

Career of August H. Hennings an Example of Well Directed Energy

AUGUST H. HENNINGs was a political surprise to Omaha citizens. He was elected city treasurer six years ago from a subordinate position in a large wholesale business establishment. Within six months he was famous as a public official who dared apply common sense business methods in the conduct of public affairs.

After he had settled in the office, taken his bearings and looked around he concluded there was much room for improvement. Having made his calculations and planned his campaign, Hennings set out to make people pay their taxes. During the first year of his incumbency he collected \$2,000 more than the year before.

Prior to the Hennings administration back to the year the city was incorporated the average collection of current years' taxes was 6 per cent of the whole amount levied. Hennings raised the average to 15 per cent, meaning the prompt collection of one-fourth more taxes than ever before and placing Omaha in the front rank of cities in this respect. The process resulted in a financial profit for the municipal government, saving about \$15,000 annually, or \$90,000 for his two terms, in interest on warrants, which must have been issued and permitted to remain outstanding, were not the cash in hand ready to meet the intrusions on the exchequer.

Merely Enforced the Law.

How did he do it? For years a law had existed authorizing the treasurer to seize personal property upon which taxes had not been paid and to sell it to satisfy the city's claim. But this had previously been regarded as a device intended to scare people with and not to be used. It was good to employ in public interviews, by way of threat, but no one ever dreamed about its enforcement. Hennings, however, assumed the law was there for a purpose, and, perceiving the necessity of such a purpose, announced he would proceed to levy upon household furniture, office equipment, railroad rolling stock, the goods of mercantile establishments or anything else movable if the owners were found grossly negligent or defiant in the liquidation of personal taxes.

The new treasurer found on the books of the office prima facie evidence that a large proportion of Omahans looked upon personal taxes as a joke. The receipt book stubs showed that real estate assessments were regarded as possessing more substance, but when it came to paying anything on places, diamonds, stocks, bonds or money in the bank, your patriotic beneficiary of the police force, the fire department, the public schools, the public library, street repairs and cleaning, the parks, boulevards and other handmaidens of municipal existence, preferred to save his coin for himself.



OMAHA'S EFFICIENT CITY TREASURER.

Discrepancy Not Appreciated.

Mr. Hennings always had held a good opinion of the man who tried to own his home. To him the possession of a domicile seemed emblematic of good citizenship, good sense and good will towards the rest of the community. It did not seem right to the new treasurer that premiums should accompany the investment in bonds, stocks, fine feathers, horses, carriages, jewelry, and that the man who foregoes these luxuries to make a center table abiding place for his family should be compelled to pay a double tax thereby. Consulting the statute books Hennings discovered the prescribed manner to enforce the payment of personal taxes.

Doubtless it occurred to him that he had a mean task on his hands, one that might forfeit personal popularity. Perhaps it struck him that was the reason why former treasurers had let dust accumulate on this particular lever of their official equipment. But Hennings had been accustomed to seeing orders issued and orders obeyed and all hands dealt with in equal measure. He was born in Germany where authority is sternly respected and he reasoned that a few demonstrations that he meant what he said about collecting taxes would be sufficient so far as further action went.

Since then Hennings has been known all over the country as the man of the red, lecturing van, "debt wagon," "cash chariot" or any other old pseudonym that happens to strike the fancy. Pictures of himself and his van were published in various cities and in Omaha a stream of money for back taxes poured into city coffers such as was never known before. After the first year it was necessary merely to hire a fire-tire wagon, tack on a sign and have it down through the streets to stir up personal tax delinquents.

Disclosures by the Van.

The law imposes on the city treasurer

the duty to collect the taxes. The city treasurer collected the taxes. It required a great deal of courage and the possession of considerable personal character. The records of the office show that it was the man who could well afford to pay that had a distress warrant served on him, the van backed up to his office or home, and his chattels carted away and sold if he did not pay up. It would have been easy to make a demonstration against the man of small means fighting to pay off a mortgage or pile up doctor bills. It was much harder to deal with the citizen of influence and resource who would not pay his personal taxes because of an inherent belief that he was too good to do so. These constituted the class whom the treasurer found out the most money. Accepting the problem squarely, he went after them and left the poorer persons alone. These, he knew, would pay when they possibly could.

Risen from Nails Kegs.

A man who surprised Omaha as thoroughly as Hennings and who caused the advocates of good government to cheer up is worth some study. When he was elected he appeared to be a good type of the solid, substantial, middle-aged German-American citizen, who had managed to stay about even with the pace of fair circumstance and by persistent application had profited in a fair degree. The tale of how he began affairs in Omaha piling nail kegs in the Hector-Wilhelmy cellar has been narrated so often it scarcely needs repetition. It was not a great while before he became a foreman, and after three years went over to the Lee-Glass-Andresen wholesale hardware house, where he resumed the original nail-keg piling exercise. This was about 1885. He stayed with this house and worked his way up

to better things. At the end of fifteen years Hennings had acquired a position by which he had complete charge of the shipping of the house and had general superintendence over the stock and store rooms. He had distinguished himself by getting up a book of tariff schedules that greatly facilitated the business of the firm and by originating a "perpetual" stock book, which delighted not only the Lee-Glass-Andresen people, but other big houses as well.

Early Life and Schooling.

The story how a foreigner comes to this country and rises in business and politics is always interesting, because it has an essence of striving and endeavor in it. Hennings was born at Emden province, of Hanover, Germany, September 1, 1859, and therefore is 48 years old. His father was a business man, and this one of several sons was given an academic education at Gera, Saxony. Emerging from school at the age of 15 young Hennings went to Holland where he had two brothers in business, to serve a cadetship in the lumber and grain business. Besides remaining in the Netherlands two years, learning a great deal of practical experience and making some money, Hennings succeeded in winning the heart of a Dutch maiden and straightway married her.

From boyhood Hennings had an adventurous turn of mind. His father had sent a number of years in South America and the son, soon after marriage, was filled with the wandering spirit. Some of his old Emden friends had gone to the states and some had settled in Nebraska and all appeared to like it. Just before reaching his majority, young wife in charge, Hennings landed in New York, where he stayed a few months and then went to Fremont, Neb., where he had friends. His education had made him fairly familiar with English and he got work in May brothers wholesale grocery house. He remained there two years studying American customs, newspapers and politics and then came to Omaha for a turn at the nail kegs.

How He Became a Republican.

From the time his ship dropped him on Manhattan island, Hennings read the newspapers and began to exercise mental participation in the business of running the country. As soon as time permitted he became a fully naturalized American citizen. The presidential campaign of 1882 was the first of the kind of which he had acquaintance. He was drawn towards Garfield and the republican party by a conviction that the former had been badly used by unjust and malicious attacks upon his public career. The sympathies of the young voter went out to Garfield. After much attention to the documents and frequent appearance at political meetings Hennings found himself a republican and remained steadfast through all the free silver turmoil being "one of the soundest of the sound money men," as he puts it.

For eight or nine years before he was nominated for city treasurer Hennings had been fairly active in ward and city politics. He was on delegations and committees and occasionally got out and hustled for votes for a friend. He naturally enjoyed brushing up against fellow citizens and discussing matters of public interest with them, but he had no deep designs on political jobs for himself until after certain sudden and history-making events occurred at the republican city convention early in 1893.

First Nomination in Omaha.

Hennings was a delegate to that convention from the Ninth ward. With nine others he had been elected at the primaries on an independent delegation labeled for Benova for mayor. The real contest for the majority nomination lay between Frank E. Moores and W. W. Bingham. The first ballot showed each with forty votes apiece and Benova with his ten from the Ninth ward. It was perceived that the Ninth ward held the key. The Moores people had first made overtures to the Fifth ward delegation for the six votes necessary to give them a nominating majority, offering in return to nominate Charles L. Saunders for treasurer, an office for which he was aspiring. The Fifth ward people deluded themselves in the belief that they could make Saunders and Bingham as well, and declined. The offer was then transferred to the Ninth ward dele-

gation. Hennings accepted the proposition, his end of it being the treasurership nomination. He secured five votes besides his own to nominate Moores. When the ballot was taken on treasurer the agreement was completed by the Moores strength going to Hennings for that office.

Hennings had a hard fight. He was looked upon as a nonentity in politics and an accident, and his enemies tried to make adverse capital out of his trade in the convention, which was the orthodox and approved thing in the days before the direct primary. His hard, persistent canvassing and his record as a good citizen won the day. He was elected by a plurality of about 1,600. Then he proceeded to show Omaha what a really efficient city treasurer could do in action.

Put Omaha on Cash Basis.

He started in to place the city on a cash basis—that is, in a position where it could pay money for current expenses without being compelled to issue interest bearing warrants, to be paid any old time that was convenient. Not in a long time had Omaha pretended to meet its obligations with ready money. The first year of his term Hennings' energetic methods accomplished the desired cash basis for a period of three months, thereby smashing all existing records. This space of cash liquidating time was increased steadily each year until 1906, when for eight months, or the greater part of the year, a warrant issued by the comptroller could be carried across the hall and cashed, and the practice of registering warrants, which is necessary to make them bear interest, was for that time abolished.

Besides saving the city the interest on the warrants, the habit of promptly paying taxes, which was brought about by Hennings, resulted in a large decrease in delinquency interest on regular taxes. For instance, in 1900 the treasurer collected \$152,084 personal taxes, accompanied by \$16,720 interest penalty, showing that a large proportion was delinquent. In 1906 he collected \$225,000 in personal taxes and \$1,332 in interest. During these six years his methods resulted in the collection of \$58,401 more than the 90 per cent limit of personal taxes, the limit being that up to which warrants can be drawn against funds until more than 90 per cent of the amount levied is actually in the hands of the city.

Methods Copied in Other Cities.

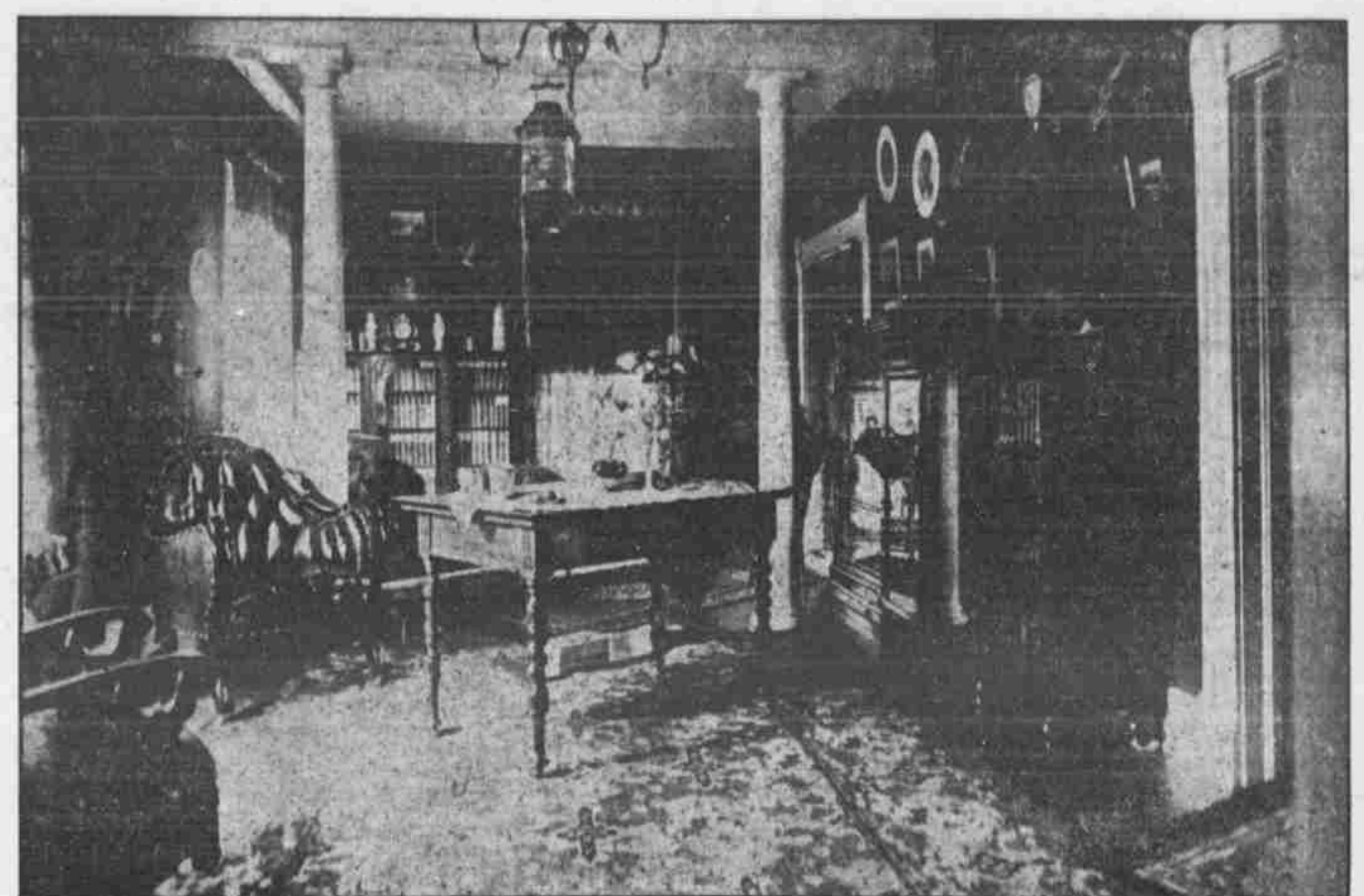
The van method of enforcing the collection of personal taxes originated with Hennings in Omaha has been adopted in San Francisco, Lincoln and other cities. On the face of it, one might suppose Hennings a cold, harsh and domineering sort of person, with no human side or kindly attributes. Such a conception of his character is very erroneous. He has the whole-souled gentleness of the German race and there has never been an act in his administration not tempered by consideration and charity. He regarded the tax paying public as he would a lot of children spoiled by over-indulgence and who had to be taught new habits. He determined to use the van no more than necessary as a warning. Usually it cluttered about the streets filled with furniture and junk rented from second-hand shops for the purpose, but the result was the same as though real policemen had been employed, and the clerks were rushed counting money. The whole expenses for van hire during a six years term was less than \$100.

When he tried the van on the ice trust to garner delinquent taxes and when he threatened to collect back taxes on the Union Pacific bridge, lots of attention resulted. The Western office so feared the van that it went into court and put its apprehensions on record and got an injunction to restrain Hennings from carting away its telegraph instruments and batteries. Likewise the threatened seizure of several law libraries was utilized to excellent advantage. Very seldom was so feared actually seized. Checkbooks were properly warrants in execution and the deal was called square.

No levies ever were made until after the delinquents had been called upon time and again by personal tax collectors and re-quested to pay. The installment plan was always held open to hard up citizens and every advantage extended them to be good. Hennings often was the subject of violent imprecation and declarations against his personal safety during his first term,



RESIDENCE OF A. H. HENNING.



CORNER IN THE LIBRARY AT THE HENNING HOME.

but his plurality of about 2,100 votes in 1903 proved the mass of the people regarded his services as a public officer. This campaign for renomination and reelection kept the entire amount of taxes unpaid. In 1902 there were 26,000 lots so encumbered in Omaha. At the end of 1904 14,000 of these lots had been cleared up and made tax producers. About \$70,000 was realized in Douglas county, of which about \$40,000 went to the city and the operation of the law has by no means been completed—in fact has accomplished little more than half of what is before it.

Home Life of Hennings.

Though marked successful as a personal campaigner and vote-getter, Hennings' personal recreations stray far from the turmoil of politics. He takes most of his rest and a large percentage of his pleasures in life in his home at 334 Davenport street, which he bought several years ago and has considerably improved. His family consists of his wife and daughter, Miss Harriet Hennings. One of the most attractive rooms of an exceedingly comfortable and tasteful home is Mr. Hennings' library. Reading with him is an avocation. He has a large and finely selected library, including in its ensemble many historical, philosophical works and liberal editions of classic and semi-classic authors.

Mr. Hennings is fond of out-of-door sports and exercise. Fishing is what he enjoys most, and next to that hunting, both for large and small game. Last year he acquired a 100-acre tract of land near Akeley, Minn., including part of a lake, stocked with game fish. Near this property, which Mr. Hennings calls "his farm," he secured a ten-acre piece of land upon which he built a summer cottage. Aside from his own enjoyment in the out-of-door life, he built a dwelling place in a half wilderness in order that his daughter's health might be benefited by means of it. He spent a month there last summer clearing the ground for the cottage and later helping to construct it.

His life has been that of a wholesome, decent, self-respecting American citizen, of a man who makes his family the center of his interests, and who takes a pride in upholding and improving the institutions of his country. His personal character is unassailable. Politics is no respecter of private life, but the worst Hennings' foes could say of him was that he was hustled heavy freight and speaks with a slight accent. They might have said, also, that in summer Hennings is the most comfortable appearing man in the city hall, affecting thin silk shirtwaists, with soft collars and a flowing tie, at once immaculate and easy-going.

Sponsor for Scavenger Tax.

The efficient collection of taxes was not the only way in which Hennings bettered private and public conditions in Omaha. He was the sponsor of the now famous "scavenger law" which real estate men affirm has achieved a great mission in making marketable thousands of pieces of property that were loaded down and immobile because of taxes inherited from the years of business depression. In this connection it is worth while to quote from a brief filed by attorneys, of which W. A. Saunders, manager of the Benson campaign was one, in a case before the supreme court:

Hon. August H. Hennings, city treasurer of the city of Omaha, realized more keenly perhaps than any other man in the state of Nebraska, the gravity of this situation. He saw how useless a thing it was for the state, county and city to continue the expense of levying taxes, employing help to extend such levies on the tax books, and publishing notices of tax sale under the revenue law, on these properties that were already covered with taxes beyond their value. He undertook to secure legislation that would relieve this situation, hit the liens, and revive the properties that had been crushed to death, and make them of value to the state, county and city as revenue producing in the future. He initiated and pushed many public pieces of legislation, as well as the Douglas county delegation in the legislation of 1903, and as a result we have what is known as the scavenger act.

The idea of the scavenger law was to

gain for public use as much revenue as possible from properties against which taxes in excess of their value constituted liens. These inspections included those of bonding companies as well as by city officers. Democrats and republicans alike have gone over the department with a fine-tooth comb. In a report for the Fidelity and Deposit company in 1902 John M. Gilchrist, an expert employed by the state under fusion reign, signed his name to the following:

We commend the careful work done by the accountant department of the treasurer's office and the willingness of the treasurer in adopting suggestions looking towards an improvement of system and methods. In view of the large volume of collections, \$2,000,000, and the multiplicity of accounts the accuracy is remarkable.

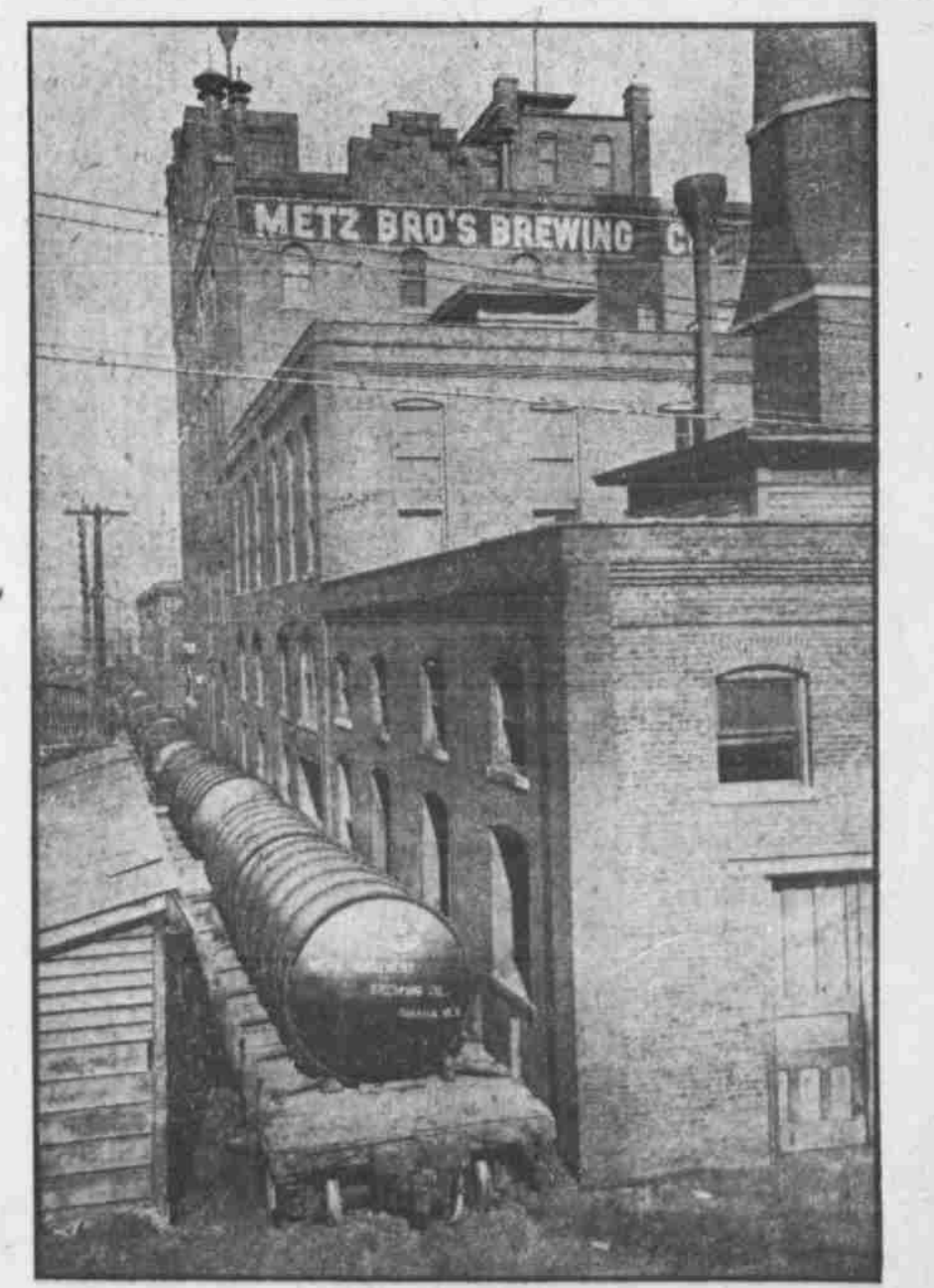
In accordance with his view that the treasurer's office should be run on a business basis Hennings has employed sufficient clerks and collectors to keep pace with the steadily increasing amounts levied and collectible. He worked on the plan that a proper expenditure at first hand saves much money in the end and a balancing of the expenses and incomes of the department proves his policy correct. Where one dollar has been spent many have been gained.

Public Services of Importance.

Friends of Mr. Hennings have declared his public service in this respect alone of extraordinary proportions. Ever since he entered the treasurer's office he had been seeking to devise a means of cleaning up the old taxes and starting on a new basis. The scavenger law was the result of much hard study and a close observation and appreciation of real needs.

Though more than \$18,000,000 has passed through his hands during Hennings' administration as city treasurer every examination of his books, accounts and

A Trainload of Glass Enamelled Steel Storage Beer Tanks



The above shows a trainload of glass enamelled steel storage beer tanks recently re-graded bottle beer. There are fourteen of these tanks, each holding 125 barrels.

Life's Wonderful Story of Jim Key



JIM KEY WRITING HIS NAME.

THE story of Jim Key, the wonderful educated horse, shows what patience and kindness will do in the cultivation of a dumb animal's mentality, if systematically and properly applied. Speech alone is denied to him, but, despite his dumbness, which even the intelligence and art of man cannot dispel, he can express himself nearly as well as if he could articulate the sounds of the human tongue.

A. R. Rodgers of New York, whose hobby for years has been humane society work, has devoted much of his fortune to the amelioration of the condition of animals, and, by using Jim Key as an example, hundreds of thousands of school children have taken up the work.

Among Jim Key's accomplishments are reading, writing, spelling, counting, changing money, filing letters, telling time, going to the postoffice for mail and giving biblical quotations.

Jim Key is of Arabian and Hambletonian blood. His dam, Lauretta, an Arab steed, was once a circus animal, but on her becoming useless Dr. William Key, an ex-slave and veterinary surgeon, bought her at Tupelo, Miss., for \$40. Key treated the mare kindly and made of her a fine animal

again. With the birth of Jim Key, Dr. Key takes up the story of his education. "For nearly a year after Jim was foaled I had no hope of him. "I began to teach him when he was 1 year old. First I taught him to lie down and roll, and soon after that to give symptoms of heat and colic, because I was then in the medicine business. Next he learned to make-believe he was lame and act as though he was suffering with different kinds of troubles, the general symptoms of which he would reproduce. I had him learn to bring me different things, and then to learn different colors. The hardest thing I had to teach him was to eat sugar. I tried every way, and had it tied to the bridle, but Jim would always spit it out. One day I saw him eating apples in the orchard, and I got the idea that if I put a piece of sugar in an apple he would eat it. I fixed an apple, and then watched Jim. When he picked it up and munched it, I thought he would go crazy with satisfaction and delight. I at once tried the sugar alone, but it was no use. He had taken a grudge against raw sugar, although he would take it with an apple coating. I worked with him for six months before I succeeded."