

MY KINGDOM FOR A CAYUSE

BY BURGESS JOHNSON

IF a horse and a dog commend me I may retain my self-respect in the face of human rebuffs. It is true that a dog may be something of a sycophant, as Mrs. Mary Austin asserts; ever since he deserted the wild pack and chose man's company. But a horse! The trouble is to find one. I do not mean a livery horse, for he must have lost in some degree his sense of discrimination. The compliment must come from a horse that has time enough on his hoofs to look me over and measure my qualities.

As a boy I was granted several opportunities to get to know horses whose sensibilities had not been dulled. That was a good many years ago, in old Mexico, and some of those horses were merely passing acquaintances; yet it seems to me that I remember their personalities quite as well as I recall many humans of the same period whose companionship may have lasted a bit longer. Two or three of them, moreover, belong in that miscellaneous company of God's creatures which have been willing to become my friends. Recollections of boyhood rides through sagebrush and mesquite are fragmentary; a mosaic of tiny pieces that can be of small interest to others, though the whole picture has rare charm for me. I mention it to make you understand, if I may, how greatly I desired my children to learn what it means to have the companionship of horses. So together we have sought them, my family and I, in different parts of the country, as finances and conflicting duties permitted.

There are plenty of horses in the East. But the day's control of a rented horse that was ridden by someone else yesterday and will have still another rider tomorrow does not make for mutual understanding, or a good mount. If you and a horse would get to know each other, you must have the care of him; that means a stable, and a programme that is difficult for a college professor, for reasons I need not discuss. But a ride of several days' duration

through upper New England, even on a hired horse, was an idea that suggested delightful possibilities; points of interest are so near together in that part of the country, and there are so many back roads. People must occasionally do it, yet I suspect that if they do, they start out from their own stables on their own horses.

But my daughter and I lately made a small attempt of the sort. We rode for a week across New Hampshire into Vermont and back, trying to avoid the motor highways which are spoiled for such riding. At our first nightfall we entered a county seat in New Hampshire, and spent wearisome hours trying to find a boarding stable. One clue that we confidently followed led to a barn that had become a garage only a day or two before. There were still stalls in it, but they stored the family trunks, and there was no feed to be had. Finally, when we were thoroughly tired and very hungry, we found the stable of a building contractor who used horses, and he made space for us.

That little city was typical. On one other evening we left the matter of a night's lodging until too late, and were forced to inquire at the hotel in a very small town indeed. There was a barn attached, so we were hopeful. They could bed and feed us, of course, and find stalls for our horses; but they had no horse feed. The manager was apologetic, but he had run out of hay and oats some time before, and there had been no occasion to get a fresh supply. In fact, we were the first actual equestrians that had stopped there in a decade. The local feed store was closed, but I routed out the proprietor and wearily lugged our feed the length of the village street.

Such experiences led us to avoid villages at nightfall and seek outlying farms. With our horses' needs as our excuse, we always managed to get beds for ourselves as well; and we came to bless the necessity. No one ever overcharged us; the balance was usually on the other side. With our horses in the barn we felt somehow more immediately at home, and our pleasantest recollections of that trip are of the evenings spent in New Hampshire farmyards or on the back porch, after supper dishes were redded up, talking of horses and crops and cabbages and kings. On one farm there was a Morgan horse which had politely given up his stall for us. He was a powerful, pure blooded youngster, recently presented to

our farmer host by a lady who had owned and trained him. She was moving to a large city and would not take him along; so she had given him to the neighbor whose own horses seemed best cared for, on condition that he should never be sold. That horse played around the place like a kitten; a rather embarrassing pet until you realized that he had every desire not to hurt you. Twice he pushed his whole self through the porch door into the kitchen begging sugar. He would rush at one the full length of the farmyard like a whirlwind, stop dead in his tracks two feet away, pick up the handkerchief you dropped, and muzzle it into your hand with a grand manner. There are beautiful horses in New England of Vermont's own breed, but I fear they are not for me until my ship comes in.

We got our two mounts from a man who supplies many of the boys' and girls' summer camps in his neighborhood; and perhaps those camps may bring riding horses back into more general favor. One day on our ride, not far from Squam Lake, we met a farmer driving a team. He stopped us: "How'll you trade that roan?" he asked. "She'd match up well with one I've got, and I'd like to talk trade."

I told him she wasn't mine, and gave the owner's name. "Tell him my name when you get back," said the farmer, "and that I'm right here any time, ready to dicker." When our week's ride was over I remembered that commission. The owner of our horses made a note of the matter.

"Are you going to do anything about it?" I asked.

"You betcha! The first time I can get up that way. I'd go anywhere on the chance of a hoss trade." There are also Yankees still left in New England.

But horses in open country were what I wanted my children to know before it was too late. Considering what motor cars have done, and what family airplanes and children's gliders and untold winged contraptions may still do, I have felt the need of haste. So the search has gone on, and some of the results have been surprising. Where horses have in the recent past been the commonest means of locomotion, the social attitude against them has become most marked. Once upon a time it was *au fait* to ride a bicycle. Now they are no longer a fashionable toy, but a

convenience for the "lower classes". Laborers ride to work on them. "The students ride bicycles at Vassar," I chance to say in the course of conversation. "Bicycles! At Vassar!!" Overalls at an afternoon tea?

In a Western town which ten years ago was in the midst of wide-spread cattle country, where in fact they still stage an annual *rodeo* advertised by the Chamber of Commerce, I asked for a riding horse. My host was mildly amused. "There isn't any livery in town," he said. "But you ought to be able to get one somewhere hereabouts, by the hour. You might get one in from some ranch, but you'd have difficulty arranging for his keep. You can always rent a Ford if you want to ride around by yourself."

So it goes in the cities and towns of Oklahoma and Wyoming and Colorado. Riding horses are still common enough; they are still needed in the workaday business of that country. But in more than one sense they are common. They cost too little in money and too much in inconvenience. If you were old fashioned enough to wish to ride a bicycle through the parks and along the boulevards of Boston or Buffalo during a fortnight's visit, would you know where to go to get a wheel, and convenient places for quick repairs? There are no longer any bicycle racks in front of Eastern tea rooms. There are no more hitching posts in Denver. But the Chamber of Commerce will be able to tell you how many motor cars are owned by Denver citizens.

Of course the horse has value as a symbol. The delegates to a Rotary convention will go from some of these Western cities attired in riding regalia with "chapps" and spurs, though no one of them may ever have straddled a horse. And though many annual *rodeos* and cowboy festivals are staged, with contests "open to all comers", it is the professional rider, doing the circuit from one to another, who carries off the prizes.

But here in New Mexico at last we found our horses. This is a backward State, so they tell me, and in terms of Anglo-Saxon America that may be true. The dominant blood here is not Anglo-Saxon but Spanish, with claims upon the soil nearly a century older than those the English blood has upon New England. Some of the phases of this backwardness are such as I would gladly walk backward to enjoy. Horses came into the country with

the Spanish in 1541, and the conservative descendants of the first Europeans still use them for business and pleasure. The native house building and communal living Indians adopted and bred them. They belong!

On a ranch high up on the slopes of the Sangre de Cristo range we hired our first New Mexican horses. They would seem unlovely little creatures in the eyes of an Eastern livery-man; but we rode them many miles in the wide spreading shadows of stately Douglas firs to points above timber line, or over the plain toward unbelievable sunsets, or let them pick their own sure steps down the sides of cañons into cool depths pillared with rocks carved into grotesque and colorful shapes. Three riding on such horses make a party of six people! Leave one of the animals comfortably at home, and he will mourn like a disappointed child; and when the travelers come back, he will hear and recognize the hoof beats while they are still far down the road and call to them with joyful whinnies, to be answered at once by the returning ones. After a long ride, that is as cheery a greeting as a light in the window.

We paid for those first horses ten dollars apiece for the summer. We fed them by renting alfalfa pasturage at twenty dollars, and turned the horses loose in it to get their food from the growing stalk. They thrive so well on this without dry grain that Spanish neighbors offered us other horses in return for their keep. But three we found to be a satisfactory number. Whenever the five of us wished to ride together we could easily get two more from our kindly landlord, or from neighbors.

Part of the day's exercise was catching them. Not one had the slightest objection to the saddle, but being caught was part of the game. A few low cedars grew in the far corner of the pasture, and again and again have I seen the horses make for that shelter at first sight of us and hide there. Undoubtedly they hid, because as we crossed the field they would move so as to keep the trees between us. They were full of whims, coming up to the bridle on one day, and on the next leading us a half hour's chase. The surest way to catch them was to send our seven-year-old daughter through the alfalfa with a short rope in one hand and a bridle held behind her back in the other. Her small head did not show above the grass tops, and one could follow her course only by the swaying

of the stalks as she pushed her way through. Her approach never failed to interest even the whimsiest pony. He would peer down at her with his ears cocked forward, until she had tossed the loose end of the rope over his neck. Then the game was over; she had won, and he was technically tied.

On the day when those first three horses were ours to command, I felt as though I had regained long lost friends of my boyhood. I became at once jealously concerned about small details of their care. Tie ropes must be knotted exactly as I had once knotted them. There was but one way to fasten a cinch. I brought one of the horses near the cabin for exhibition purposes and was busy staking him as I talked. "However friendly they are," I said to the assembled young, "never forget that you must saddle and mount from the proper side, and always be considerate of their hind hoofs." I was squatting over the iron stake, and the horse as he bent down his head to consider me slobbered my neck. I looked up and slapped his cheek admonishingly. At the slap he swung instantly around, and one of his hind hoofs smashed the watch in my belt pocket. Then he began nibbling grass as though nothing had happened. No classroom lecture was ever more aptly illustrated. But I had treasured that watch.

As I write this we are living in a five-room adobe house in old Santa Fé. During two former summers we found our horses among the forested mountains of northern New Mexico, and now we are tasting city life. Here ancient and modern civilization rub elbows at every street corner and a motorist may be forced every few moments to slow down to a horse's pace because some rider occupies the middle of the city street. In this very mansion of ours mud walls and mud floors enclose electric lights and modern plumbing. There is grass growing on our roof. The wire fence of our corral is twenty feet away from our bedroom door, and the three horses standing with their necks stretched over the top wire see when I get up in the morning, and nicker for their oats.

These three are no lovelier than any others we have temporarily owned, except perhaps the little pinto which is the baby of the household. He it is who pretends he does not want to be bridled, but who cries if he is left alone; who steals the feed of the others; and often lies down to sleep at night like a kitten. Two of these

horses we hired for ten dollars a month each, though I suspect that is under the market rate for tourists. The other we get for his keep, which averages eight dollars a month. We have renamed them War, Famine and Pestilence, but we usually forget and call each one of them anything. Famine, our bony black steed, is as old and wise as Pestilence, the pinto, is young and foolish. They tell us that once upon a time the black was locoed, and that although he has recovered from the drug-like influence of the poisonous weed, it has left some undesirable traits of nervous irritability. But we have decided that this is the malicious gossip of a small neighborhood, probably started by some other horse with a jealous disposition. At any rate he responds to kindness, and is the favored mount with us all, though usually we leave him trailing a short rope over night, for easier catching in the morning.

War, the sorrel, goes calmly about his own business, biting the other horses without discrimination if either reaches for his oats. Animosities disappear between meals, and during the heat of the day they have a pleasing social custom. Two of them stand closely side by side, the head of one by the flank of the other, so that each switching tail serves a double purpose; for it keeps the flies off the side of its owner and off the face of a friend. I note that this is generally done by twos. The third horse, whichever he happens to be, stands a little apart, attending to his own flies as best he can. But if some new interest draws one of the pair away, the third strolls up and establishes his own reciprocal arrangement.

Close acquaintance with these little horses reveals a surprising variety of facial expression, though at first sight a herd of them may seem facially as much alike to us as Chinese. I am forever discovering resemblances between their faces and those of certain human friends of mine; or else wondering just who is it they do look like. They are all nervously active, and that is their misfortune. Eastern tourists who can sit on a horse come out here and ride them to pieces, thinking that as long as a horse consents to go he is able to go. Every renter of horses in Santa Fé has incredible stories to tell of such tourist callousness or sheer brutality. The Spanish native of New Mexico, unlike the Mexican, treats

his horses pretty well; and the native Indians treat them even better.

I suppose that we must be classed as tourists here, but Heaven knows I am made ashamed of my tribe every now and then. The other day a motor car stopped before our house; a man and a woman got out and came to our corral fence to look at the pinto, while a little girl waited in the car. I joined them to pass the time of day, or chat about horses; but they cared for no amenities. They wanted to buy or hire the pinto for the little girl. I said I did not own him, but named the man who did, and suggested that he might have other horses. They left at once, and I learned later that they offered the owner many times the rental I was paying if he would break the arrangement with me. I often pass the house in New York where that man lives, and some day I am going to throw a horseshoe through a window of it.

I would rather talk about the manners of horses than the manners of tourists; yet I must admit that the manners of our three are bad at feeding time. Pestilence impatiently tips his box over at the start, and after trampling some of his oats into the ground, makes a grab for War's share. But War is quite able to take care of his own. We have at last humiliated them by roping them to separate posts. The old black eats slowly and cleanly; when his container is nearly empty he tips it over upon its side and then back again, without spilling any on the ground, thus collecting the remainder along one side of the box for easier eating. I had never noticed before how a horse's upper lip resembles the tip of an elephant's trunk in its motions. I have been told that an elephant can pick up a pin. A horse can pick up a single oat from the ground by a sweep of his upper lip, and bring up no dirt with it. In the same way he selects the blades of grass that he prefers, when grazing, separating with his long upper lip some sweet grainy stalk from other less desirable blades that grow close about it.

It is hard to believe that motor cars will ever crowd horses out of Santa Fé, but the very thought is depressing. Horses are forever straying into the streets; if the owner does not quickly follow them up they are impounded by the police, and it costs the owner two dollars or so to redeem them. One cheerful roan, with a long rangey stride, which lives a block or two up the street, has

found out where we keep our alfalfa. Four times he has escaped from his corral and come to us on the run, managing to snatch one or two mouthfuls from a bale before his small boy owner, scolding volubly in Spanish, has roped him away. He departs cheerfully enough, evidently saying to himself, "Well, so much to the good!" Two little broncos strolled into our yard yesterday and looked over the corral fence at our own three which were feeding. Then they strolled about, curiously smelling of the hammock and the trees and the weeds which pass for a lawn. They seemed to have every intention of staying for the afternoon, until they saw our youngest approaching with a rope; then they left side by side at full speed.

The city is small enough for one to get away from paved streets after a ten minute canter in any direction. Then, though we are already seven thousand feet above sea level, roads and trails in any direction carry one higher still to enjoy outlooks that defy description. Yet we love to ride though the streets of Santa Fé, watching the varied population strolling about its business. Almost alone among our American cities, here the native seems to have assimilated the newcomer. The numerically dominant Spanish do not surrender their musical native speech, nor the many Indians their picturesque dress when they come in to market from their pueblos. Anglo-Saxons, especially the children, quite unaffectedly adopt sombreros and brilliant scarves; and here at last even a man may express his soul's longing for colorful and varied attire, and go about unremarked.

I like to jog along between these rows of one-story adobe houses that crowd up against the street line. It pleases me to fancy that any such habitation, long abandoned, melts away and in time flows back into the earth whence it grew, instead of tumbling into an unsightly clapboard and shingle ruin. Nor have I any quarrel with the new "Santa Fé type" of architecture, that borrows from Hopi and Mexican adobe; a hybrid that is soft and picturesque of outline, and full of comfort within. English country house and New England colonial are equally hybrids, if you like, combining certain older forms and adapting them to current needs and surroundings.

In these Western searches after horses we have had to forego the

thought of a European trip or a motor tour, or some more usual method of spending the savings laid by for a summer. But we have been more successful here than among New England hills; and the trail which eventually brought us to Santa Fé led over the Colorado line, past ancient Taos, along between the deep cañon of the Rio Grande and the thirteen thousand foot summits of the Sangre de Cristo, and we feel that we found a kingdom and our horses too.

Even royalty has its trials. This morning I was wakened at five-thirty by a great clangor that seemed to arise at the very threshold of our outside bedroom door. It was a bright morning, cool and clear, that promised once again the opalesque wonder of a New Mexican day. The pinto, our spoiled child, evidently felt that such a day should begin promptly. So he was rolling an empty water bucket around, kicking and nosing it here and there, and with every effort making a louder noise. There was no choice about it. I had to go out in my pajamas and feed the three of them.

BURGES JOHNSON.

OUR GARDEN

BY MRS. WILLIAM LOWELL PUTNAM

If anyone picking up this essay hopes to glean from it information of value about gardening he will find himself in the position of the young and enthusiastic collector of moths who sought in the library for a book which would be helpful to him in his specialty. His mother found him some time later curled up in a chair with knitted brows, poring over the book he had selected. On peeping over his shoulder, she found it was entitled *Advice to Young Moth-ers*; but, strange to say, in spite of the title his expression indicated that he had not found the information he sought!

Our garden is what it is from necessity. That it should exist at all is because of our need of the charm of flowers. That it exists in the form it takes is due to other necessities—some intrinsic and some in part extrinsic to us.

Our place is one where it was necessary to follow the teachings of the Scriptures and found our house upon a rock, partly because we should otherwise have lost our view, and partly because it would have been well nigh impossible to find a place large enough to build a house which was without rock throughout a large part of its area. This persistence of rock is what I mean by the extrinsic reason for the garden being what it is. With the exception of the flower border, which has found a place for itself between the rock and the grassy field, and the seedling garden and nursery, in the low land near the cold frames, almost every bit of garden has been won from the rock by terracing—or occasionally by blasting it away.

In rare spots a few flowers have found a foothold by boring among tree roots, for there are grand old trees on the place where the rocks are not. Oaks, black and red and white, the latter our favorites, have grown here since long before white men settled on the land, and they are flourishing today, and are