

BLACK BEAUTY

BLACK BEAUTY

Anna Sewell



COLLECTOR'S EDITIONS

For my husband
ANTHONY JOHN RANSON
with love from your wife, the publisher.
Eternally grateful for your
unconditional love.

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This edition published 2018 by
Wordsworth Editions Limited
8B East Street, Ware,
Hertfordshire SG12 9HJ

ISBN 978 1 84022 787 1

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Typeset in Great Britain by Roperford Editorial
Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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An Appreciation and Life of the Author

*He liveth best who loveth best
All creatures great and small,
For the good God who loveth us
He made them first of all.*

COLERIDGE

The year of Grace one thousand eight hundred and twenty was a year fraught with many important events, but little did those who passed beneath the shadows of the old church in Yarmouth know that the faint sun of a wind-swept March day was ushering into the world a girl-child whose pen was one day to be used to her own fame and to the generous service of promoting kindness to that noble animal, the horse.

In that little house beneath trees that were already dreaming towards the spring, within hearing of the bells of the Church of St Nicholas, on this thirtieth day of March, Anna Sewell, the author of *Black Beauty*, was born.

There was no silver spoon in the tiny Anna's mouth, for things were not going too well with her father, Isaac Sewell. Whilst he rejoiced in this acquisition to his

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family, financial clouds were crowding upon his business horizon.

A few days after Anna was born her father made the discovery that he had been overreached and swindled in a business venture that he had entered into a short time before, and the husband with so young a wife, and now further domestic responsibilities, had to look about him for new business openings.

But Isaac Sewell came from a hardy stock that had, through many decades, been accustomed to a harsher persecution than the lack of money, so he took heart in memory of the Friends who were both his wife's and his own ancestors, and took a little house just off Bishopsgate Street, London, and opposite a gin palace. In this he had been badly advised, for the same fate that had met his other business at the birth of Anna came upon this new enterprise with the birth of his only son, Philip.

This bad fortune must have been very trying for his wife, Mary Sewell (*née* Wright), for Mrs Sewell was a woman of a very sensitive and artistic nature as is shown by her well-known works, *Mother's Last Words*, *Our Father's Care*, *Thy Poor Brother*, and many a homely ballad.

Trying as these troubles were her staunchness of spirit is shown by the remark in her diary when, in writing of Anna's birth, she says, 'to be an unclouded

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blessing for fifty-eight years, the perennial joy of my life’.

Isaac Sewell, on his second stroke of bad fortune, had to begin his business life all over again. He chose Dalston, and there the little family lived for nine or ten years that were full of happiness despite the strictest economy and hard work. Happiness had come because the fret and harass of both debt and care were absent, and in this bright atmosphere Anna and Philip thrived.

The two children had been their mother’s play-fellows and helpmates from the moment they were old enough to be so, and they spared no pains, as they grew older, to help her in every possible way. Mary Sewell had trained her children to find glory, not degradation, in work. Work was the finest outlet for Anna’s high-spirited nature, for she was very highly strung and courageous.

Anna soon developed a great love for Nature and art as well, and as quite a child made pen and ink and pencil drawings of the beauties of nature which were most admirably done.

Had the authoress of *Black Beauty* been stronger it is highly likely that the world would have acclaimed her as an artist, but she was not fated to maintain the healthy vigour of those days at Dalston.

It was at Dalston that Mary Sewell’s first little book

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was written, and there was the spirit of sacrifice in Mrs Sewell's desire to give expression to her thoughts.

She wrote to earn money with which to buy books to educate her two children.

Mrs Sewell must have been a splendid teacher as well as a devoted mother, for she instilled not only knowledge into her children's minds, but she taught them to be fearless. Neither Anna nor Philip were in the least afraid of animals or insects of any kind, and darkness held no terrors for them.

One of the happiest recollections of the two children was a visit to their grandparents who lived at Buxton, just outside Norwich.

It was the first of many visits; and here they found the unfettered freedom of the country and a grandfather who knew the heart of a child, and fostered their affection for all the wonders of the countryside.

It was at Dalston that Anna sprained her elbow, and, when spoken to of this painful accident, Anna said simply, 'I bore it well.' It was typical of the patient courage and cheerfulness under suffering that she showed throughout the whole of her tranquil life.

Anna could not have had a better example to follow than her mother, for Mrs Sewell was never happy unless she was ameliorating the conditions of those who suffered, and in those days there were many crying evils that flourished under the mantle of justice.

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The fortunes of Isaac Sewell were slightly on the mend and, in order to make more room for his growing family, he purchased an old stable building lying near his home, and this he remodelled.

Anna's grandfather suggested a scheme whereby their income might be supplemented by the keeping of cows, but the new interest met with misfortune owing to the dishonesty of the man who delivered the milk to the various customers that the Sewell family had obtained.

There was now a new occupant of the home in the shape of Anna's uncle Richard and, as Mrs Sewell could find no time for her lessons with Anna, it was arranged that Anna should go as a day boarder to a school about a mile distant from her home.

The Sewell family was now in troubled waters, but the worst was yet to come.

Returning from school one day Anna, racing up the carriage drive to the garden gate, fell and sprained her ankle very severely. It was destined to result in Anna being something of a cripple for the rest of her life, but as Mrs Sewell says in her diary: 'Little [did we think] that henceforth her dear life was to be coloured by this event, *not* discoloured.'

Everything that could be done *was* done, but there were doctors who made mistakes and Anna Sewell became more and more crippled.

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Mary Sewell never abandoned hope that one day that high-spirited child would run and walk and ramble as she had done during her nature trips, but alas . . .

All those who knew Anna Sewell in those days of affliction loved her, for she was an example of most persevering industry and cheerful patience. Her sufferings never made gloom or a cloud in the house. Anna never brooded over her loss of power, or loss of the changes or amusements which others enjoy. Her own mind was always a storehouse of refreshment to herself; it was a rich garden which circumstances never allowed to be fully cultivated, but it was full of thought and ready appreciation of the genius and talents of others. She was her mother's sunshine always. 'There never came the slightest cloud between us,' writes Mrs Sewell.

Mr Sewell removed to Brighton in 1836 to take up his position as manager of the London and County Bank's Brighton branch, and there a remedy to cure Anna was tried. It proved to be worse than her disease. A doctor bled her severely and to this draining away of life her mother attributed the many disablements which subsequently afflicted Anna. Her health was full of fluctuations, but as time went on she gradually grew worse and her loved employments had to be laid aside by tired hands. In Brighton days though, she must have possessed some walking power for in

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a journal written there in 1844 she tells of pleasant walks with her friends, trips to London to visit the picture-galleries, and other things which suggest some measure of activity.

It was in the year 1845 that the Sewell family removed to Lancing, and in order to get Mr Sewell to the station a pony chaise became part of the household staff, and it was Anna who was accustomed to drive her father to and from Shoreham Station. No doubt Anna Sewell learned to love horses more and more through this self-imposed pleasure and duty.

The following year Mrs Sewell took her children to Germany for a holiday, but Anna was left there for treatment which proved so satisfactory that she returned with the use of both legs – she walked!

Anna Sewell had the artist's instinct for form strongly developed. Her own drawings prove that; and it was this gift of form that made her so admirable a critic of manner and arrangements in word painting.

Nor was she a lenient judge. 'Oh, if only I can pass my Nannie, I don't fear the world after that,' said Mrs Sewell, accepting her own child's criticism with eagerness.

In the autumn of 1857 the family paid a visit to Santander in Spain, and on their return they settled at Blue Lodge, Wick, near both Bath and Bristol, and at Wick Mrs Sewell's chief works were written. Mrs

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Bayly, the author of *Ragged Homes and How to Mend Them*, mentions a very pleasant visit paid to Mrs Sewell at Blue Lodge, Wick, in the summer of 1863: “The mother was then writing the last chapters of *Thy Poor Brother* in which Anna was assisting her. I was once with mother and daughter when Mrs Sewell was reading aloud something she had prepared for the Press. It was beautiful to witness the intense love and admiration and pride which beamed in the daughter’s eyes, but this in nowise prevented her being, as I could see, a severe critic.

‘It was the future author of *Black Beauty* who drove me to the station, and she evidently believed in a horse having a moral nature if we may judge by her mode of remonstrance: “Now thee shouldn’t walk up this hill – didn’t thee see how it rains? Now thee must go a little faster – thou would be sorry for us to be late at the station.”

‘I think it was during this drive that I spoke to Anna about something Horace Bushnell had written about animals. It was never forgotten.’

Soon after the publication of *Black Beauty*, Mrs Bayly says: ‘I had a little note written from her sofa in which she says: “The thoughts you gave me from Horace Bushnell years ago have followed me entirely through the writing of my book, and have more than anything else helped me to feel it was worth a great

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effort, to try at least to bring the thoughts of men more in harmony with the purposes of God in this subject.”’

Poor Anna Sewell! The maladies from which she suffered were mainly of a very painful and depressing character, and had her face been marred with grief no one would have been a whit surprised. It was a wonderful evidence of the triumph of the spirit over the body that her face was not only sweet and peaceful but often radiant, and so evidently did this proceed from the power of the Spirit of God, that, in her presence one had the feeling of being on holy ground; her face shone with the far-off light of intense spirituality.

For the last seven years of Anna’s life, the work which formed for her an unfailing interest was the writing of *Black Beauty*.

The first mention of the book occurs in the journal, under the date November 6th, 1871: ‘I am writing the life of a horse, and getting dolls and boxes ready for Christmas.’

That is the only mention of it until December 1876, when she writes: ‘I am getting on with my little book *Black Beauty*.’

The next entry comes against the date of August 21st, 1877: ‘The first proofs of *Black Beauty* are come – very nice type.’

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It is extremely touching to remember that this 'Beautiful Equine Drama', as it has been called, was thought out almost entirely from the sofa where so much weakness and pain were daily endured. When a time came during which she was capable of enduring the fatigue of writing, it was done in pencil – the mother sitting by received the paper and made a fair copy of it.

That a book accomplished in such a fragmentary way should 'show no joins', says much for the skill of the writer; but oh, what discipline must have been endured in having perpetually to 'leave off in the most interesting place'.

Among the very few papers left in Anna Sewell's handwriting is the following:

I have for six years been confined to the house and to my sofa, and have from time to time, when I am able, been writing what I think will turn out a little book, its special aim being to induce kindness, sympathy, and an understanding treatment of horses.

In thinking of cab horses I have been led to think of cabmen, and am anxious if I can, to present their true condition, and their great difficulties, in a correct and telling manner.

Some weeks ago I had a conversation at my open window with an intelligent cabman, who was waiting at our door, which has deeply impressed me.

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He led the conversation on to the Sunday question, after telling me he never plied on the Sabbath. I found there was a sore, even a bitter, feeling against religious people who, by their use of cabs on Sunday, practically deny the Sabbath to the drivers. 'Even ministers do it, ma'am,' he said. 'And I say it's a shame on religion.'

Then he told me of one of the London drivers who had driven a lady to church. As she stepped from the cab she handed the driver a tract on the observation of the Sabbath. This naturally disgusted the man. 'Now, ma'am,' said my friend, 'I call that hypocrisy, don't you?' I suppose most of us agree with him, and yet it might not have been done hypocritically. So few Christians apparently realise the responsibility of taking a cab on Sunday.

This, to my mind, shows how deeply incensed Anna Sewell was at the fact that horses were used when they could be resting, and that religious people, or so-styled religious people, should offend in this respect.

Black Beauty was published near the end of the year 1877, and Anna Sewell lived just long enough to hear of its success. Poor wasted and patient writer! She knew enough to lighten a supreme moment, but she did not live long enough to know what lasting good her 'little book' achieved, or of those who read it and saw to it that patient horses should be cared for and befriended.

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Black Beauty is read by the squire, his lady, their stablemen and boys; and it has taught them to love and care for horses more than any other book ever published.

Our national papers, foremost among them *The Times*, have borne the strongest witness to the remarkable improvement which has taken place in the treatment and care of horses. Perhaps few who notice these changes and improvements know how much is due to the genius and prayers of one fragile woman who so loved horses.

She never went forth to sow
But there rose from her lowly couch of pain
The fervent pleading prayer –

the prayer for happier men, happier horses, and happier homes, and that we might know how to use, and not abuse, God's munificent gifts to us.

God heard the prayers of Anna Sewell and permitted her to be a fellow-worker with Himself in bringing about these beneficent changes.

In May 1878, Anna Sewell was laid to rest in the quiet little burying-ground in the village next to Lammas, near Norwich, where her ancestors for many generations sleep. It is a high sequestered spot surrounded by trees and a high hawthorn hedge where the birds are never disturbed. But her life remains to us as an

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ideal and as an inspiration as long as *Black Beauty* is read. Her life-work for dumb creatures who cannot speak for themselves will remain and spread her influence far and wide throughout the world. She indeed opened her mouth for the dumb.

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CHAPTER ONE

My early home

The first place that I can well remember, was a large pleasant meadow with a pond of clear water in it. Some trees overshadowed the pond, and rushes and water-lilies grew at the deep end. Over the hedge on one side we looked into a ploughed field; and on the other, we looked over a gate at our master's house which stood by the roadside. At the top of the meadow was a plantation of fir trees; and at the bottom, a running brook overhung by a steep bank.

Whilst I was young I lived upon my mother's milk, as I could not eat grass. In the daytime I ran by her side, and at night I lay down close by her. When it was hot, we used to stand by the pond in the shade of the trees; and when it was cold, we had a nice warm shed near the plantation.

As soon as I was old enough to eat grass, my mother used to go out to work in the daytime, and to come back in the evening.

There were six young colts in the meadow besides me. They were older than I was; some were nearly as

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large as grown-up horses. I used to run with them, and have great fun. We used to gallop all together round and round the field, as hard as we could go. Sometimes we had rather rough play, for they would frequently bite and kick as well as gallop.

One day, when there was a good deal of kicking, my mother whinnied to me to come to her; and then she said: 'I wish you to pay attention to what I am going to say to you. The colts who live here are very good colts, but they are carthorse colts, and, of course, they have not learned good manners.

'You have been well bred and well born; your father has a great name in these parts, and your grandfather twice won the Cup at the Newmarket races; your grandmother had the sweetest temper of any horse I ever knew, and I think you have never seen me kick or bite.

'I hope you will grow up gentle and good, and never learn bad ways. Do your work with a good will; lift up your feet well when you trot, and never bite or kick even in play.'

I have never forgotten my mother's advice; I knew she was a wise old horse, and our master thought a great deal of her. Her name was Duchess, but he often called her Pet.

Our master was a good, kind man. He gave us good food, good lodging, and kind words; and he spoke as

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kindly to us as he did to his little children. We were all fond of him, and my mother loved him very much. When she saw him at the gate, she would neigh with joy, and trot up to him. He would pat and stroke her and say, 'Well, old Pet! How is your little Darkie?' I was a dull black, so he called me Darkie.

Then he would give me a piece of bread, which was very good, and sometimes he brought a carrot for my mother. All the horses would come to him, but I think we were his favourites. My mother always took him to the town on a market day in a light gig.

There was a ploughboy, Dick, who sometimes came into our field to pluck blackberries from the hedge. When he had eaten all he wanted, he would have, what he called, fun with the colts, throwing sticks and stones at them to make them gallop. We did not much mind him, for we could gallop off; but sometimes a stone would hit and hurt us.

One day he was at this game, and did not know that the master was in the next field; but he was there, watching what was going on. Over the hedge he jumped in a moment, and catching Dick by the arm, gave him such a box on the ear as made him roar with pain. As soon as we saw the master, we trotted up nearer to see what was going on.

'Bad boy!' he said, 'bad boy! to chase the colts. This is not the first time nor the second, but it shall be

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the last. 'There, take your money and go home; I shall not want you on my farm again.' So we never saw Dick again.

Old Daniel, the man who looked after the horses, was just as gentle as our master, so we were well off.

CHAPTER TWO

The hunt

Before I was two years old, a circumstance happened which I have never forgotten.

It was early in the spring; there had been a little frost in the night, and a light mist still hung over the plantations and meadows.

The other colts and I were feeding in the lower part of the field when we heard, quite in the distance, what sounded like the cry of dogs.

The oldest of the colts raised his head, pricked up his ears, and said, 'There are the hounds!' and immediately cantered off, followed by the rest of us, to the upper part of the field, where we could look over the hedge and see several fields beyond. My mother and an old riding horse of our master were also standing near, and seemed to know all about it.

'They have found a hare,' said my mother; 'and if they come this way, we shall see the hunt.'

Soon the dogs were all tearing down the field of young wheat next to our meadow. I never heard such a noise as they made. They did not bark, nor howl, nor

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whine, but kept up a 'Yo! yo, o, o! Yo! yo, o, o!' at the top of their voices. After them came a number of men on horseback, some of them in green coats, all galloping as fast as they could.

The old horse snorted and looked eagerly after them; and we young colts wanted to be galloping with them, but they were soon away into the fields lower down. Here it seemed as if they had come to a stand; the dogs left off barking, and ran about in every direction with their noses to the ground.

'They have lost the scent,' said the old horse; 'perhaps the hare will get off.'

'What hare?' I said.

'Oh! I don't know *what* hare; possibly it may be one of our own hares out of the plantation. Any hare they can find will do for the dogs and men to run after.'

Before long the dogs began their 'Yo! yo, o, o!' again; and back they came all together at full speed, making straight for our meadow at the part where the high bank and hedge overhung the brook.

'Now we shall see the hare,' said my mother; and just then a hare, wild with fright, rushed by, and made for the plantation. On came the dogs, followed by the huntsmen. The dogs burst through the bank, leaped the stream, and came dashing across the field. Six or eight men leaped their horses clean over the hedge and stream, following close upon the dogs. The hare tried

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to get through the fence; but it was too thick, and she turned sharp round to make for the road.

Alas! it was too late; the dogs were upon her with their wild cries. We heard one shriek, and that was the end of her. One of the huntsmen rode up and whipped off the dogs, who would soon have torn her to pieces. He held her up by the leg, torn and bleeding; and all the gentlemen seemed well pleased.

As for me, I was so astonished that I did not at first see what was going on by the brook; but when I did look, there was a sad sight. Two fine horses were down, one was struggling in the stream, and the other was groaning on the grass. One of the riders, covered with mud, was getting out of the water; the other lay quite still.

‘His neck is broken,’ said my mother.

‘And serve him right, too,’ said one of the colts.

I thought the same, but my mother did not join with us.

‘Well, no,’ she said, ‘you must not say that. But though I am an old horse, and have seen and heard a great deal, I never yet could make out why men are so fond of this sport. They often hurt themselves, spoil good horses, and tear up the fields; and all this for a hare, a fox, or a stag, that they could get more easily some other way. But we are only horses, and don’t understand.’

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Whilst my mother was saying this, we stood and looked on. Many of the riders had gone to the young man; but my master, who had been watching what was going on, was the first to raise him. His head fell back and his arms hung down, and everyone looked very serious.

There was no noise now; even the dogs were quiet, and seemed to know that something was wrong. They carried him to our master's house. I heard afterwards that the young fellow was George Gordon, the Squire's only son, a fine, tall young man, and the pride of his family.

People were now riding off in all directions, to the doctor's, to the farrier's, and no doubt to Squire Gordon, to let him know about his son.

When Mr Bond, the farrier, came to look at the black horse that lay groaning on the grass, he felt him all over and shook his head; one of the horse's legs was broken. Then someone ran to our master's house and came back with a gun. Presently there was a loud bang and a dreadful shriek, and then all was still; the black horse moved no more.

My mother seemed much troubled. She said she had known that horse for years. His name was Rob Roy; a good bold horse with no vice in him. Afterwards she never would go to that part of the field.

Not many days after, we heard the church bell tolling

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for a long time; and looking over the gate we saw a long, strange, black coach covered with black cloth and drawn by black horses. After that came another, and another, and another; and all were black. Meanwhile the bell kept tolling, tolling. They were carrying young Gordon to the churchyard to bury him. He would never ride again. What they did with Rob Roy I never knew; but 'twas all for one little hare.