

PLAYING WITH WILD BEASTS.  
A Woman of Wonderful Nerve in a Cage of Lions.

In front of the semi-circle of chairs in one of the mysterious recesses of the Royal Aquarium at Westminster was a vast iron cage, in which a huge lion and four lionesses were pacing up and down. As we had foregathered there to see a lady pay them a visit in the cage, I naturally supposed and hoped that they were docile and harmless. But instead of this they apparently retained an unseemly amount of their native ferocity, for they growled and snarled at each other and flashed their great paws against the bars as the attendants walked by. It occurred to me that something had disturbed their usual placidity, and I hoped the Countess X— would notice this and venture among them.

I was watching the beasts nervously and speculating what the chances were of surviving a blow from one of those paws, when a little lady in a low-cut black silk bodice and knickerbockers came out from her dressing-room, and, with a smile to the audience, which necessarily included me, she ran up the steps and through the double door into the cage.

She carried only a wooden shield in one hand and a stick in the other, and beating these on the floor she drove the lions back to one end growing and striking at her while she shouted commands to them at the top of her voice in a perfect hurricane of French.

The audience caught their breath.

It was terrible to see this woman facing those five enraged creatures, their great mouths open, their tails lashing furiously against the bars behind them. She wore a black mask, but nevertheless one could see that she was perfectly composed. Evidently she did not know what fear was. But not one of those five glaring pairs of eyes ever felt that her eyes were off theirs for a moment. She flashed from one to the other so rapidly that it seemed like a continuous gaze. The whole time she is in the cage, and it must be a quarter of an hour or more, Countess X— never sees anything but the lions' eyes.

At her command the monsters crouched down or chased from one end of the cage to the other as if under some hypnotic influence from which they were striving to shake themselves. There was nothing of that heartrending humility that one sometimes sees in those unfortunate caged creatures. The ferocious animals had found some one more fearless than themselves, and submitted to her will, though it was with a very bad grace.

The great lions began a steeples-chase at her command; they descended to the indignity of mere performing dogs, leaping through paper drums and flying burning hoops. Every now and then one would seem to turn upon her, and fresh marks would be scratched on the fragile wooden shield, but her torrent of words subdued it again in a moment.

She knelt before a big lion and spoke to it caressingly, and stretched herself in front of them all in a position which to the onlooker seemed full of awful peril, and then, springing to her feet, she moved slowly backward to the door and with a rapid movement darted through. Quick as she was, however, she was only just in time, for as the door opened her eyes were shifted for a moment, and the big lion, who had been waiting for his chance, sprang forward with a furious bound that made my heart stand still.

"He always watches for that moment," said the countess to me afterward, when, dressed in the habiliments of every-day life, she had expressed her willingness to receive a visitor. "Once I was too slow, and his claws tore me horribly; but that is the only injury I ever received."

"How long have I been performing? Eighteen months, that's all. I was down in my fortunes, and was looking for some way to replenish them, when I happened to see the gentleman who is now my manager performing in Paris. I was enchanted immediately, because I have always loved animals, and these great wild beasts most of all, and I offered to do all that he did myself. For the first six or seven days, however, I wore a sort of iron cage to protect me from their claws, but very soon they got to know me. Do you know, I love the excitement? It is delightful to feel so much power."

We chatted for long time about her life. Undoubtedly Countess X— was very charming. I began to understand why the lions were fascinated. But the little theater was being closed and I had to go.—N. Y. Weekly.

At the Opera Rouffe.—Visitor (behind the scenes)—"Say, why do you call these 'dressing rooms'? No one ever dresses in them—do they?" Dolly Dimple—"Oh, yes—after the show is over."—Life.

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## HOW HE SAVED HIMSELF.

Coolness of a Bicycle Rider Threatened with Arrest.

The coolness of a well-known business man was all that saved him from being dragged to the police station, a few nights ago. He had bought a bicycle and decided to learn to ride it outside of an academy.

Accordingly, as soon as it was dark enough to make it impossible for his neighbors to recognize him, he got out and began practicing.

For an hour or more he and his hired man wrestled with the machine, and at last success crowned their efforts. The well-known citizen could ride from one end of the street to the other without falling off more than two or three times, while the hired man would trot along behind—swearing softly to himself—for the purpose of assisting his employer to remount.

The delighted beginner was having the nicest kind of a time when a policeman suddenly appeared upon the scene.

"Here!" the officer yelled, at the same time grabbing the man on the wheel, "don't you know that it's unlawful to ride after dark without a lantern?"

"Certainly," said the business man, who was not going to admit that he didn't know everything about law and city government.

"Well, that being the case," said the policeman, "I don't see as I can do anything but arrest you."

By this time the owner of the wheel had succeeded in dismounting, and it was just here that his presence of mind came into play.

"All right," he said, "go ahead and arrest me; but I warn you that you'll be sorry for it if you do."

"What do you mean?" the officer demanded.

"I mean that I've been out here practicing without a lantern nearly every night during the past three weeks, and this is the first time you've shown your face on the street, in all that time. If you desire to have these facts made known, go ahead and arrest me."

The next time I catch you out after dark without a lantern," growled the policeman, as he walked away, "I'll run you in. Just mind that, will you?"

Even the hired man had to laugh at "the boss" cleverness.—Cleveland Leader.

## OWNERS OF NEW YORK.

A Few Men Who Possess a Large Amount of Real Estate.

Twenty individuals and estates own nearly 18 per cent. of the real estate in the city of New York; with perhaps 150 others this score owns 50 per cent., and the remaining half of the metropolis of the western hemisphere is in the hands of a few of the 2,000,000 persons who live here and pay rent.

The figures upon which the Herald bases this statement have been compiled with infinite care from tax receipts and other reliable sources of information, the table printed herewith being subsequently submitted for revision to real estate experts having intimate knowledge of the great estates.

If any fault can be found with the estimates it is that they are too low—by 25 per cent. in most of the cases cited—but this is erring on the right side.

The assessed valuation for real estate in this city for 1897 will be in the neighborhood of \$2,000,000,000—the figures have not yet been revised—and of this sum \$352,000,000, or 17.6 per cent., is represented by the holdings of a score of owners distributed in this way:

William Waldorf Astor.....	\$110,000,000
John Jacob Astor.....	70,000,000
Robert and Ogden Goelet.....	35,000,000
Amold Constable estates.....	12,000,000
D. B. Potter estate.....	11,000,000
Bridget T. and Louise M. Gerry estate.....	8,000,000
Alfred Corndy Clark estate.....	7,000,000
William Rhinelander estate.....	6,000,000
George Ehret.....	6,000,000
O. D. Mills.....	6,000,000
Solomon estate.....	5,000,000
Roosevelt estate.....	5,000,000
Matthew Wilks.....	5,000,000
D. Willis James.....	5,000,000
Total 20 holders.....	\$362,000,000

It will be borne in mind, of course, that the totals given above are entirely exclusive of all personal property and all real estate not included within the boundaries of the present city of New York.

The element of strength remarked in real property on Manhattan island in the annexed districts during the recent panic, when land values everywhere else in the country were suffering a great decline, is explained in a great degree by the fact that property here is distributed among a very small number of persons, all of whom are so wealthy that a temporary stringency in the money market, and even a prolonged period of distress in mercantile circles, causes them no inconvenience.—N. Y. Herald.

Increase in Gun Charges.

According to Sir Benjamin Baker, the charges of powder in guns have, since the time of the Crimean war, increased from 16 pounds to 900 pounds, the weight of projectile from 68 pounds to 1,800 pounds, and the energies developed from 1,100 foot tons to 62,000 foot tons.

Bad for the Rats.

Young Wife—Oh, John, the rats have eaten all of my cake!

John—What! All of it?

"Every piece. I feel like crying."

"Oh, don't cry over a few rats."

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## IN POVERTY FLAT.

An Incident of Actual Life in a Large City.

From a window next to the roof in a downtown tenement, a baby face looked out upon the cold and dreary world below. But presently the gathering darkness drove the little one away from the broken pane, and he was moving disconsolately toward a ragged bed, where a quiet figure lay, when the attic floor creaked noisily on its hinges, and with a gurgle of delight the little toddler turned that way, and was met on the threshold with a kiss and a gentle admonition to be more quiet lest he disturb the sleeping mother.

So, closing the rickety door as easily as the rusty hinges would permit, the two children, for the newcomer was but ten years of age, groped their way into corner where a tiny, open-faced stove stood, and, taking from her basket some bits of wood and coal which she had somehow managed to scrape together from the street without, the girl kindled a fire.

The unsteady flame cast but a feeble blaze, and yet enough to light all the sickening poverty around. Warming their little hands at the welcome glow, the two children knelt, and in the firelight their youthful faces showed hollow and suffering from hunger, while a few scant rags partially protected their shrunken bodies from the night chill.

A large dry goods box served as table; it was a half candle in a battered tin holder, while nearby stood the only chair the room contained, or rather frame, for the seat had long since given place to a bit of board, which fell through to the floor with a clatter every time the chair was moved.

The room was bare of all ornament; great holes in the wall where the plastering had fallen off showed the laths beneath, and the floor was soiled and stained except such parts as was hidden under a bit of matting near the screeched and broken bed.

On it lay the sleeping mother; she who had suffered and starved that her babies might have a crust of bread, and who now for many days had been too weak and ill to do her daily work upon which her precious ones depended. And so the little girl had started out to beg, but seldom succeeded in getting enough to keep body and soul together, and to-night she had come home tired and cold and hungry and yet trying hard to be brave, to comfort the baby brother with kind words and caresses while his little stomach was pleading so pitifully for only a crumb to eat.

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Gems in Macadam Paving.

The costliest macadam on record once paved the streets of Kimberley, South Africa. This celebrated roadway was studded with diamonds, and hundreds of valuable gems were taken from it. A peddler, 30 years ago, while hawking his wares from farmhouse to farmhouse, found a shining stone by the wayside, and, thinking it might be of some value, sent it to a geologist, who at once recognized it as a fine diamond. It is the Kimberley diamond.

The largest lobster ever caught on the coast of America was taken by a Belfast (Me.) fisherman in 1891. It weighed 23 pounds, and measured 37 inches from the end of its tail to the tip of the long front claws. The monster was too large to enter a common lobster trap, but as the trap was being drawn up it was caught in the netting and safely landed. Many years ago a lobster weighing 22 pounds was captured near the same place, and the event was considered to be of enough importance to be given a place in William H. Williamson's "History of Belfast."

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