

ida, dealt herself thirteen spades. Mrs. James Purgason received thirteen diamonds; Mrs. R. B. Deaton, thirteen hearts; and Mrs. Myron Stevens, thirteen clubs. The *Post* article continues: "*The Guinness Book of World Records* says: 'If all the people in the world were grouped in bridge fours and each four were dealt 120 hands per day, it would require 1,000,000,000,000 years before one "perfect" deal could be expected to recur.'"

ESP IN ANIMALS

Extrasensory-perception tests were not limited to human beings during the days that Dr. J. B. Rhine had his Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University. In the 1950's, Dr. Karlis Osis and Mrs. Esther Foster experimented with cats. While one researcher watched a cat make a choice of food from two similar plates, the other, hidden by a screen, tried to direct the tabby mentally. In another series for clairvoyance, the cat on its own was to find which of two pans contained food. The results were not impressive.

A dog named Chris made phenomenal scores at symbol-card guessing. He indicated his choice by pawing once for a circle, twice for a plus sign, and so on. The results were never documented under conditions acceptable to skeptical scientists. Rigid control was impossible as Chris performed in the home of his owner, G. H. Wood, in Warwick, Rhode Island. Two of Rhine's associates, Dr. Remi J. Cadoret and Dr. J. Gaither Pratt, on several occasions between 1957 and 1960 traveled there to observe. In his book *Parapsychology: An Insider's View* (E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1966), Pratt offered three possible explanations for the dog's remarkable performance. The first, and most satisfactory to him, was ESP. The second was "the successful agents were unconsciously giving sensory information . . . to the person working with Chris." The third was "some honest mistake in interpreting

the rules they were supposed to follow." The latter two, Pratt concluded, "are hardly within the bounds of reason." A fourth possibility may occur to the reader before he finishes this chapter.

The most discussed animal marvel of recent times was Lady, a benign mare who performed in a red barn near Richmond, Virginia. Though widely heralded as a talking horse with occult powers, Lady offered no more than an occasional whinny or snort. She communicated by spelling out words with large letters of the alphabet which she raised with a shove of her nose.

"She can read minds, predict the future and converse in Chinese," said an article in the *New York World* in 1927. A quarter of a century later, Les Leiber reported in *This Week* that he had arrived at the barn without an appointment and had written his name on a piece of paper which he kept clutched in his hand. The equine marvel spelled out L-E-S. It was enough, he confessed, "to have given me the willies."

Mrs. Claudia Fonda, the horse's owner, bought the filly two weeks after she had been foaled. She told me that she raised Lady as she would a child. The animal was not a thoroughbred or even striking in appearance; her only idiosyncrasy was a fondness for bananas. The horse, however, was a quick learner. Mrs. Fonda said she taught her how to count, master the alphabet, then perform simple feats of mathematics. No calculus—just practical everyday arithmetic. Proud of her prodigy, Mrs. Fonda decided to show her off to the world, at least that part of the world which drove by the farm on Petersburg Pike, three miles south of Richmond, Virginia.

A roadside sign announced that the Wonder Horse could spell, add, subtract, multiply, divide, tell time, and answer questions. Most people knew the time, and children were delighted when she solved math problems; but her answers to questions intrigued everyone and eventually made Lady a Richmond celebrity. Admission to the barn, which was open to the public afternoons and evenings, was reasonable: fifty cents for children, a dollar for adults.

Motorists on the pike, a section of Route One that extended

from New York to Florida, spread the story of the mare's amazing ability not only along the East Coast but throughout the United States. Most people asked personal questions: When would they marry? Should they take their doctor's advice? Was their husband true to them? How should they invest their money? Lady's prediction that Dempsey would trounce Sharkey attracted widespread comment. Sportsmen came to Virginia with serious queries. Who would win the Preakness? Which team would take the World Series banner? The mare was as well informed about Midwestern baseball as she was about the big leagues. She correctly prophesied that the Terre Haute, Indiana, club would capture the Three-I pennant in 1932. She had more success picking the annual winner of the Army-Navy football game than most professional sportswriters. An advertising man told me that he had three winners in a single afternoon at the Havre de Grace racetrack. It wasn't just chance, he went on, he had the tips straight from a horse's mouth. The horse, of course, was Lady.

Few horses devote much time to politics. They are more interested in oats, pastures, and other horses. Lady was never hesitant to give her opinion on the outcome of an election—local, statewide, or national. She singled out Franklin D. Roosevelt as the winner of the 1932 presidential campaign even before he received the Democratic nomination, and galloped from the Virginia limelight to the pages of the national press.

She was not impressed by Thomas Dewey when he ran against Harry Truman, the man from Missouri, nor, it developed, were a majority of the voters. It was said that senators and congressmen drove down from Washington to get her advice on pending bills and that fortunes had been made when her tips on the stock market were followed, but no evidence was ever offered to prove that this was true.

Dr. Joseph Banks Rhine, who later was to head the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University, firmly believed that Lady had psychic ability, or ESP as he termed it. He pitched a tent near the barn so that he could study her talents scientifically.

Life lamented in 1940 that the fifteen-year-old mare's days as a

gifted psychic were over. Her misses were outtotaling her hits; she was better at grazing than prophesying. Yesterday's animal marvel was today's old horse.

Then, late in 1952, America's most famous four-legged prophet was in the headlines again, reaping the biggest press coverage of her long career. A man came south to confront her with a problem that had stymied the police of Norfolk County, Massachusetts. A four-year-old boy had vanished without a trace. Intensive searches by state troopers and volunteer citizen groups had failed to find even a shred of his clothing. There were many ways to pose the question. Had he been kidnapped? Had he met with a serious accident? Had he run away from home? The man chose the direct approach. Where was the boy now? As Mrs. Fonda stood by Lady's side in the barn, the twenty-seven-year-old former oracle bent her head over the lettered oblongs and spelled out "Pittsfield Water Wheel." The man knew there was no water wheel in Pittsfield, Massachusetts; he returned home disappointed. Too bad the old horse wasn't as psychic as she used to be.

A police captain who learned of Lady's prediction stared at the words after he wrote them on a piece of paper. The ancient oracles of Greece had been known to give messages that required considerable interpretation. Pittsfield Water Wheel. As he stared, his mind rearranged the syllables: Field Wheel Water Pitt. No, that wasn't quite right. It should be Field and Wilde Water Pit. Eureka! There was an old quarry which people knew by this name filled with water. They had looked everywhere else. Why not there? Dragging operations began, and eventually the body of the missing youngster was pulled from beneath the murky surface.

Lady made a comeback of spectacular proportions. It was the first time that *Life* ever publicly apologized to a four-footed animal. Two pages of pictures announced her return to the magazine's good graces. More people than ever began taking a detour to Virginia to seek the psychic horse's counsel. Reporters from the West Coast as well as the East coaxed Lady to find other missing persons or solve local crimes. One woman visitor was more interested

in the horse's welfare than her talent. She asked the old mare a personal question. How did she like her work? Lady, bored by now with nuzzling out answers to queries, flipped up the letters to spell "Don't."

By 1956, Mrs. Fonda had shortened the time the famous horse was available to the public. The mare could be seen then only in the afternoon. Her evenings were free. One day I had a phone call from my friend John Kobler. The *Saturday Evening Post* was sending him to Richmond to do an article on Lady. Was I available to go with him, as one who was familiar with the techniques of deception, to act as a consultant? I was.

On the plane down I suggested that he introduce me to Mrs. Fonda as John Banks. She might have read my comments on Lady in the *Baltimore Sun*, and besides my assumed name had a special significance that I would explain later. We drove in a rented car out to the Petersburg Pike and turned left at the roadside sign. I had a camera with me, and it seemed logical to assume that Mrs. Fonda would accept me as a photographer associate of the writer.

We talked with Mrs. Fonda in her frame farmhouse. She told us how impressed Dr. Rhine had been with Lady and let us read a letter he had written her stating that the animal was "the greatest thing since radio." I asked if Lady answered questions that came by mail. No, she answered, she didn't want any trouble with the government post office. Once the Richmond authorities had tried to make her pay the thousand-dollar yearly fee imposed on fortunetellers, but she had convinced them that she was exhibiting an educated animal and the annual license in that category was fifty dollars.

While we were talking, some schoolchildren knocked on the front door. They wanted to ask Lady a few questions. She told them to come back later. She adjusted her glasses when I asked her if she planned to train another horse to replace Lady when the horse died. No, she answered, it had been fun working with Lady as a girl, but she would never go through it again.

We walked across the lawn to the red building with "Lady

Wonder Horse" lettered in white on its side. She unlocked the door. At one end of the structure was a pipework frame stall, with open sides and a rope tied across its front. In it stood the celebrated swaybacked mare. There was a "typewriter" between us and the horse.

To a thick plank were fastened two horizontal metal rods. Half the letters of the alphabet were flat on the horse's side of the rods, the other half extended flat toward us. Each of the metal oblongs that bore the letters rested on a lever. By pressing one of the levers, a letter could be raised to stand on end or drop vertically in place on our side. There was no trick to the simple mechanism. A bar on the right was pulled after words had been spelled and the letters were forced flat again for the next round.

Mrs. Fonda stood to our right by the horse with a rod, similar to a riding crop, in her right hand.

"What is my name?" I asked the mare. Lady moved her head, lowered it so that her nose pressed on a lever and *B* popped up to be followed by *A-N-K-S*.

"When will my brother come back from Europe?" Lady spelled out *S-U-M-M-E-R*.

I was disenchanted. I had been introduced to Mrs. Fonda as John Banks. I had used this name because a showman named Banks had exhibited the first famous talking horse in the seventeenth century, and I don't have a brother!

After Kobler had asked several questions, we were given pads and pencils. We could write any numbers and the clairvoyant horse would flip them up, Mrs. Fonda said. We stood far away from the stall to write. Neither the horse nor its owner could see the faces of the pads. John's numbers were immediately nosed up. I wrote several numbers. Some were correctly indicated, others not, and there was a good reason why they were not. For example, I wrote a 2, which Lady flipped up, then a 1 which Lady gave as 9. I wrote the 2 as anyone would, but when I wrote the 1, I went through the motions of writing a 9 but only touched my pencil to the paper for the downstroke.

It was obvious that a trick employed by mediums was being used. This is the technique known as pencil reading. The medium doesn't see the surface of the pad, but she can see the long end of the pencil. By following its movements, numbers and letters can be detected many feet away.

Mrs. Fonda had simplified the method; she had given us long, narrow pads. A wider pad or shorter pencil would make it difficult for her to follow the pencil movements. I still have the slips on which I wrote. They are 2½ inches wide and 8¾ inches long. The paper is yellow with thin, blue, ruled lines. Three pads of this width can be made by cutting a school tablet in three vertical parts.

I have read many accounts of others who visited Lady. In a few it was mentioned that questions were written, but not one, Rhine's included, noted the special long pads or the long pencils. Obviously the investigators were not aware of the pencil-reading system.

If Dr. Rhine was interested in testing for ESP, he should have ignored the horse and studied Mrs. Fonda.

There is an amusing sidelight to my visit to the talking horse. Tacked to one side of the barn was a notice. Mrs. Fonda's pet dog had run away. She offered a reward for its return. Here was Lady answering questions, telling where lost people could be found and not cooperating in the search for the missing family pet.

The trainers of talking animals deserve credit for infinite patience. The most successful insist on remaining in the background, focusing attention and applause on their pupils, just as ventriloquist Edgar Bergen insisted that Charlie McCarthy, his dummy, was the clever member of the team.

The trainer's basic problem is to get his animal accustomed to the cues that trigger the actions. Every successful circus has a riding master who can make his steed kneel, stand, trot, and stop with no visible signals. Silent commands can be given with the slight movement of a foot, head, hand, whip, or, in Mrs. Fonda's case, with the stick she held in her right hand. A horse does not

see ahead. Lady's vision to the left included Mrs. Fonda who stood by her side. A good performer apparently remains idle with his eyes on the animal while the four-footed marvel seems to do all the work. Lady was trained to move her head back and forth above the board bearing the letters. When she was over the right lever, a slight movement of Mrs. Fonda's stick cued her to lower her head and touch the proper lever.

As animals, unlike humans, are not interested in money or fame, their rewards are in the form of food. No trainer feeds his protégé before a performance. Tidbits are given after feats have been accomplished, for once the animal has been fed, the work incentive disappears.

Early in the twentieth century a horse convinced his master that no signals were necessary for him to stamp out answers to questions. Clever Hans was the horse; Wilhelm Von Osten, an elderly Berliner, was his owner. Learned professors were convinced that Hans could work out his own solutions to mathematical problems and had a better knowledge of world affairs than most fourteen-year-old children. Oskar Pfungst was determined to find a more rational explanation. Had Hans's master been a charlatan he would have blocked the intensive investigation by the Berlin psychologist, but Von Osten shared the general opinion that his horse was a phenomenon.

Pfungst's study revealed that the horse could give a correct answer only if the questioner knew it. When Pfungst shielded the eyes of the animal, the hoof remained still. It was reasonable to suppose at this point that Von Osten was cuing Hans subconsciously. Further study ruled out signals by touch or sound. Pfungst now centered his observations on the questioner. He discovered that Hans started stamping when the questioner leaned forward ever so slightly to see the hoof in action. Hans stopped when the man relaxed even a fraction. The other investigators had never noticed this; their attention had been focused on the horse.

Then Pfungst played horse himself. He rapped with his right hand as friends posed queries. Twenty-three out of twenty-five

questioners gave the starting and stopping cue without realizing it. Pfungst's answers were as baffling to them as the horse's had been.

The psychologist published his findings in 1904. Von Osten refused to accept them. Before he died four years later, he willed Hans to his friend Karl Krall, an Elberfeld merchant and horse fancier, who believed as he did that the animal had remarkable reasoning powers.

Krall had the time and the money to develop the talent of other equines. The Elberfeld horses became world famous. The Arabian stallion Muhamed mastered mathematics in less than two weeks; it had taken Von Osten three years to "educate" Hans. Krall simplified the answer system. One rap of Muhamed's left hoof indicated tens, while the right hoof tapped ones. Four left stomps and one right, for example, represented the figure 41. Muhamed worked out square roots and complicated equations which were as far beyond Hans's capacities as Krall's were beyond Von Osten's.

Other Krall horses, especially Zarif and Mustapha, approached Muhamed in brilliance. Professor E. Claparède, who came from the University of Geneva to study the Elberfeld horses, was as awestruck as Dr. Rhine was to be in Richmond. He proclaimed: "These horses are the most sensational event which has ever appeared in the field of animal psychology—perhaps, indeed, in the whole realm of psychology."

Dr. Stefan von Maday took the opposite view. One by one he struck down Krall's points of evidence, then went on to analyze the human behind the horses. Krall, he said, was driven by a desire for importance. He was an animal lover and thought through them to achieve a greatness not possible in the business world where he had accumulated his wealth.

Krall's horses were more cautious than Lady. None seems to have predicted the date of its death. Lady, years before her end, said she would live thirty years. She died in 1957 at the age of thirty-two.

I had chosen to be introduced to Mrs. Fonda as John Banks because I thought that if Lady were really clairvoyant she would

spell out my own name rather than that of the man who had exhibited "the white oat-eater" Morocco in the seventeenth century. Morocco, like the Elberfeld marvels, answered questions by stamping his hoof. With popular belief in witchcraft, sorcerers, and seers widespread, his performances were greeted with awe and some apprehension. The steed would rap out the totals of two rolled dice, though the dice were hidden from his view. He would give a quick count of the pence in a piece of silver which any spectator could put in his master's hand, and he was as well posted on the value of French money as he was of English.

Sentenced to be burned at the stake in Orléans, the marvelous animal saved his own hide and the skin of Banks by kneeling in submission before a high authority of the church. The charge of witchcraft was dismissed on the grounds that no emissary of the devil could come that close to a wearer of the holy cross.

History does not record where Banks and his talking horse met their fates, but there are tales in old books that, despite their narrow escape in France, they were eventually burned to a crisp for dealing with demons.

Another famed equine was the "Learned Little Horse" which a Mr. Zucker exhibited in Glasgow in 1764. This horse, in addition to his talent for "speaking," had more than his share of bad habits. He played cards with spectators, enjoyed a game of dice, and ended each performance by drinking a toast to the audience's health.

A less riotous-living stallion was Mr. Henley's "Military Horse of Knowledge." I have a 1780 handbill that describes his performance in glowing terms. This popular quadruped performed feats of multiplication, fired a pistol, and charmed his viewers with a repertoire of card tricks. "If any person takes a pack of cards in his own hand and shuffles and cuts them ever so often, the creature will with his mouth draw a single card and tell the number of spots on it to the amazement of the spectators."

This steed was perhaps the most patriotic of his breed. If Mr. Henley jokingly remarked that he should serve the king of France

or Spain the animal—British to the core—would seize his master's arm with his teeth. When, however, Mr. Henley asked if he would fight for the English sovereign, the Military Horse of Knowledge demonstrated his great enthusiasm by rearing back on his hind legs "and returning thanks."

He, like Lady, could tell the hours and the minutes by a time-piece and "agreeably entertain the company with several other diversions, too tedious to mention." Let's hope they were not too tedious to enjoy.

Almost a century and a half ago when ventriloquism was still a mystery to the average person, Signor Antonio Blitz, one of the most celebrated voice throwers of his day, used to amuse himself by strolling through a town and holding conversations with the horses he found tied at sidewalk hitching posts. As if this weren't startling enough, Blitz once discussed the state of the weather with a dead mackerel in a fish market and almost created a panic.

The best-known talking horse of yesteryear in America caused astonishment by his appearance as well as his talent. Spottie, "an African horse," was spotted like a leopard—and in four colors. He had a tail "like an elephant," and this appendage was prominently mentioned in the advertisements for his performances. At Mr. Cook's tavern in Baltimore in 1807, you could quaff a few beers, then for twenty-five cents watch Spottie stamp out the time and give the totals of figures suggested by those who looked on. He personalized his demonstrations by striking the floor once for every button on a gentleman's coat.

Sunday circus performances were illegal in New York in 1892. When E. L. Probasco was arrested in May for exhibiting his educated horse Mahomet on the Sabbath at Huber's dime museum, the brown stallion was the principal witness for the defense. He was not sworn in; the judge transferred his session to the doorsteps of the courthouse so that Mahomet could testify. Probasco's lawyer had contended that the exhibition was "of an intellectual character." "How old are you?" the judge asked. The horse struck his right forefoot five times on the ground. He then tapped out that for

three years he had appeared before the public. When the judge pulled out his pocket watch and asked Mahomet the time, the horse immediately stamped out the hour. The New York *Herald* reported that the judge "seemed to be of the opinion that Huber's exhibition was not an infraction of the law, yet he felt constrained to hold him for trial." The outcome of the case is not known, but it was the first time a horse was accepted as a qualified witness by an American court.

Two years later in London, Probasco, who was then exhibiting Mahomet in British music halls, admitted to a writer from *The Sketch* that for centuries trainers had cued their animals to stamp once for "yes" and twice for "no" by a simple movement of their whip. An affirmative reply was signaled by tilting the far end toward the shoulder; a negative answer was indicated by tipping the whip forward. He had worked with Mahomet so long, and the Australian horse was so intelligent that he now dispensed with the whip and sent his signals so unobtrusively that no one could detect them.

One of the features of the stage performance was an addition test. Each of four spectators wrote a four-digit number on a blackboard. Mahomet glanced at the numbers and stamped out the total. The horse was equally skillful, many credulous spectators thought, at subtraction and division.

A talking horse named Captain was one of the attractions at the San Francisco Exposition of 1915. Captain finished his act by playing popular tunes on a set of chimes. He nuzzled the keys of an ingenious control board, not unlike the one in Lady's Virginia barn.

Despite the accomplishments of these famous equines, scientists say that horses are not unusually intelligent animals. George John Romanes in his *Animal Intelligence* claims that horses as a species are rather dull creatures, far less perceptive than elephants. Dogs, on the other hand, are quick learners, and a long line of talking dogs has matched and even surpassed their equine rivals.

Don Carlos, "The Double-Sighted Dog," was a great draw in

England during the 1830's. The handsome spaniel gave a command performance before King William and the royal family at the Brighton Pavilion. The knowledgeable animal added fun to the proceedings by pointing out the loveliest lady present and "the gentleman most partial to the ladies." It must have been with considerable regret that his owner, Mr. Harrington, eventually offered him for sale at fifty guineas (\$262.50).

Munito, another clever early-nineteenth-century canine, answered questions pertaining to geography, botany, and natural history in France and England. While Signor Castelli urged him on, he would pick up lettered cards between his teeth to spell out the answers. Fond parents brought lackadaisical youngsters to see the show, hoping that Munito's talents would serve as an object lesson.

Munito had another claim to fame. He proudly wore a gold medal attached to his collar. It had been awarded to him with proper ceremony by the British Humane Society "for having saved the life of a lady in the most extraordinary manner." He had gripped her dress between his teeth and pulled her ashore before she drowned.

There are records in the French Academy of a dog who actually talked. According to Leibniz, the celebrated scholar, this animal, which was owned by a peasant in Saxony, had a vocabulary of thirty words, which was put to effective use when he wanted something specific to eat or drink. Academicians admitted that if someone of lesser importance than Leibniz had vouched for the dog they would have considered the matter unworthy of their consideration.

Charles L. Burlingame, a Chicago magic dealer at the turn of the century, had a talking cat of sorts. The conjurer's tabby would purr in different tones for milk, meat, or water. Beyond this the feline never spoke.

"Learned pigs" were strong attractions at Bartholomew Fair in London and other British festivals. Generations of Englishmen paid their shillings to see the sapient porkers. The public had been intrigued by the wonderful horses and dogs, but it was absolutely

entranced by the savants of the sty. Grunting and waddling, the gross animals went through the routines made popular by their predecessors. One pig, learned or not, looks pretty much like another. When the reigning star became too old to exhibit, he wound up on a dining table, and another took his place in the exhibition booth.

The Mr. Nicholson who toured through Scotland with a learned pig in 1787 also taught a turtle to fetch, a hare to beat a drum, and six turkeycocks to do a country dance. The S.P.C.A. will be unhappy to learn that many a callous showman who exhibited dancing chickens skipped the usual training period and relied on a heated metal stage. Once the tender-footed performers touched the hot plate, they "danced" to keep from being burned.

Bostonians saw their first pig pundit in January 1798. William Fredrick Pinchbeck announced that his attraction had been imported from England by way of Philadelphia. He said he had paid a whopping big price for it—a thousand dollars.

Realizing that canny Yankees might be dubious about his prodigious pig, he offered a money-back guarantee if anyone could prove that his wonder wasn't a bonafide, in-the-flesh animal. No one ever got a refund; his claims were true. Pinchbeck wrote and published *The Expositor; or Many Mysteries Unravelled* in 1805 "to oppose the idea of the supernatural agency in any production of man." Its principal feature was a series of lessons which instructed the reader how to teach a "Pig of Knowledge."

"Take a pig, seven or eight weeks old, let him have free access to the inferior part of your house, until he shall become in some measure domesticated," Pinchbeck began. Each day put a card in the animal's mouth and try to make the pig understand that he must hold it firmly until you take it away. Three lessons daily will soon produce results. Each time the animal follows your instructions, he went on, you should reward him with a piece of bread or a slice of apple, whichever he prefers.

Next the pig should be taught to pick up a card from the floor. Bend a corner of it, hold the animal's head down, and put the cor-

ner in his mouth. More practice and more tidbits, and the pig will learn to pick up the card by himself. Now with three cards on the floor the porker is taught not to pick up the card nearest him—his natural tendency—but to move his head and bend it down only when you sniff through your nose.

Finally spread a dozen or more cards in a circle with a four-inch space between them, and after several weeks of rehearsal the pig will be ready to perform in public. When the pig has been properly trained, it will move around the circle with his snout just above the cards. Hearing the sniff signal, he will pick up the proper card immediately. Pinchbeck suggested that it may be necessary at first to tie a string around the animal's neck when training him to walk in a circle, but this can be dispensed with when the pig fully understands what you expect him to do. "That animal, who in his rude state appears the most stupid, with the least share of tractability amongst all other quadrupeds," Pinchbeck wrote, "will be found sapient, docile, and gentle."

While evidence of talking pigs abounds, I have come across only one "goat of knowledge," though surely there must have been more. This billy was not as balky as his brothers and went through the same paces as the animals that had preceded him in taverns up and down the populated centers of the eastern seacoast early in the nineteenth century.

Many birds have been taught to tell time and to find cards selected by their audiences. A Sieur Rea had a pair of "minous . . . from Botany Bay" in England in the fall of 1810. "They are much superior in Knowledge to the Learned Pig," Rea boasted in his handbills. I have seen birds in Hong Kong and Japan which street fortune-tellers had taught to pick out slips of paper bearing advice for the future from heaps carried in baskets and boxes.

Houdini was so taken with a handbill advertising "Learned Goose" that he made a tracing from the original in the British Museum. Eight years ago I found another original. This feathered marvel offered feats "most prodigiously and certainly unbelieving to those who know the intellects of a goose" at the shop of Mr.

Beckett, a London trunkmaker who plied his trade at No. 31 Haymarket. The goose was advertised to tell "the number of ladies and gentlemen in the company or any person's thoughts." This is the first bird I have found who performed the feat of picking up a chosen card while wearing a blindfold.

A second learned goose was exhibited later at No. 5 Pantech-nicon Arcade, Belgrade Square, in London. "The curious may be highly gratified with a very extraordinary performance by one of the most silly and stupid Animals in Creation . . . no one would believe, unless they see him, that such an Animal as a Goose could be taught to display feats of intelligence." Talking Goose No. 2 added a new mystifier to the ones earlier animals had shown: "any person may put Figures in a Box, and make what Number they please, and this Curious Bird will tell the number made before the Box is opened." The conjuring trick was even more mysterious when the performer was a goose.

I have known two exhibitors of trained fleas who amazed audiences when their insects pulled tiny carriages and carried tinier flags, but neither claimed their fleas could read thoughts and as yet no parapsychologist has attempted to measure a flea's ESP quotient.

THOUGHT READING

A proficient thought reader carries out the unspoken directions of his subjects. Parapsychologists say that in the future everyone will be using untapped areas of the human brain. The potential is there, they claim, but it must be developed. Unlike the patient experimenters in scientific laboratories, professional thought readers rarely fail to achieve a perfect score in their demonstrations. They are willing to bet heavily on their ability to perform seemingly impossible feats.

George Kreskin ended his week on the Mike Douglas television show in November 1969 with the statement that he would either find the hidden check for his salary or go without compensation. A committee from the studio audience had secreted the valuable piece of paper while he was in another room. In the final minutes of the program he seized the hand of a woman, who thought of the hiding place, and quickly led her to a man who was sitting with the other spectators. Kreskin asked the man to stand, then ran his free hand up and down a few inches away from the man's body. Just before the final commercial the thought reader triumphantly pulled the envelope containing his pay from the man's left shoe.

For many years this effective finale was the climax of Franz J. Polgar's routine. Despite the trepidations of his agent, who constantly feared he might lose his commission, the Hungarian-born