till he was on and had both feet home in the stirrups. "Now," he said, "I shall move her around the paddock, slowly at first."

He spoke to Isabella, telling her to "Get on;" and then, placidly and more in sorrow than in anger, the mare gave three bucks. The first was a large one, but Scott hung on. With the second, which was larger, he was on her withers. On the third buck she shook out all reefs and sent him crashing through the top board of the paddock fence. He landed outside, surprised but uninjured.

"I have been to all the Wild West Shows," observed Mr. Carteret from the

She made no attempt to fight the bearing-rein and buck. She lifted her fore legs and reared rather slowly until she was perpendicular.

"Look out! She's going over!" said Mr. Carteret.

As he spoke she dropped over on her back.

Scott had anticipated her actions. He slid off before she came down, and rolled himself out of her way. He arose hastily, and, with such dignity as a man can command who has been rolling in the soil of his paddock, said to the groom,

"You may take the mare to the stable." Then he climbed the top of the paddock fence and sat down beside Carteret.

"Carthy," he said after a long silence, "I had always believed that a horse that was checked up couldn't rear."

Carteret tapped the fence boards thoughtfully with his ratan stick. "Old man," he said, "as we go on in life we lose many of our young beliefs."

There was a long silence. Scott made no answer. "I think," he observed presently, "that a trap just now turned into the driveway."

They could see the house from where they sat, and they watched and waited. In a few moments they saw Williams, the in-door man, come out and hurry down the walk towards the stables.

"You might brush yourself," suggested Mr. Carteret. "A man who sells horses ought not to be found at his own stables with so much mud on the back of his coat."

"Brush me," said Scott. "Who is it?" he called to the man as he approached.

"Mr. Henderson Lampie, sir," said the man.

Scott jumped down from the fence and twisted his moustache for a moment. "I don't think I can stand him to-day," he said, as if speaking to himself.

Mr. Carteret also came down from the fence. "Old man," he said, "I ought to be going."

Scott looked at him in surprise. "But you said you'd stop for lunch," he said plaintively, "and it is almost ready."

"I know," said Mr. Carteret; "but I forgot about an appointment. I must hurry."

"Carthy," said Scott, "if you leave me alone with Henderson Lampie, it never can be the same between us."

"Well," said Carteret, "if you put it that way, I shall have to stay; but I may not be very civil."

"You can be what you please," said Scott. "Tell Mr. Lampie," he said to the man, "that we are at the stables. Put another place at lunch, and make my excuses for not going up to the house to meet him. Carthy," added Scott, after the man had gone, "what an odious little beast that fellow is!"

"The most odious," said Mr. Carteret. "Carthy," said Scott, "don't you think it strange that a girl like Elizabeth Hemingway should stand having him about? Those Dago diplomats are bad enough, but Lampie is worse."

"That thought has occurred to me," said Mr. Carteret.

"Carthy," said Scott, "I feel that we ought to do something to save Elizabeth Hemingway. One of us ought to marry her."

Carteret laughed softly. "That thought, too, has occurred to me," he said; "but not the part of it which introduces you."

"Well, ride up, then," said Scott. "Go out in front. I'll give you the panel first."

"It is foolish," said Carteret, slowly, "to ride for a fall when you know the landing is hard."

"Falls be hanged!" said Scott. "If white men like you are going to funk, probably some Dago or Chinese will marry her, or Lampie."

"Very probably," said Mr. Carteret. "It is apt to be that way."

"Well something ought to be done," said Scott.

"That's true," said Carteret.

"We might begin by murdering Lampie," suggested Scott.

"Why not put him on Isabella?" said Mr. Carteret. "It's more lawful."

"That might be better," said Scott. "He's coming."

Carteret glanced at the approaching figure, and then looked gravely at a mud-puddle about fifty feet beyond the paddock fence. "It's your turn," he said, "that she could buck him over the fence into that!"

"I think she could," said Scott; "but probably she wouldn't; she's too contrary."

"Probably not," said Mr. Carteret, with a sigh.

"Hallo, you chaps!" called out Mr. Lampie, when he came within hearing distance. "I say, Scotty, have you a good one for me? I'm in a hurry, and

fence; "I think you have the best bucker I ever saw. Are you hurt?"

"I shall fix that mare," said Scott, gloomy with rage. He called to the man: "Bring out a harness-bridle with a check-rein, and some strong cord." He climbed back over the fence. "Look at her!" he said. The mare had gone back to the plot of tender grass. The episode seemed to have stirred no evil passions in her.

"She certainly is a mare of character," observed Mr. Carteret, thoughtfully.

Scott watched her in silence until the groom came out with the bearing-rein and string; then he approached Isabella and proceeded to arrange the apparatus, and Isabella made no remonstrance. "Do you see," said Scott, "how you can get her head down now?"

"No," said Mr. Carteret, doubtfully. There was something in Isabella's resourceful calm which impressed him and made him uncertain of everything.

Scott mounted, and clucked to Isabella to start. Then a curious thing happened.