HORSE SENSE & SENSIBILITY

"SENSE AND SENSIBILITY."

HORSE SENSE & SENSIBILITY

By

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I

HORSE SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

NOT long ago a certain publication portrayed on its cover a well-fed, red-faced person dressed in what the weaker brethren call 'correct hunting pink.' He was shown supported by what was, no doubt, considered an adequate supply of foxhounds and by his own, as I thought, somewhat inadequate horse : he was labelled " Dressed to Kill !" Seeing that he wore no spurs, and had, apparently, sought to compensate for this by wearing black *cuffs*, as well as a black collar, to his coat, the title puzzled me at first. A moment later (so quick-witted am I) I realised that this was a joke. " Fit to *be* killed " was what the artist intended to convey, and, except that the man was obviously unfit to die, one could agree with the artist wholeheartedly.

But in these days, when half the world spends three-quarters of its time in trying to understand the other half, it seems a pity to draw a pink herring of an imaginary " sportsman " across the trail to truth. If your profession happens to be that of humanitarian, it is, of course, a convenient fiction to imagine that all horsemen are noisy, brainless fellows, full of strange oaths and gross thoughts. But it is pure (or impure) fiction. So far as fiction is concerned, the writers of fiction declare that it is all our fault, that it is we, their readers, who insist upon a strong line being drawn between villains and heroes, virtue and vice, nimble wits and noodles. Proceeding on that assumption, the old morality plays attempted to meet in this way the demand for what the unfortunate public was supposed to want. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in more recent years, confirmed that view—for Watson, he seems to say, must always be Watson, or Mr. Sherlock Holmes could never have been a best-selling sleuth. But Jane Austen, perhaps, holds the championship for " drawing a

line where God has not," for Jane Austen, with her fine distinction between sense and sensibility, triumphantly got away with it, and confirmed a fallacy which real life has not yet succeeded in exploding.

This fiction-fallacy of the Pharisee has been a great comfort to the professional humanitarian. It has encouraged him to draw a strong line between, for instance, himself and the horseman. Horsemen may have horse sense, but, in his own eyes, only the humanitarian can lay claim to sensibility, and sensibility (so the dictionary says) is " sympathy, delicacy or keenness of feeling."

But if strong lines must be drawn, let us begin with a good strong one between fact and fiction. It may, or may not, still be true that " we are all Socialists now," but it is certain that we are all—in the wider meaning of the word—humanitarians; and, resisting the almost overpowering temptation of the retort scurrilous, one can at least ask from what source are drawn the models for these amazing pictures of " Horseman *sans* Sensibility "? Because an artist is a pretty good shot at an Aunt Sally it does not mean that he should be allowed to set up his sallies all over the hunting field and expect to win our admiration at the ease with which he biffs them in the face.

If directly tackled, the abusive ones will say that it is the hangers-on of horsemanship to whom they take exception—from the dregs of the racecourse crowds to the synthetic cream of (some among) the Midland hunting-boxes. But this is most unfair. The hangers-on of horsemanship are drawn willy-nilly into the open air—for all to see and revile. What about the hangers-on in other spheres of life? In a fairly wide acquaintance, ranging from a reputed receiver of stolen goods downwards (or sideways, if you prefer it), I have myself found no great variation in calibre among hangers-on, humanitarian or otherwise.

Horsemanship, as a matter of actual fact, has always been able to attract a pretty sound type of hanger-on, and horsemanship calls for (even if it does not always get) qualities above the average. The Aunt Sally men may declare that a horseman cannot have both

horse sense and sensibility, but the horsemen whom I've seen disprove it. Neither horsemen nor humanitarians will get very far without horse sense; but horsemanship would long since have degenerated into an affair of horse-copers making a precarious living by selling screws to screw-loose humanitarians, if horsemen had not had the sensibility which is "sympathy, delicacy or keenness of feeling," and had it in high degree.

In the history of England lies part of the proof of this statement. It is not for me to presume to defend the great horsemen, and among the hangers-on are many who may be allowed to speak for themselves. To take a couple at random: George Borrow was a hanger-on of horsemanship, so was Dante. Dante was a cavalry trooper before people paid much attention to his poetry. It is very possible that his poetry improved his horsemanship. It does not appear that his horsemanship did much harm to his poetry. Again, no one would deny that horse-sense and sensibility were combined in George Borrow: in *Don Jorge*, pricking on, hot-haste to reach and distribute his "depot of 500 copies of the New Testament at Corunna"; finding time to note the monstrous accusation that he rode with his stirrup leathers too short, claiming his title of *El brujo*, the wizard, as he bleeds his horse—successfully, if somewhat drastically—at Betanzos. And, incidentally, did it not prove that the only bookseller whom 'Don Jorge' could find with enough courage, idealism and business ability to sell "several copies" of that same Testament in the priest-ridden town of Toledo was a bookselling cavalry soldier, complete with bookshop, "sabre, and a Cordovese *entero*"? "Match me this marvel" of combined horse-sense and sensibility in the ranks of the professional humanitarians—if you can!

But hatred is becoming as old-fashioned as the pattern of last season's spurs. Behind the scenes the "Dressed to Kill" artist and myself may continue our duel with paint-brush and goose-quill, but behind the footlights, on the stage of life, humanitarians and horsemen will, no doubt, soon begin to give a more realistic presentation of each other's parts. At the moment, however, the presenta-

tion of the horseman, even by those who wish him well, is still a little crude. We continue, for instance, to be told that His Royal Highness's hunters "stumbled at a jump" whenever H.R.H. achieves a particularly smashing toss. We are still confronted with those unreal men and women who sit round their real sirloin of beef singing "John Peel" in the great hunt-breakfast scene of the autumn melodrama. On the other hand, on the humanitarian side, we might perhaps admit, if we were sure that no humanitarian was within hearing, that we have not yet entirely eliminated from the tragedies of life the *exceptional* hunting-man whose only justification for existence seems to be that, by his selfishness, extravagance and arrogance, he proves the rule that these things can be no part of horsemanship.

There was once (once?) an American, nine-tenths of whose remarks to perfect strangers began and ended with a statement that his ancestors landed on Plymouth Rock. "And I wish to God, sir," finally retorted one of his exasperated victims, "that Plymouth Rock had landed on your ancestors." It would be pleasant to abolish both the fox-hunting glutton and the alleged humanitarian with some such simple words as these: but would it really settle the matter? When due allowance has been made for flat-catching exaggeration, bred, so to speak, by jealousy from fanaticism, there remains a grain of truth in the charges brought by professional humanitarians against fox-hunting itself, the source from which the English horseman draws his inspiration. Fox-hunting is cruel, destructive, wasteful. "Well, so is life," says the horseman. "But can you suggest any better way of teaching courage, unselfishness, sympathy?" Up to the time of writing, I am bound to say that the humanitarian can not.

Personally, I like horsemen to adopt this attitude and to stick to it. As an outsider, I am not much impressed by the statements of the people who bob up with a column of figures to prove that fox-hunting is a national industry, is economically essential to the country, and is irreplaceable as such. Broadly speaking, that is all my eye (and Betty Martin). Fox-hunting and horsemanship are

among those nebulous things, the invisible exports with which we have paid for our Empire, and with which we continue to pay for our place in the world. That may sound as if Betty Martin was speaking broadly again; but that is truth.

Perhaps, like Marianne Dashwood of "Sense and Sensibility," both horsemen and humanitarians will yet find themselves born to what Jane Austen, for some reason, considered "an extraordinary fate—to discover the falsehood of their own opinions"; but if this does not happen, if it is to be one thing or the other, then I fear that horsemen must become increasingly humanitarian, for I see no reason to hope that humanitarians could ever become decent horsemen.

In the meantime a part of the youth of England continues to ride forth—not, as the professional humanitarian would have us believe, like so many young Baron Munchausens (or even Barons Munchausen); they are more in the style of St. George, having "great dreams before them and deeds as great behind." They, too, ride forth, "knowing humanity their star," asking the same guerdon:

> . . . choice of the heart's desire,
> A short life in the saddle, Lord!
> Not long life by the fire.

Now, if they happen, early on, to meet a humanitarian in the way, it may mean the end of what horsemen call "everything." But it is always on the cards that youth will have a nice, quiet, uneventful ride—a quieter ride than St. George has had hitherto; and, when at last they turn their horses' heads for home, it may be that they will merely have grown old enough to realise that long life by the fire has its compensations—provided one can pay for coal.

Let us, however, suppose the worst. Any reference to "Macaulay's New Zealander" (and he is referred to at least once a week) fills me with acute mental nausea, for Macaulay's New Zealander "standing on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's," was, in reality, not Macaulay's—nor a

New Zealander. But supposing that Horace Walpole's "traveller from Lima" is due some day to come and take a view of humanitarian England, perching himself for this purpose on the ruins of the kennels of the Quorn? What will he see?

Personally, I think he will see the members of the Quorn Hunt rebuilding the kennels.

In that case it would be rather jolly if they were to find my friend the "Dressed to Kill" artist buried under the ruins, having been overwhelmed in the act of making another of his sketches for a picture entitled "The Senseless Horseman." If *that* could be arranged, I hope (to finish on a high, humanitarian note) that all horsemen would have enough "sympathy, delicacy or keenness of feeling" not to mind very much if the artist were found to be still alive—and determined to go on kicking.

"HIS PUPIL WILL CLASP HIM ROUND THE NECK."

II

BOYS ON PONIES

A MAN once gave in nine words a reason for killing himself that was more adequate than most men could give for being allowed to live. "I am tired," he wrote, with a fine simplicity, "of all this buttoning and unbuttoning." The coroner said it was temporary insanity, but the unofficial view is that the man was temporarily sane.

All small boys would agree with the latter verdict, and it is therefore prudent, when teaching boys to ride, not to lay too much stress on the importance of a boy being able to strip his own saddle, fit his own bridle and carry out the thousand and one buttoning and unbuttoning processes which are, naturally, so interesting to the horsemaster and, rightly, so boring to a boy.

The man who cannot realise this may or may not be fitted to command a cavalry regiment—he is totally unfit to teach a boy to ride. And if you want your boy taught to ride, you had better sound the proposed teacher as to the rest of his views on the subject.

If, with the airy generalisation which some men adopt in laying down laws for the young, he declares that "every boy" ought to be able to groom his own pony, water and feed him, and know the parts of the horse, then shun that man. It would, of course, be better to kill him, but shunning is safer.

Horsemastership and democracy have this in common, that an equal amount of cant and hypocrisy is talked by the devotees of both. To bore a boy with riding school and "the minor ailments" and expect him to become a keen young horseman is nearly as futile as to preach the federation of man to a Russian peasant. The boy and the Bolshevik will go round the corner together—looking for something to smash.

On the other hand, while there may be certain difficulties in persuading a man that Socialism means sharing his own property

as well as that of other people, there are no difficulties in persuading boys to like riding—if you go the right way about it. And the right way is perfectly simple.

"First take your boy"—you can almost do the thing on the principle of a cooking recipe—or, preferably, take someone else's boy. In the latter case, you will neither be so annoyed when he shows himself to be frightened, stupid and forgetful, nor will you be so extravagantly proud when he proves himself courageous, quick-witted and apt to learn. Being a normal boy, he will inevitably be all these in turn; but on your intelligent, as well as sympathetic, reading of the outstanding traits in his character depends your whole chance of success.

Of course, if you are satisfied that the boy is a hopeless fool, you will at once set him, bare-back, on a very large, fast and broad pony with a mouth of iron, and attach a lighted rocket to the pony's tail. You can then, with a perfectly clear conscience, go home and tell his mother.

But, while few boys want to learn to ride, all boys would like to be able to ride: there can, therefore, be no boys who are either hopeless or fools, and this is an encouraging truth which their teacher will find it comforting to keep constantly before him.

He must, therefore, persuade himself to take boys as he finds them, and it is equally important to be prepared to take ponies as they are made (or spoilt). The proper pony on which to teach a boy to ride is, of course, one with perfect manners; a narrow pony with a light mouth, and one which is both fast and temperate, and a safe and confident jumper: a pony that does not mind being kicked in the ribs for no reason, or jobbed in the mouth for a bad reason. It will save time if we allow that such a pony does not exist.

On the other hand, so far as horsemanship is concerned, it is a waste of both time and money to set a boy on a fubsy Shetland; while the practice of putting a man and his sister (both being of tender years) back to back in badly balancing baskets on a donkey is simply silly. It probably gives rise to a false complex on saddle-

fitting in the boy's mind, and certainly prevents his sister from pulling his hair. Which must be wrong.

Take both ponies and boys as you find them; but if you can find an Exmoor pony for the small boy and a Welsh pony for his bigger brother you won't go far wrong—especially if you can keep both boys and ponies out of the hands of a groom in their days of early instruction. For, while opinions about horsemanship and horsemastership may differ, in one respect there are no differences—every horseman and horsewoman will unite in raining curses on the devoted heads of grooms as a class, on their love of blistering, their total incompetence.

One wonders how they have managed to survive this general "hate"—probably, so far as children are concerned, it is because their heads *are* devoted. Many a man connects his first enthusiasm for horses with the round, red, smiling face of an old groom or the spidery legs and hissing noises of a young one. And the most mutton-fisted groom in the world has always got a fund of tremendous tales of horsemanship to share with a small boy.

Having got his boy and his pony, and having left the groom (much to his annoyance) at home, the teacher can now sally forth. He will do so on foot, and he may as well make up his mind that the first few lessons will certainly be exhausting, and probably be painful—for himself. They will consist of a series of short rushes down secluded lanes, throughout which his pupil will clasp him round the neck with one or more arms.

It is the teacher's duty to proceed in this manner, come what may; and whether it is cows or cars that come, the teacher will steadfastly refuse to allow the small boy to dismount. He will not do so brutally, but will exclaim "Oh *no!*" or "That would be absurd," and be prepared, if necessary, to elaborate on the absurdity until cars or cows have passed. It is, of course, understood that he will maintain this attitude of *non possumus* in spite of the fact that his pupil is half throttling him, and the pony is standing on his toes.

On the other hand, he will *encourage* the boy to dismount at

frequent intervals, so long as fear is not the motive! At such times he will get the boy to lift the pony's fore legs (hind legs come later) or to loosen and tighten the girths, and he may even venture on a casual remark to the effect that "these" are the withers and "this" is what they call the hock. If all this is done casually, there is at least a fifty-fifty chance that the boy may take a real interest: if it is done, as some men do it, with the pugnacity of an old-fashioned drill-sergeant, there is the certainty that, when next a ride is suggested, the small boy will prefer to spend the afternoon making his rabbit's life a misery.

Indeed, all through the training, you and the rabbit will always be up against the fact that, if teaching is conducted in such a way that the small boy is either bored or frightened, he will plump for more peaceful pursuits—in which he gets peace, even if other people and his rabbit are frightened or bored. And his mother will support him!

The excruciating period of the first lessons will only end when the boy himself refuses any longer to hold on by the teacher's neck, and asks to be allowed to ride alone. This, if you are the teacher, heralds the dawn of a new day for you. You must not allow the exhilaration of the prospect of escaping death by slow strangulation to dim your judgment. There are two definite stages. At first, you yourself run on ahead—preferably uphill—and the boy walks or trots towards you. You must *run* on ahead, not just walk, or a very small boy may have time for his rather small ardour to cool. Next, the boy walks his pony away from you, turns, and trots back to you. On the more or less successful completion of either exercise you will express yourself volubly as being lost in admiration. You will call to mind other boys who have failed, miserably, to achieve this: and you will mention by name distant relations in far corners of the globe to whom the news of this success will be as nectar from the gods.

You will probably be invited not to be silly—but your charge will proceed with *moral* and colour very much heightened.

The days of your extreme labour are now over: you must not

"HIS SHORT LEADING-REIN PERIOD."

yet get on a horse to accompany your pupil, but you need no longer pound along the roads on your flat feet, and the next few lessons will be in the nature of games.

For a few minutes at a time each day, the boy and his pony will circle round you, on the long rein, while the boy discovers the astounding fact that the left heel is of some use in turning his pony to the right, and that it is not essential to make a noise like old ladies talking to their canaries in order to set his charger in motion. But these things will be learnt in intervals only; for the rest of the time boy and pony will accompany you across fields and through the woods in the manner of a spaniel out for a walk. And you will send them off, as you would send a spaniel, to pursue investigations in odd corners on their own, or to go back on your tracks, find, and return to you, a dropped tobacco-pouch or a glove.

Towards the latter end of this period you will arrange that one of these missions involves the negotiating of a shallow ditch, or two or three hop-poles lying on the ground together. If the negotiation is successful, it is once again your obvious duty to register admiration and ecstasy with all the pantomime accompaniment of a cinema artist. You must say that words fail you, and see that they don't.

And, at last, you yourself can get mounted.

There is now only the short leading-rein period to intervene, and your fledgling will be free to start on the unaided flight which may some day lead him to—and, it may even be, over—Becher's Brook. The metaphor may be a trifle confused, but not half so confused as your own feelings will be.

For, from the moment when you met the first cow in the lane, you have been consistently poohing, bahing and tushing at any and every suggestion that caution is necessary or fear a word with a meaning. From now on—if you have done your work well—you will spend most of your time making the corresponding noises indicating an exhortation to have a care. You will be forced to behave as a hen behaves with another female's ducklings, and

you will have just about a hen's chances of controlling your charge successfully.

It will start with the first request that "We won't have the leading-rein to-day." You will reject that request and the next one (made two minutes later). But on no account will you reject the third request: any such refusal at *that* stage would inevitably revive this terrible preference for staying at home and giving the rabbit hell.

Your charge is now loose. For better or worse, for poorer and not richer, he has joined the ranks of the Horsemen—those intolerant men who, while thinking it wrong to criticise the honesty of a friend or his faithfulness to his wife, will persistently insult and decry his horsemanship—which the majority of them secretly think to be a virtue infinitely more important than either of the others.

It is better in this, the last, stage, if your charges number more than one. Your responsibility could not be greater than it already is, and a man may as well be hung for, say, three lambs as a sheep. (Incidentally, a man I know has never got to the bottom of this saying about sheep: he protests that you *don't* hang sheep.)

Anyway, with two or three or four embryo horsemen about you, your own enjoyment and their experience will be proportionately increased. Besides, there is always a chance that one of them will learn sooner than the others how to hold a gate open for you without hammering your horse's hocks with it.

And the last stage of all. For some time past you will have been careful to point out possible jumps to your charges. You will even have gone so far as to pop over one or two such places yourself. But on no account whatever will you have insisted on anybody else following your lead.

The suggestion will come from your pupils, and it will be pure coincidence that the groom has for several days been busy on a series of little made-up fences with long and substantial wings. As soon, however, as the suggestion reaches you, it is your im-

mediate duty to hie you to those fences secretly, and cut them down by two feet or more—the exact amount depending on the degree of idiocy shown by your groom.

You can now mop your brow and await events.

The Great Man of Great Coram Street may have been borrowing a Danish proverb of long standing when he told us that children were "certain cares and werry uncertain comforts," but he was his own authoritative self when he declared that "A Fall's a h'awful thing."

If at this stage your charges have a fall (and therefore a h'awful fall), it is probable that the poor old rabbit's number is up—and he a starter. The amount of undivided attention which he will get for the next few days will make his chances of survival—except after death—merely negligible.

But if they do *not* fall! Then, indeed, all ranks may return home singing: and loudest of all shall the groom sing (you will have been quitc unable to eliminate him from this—the greatest occasion) as he tells you that he is surprised that the young gentlemen have picked up so quickly what *he* has tried to teach them. . . .

If you say that it is all too much trouble, I answer this: that to-day there are arrayed against you all the *easy* ways for a boy to get a thrill, to test his nerve and try his skill. It will be too late for you to burble about the incomparable joys of horsemanship when your boys have been finally, irretrievably won over to an exclusive devotion to motor-cars and aeroplanes. In the roar of the exhaust your miserable gibberings will—very properly—be drowned.

The younger generation to whom you have denounced war without finding them a substitute can yet be shown an alternative to road-scorching: and in the hunting field and on long summer evening rides it may be that they will think out for themselves substitutes for war.

And, in any case, however that may be, I presume you will not dispute that, at least, we all ought to try to do what we can to keep the rabbit alive a bit longer?

III

LOW-GRADE AMATEURS

THERE is nothing to be proud of in being an amateur of horses and horsemanship; but, equally, there is nothing of which to be ashamed. In this it resembles earning-your-own-living-because-you-have-to, which some of us persist in regarding as a virtue. I use the word "amateur" in its lowest sense, and by it I mean those of us who are amateurs of necessity (as it were, the confirmed spinsters of horsemanship), whom no one would pay to be professionals. We are *frightfully* ignorant—but we get a lot of fun out of it.

In the course of a chequered career it once became necessary for me to sell for somebody else two horses which he had bought for, I think, three hundred guineas apiece, with a view to advertisement. Other people have bought horses to advertise themselves in a quiet way; but this case was remarkable in that the purchaser was not advertising himself. However, that (as has been said elsewhere) is another story.

The horses arrived in London and were standing at a stable not a thousand miles from Sloane Street—not, in actual fact, any miles from Sloane Street. I went to inspect them.

"Rather a nice-looking couple," I suggested to the groom who had taken them over.

"Yessir," he appeared to assent; "but," he added, "a bit more 'rather' than nice. *This* 'orse is goin' blind in one eye. The mare"—he cocked his thumb at a good-looking bay—"is touched in the wind and she's got thoro' pin."

As the owner was hopefully expecting to get back at least the greater part of his six hundred guineas by the sale of the horses in question, and as I was supposed to be arranging the sale, the

"A BIT MORE 'RATHER' THAN 'NICE.'"

information cast a certain gloom over me. This was considerably intensified by the fact that, speaking from any but a low-grade amateur point of view, I had not the smallest idea of what thoro' pin might be.

Yes, I can see your self-satisfied, sneering smile. I don't like it, but I am not perturbed by it: for, as to what thoro' pin really is, I am prepared to bet a larger sum than either of us can afford that *you don't know either.*

"Why, it's the hock," you'll say. "Not the hock itself, of course, but in or—er—round about the hock. An enlargement . . . well, not exactly an *enlargement*. It's rather difficult to explain." And you'll poke about the room, pretending you're not looking for your copy of "Animal Management" (which, as a matter of fact, says nothing about it).

You won't deceive me in the least. This (except for one man who admitted at once that he didn't know, and a woman who thought it "must be a sort of stitch") is just the kind of answer which I got at the time. Contenting myself with smiling at the groom—somewhat knowingly, as I hoped—I ran all the way home and read "Animal Management" from cover to cover.

"Teeth," "Temperature," "Tied at the knee" were all there. But not thoro' pin. In desperation I searched the most unlikely paragraphs. "Make the Camel sit down" was one of these, I remember. I should infinitely have preferred to have been told how to make the Author sit up.

With tears in my eyes, I telephoned all over London, frantically, beseechingly, asking people what thoro' pin might be. Even to the Wrong Numbers I addressed the same pathetic query, and I shall always be intensely grateful for the sympathy of the subscriber who proved to be a butcher at Wapping, and who told me that it would be all the same a hundred years hence.

I found out in the end (I have forgotten again now), and by dint of getting my informant's information by heart and repeating it to myself all night, I went with confidence to meet my Proposed Purchaser in the morning. This is the maddening part. I had

taken all that trouble for nothing. Frightened of remaining a true-blue low-grade amateur, I had worn myself to a frazzle in a desperate attempt to acquire knowledge. I hadn't really acquired the knowledge (as I say, I have already forgotten what thoro' pin is), *and* the knowledge proved quite unnecessary.

I first incurred the expressed contempt of the groom by *telling* the Proposed Purchaser that one of our horses was blind and the other thoro' pinned. Then I agreed to a trial in the Row.

The groom, with many side-winkings, had suggested that trials were unremunerative things, but that a trial in a riding-school might be made less unremunerative than some. I, in my silly way, had rejected the idea.

To start with, I didn't believe it. And then I had had experience of the results of refusing a proper trial.

It wasn't I who refused the trial. Mine was the happy lot which sometimes falls to the low-grade amateur—that of looking on and seeing quite a bit of the professional little game. Some day, when everybody concerned is dead, I think that the true facts about that refusal of a trial ought to come out. They might even come out if everybody but myself were dead: but if they came out now I should be the *first* dead—the others would see to that—and none of them would regret it more than myself.

So I, reluctantly, suppress the facts.

But it was really this experience which determined me not to resist my Proposed Purchaser's request for a trial of the six hundred guineas' worth of advertising horse and mare. In spite of my friend the groom, we *did* adjourn to the Row.

Apart from telling you that the gelding gave one terrific kick, slipped on the hard metalled road, and promptly fell down, I cannot enter into details of that trial. I only instance it at all as an example of how we low-grade amateurs worry ourselves unduly over our lack of knowledge.

The mare had thoro' pin, the gelding was blind in one eye: at the last moment the gelding had fallen down, and he now appeared to be lame for life. I expected—I may say, I hoped—

to be offered twenty pounds for the mare and thirty shillings for the gelding. I had made up my mind to hold out (for a time, anyway) for a tenner for the gelding, when the Proposed Purchaser rode back towards me.

"How much?" he asked.

I had only one card to play, and, in a shamefaced way, I played it. I said that the two horses had cost my friend three hundred guineas apiece twelve months ago. Were they worth six hundred guineas now? I supposed not. But what were they worth? I wished, I said, that I knew.

I thought that the stableman looked at me, not exactly with respect (that would have been too much after I had *told* about the blindness and the thoro' pins), but with, perhaps, a little more interest. Stablemen know that there *is* one type of man who gets worse "stung" by the professionals than the ignorant low-grade amateur. And the man who gets this bigger sting is the Johnny-know-all. The professionals charge him up to 50 per cent. more when he buys a horse from them, and they pay him some 50 per cent. less than they otherwise would have done when he sells a horse to them. Their view—that Johnny-know-alls should be taxed out of existence—has my hearty sympathy.

I made no such mistake. I stood there looking foolish, helpless, ignorant. So ignorant as not to know the value of the horses I was trying to sell, so helpless as to say so, so foolish as to put myself at the Purchaser's mercy. But you don't always get a sheep killed when you tie him to a stake for the tiger's benefit. I believe it's because the tiger's too sporting to kill a sheep of that kind.

I was, as I say, merely wondering for how long it would be worth while to hold out for thirty pounds for the mare and gelding together (at the risk of losing the twenty-one pounds ten shillings which I estimated to be their true value) when, as in a dream, I heard the Purchaser speaking.

"I will give you," he said, "a hundred and fifty for the mare and fifty pounds for the gelding—*not a penny more.*"

Jaws can drop for more reasons than one: and if I looked as if his words had shattered my universe, he wasn't, I suppose, to know that it was a joy-shatter. I could only stand there repeating his own last words.

"Not a penny more," I parroted, more than half stunned by this astounding offer, "not a penny more."

"Well," he said, "I'll make it guineas."

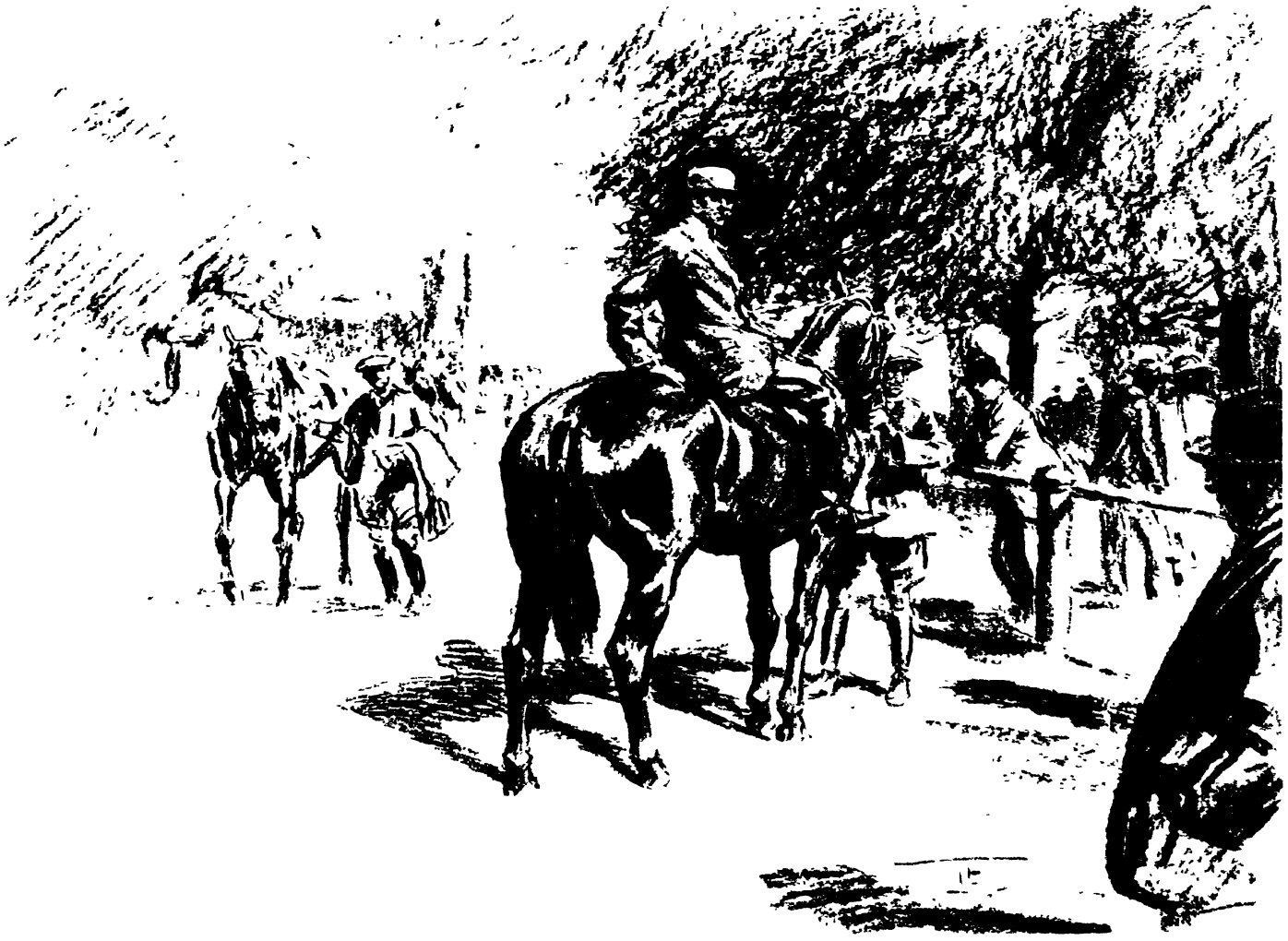
I don't attempt to explain it. I had sold a 50 per cent. blind horse and a thoro' pin cripple touched in the wind for two hundred and ten pounds. The stableman had assured me with gusto that, sold without warranty at Tattersall's, they might (or might not) fetch enough to pay the stable bill: sold under what he regarded as the idiotically candid description which I myself gave of them, they wouldn't—as he, suggestively, put it—sell for enough to enable me to reward their groom for his trouble.

I have only to add that six months later the man for whom I had sold those horses put a letter into my hands. With a sinking feeling, I saw that it was from the Purchaser.

"*It's disgraceful,*" I read, in fear and trembling. "This is the third time that I have had to write to say that you have not even yet *sent the clothing which I bought with the horses.*" That was his sole complaint.

This experience was, to me, a most satisfactory proof that a *little* knowledge is what we low-grade amateurs ought to have. If we have more than a little we are always in danger of being rated, for pecuniary purposes, among the Johnny-know-alls. With less than that (very) little, we miss a lot of fun. It is, however, quite enough for us if our knowledge is sufficient to suggest to us the name of a friend or a book from whom or which to get more knowledge, on those rare occasions when more knowledge is necessary.

To my mind, where our little knowledge is in most danger of handicapping us is in the judging of the true merits and demerits of the conformation of the horse which we want to buy. I boldly assert that there are not, in all the world, more than three men



and one book capable of giving us this knowledge. The men I have never met: the book is the "Points of a Racehorse," by the late General Sir John Hills.

Every amateur of horses and horsemanship ought to be locked into a room, given a copy of "Points of a Racehorse," and not allowed to leave until he can at least, by pointing to the pictures, set in order of merit (giving his reasons) half a dozen horses depicted therein. Choosing at random, shall we say Persimmon, Amberite, Grig, Spur Royal, Orme and Calaisand, it makes quite a useful exercise. And even a low-grade amateur can place Calaisand—and so make up for his bloomer over Amberite.

I should, perhaps, add that the book, I understand, is out of print!

If I seem to be flying in the face of all my principles by urging you to study it, I must say, in self-defence, that I myself was first drawn to it by reading that Sir John had "three simple tests and one rough measurement," which were "all that are practically required by the tyro to satisfy himself" as to his proposed purchase.

But I am afraid that the high-grade amateurs over-estimate our sense and our courage. It seems to me that the "three simple tests" require a lifetime's study of horses to put into execution, while some of the "questions to be left to the Vet." are so simple that no one but a man whose own knowledge was famous and unassailable could possibly have the courage to put them to the Vet. "Are the head and neck well set on?" is one of these. I have tried all ways of putting that question to the Vet.—nonchalantly, fiercely, how you will. I cannot do it. It would appear that there are depths of ignorance to which even a low-grade amateur is unable to descend.

IV

"AW! DOMMIT!"

THEY come back to you—don't they? To the expert, no doubt, the whole horse—but to us, the heads. The expert remembers, regretfully, that that particular horse was lacking in length or depth where depth or length was essential, but *we* only know how wise he looked, how altogether topping.

That is when you and I have our memories stirred by a picture of the head of some particular horse; but we feel almost equally sentimental about *any* horse when we see him portrayed with ears cocked forward, head up, a light in his old eyes. The most inarticulate among us will be moved to words on those occasions, the strongest and most silent will deliver himself of a flow of them: a fairly short flow, perhaps—but a flow. "He really does look rather an old topper, doesn't he?" is the sort of thing; and we sit down, cramping an unaccustomed fist to the task, to write one of those letters which run, "Sir, the illustration in your issue of the umptieth . . . old favourite of my own . . . some of your readers may be interested." We enclose several poorish snapshots, post the letter, and spend the next week wondering why we ever thought that "your readers" would be interested, hating those uninterested readers in advance, and—alternately hoping that the editor will, and will not, publish our letter and the pictures. To the eternal credit of editorial sympathy, he generally does.

The fact is that, while the faces of very few men will stir us to enthusiasm, the head of a horse will always do so. At the risk of calling upon myself the severe displeasure of the Court Official concerned, I would ask you to look back with me at His Majesty, our present King, at a moment which, to my mind, was historical—even if the history books, in their dull way, continue to say nothing about it.

In the year 1918, when his soldiers had fought that last long fight (see how cleverly I avoid giving you a chance to tell me not to write about "the war"), the King went among them informally. He, I think, wanted to see them; they, beyond all doubt, were glad to see him. Figure to yourself (how French I'm getting!), a cobbled road thronged for a mile or more with the men of a whole division: "thronged," not lined, for this was to be an *in*formal meeting. And here he comes!

A great crash of cheering broke out, men who had expressed but little enthusiasm for four years, and had lately sworn they would never be enthusiastic again, snatched their caps from their heads and roared their welcome; and—with the flush of a pleasure which a man might feel in such circumstances—the King passed among them. A soldier who had been silent, searching the eyes of his King—thrust himself, somehow, into the narrow lane which a staff-officer tried to clear. A great, big fellow, he was, a rough, inarticulate warrior; but he leapt into the air, dancing before His Majesty with all the enthusiasm, if less than the grace, which dancers who dance before a king should show. And, "Aw, Dommit," he roared at His Majesty, "*but it does us good to see yer face.*"

A man whose opinion counts has recently assured us that King George knows more about a horse than did his illustrious father; is, in fact, a better judge of one. The Court Official concerned will perhaps, therefore, continue to excuse me when I say that the enthusiasm which is aroused by the sight of a few kings and all horses springs from the same deep-seated emotion.

How do they, the horses, do it; how do they get it across? It cannot be all in the eyes. A blinded man retains expression, for the deep cut lines about his face convey that expression to us. But a horse in blinkers retains expression and he has no deep cut lines. I once watched the big bay carriage-horses of the Sultan of Egypt throughout the greater part of a Cairo race meeting. I do not drag in the Sultan like that to try to give you the impression that I am a person who lives in royal boxes—or even royal horse-

boxes. It is only that the Sultan, like His Majesty in London, was the only man in that country who still kept a pair of carriage-horses worthy of the name. And even on a Cairo racecourse, where colour, light, and movement combine to make pictures for you, there was nothing better worth watching than those great, upstanding horses.

Anybody can draw a picture of the head of a horse (it is when we get to the legs that the thing comes out so woggley); it will not, necessarily, be a good picture—but I have just drawn one of the off-side horse of the Sultan's pair, which reminds me of him exactly. It would, I fear, remind anyone else of nothing more equine than a red-nostrilled rocking-horse, but to me it brings the whole thing back.

He was standing there, under the trees, behind the grand stand. They had taken him out of the carriage, and while his native coachman watched the races a small army of underlings whisked and polished away at the black and gold-gleaming harness on his back. He paid not the slightest attention to them; he paid no more to the ever-changing crowd of natives who surged and jabbered around and past him, and he was quite unmoved by the blare of the brass band which was making all those brass-band noises which are properly associated with the scent of trodden grass and the flash of gay colours as the horses are cantered down to the start. He just stood there, looking every inch of his 16·3, with his head flung up, as he gazed over the heads of the crowds, watching something which nobody else could see.

When the field swept past to the winning-post I thought that he would surely turn his head; but he did not—by no sign did he betray that he was even aware of those Arab ponies scuttling past him; his lips remained slightly parted, his tongue showing at the side, and he stood there, mild and magnificent, unmoved and apparently immovable. I think that he was remembering things; that his mind was going back to his own Arabian ancestry to which all the great carriage-horse breeds owe so much, and that a train of thought had been started in his mind which left him semi-

oblivious of what was going on around him, trying to piece together those recollections of Arabia, to fit them in with more recent recollections of an English home. I like to think about him.

It is curious that it is always the pleasant, peaceful mind-pictures which these pictures of horses' heads recall. Why does not the head of a King's Cup jumper, for instance, remind you of old Bucephalus who jumped on *you?* You will recollect that you had, at the time, a clear enough picture of *his* head, as he hurtled through the air.

Personally, I like these horses' heads presented to me bridled, ready to share with a rider all that ecstasy of speed and power which horses alone can give us. Other people have a fancy for the haltered pose, so to speak, and the thought which it evokes of a row of boxes when it is time for water and feed—every box with a wise head poking out, and a pleasant air of bustle about the place, and a clattering of bucket handles.

The heads with the show-ring ribbons, the rosettes fastened to the brow-bands, do not appeal to me much. The proper place for the rosette is gripped in the rider's teeth (have you noticed that the linen of the red, first prize, rosette has a slightly more delicate aroma than that of a mere blue one—and that the white, "Commended," rosette is a tasteless, scentless thing?) Of course, when your friends among horses win honours and decorations, you may like to have these pictures of them, taken at the investiture, so to speak. Personally, I think that the ribbons and things make a horse look a trifle foolish, or, at any rate, embarrassed; not *more* embarrassed than a man looks at an investiture with the Order of Something Tremendous hanging round his neck, but embarrassed in a similarly deprecating way. "Of course," he seems to say, "this is a great honour *and* I should have been extremely annoyed if I hadn't been given it—still, the sooner we can put it back in its box" (or hang it up in the saddle-room) "the better I shall be pleased."

Perhaps that is only jealousy on my part. In my defence I

would claim that I once cut out of a monthly magazine a picture of the head of someone else's horse, mounted it rather smudgily on an inadequate piece of cardboard (I was rising eight at the time), and kept it for five years as one of my most treasured possessions. It was one of those snapshots which the editors get, and it was called, without equivocation, "The Finest Horse in the World."

I endorsed that verdict for five years, until, in fact, I began to become so unpleasantly sophisticated. Now—possibly as the result of approaching second childhood, if not of senile decay—I should be glad to have that picture by me again. I should feel once more the wish to pat with resounding pats that firm, strong neck; and then, with my hand on his neck, as it were, I would wonder just how good a horse he really was.

I believe that everyone—every British one, at any rate—feels things like these when they see a horse's head. It is always possible that you (or I) may have been no nearer to a horse than to ride on the tail-board at a cart-horse parade—but, show us the picture of a Real Old Sort looking at us through his bridle, and——Aw! *Dommit!*

V

"PROPER AMBLYNG LITTLE NAGGS"

TO grow a cabbage might—if anybody liked cabbage—be useful, to breed hippopotami is probably intriguing (especially as nobody seems to know what, if anything, the word means in such a connection); but to breed a horse is to become a life member of the World's Best Growers. It is a thing vastly to be encouraged.

Those of us who have tried to grow things, if we can seldom explain coherently to the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy just why we failed, can sometimes remember why we tried.

You—a stout heart—will try for one of several good reasons. You will see yourself (and why not?) riding to victory this magnificent animal-to-be over the last fence of the point-to-point course. It is a victory at once so smashing and so popular. While the huge crowd roars its approval and the idle tears of some *not* divine despair well into the hard, small eyes of the bookies, the rest of the field, utterly outdistanced, presently becomes engulfed in the next race.

Or, in quieter mood, you will think of how, in the years to come, the writers of books will refer to "that good horse" (*your* horse), "bred by that great man to hounds, Mr. ——" *your* name; and will tell of how you two witched the world with noble horsemanship.

Or you may just be led on by the love for things that are young which animates all men, from market gardeners to horsemen. But while the market gardener may be supposed to love comparatively dull things, such as very small mushrooms, the horseman's young things are colts and fillies seen when the mist lifts on

the moors of Dart and Exe, where they seem to be part of the swirling mist itself, or fillies and colts out in the paddocks upon an evening in June, seen against a background of big-limbed oaks and cool, shallow streams—with, it may be, an old cock pheasant or two prinking through the meadow grasses.

When all the world grows happy and wise again (which, of course, it never has been), we shall have a revival in some sort of that admirable Act of Henry VIII, of glorious, if uxorious memory; the act, I mean, which said that "any layman whose wife shall wear any French hood or bonnet shall keep one trotting stallion for the saddle."

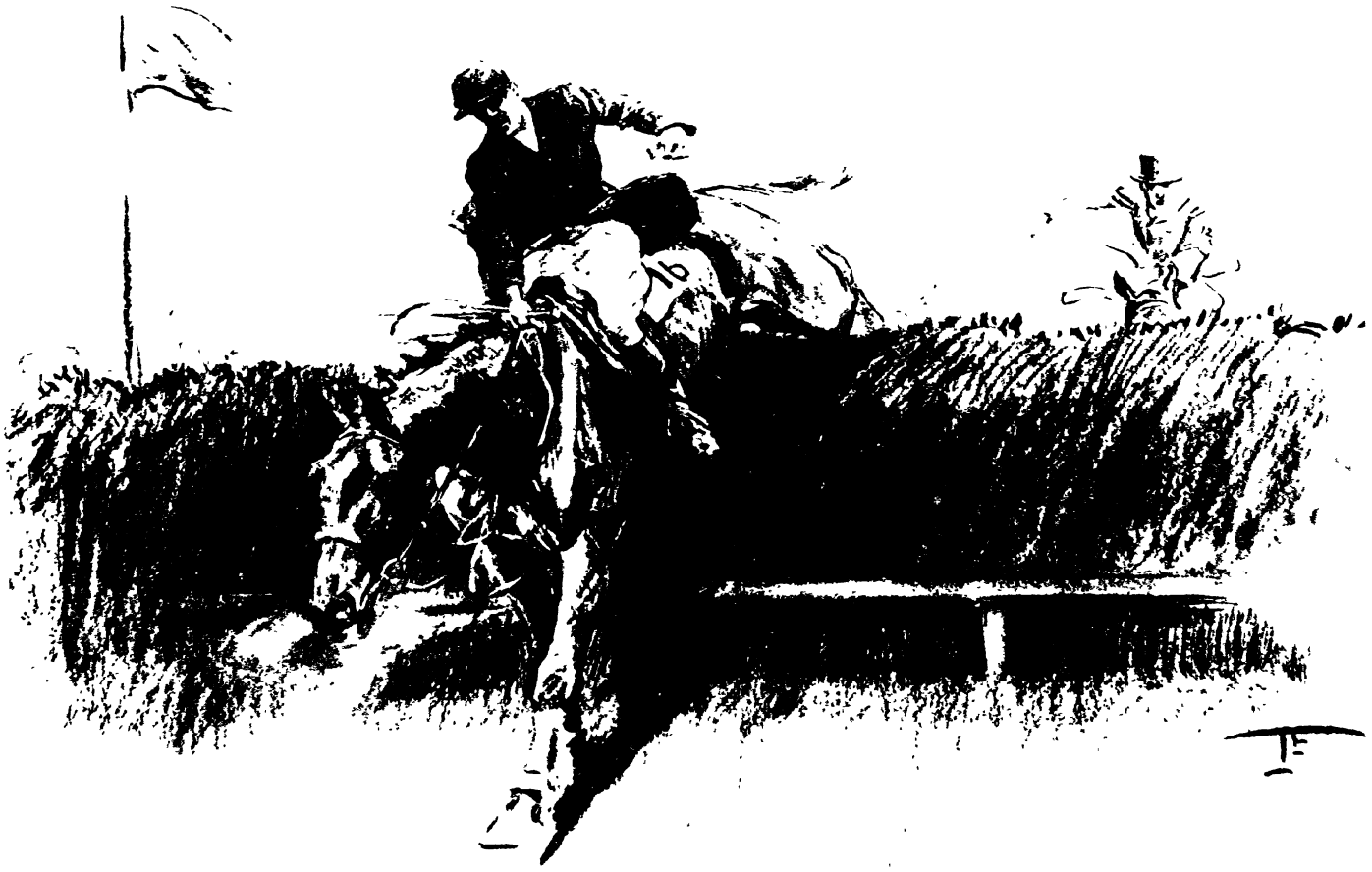
As an Act, it must have caused what are called "scenes" in the family. It will have brought the prices of women's hats to something near to-day's appalling figure. While the act was in force only a *very* good husband can have responded with anything but the crudest oaths to an invitation to "see my new French hood" (or bonnet).

But the idea was a nice one, and, as soon as history is ready to repeat itself, Parliament must get back to it. I hope that they will keep the old-fashioned words: "—— shall breed," they should insist, "a proper amblyng little nagg for his lordship when he goeth on hunting."

You will not breed the "little nagg" for profit; not because you wouldn't like to, but because profit making is too difficult a business, as the profit makers are the first to admit.

In 1185 the King, I find (though I can't remember which King that would be) was selling imported brood mares to his tenants at four bob apiece. So far from acting upon purely philanthropic motives, he was making some 14 per cent. on the deal. But the days when landowners and amateur horse-breeders could expect to get 14 per cent. on anything except their claim for repayment of income tax are gone; and we may as well face the fact.

Nor, I think, will you breed him with any idea of "improving the breed." When this project of the "little nagg" first takes shape in your brain you will mention it casually, diffidently, to all



"RIDING TO VICTORY OVER THE LAST FENCE OF THE POINT TO POINT COURSE"

those of your acquaintance who have some reputation in the breeding world, to all your grand friends who do things on the grand scale, who, for income tax purposes, are the owners of breeding establishments and for all *practical* purposes are themselves owned (or disowned) by their stud managers.

Such men will, I think, scarcely understand about the "little nagg." They will, more probably, make it pretty clear that, with your loose ideas about selection and so forth, they regard you as a mild nuisance.

> You are too senseless-obstinate, my lord,
> Too ceremonious and traditional.

It takes a man like W. Shakespeare to knock together a hyphenated word like senseless-obstinate; but quite ordinary fellows among your grand friends can *be* senseless-obstinate in their insistence upon the rules governing selection of sire and dam.

They will admit that they themselves are not infallible. They put this down to the fact that, choose a man never so wisely, he is always at the mercy of chance; and, in horses, as in other animals, chance will sometimes achieve a throw-back to some unknown and most disreputable ancestor on one side or the other. But you, they say, render the *whole thing* chance—and a poor chance; for, even when you make a few uninformed researches into the ancestry of the sire, you are invariably guilty of completely ignoring the family history of the mare.

On the other hand, if, so far from approaching the matter in a more or less frivolous spirit, you *have* evolved a theory of your own—then you must expect to be treated as a public danger. But, after all, this has always been a cry, from the days when the wiseacres frowned upon those frenchified fellows who wanted to breed something a little more elegant than the plough horses to pull the barouche to church on Sundays.

As a matter of fact, when your grand friends fail you, you will probably continue to take a lot of trouble to be orthodox, even if you *are* inclined to confine your attention to the "little nagg's"

sire. You will search the new books and the old books for advice, and you will get it—though, perhaps, not so explicitly as you could wish. Youatt, for instance, fails us in this respect most lamentably.

"If horse-breeders possessed of good judgment," declares Youatt, "would pay the same attention to breed and shape as Mr. Bakewell did with his sheep," the thing, he says—though he uses more dignified language—would be as easy as kiss your hand.

Now, this, to me, was very irritating. Except from Youatt, *I had never heard of Mister Bakewell.* It seemed obvious that at the cry of "a Bakewell, a Bakewell!" sheep growers all across the world would leap to their feet, eyes ablaze, glasses charged. But to me the word Bakewell conveyed nothing more than a confused recollection of an injunction to pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake. Then how, in the name of Youatt, *could* I pay the "same attention to breed and shape. . . .?"

People to whom I subsequently put this question told me a lot about Robert Bakewell of Dishley, and the Leicester influence on the long-wool breeds. I can only say that if that is the same Bakewell, I am very much annoyed. I had thought that when Youatt talked about "Mr. Bakewell's sheep," he was referring to some particular sheep. It had, at least, been pleasant to think of Mister Bakewell showing off his sheep—after church on Sunday—with the same modest pride with which you will show off the "little nagg."

Modest pride, by the way, can be overdone.

"Bred him myself, you know," said a man in my hearing.

"Well, after all, it's very difficult, *and we all make mistakes sometimes,*" was all he got for his modesty.

But in one way or another we can be trusted to make a reasonably good selection if we are left alone. We are more likely to go wrong when (as it seems to us) the selection—like our greatness—is thrust upon us. For we have one terrible temptation to resist—the temptation to "get a foal from the old mare before she has to be put away." It is a temptation which comes when the old mare finally breaks down utterly, irretrievably, for the

twentieth time; and it seems the most natural thing in the world. It is, we feel, part of our lifelong kindness to the old mare.

But the devil is in *that* temptation; certainly the old mare is not in it, and her comments would be found to be sulphurous if they were intelligible.

A reasonably good and sound hunter has never yet been bred from a broken-down old mare. I write that sentence on purpose; my purpose is that after you have done with saying what you think of its stupidity, you may grow calm enough to agree that one really does better to breed from a *young* mare.

You will not, in any case, forget the corner-man person of the legend who enquired of the ancient whether his horse could do one or other of the impossible feats which legendary (as well as real) horses can do. "Ask of his *dam*," the ancient answered.

It is a bit late to be asking more questions of the old mare when her offspring breaks down 'utterly, irretrievably, for the twentieth time,' halfway through his second hunting season.

This temptation resisted, it is, after all, comparatively 'kiss your hand.' If you have the misfortune to be a certified lunatic, you will entrust the mare to the rowdiest and clumsiest groom you can obtain. You will instruct him that the mare is on no account to be kept quiet for the six months before the foal arrives and that he is to feed her with mouldy hay. You will tell him not to trouble to call in the vet to assist the unfortunate mare, and, when the foal, in the face of every discouragement, does arrive, you will see that mare and foal are at once turned out into the most exposed and poorest pasture you can find, and that there is no shed or shelter in which they can stand when rain, sun or flies become intolerable.

The ordinary, uncertified lunatic modifies this procedure to the extent of merely forgetting that it is essential that both the mare and the foal, soon after it arrives, should have all the oats they can do with.

The fact is that it is as easy as it is delightful to breed one goodish foal. The reason why many people never breed more than one is because they find that foals, like other children, have

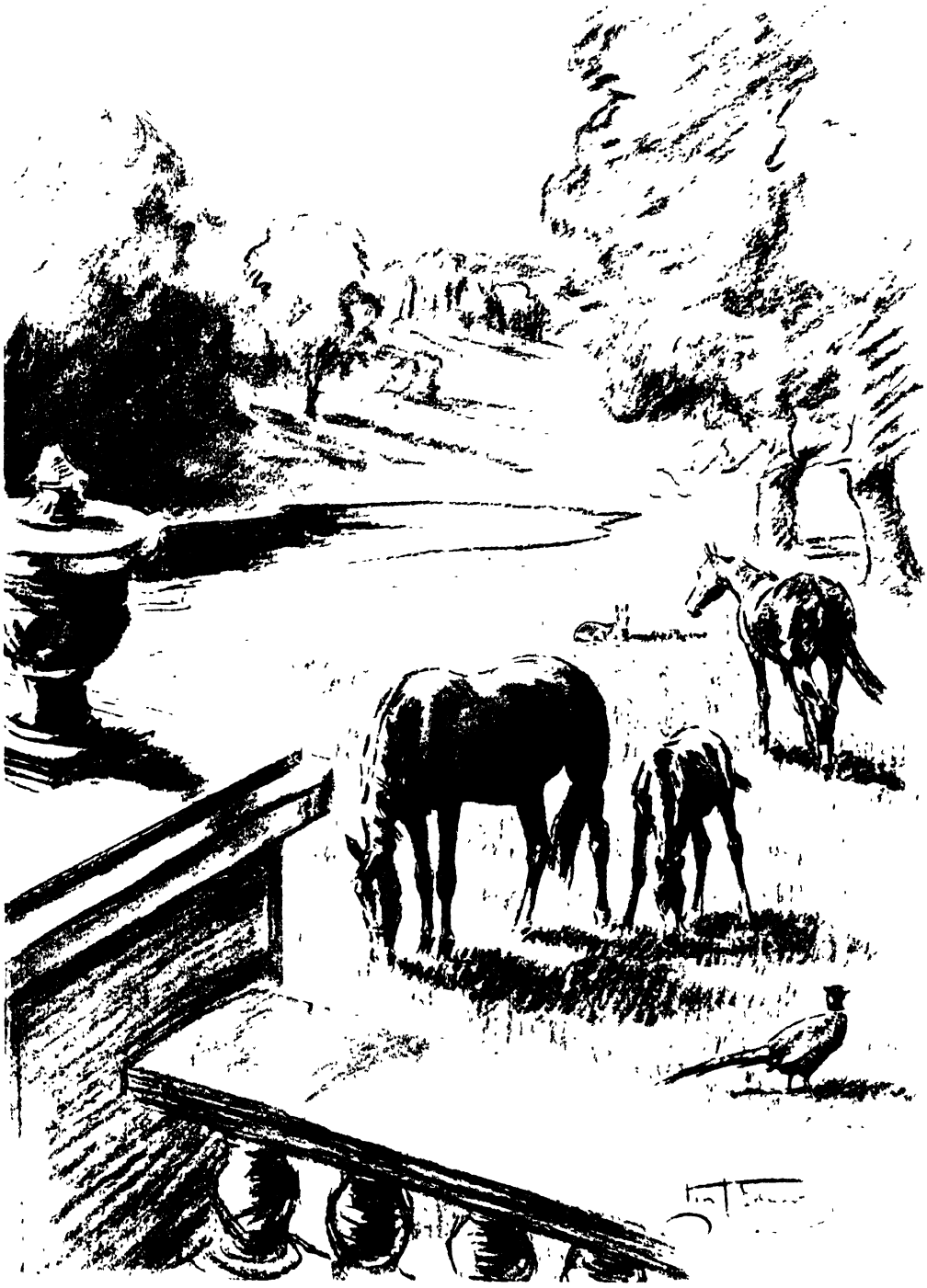
the habit of growing up and requiring to be trained and given character. Some of them, as a matter of fact, seem already to have too much character of their own. I recollect one such young lady—she's rising three—of my recent acquaintance, who is at once the plague and pride of all her friends. One of her best friends spends the greater part of his time in leading her by the forelock away from the lane of "school" jumps which runs through her meadow and which it is part of his job to keep from being damaged unlawfully. The rest of his time he spends in watching her coming back again.

When I last met them both, it was to hear that he had caught her *flagrante delicto* with her head in his bucket of whitewash. Lifting a white (washed) face as her elderly and involuntary playmate lumbered rapidly across the field, apostrophising her as a "runagate" meanwhile, she had kicked her heels in the air and galloped away. She then observed him from a safe distance, while he discovered that, she having drunk three-quarters of a bucket of his whitewash, he must walk half a mile to get some more. He returned to find that in the interval she had opened his dinner-basket and eaten his dinner; looking up, with purplish face and a heart too full for words, he espied her trotting gaily round him in widening circles with his one and only (and practically sacred) hammer in her mouth.

He spoke of her in tones of anger from which, however, it was evident that he found it hard to exclude a note of pride. "'Tis all what *she* wants," he declared with bitterness, "and never not nothing what nobody else wants."

But such things must be suffered for the good of the cause, and a man is only entitled to swear off breeding if and when the "proper amblyng little nagg" proves to be an improper clumsy pig of a young horse. Then he ought to be *made* to swear off, for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the fault will lie in his own methods of training, and will prove that he is constitutionally unfit for the job.

Nevertheless, all honour to the one-foal men whose struggles



"OUT IN THE PADDOCKS UPON AN EVENING IN JUNE"

brighten the lives of the rest of us. I think, too, that for each time that they recollect with disgust the tearing, ramping, hard-mouthed brute, whose education they were eventually compelled to entrust to another, they must remember a dozen times the long-legged foal. For even if they failed to teach him anything, the long-legged foal will have taught them much.

Of Ali the Yogi, whose side was pierced by a spear in battle, it is said (as Mukeji tells us) that he "continued to sit on his horse and commanded the fortune of war. At last, when victory put its muzzle in the palm of his hand like a colt. . . ."

That, to my mind, is a wonderful metaphor. It would, I think, have meant a lot to *my* Mister Bakewell.

VI

EMPTY STABLES

DO you *know* the smell? There are old broughams in it and a dog-cart or two, and a clean concrete floor—but, most of all, the old brougham and the big landau. There is no "economic demand," nowadays, for a big landau: but then, that one hardly expects; for, if we are to believe the manufacturers of England, there is no economic demand for *anything*. There is only the demand which people, like you and me, make—something for nothing and a great deal for sixpence (less trade discount).

The tragedy is that there is not even an *un*economic demand for the big landau. Having lately sold one for thirty shillings, I know.

A man had come up from Judea—I mean, London. He was Our Mister Somebody, of a Great Commercial House. (I gather that big shops don't exist any longer—they are all, it seems, Great Houses.)

Our Mister Somebody was to buy the carriages and harness, and I had arranged to deal with him myself and had sent the men away. That sounds very grand: actually, it only, nowadays, involved finding an excuse for persuading old Scaynes that he and the boy should leave me alone.

Preparations for giving up a house to tenants are apt to be dismal, and Our Mister Somebody did nothing to dispel my gloom. He proved to be a mournful little man—not at all my idea of a Representative of Big Business—but he was sympathetic, and it was as if my sorrow was his sorrow.

I had supposed that our saddle-room and coach-houses held a collection—and a deplorably expensive one—of every imaginable variety of harness and carriage. This, it appeared, was not so.

Our Mister Somebody made it quite clear. We had all the kinds—and only the kinds—of cart and carriage which "are really not worth our consideration, if you understand me."

"THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION."

Quite kindly, he succeeded in making me feel that I had brought him away from London under grossly false pretences.

"Well!" he suggested presently, as if to give me another chance, "may I see the harness, sir?"

We went across to the saddle-room.

"Tcha! Tcha!" was all he said, as he looked round the walls and the heaped-up saddles on the floor.

I began to get irritated. Here, at any rate, he had something of everything. I told him so.

"But *we* have no demand for *double* harness," he replied.

I pointed to three sets of single harness hanging on the walls.

"It's black," he pointed out reproachfully, as if he spoke to an idiot. "Now, if it had been brown . . ."

To shorten matters, I thought it well to suggest a price without further delay—carts, carriages, harness and saddlery, all in.

"Two *hundred?*" he screamed. "But"—he snatched at a chance to recapture a belief in my sanity—"p'raps you mean shillings?"

Grabbing a pencil from his pocket, he proceeded to make rapid calculations on the back of an envelope.

I gave some excuse—said I should leave him for ten minutes while he had a proper look at the stuff—and walked hurriedly away. I had seen the value which the man from Judea had set against the big landau!

It was then, when, going into the coach-house, I opened the carriage door, that I got a sniff of that delicious scent—the stuffy, but nice, clean scent of the leather of a well-kept old carriage.

It awoke memories—lots of them—and I turned away to walk through the rest of the empty stables.

I opened the half-door of the nearest range of boxes, and the place looked invitingly cool. I slipped inside, carefully shutting the door behind me.

It was cool—but it was certainly a bit desolate. You know the sort of thing—five or six empty loose-boxes and a couple of stalls for visitors' carriage-horses. It used to be fun for a small

boy to go and look at other people's carriage-horses, and to come away with the proud conviction that these brown giants, tossing their pillar-reined heads, weren't a patch on our own big bays! And everybody knew that silver-mounted harness was beastly; and that jolly, winking brass was the proper thing.

But now the stalls, like the boxes, seemed to be empty—save for an untenanted ferret-hutch. A *ferret*-hutch! The abomination of desolation.

I peeped into one of the boxes. Someone had seen fit to cover the floor with potatoes. *Blast* potatoes! I clattered back to the other stall. It held two bicycles and a large tin bath with a hole in it.

I turned the bath upside down and sat on it.

There should at least be a certain dignity about desolation, but this empty horse palace was merely sordid. "Men say the lion and the lizard keep the halls where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep." But here there was only what Shakespeare (in, after all, a similar connection) called "A beggarly account of empty boxes."

It is possible that, oppressed by the little man and "Big Business," I dozed as I sat on the tin bath. If so, I was awakened by a friendly whickering from the farthest loose-box: *that* I can swear to.

Now, the farthest loose-box was last owned by Paddy's Delight. Both Falcon and Ladybird were *before* Paddy's Delight, and Dance-of-Snow was even before them. So it must have been Paddy's Delight.

But *he* had been gassed in France and they had to shoot him. I had still got a letter, somewhere, from a corporal in the cavalry regiment to which Paddy's Delight had gone 'way back in August, '14. "Sir, the poor Old Horse 'as copped it. . . ." I remembered the letter—every word. Some of the words were a good deal blurred: as if rain or something had fallen on them.

I had found time even in those days of the greater disasters to feel quite upset about it. It was the corporal's manifest grief which was upsetting, not so much the copping it of Paddy's Delight; for he was a tearing old devil of a roan horse with an ugly china

blue eye. One of the sort that you cannot tire, and wish you could. He was called Paddy's Delight because no one but Paddy, his Irish groom, delighted in him.

Still, it was nice of the Delight to come back. I got up from the tin bath, which gave out the tinny note of protest which tin baths do, and went over to talk to the old horse, who continued to whicker at me.

"Hullo, old man," I said.

I opened the door of the box, and the horse pushed his great Roman nose at me—just as he always used to do. Not with the playful nibbles of high-bred Falcon or the little coaxing nudges of lightsome Dance-of-Snow, but the great awkward shove of the Delight himself.

"*Get* up, you old fool," I adjured him.

"Never mind," he said, talking as horses do, by way of thought transference, "you know, we're all coming back."

"Get off my *foot*," I said, pushing him away from me. He snatched greedily at a mouthful of straw which he didn't want, as he lurched away and began to walk round and round his box in the tiresome way that was always his custom.

"Yes," he resumed, stopping short at intervals to sweep in another mouthful of straw, or blow water-rings in the bucket which stood in a corner. "And it won't be long now! People are tired of horseless carriages—well, automobiles, then. You must have seen it yourself. Everybody used to drive about in open automobiles and say they were enjoying the scenery (though they never stopped to look at it). Now they've given up that pretence, with a lot of other shams, and they all want closed automobiles. Even you"—he raked his great head at me—"have got a sort of badly made brougham top on that thing you gave so much money for."

"So much money!" I gasped with mingled pride and amazement. "Why, it's the cheapest car of its kind on the market—and I bought it second-hand. I—I only paid two hundred and twenty for it!"

"Just twice what you paid for me!" An ugly glint appeared in the china blue eye: the Delight was always a funny-tempered devil, and I felt behind my back for the door of the box.

But he resumed his walk.

"Of course," I began, anxious to placate him (after all, it was rather nice of the old horse to come back, just to talk to me): "Of course, people do seem to prefer closed cars. But as to giving up cars, altogether, why, people tell me——"

"People!" the Delight snorted. "Since when have *people* known what horses would do next?" He looked at me with suspicion. "You've been talking to that man from London. People!" he snorted again, as he cocked his ears to listen to the drumming of the electric-light engine which the new tenants had demanded.

Well, John P.
Robinson he
Sez they don't know *everythin'* down in Judee.

I don't quite know whether he *said* it, but the words certainly came from somewhere, to the accompaniment of the measured throbbing of the electric-light engine.

I looked at the Delight with fresh interest.

"Where on earth did *you* get that quotation from?" I asked.

"Yankee horse," he answered laconically; "met him in the Army. I rather like the Yanks. It was he told me of what's happening.

"Listen to me," he commanded rudely, "then perhaps you'll understand."

I leant up against the Delight's manger (he had, as usual, licked it clean of every oat) while he told me.

"Men and women—or whatever you call your present-day sexes—want, first of all, *speed:* to get somewhere quickly and, having got there, to get somewhere else. Up to now they've not been able to get everywhere, all in one day: soon they *will* be able to.

"DART AND DEVON, THE EXMOOR PONY PAIR, WERE IN THERE."

"You've heard of underground streets in London for cars, and pilotless aeroplanes?"

I said I didn't go to London much, but I had seen something about pilotless 'planes.

"Well, then, surely it's all obvious enough? You will first have a great speeding-up of speed: everybody will be able to go everywhere in what we used to call 'no time.' Having been everywhere, nobody will want to go anywhere—there'll be no need, they'll know what everywhere's like. And if they *have* to go anywhere, they'll go there in thought—send themselves out in the same way that men can send a pilotless aeroplane."

He wheeled round suddenly, and began to walk the other way in his loose-box. "I suppose you can understand that much?" he whickered, scornfully, as I felt.

"After that"—he stopped to nose about in the straw, looking for stray oats—"it is believed that men will begin to recover their senses—their horse-senses." "Being able to go everywhere, they'll want to stop at home. And when that happens we shall come back."

"I see," I said, speaking, naturally, more to myself than to the horse. "With town travelling all done under the ground and the longer distances in the air, the countryside would certainly become better again for horses and——"

The Delight turned and came towards me with his ears laid back. I threw up a hand, and he tossed his head ill-temperedly, but thought better of it.

"Better for horses, nothing!" he snorted. "Better for *you*, you mean. *We* are all perfectly happy where we are, but men can't do without us and—well, as I always say, one is a soft-hearted old fool."

He didn't look a bit soft-hearted as he stood there—between me and the door—while I wondered what he meant. I was just deciding to slip out of the loose-box as soon as he gave me a chance when he surprised me by flinging up his ugly old head again. He stood there, a wisp of straw hanging from his mouth, head held erect, ears cocked—listening.

I had heard nothing; but when, with a sudden twist, he turned his head and looked between the top bars of his box, I moved to the door, opened it, and stood there trying to see what it was that had caught his eye.

From behind me came the Delight's ugly whinny that I remembered so well. "Why, here they *are!*" he seemed to say.

I was amazed. The floor of the stables was no longer bare, for newly bedded-down straw filled the whole place. The doors of the two end boxes were open and, hock-high in the good wheat straw, stood the rugged-up figures of two undocked horses. I could have sworn to them at any time in any conditions; it didn't take me a moment to recognise either Lady Jane or Themistocles (the bookies, you remember, *would* call him "Themmy-stockles").

A moment later I realised that every box but one held a horse. Gamecock was in his old home next to Lady Jane, and Galloping Lad next to him. Galloping Lad was amusing himself by banging away at the boards behind him: I made a mental note to have the well-known spot re-padded.

Only the biggest of the boxes now stood empty. That, too, was deep in straw and folded horse-rugs lay ready. . . .

Someone was leading her in, but he was on her near side and I couldn't see who it was. But *her* I could see—saddled and bridled, the girths covered with mud-sparks. Dance-of-Snow had got home again.

I moved away from the Delight's box, meaning to go and talk to Dance-of-Snow first of all: for, although one mustn't be sentimental about horses (who are, of course, great fools), Dance-of-Snow was always rather an old special darling.

But I stopped at the second of the two stalls, when I saw that both were tenanted. Dart and Devon, the Exmoor pony-pair, were in them: and Dart and Devon hadn't been in those stalls for more years than I cared to remember.

I sat down on a bale of hay which someone had conveniently left for a moment in Dart's stall, to think about it.

The others — Gamecock, Lady Jane, Dance-of-Snow — were

comparatively recent occupiers of their boxes: it had seemed natural to see them again. But Dart and Devon! I put out a hand to touch Dart's satiny skin.

At that moment I heard a voice in the stable-yard outside. Curiously, a sudden fear seized me: what was happening, what did it all mean? Voices! Cheery, gay voices had echoed in that stable-yard, but—I struggled to my feet and waited while the top half of the outer door was flung back.

Framed in the doorway were the head and shoulders of the little man from London. He was smoking a cigarette.

For a moment I did not recognise him. I was about to suggest that he should not bring his cigarette into the stables, and I pointed at the straw around us, and gave a kick at the bale of hay.

The bale gave out a ringing, tinny sound—like a tin bath. I looked down. Yes! Just like a tin bath—a bath with a hole in it.

Our Mister Somebody was speaking. "Couldn't get the door open at first," he said. "I hammered on it, too, but I expect you didn't hear me?"

"Yes, I did," I began, "but I thought it was Galloping L——" I stopped abruptly. "I thought it was stuck," I amended. "I mean I was just thinking!"

The little man looked at me. "I expect it's a bit off," he remarked, "seeing it all go to rack and ruin, as you might say. Still, I dare say the—er—compartments will have their uses." He waved his cigarette as he peered in: "Potatoes, you know," he said vaguely, "and one thing and another."

I pushed past him hurriedly. "Horses is finished," he began to tell me—with some idea, I suppose, of preparing me for the melancholy result of his purchasing calculations.

And only the electric-light engine remained to give him the lie:

For John P.
Robinson he
Sez they don't know *everythin'* down in Judee.

VII

PRIVATELY EDUCATED

WITH horses, as with boys, the privately educated get the worst education. We know very well how important it is that the earliest lessons should be conducted with unruffled calm. Yet, what happens? Leaving the children and the dogs at the five-barred gate, we start in orthodox fashion, leading the young horse sedately round the field by the halter. In five minutes the children have grown tired of this, in ten minutes so have we: two minutes later the whole boiling of us is rushing from point to point, waving our arms, yelling with delight, making frantic efforts to bar the kicking, snorting progress of the young horse as he gallops round and round the field pursued by all the dogs.

As soon as we ourselves have had all the exercise we want, we rebuke the children, rate the dogs (or *vice versa*) and put a stopper on lessons for the day.

After some weeks of this, with intervals during which the children go to school and everybody else forgets the young horse, we suddenly decide to proceed with his education. Too lazy to equip ourselves with proper long-reins, we drag him about by his mouth with a single *too* long rein, in which we become hopelessly entangled in our pathetic attempts to brandish our whip. Tiring of this again, we rush the young horse into a loose-box, put a large, and probably rusty, bunch of keys in his mouth (holding them in place by means of an incorrectly adjusted dumb-jockey), slam the door so as to ensure that he can see nothing to distract his thoughts from rusty keys—and we leave him thus, to acquire a mouth.

We next take him out and attach him to a log. No! There must, after all, be a limit to humility: it is *you* who commit this particular sin—not I. And this, I think, though not the worst, is

the silliest of the things which you do. To teach a horse to draw a load—even though he may never have to do so in after life—has much to commend it: to compel a horse to draw a heavy log over a bumpy field bears no relation to *anything* he ought to have to do in after life. The horse either knows this or takes an early dislike to what is apparently to be his after life. In either case he becomes irritable.

Beaming with satisfaction, you turn to the next page of your *protégé's* primer. "The horse may now be mounted," you read. Undeterred by that ominous "may," you persist in your tragedy of errors.

It is possible that you yourself are a survivor of the days when a certain proportion of babies were, to their subsequent embarrassment, born with silver spoons in their mouths. If so, it is also possible that you went for your first ride with the French tutor on one side of you, the German on the other. A butler in charge of three footmen with restoratives may have followed you, and, in that case, the still-room and laundry-maids will have been assembled in the middle distance for to admire the butler, if not yourself.

Did you like it? No more does a horse.

It is just in this matter of a horse's dislikes that we fail most lamentably, for we find it impossible to differentiate between his various dislikings. It is clearly enough laid down that there are two rules common to the education of horses and men, to which there should be no exception. If your man or your horse dislikes doing something which is necessary, he must be encouraged not to dislike it, and, in the last resort, compelled to do it. If he *fears* to do something which is necessary, you may seek to encourage him, but you must on no account compel him. All you have to do is to "sublimate his fear instinct." I find it difficult to discover a psychoanalyst who will tell me what this really involves; but it appears that we are, at any rate, barred from snatching at the easy solution of tying to a travelling steam-roller a horse which is afraid of road engines.

When the results we obtain by educating our horses privately

are so unsatisfactory, it is, I am afraid, no defence for us to assert that the rough-and-tumble ways of public school education are too rough and too full of tumbles. All the same, if all are agreed that the privately educated get the worst education, few will deny that a horse which goes, so to speak, to a public school does not always get a good education. At one such school it is the practice to jump their horses over a telephone pole slung on chains 4ft. 6ins. from the ground. At the last moment—after the horse has taken off, and as he is in the air—willing helpers jerk the pole up another foot higher. My personal objection to this proceeding springs, I suppose, chiefly from the fear that it will become so widely adopted that, whenever we go to try a dealer's horse with a view to purchase, we shall ourselves be expected to pop him over this nightmare obstacle.

As to the admissibility of such methods, we who fail as teachers are in no position to criticise those who succeed in getting a living by teaching : and in any case, whether or not the professional horse-breaker (as opposed to the trainer) knows his own business, one must assume that he knows enough of his business not to listen to us.

Still, "horse-*breaker.*" . . . It is funny how some people get the names they deserve : and no one will deny that, quite apart from private tutors, the short supply of perfect horses is due to the unfailing supply of imperfect horse-masters. Then, in a country which is said to be going mad (or nap) on Nationalisation, why does no one nationalise our horses' education? Our young horses, like our children, should be taken away from us to be educated, and so given a sporting chance, at cavalry or other central schools, of finding a teacher fit to teach them.

You and I, if not the horse-breaker, might still be allowed to try to learn something in the process of schooling the *old* horse. The clumsiest of us can do very little damage there ; and there is so much of knowledge, interest and amusement to be got from giving continuation classes to a trained horse that it is surprising how little of it is done. So far as the long-rein side of this training is concerned, you—or, shall we say, I—can do no more damage to the old horse's

mouth with the long-reins than I do with the short reins; and by using the long-reins I give him more exercise in a shorter time and revive any waning respect he may have for my power of control over him. There are men who never see their grooms going out exercising without screaming with agony at the thought of the harm which they will do. If it would be even greater agony for a man to see his groom driving the horse with the long-reins, it is simple enough to substitute a longeing-rein and attach it to the D of the headstall. Only a hypersensitive person could then feel agony enough for screaming purposes.

It is probable, however, that there are risks in teaching new knowledge to an old horse. It was once my misfortune to ride a charger whose education, such as it was, had been given to him very late in life. He had rejected it with scorn: all of it, that is to say, except "the passage." For some reason, it amused him to passage. He would do little else: at a moment's notice—or, rather, without notice—he would suddenly start passaging, and he passaged faster and farther than any horse I have ever met before or since—unstoppable, irresistible.

He was one of those nameless horses. People are afraid to name them—for fear of being overheard. His groom and I called him the Big Horse, and he was one of the finest-*looking* chargers imaginable. In the hope of distracting the Generalissimo's attention from my own shortcomings to the magnificence of my horse, I decided to ride him in a review of some local importance. To the disappointment of my friends, all went well at the saluting base: the old horse cocked his ears, played with his bit and looked a perfect picture. Once clear of the ground, however, his sense of humour became too much for him. He scattered the Generalissimo's troops for him—horse, foot and guns—to an extent which the Generalissimo himself had never been able to approach in dealing with those of his enemies. I offered such apologies as I could while we went, but we continued to go. A standing camp was set beyond the parade-ground, which itself was in a desert. *Via* the camp, which we took in a series of bold zigzags, like a

picture of a streak of lightning, we reached the desert. How far we went it is impossible to say. I only know that when we returned it seemed to me that we had been away for weeks, and the assurance that the Generalissimo had long since gone home scarcely compensated me for the discomfort of that journey.

It may be that war-horses resent being taught new things in later life. I once put a most kind-hearted and obliging mare into a mess-cart, with the idea of varying the monotony of her life as a charger. On the outward journey all went as well as one could expect, and after half an hour's drive we decided to turn round. The mare, unfortunately, decided not to. About an hour later, however, we *had* turned round. I shall not forget the drive back to billets.

With intervals during which she stood stock still and immovable, the mare pelted down that road as fast as she could split: the two men who accompanied us, clinging one on each side of her, were swung along like tassels in the wind, their feet touching ground about once in a hundred yards. Halfway home a soldiers' football match had just ended, and the crowd filled the whole road.

It was interesting to see the rapidity of the change in their bright, smiling faces as they turned to admire our progress, and then beat each other out of the way as they fought for the protection of the hedge bank.

I suppose that we private tutors might get better results if we paid more attention to the written advice of the public schoolmasters. But we might choose the wrong master. It has been said (and if it has not, it shall be now) that the negatives of wise men are of no more value than the affirmatives of fools. The authority on horsemanship who is fond of laying down the law may be right if he says that something can be done in a particular way: he is always wrong when he pronounces that it cannot be done in another way.

The man with a horsemanship bee in his bonnet is a bore. The novice who worships at a beehive is a danger to young horses—and old chargers.

"HE NEEDS TO BE TOLD ABOUT THESE THINGS"

VIII

BUCKLES ON A BRIDLE

IT is told of a certain man that he said, "About two things only I have no sense of humour—my Mother and Eton." We all make reservations similar to these, but, in a world where most of the laughs are, already, on the other side of our face, it is to be hoped that the list of things at which we do not laugh will not be increased unduly.

When we are feeling fit and well, people can tell most of us rude truths or untruths about practically anything, from our code of honour and our horsemanship downwards, and the ruder they are the more exquisitely humorous we find them—especially if they are truths. In the rare cases where an insult of this type fails to amuse us, we are reduced to an admission that we have no sense of humour—a sense which, in other people, at any rate, we prize far above the other seven. (Or is it seven wonders of the world and less than seven senses?)

That is when we feel fit and well. I (as you will readily have guessed) am feeling *unfit*, and a recent remark by a well-known authority upon horses and horsemanship has made me feel more than unwell.

"There is," he announces, "*nothing so ugly or so vulgar as buckles on a bridle.*"

The italics, as they say, are mine; I wish that the author of the remark were mine—for ten minutes—to do what I liked with. Make no mistake: he is not talking loosely, he means it—every word. The world, as we all admit, is indescribably vulgar, and the men in it (every one of them being, to a greater or less extent, morally, mentally, physically and spiritually deficient) are quite ugly enough: yet, in such a world, it is, apparently, to be laid down unequivocally, that *nothing* is so ugly. . . .

I can't repeat it. When people say things like that I am in

the mood to vote away every penny of other men's money in the cause of education—so that all of us may acquire a vocabulary of something more than the couple of thousand words on which we are at present compelled to ring the changes, and thus be better able to cope with these situations.

Apart from the appalling insolence of such a remark, the real danger of it is that it is just such cant as this which has always discouraged men and women from adventuring upon the paths of horsemanship. Hearing it, the poor ignorant fellow who has just invested in a lovely yellow-coloured bridle with ever so many buckles (and nice thick reins and a plated bit and, it may even be, a jolly green and blue brow-band), hurries out again to buy a motor-bicycle. Nor, as they say, I don't blame him.

But those others blame him. They say, as he bang-bangs past them on a second-hand contraption which appears to be held together largely by mascots and has U-AN-MEE painted on its petrol-box—they say he's a soulless scoundrel. They say that it is horrible to think that men spend their spare time and money in this way when they could keep a horse on it. They say that these fellows will soon make hunting impossible for Uanmee, who badly need their cap-money and subscriptions if the cost of hunting is not to become prohibitive.

There, in fact, is the rub. They want these vulgar fellows out hunting (at any rate, on the blank days), but they don't want their nasty, vulgar ways. And so they set about encouraging them with a kick in the jaw like this.

Let us cut the cant and cackle. The plain truth is that, so long as a man can show as much consideration for others out hunting as he ought to show for others when he is riding his abominable motor-bicycle, he must be made to feel very welcome. Unfortunately, if he is *not* welcome, the silly fellow won't feel so.

At this stage in his hunting experience it doesn't matter—as is enigmatically said—two hoots in hell or a hill of beans what he wears, does, says, or rides. Nor does it matter any more hoots what his unfortunate horse is dressed like. I have every sympathy with this man's horse, but the hard fact is that *il faut souffrir*

pour être horseman, and the suffering is bound to be largely vicarious.

It is not only on questions of his own dress and his horse's saddlery that the would-be horseman is discouraged. The snobs of the world of horsemanship make it hard for him in a dozen other ways. It is this which renders it so difficult for the ignorant rich to enter the kingdom of horsemanship, and so unattractive for the comparatively poor. And it seems to me that the people who attempt to counterbalance the influence of the snobs are too few—and too lazy.

The days when Masters of Hounds were loud-voiced in their public denunciation of any unfortunate individual who infringed the unwritten laws are probably past; but the days when hunting men as a whole will do all in their power to make hunting easy for the novice have not yet arrived. The habit of bawling abusive threats at offenders was certainly a bad and a bullying one: even where the infringement itself represented a gross breach of good manners, these roaring tactics were undignified—and often unsuccessful. "Either I take hounds home, or you go home yourself," was once bellowed by a Master at a young man who was already fully conscious of having committed a violent breach of etiquette, but who had been only too anxious to offer a decent apology. With the eyes of the field upon him, he sat on his horse considering the injustice of this ultimatum. "Well, . . ." he said finally, "*I think I'll stay!*"

An account of a similarly disastrous scene recurs to me. I mention it here because, when things like this can happen to the initiated, the novice is apt to be the more chary of making his vows.

Certainly, the Master had shouted "Hold hard!"—and quite obviously the Important Subscriber had not heard him.

"I *said* HOLD HARD!" announced the Master, galloping up and doing his best to cannon into the Important (but Meek) Subscriber.

"Very sorry, but I never heard you," murmured the I.B.M.S.

"Well," retorted the Master, "keep your great lop ears open, then."

It was just one of those exquisite pieces of back-chat of

which we all long to deliver ourselves at times, but which we know very well *must not* be indulged in if we want people to come out hunting.

The result in this case was appalling. There followed, I gather, a sort of Procession of Protracted Death. Before anything could be said or done, the column had moved off for home. At the head of it rode the Important Subscriber, behind him went his glowering family, behind them rode the friends and sympathisers, and last of all came such of the field (and they were numerous) as were indebted to the Subscriber in the way of business. Every man and woman of this lugubrious exodus had his or her eyes fixed in a glassy stare—avoiding the now horrified Master's eye, craning for a view of The Lop Ears of the Important Subscriber.

Those days of Masters who ruled by terrorism are gone—at any rate, in countries where the Hunt is not maintained at the Master's personal expense! But if the Master is no longer grossly rude to strangers and transgressors, not many of his field go out of their way to be welcoming and helpful. A well-known writer states that a spirit of fellowship should animate all hunting men. If a little trite, this reads very satisfactorily. Unfortunately, he then goes on to describe the happiest run of his life, and he makes it abundantly clear that his happiness lay in the fact that hounds slipped away unexpectedly and only he and two or three others were there to enjoy a good thing. It is, apparently, difficult for most hunting men and women to share the conviction of the old party who saw the sea for the first time, and thanked God that here, at last, there was something of which there was enough for everybody.

If this state of things continues, the true spirit of horsemanship—which, for Englishmen, can only be fostered in the hunting field—will die. I am aware that fields grow bigger than ever, and many Hunts (particularly in the provinces) are each season said to be richer than the last. But one hears complaints from others besides the snobs that "the wrong sort of people come out hunting nowadays," "the old sort seems to have died out."

"ONE OF THOSE EXQUISITE PIECES OF BACKCHAT

How long will it take the grumblers, I wonder, to realise that these careless, rather rowdy folk who leave gates open and won't wait their turn at awkward places *are* the old sort—the new generation of the old sort, or such of them as have the courage to come out hunting in the face of every discouragement? No longer in fear of the Master, they are too ignorant to respect him, and, meeting only this buckles-on-a-bridle attitude from the old hands, their hunting is chiefly inspired by an uninformed determination to get their share (and someone else's, if possible) of what they can recognise to be a good thing.

If they are not helped to learn, perhaps emigration — the "blessed word" of this century — will alone serve to keep the fox-hunting spirit alive. In England and Wales there have latterly been as many as fifty Masters who are their own huntsmen, and a further dozen or so of amateur huntsmen who are not Masters. If it were not for the buckles-on-a-bridle people, that might be very encouraging; but what definitely *is* encouraging is that there are thirty or more packs in other parts of the Empire.

Nearly half of these are in New Zealand, they tell me. I don't fancy that out there they bother much about buckles-on-a-bridle—but I do fancy that they are a pretty workmanlike lot.

I hope nobody will misunderstand me. It is only in the early stages that I implore both the snobs and the men who have the interests of the sport at heart not to frighten away the novice by audibly gasping at his general appearance or that of his horse. He needs to be told eventually about these things—but gradually, confidentially.

And if I had the telling of him (and he was still ignorant enough to ask my opinion), I should try, like the prophet of old, to sum up the whole thing for him in one sentence. After considerable thought I have formulated such a sentence. I am very pleased with it.

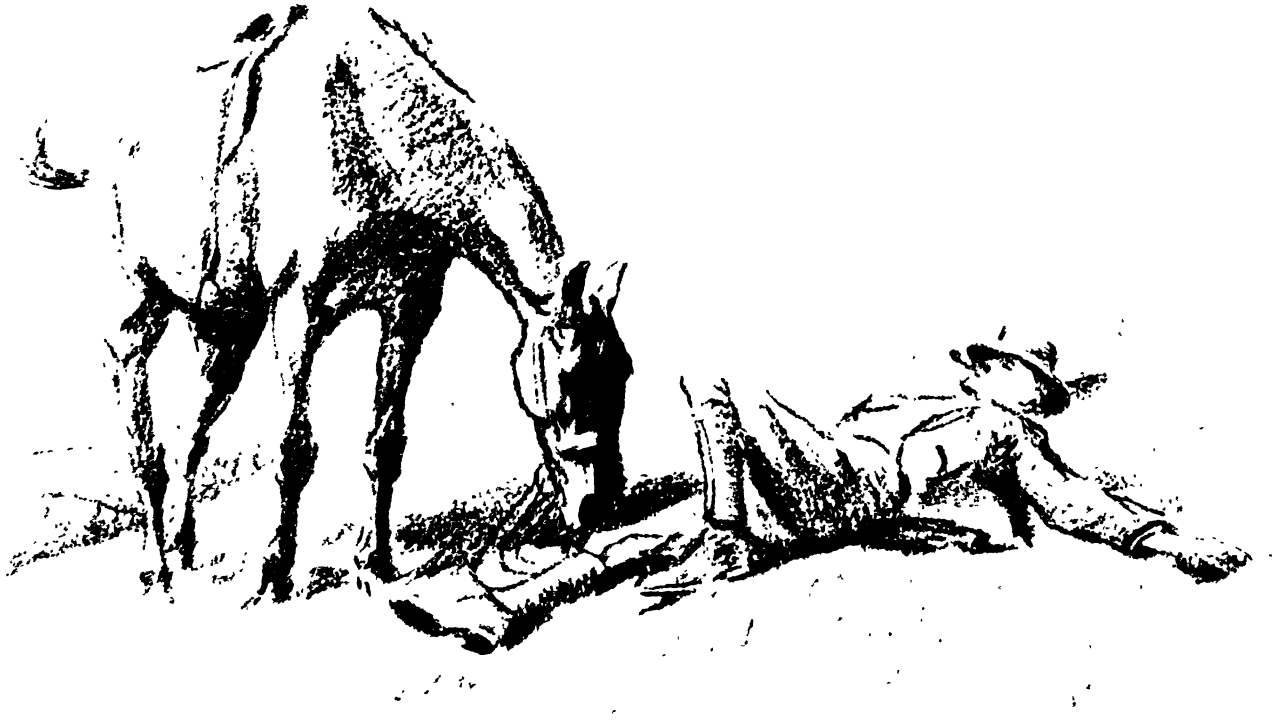
"There is nothing," I would say to him, with a pointed glance at the neat stitching which would be securing *my* horse's bit, "there is nothing quite so ugly or so vulgar as buckles on a bridle."

IX

SOCIETY IS FATAL——

A MAN will never get to know his horse—nor does a horse begin to know his man—until the two have had many a ride together, apart from the rest of the world. "Solitude is impracticable and society is fatal," but the first part of that statement is unduly pessimistic. An overdose of society has before now proved fatal to a *débutante's* complexion or a polo-player's chances; but solitude sufficient for a horseman's purposes is easy enough to come by and is far from being deadly.

If we share that solitude with our horse our friends will profit by it. Nine horses out of every ten we meet are most irritatingly unschooled; but if there is one thing more infuriating than going for a ride with a man who fails to appreciate this, it is to ride with a man who *does* appreciate it—and sets about schooling his horse during our ride. A man of the first type will barge into you at a gateway with the guffaw of an imbecile, he will keep just half a length ahead of you at the walk, trot, canter or gallop; shouting his silly questions into a high wind, with—an insufficient compensation—his foolish face averted from you. But at least he generally keeps plugging along. A man of the other type never gets galloping at all. If a gate has to be opened he will keep you waiting for half an hour until it is opened to his satisfaction. He will ask you to stop while he reins back his horse for minutes on end: until you wish the earth would suddenly open behind him and topple him over backwards—to be vomited forth again (if at all) in a volcanic eruption on the other side of the world. Finally, he will set you and your horse in the middle of the field, like an old-fashioned rubbing-post, while he canters round you making dissolute



"AS YOU LIE AT FULL LENGTH LOOKING AT THE LARKS ABOVE YOU."

"figures-of-eight" in a pitiable attempt to induce his horse to 'change legs.'

Of course, if you are *both* schooling your horses in a serious way you can bore each other in turn, and it is then a different matter altogether; but I am thinking of the schooling which is given—or ought to be given—in the course of a casual country ride. And that is a schooling which should not be done in company.

If we want exercise for horse or self we can get it better and quicker by trotting and cantering an awkward, unbalanced horse in figures of eight about a rough field with a steep pitch in it, than in any other way. But if we want to make a horse a perfect hack (a horrid word, which, from a false sense of economy, we have to use because it has been invented), then the process is a more subtle one. Personally, I have never succeeded in making a horse a perfect hack, owing to the fact that in the course of every such schooling ride there have come moments which presented to me an overpowering invitation to act like an idiot. I cannot remember that I ever refused such an invitation.

All you people who excel because you are made of sterner stuff will at least know what I mean. Riding on the Downs you come to the edge of a deep valley: the slope down is steepish, the farther slope upwards is very steep indeed—dividing the two is a grass ride some two horse-lengths in width. What is the proper course to adopt with your three-parts perfect hack, to whom you have been giving lessons in deportment all the morning? Surely you should trot him down the near slope (keeping him balanced and collected), make him break into a canter halfway across the ride, walk him as soon as the up slope gets too steep—and, finally, dismount and walk beside him until you reach the top.

Is that what you do? I suppose so. But how you *can* do it beats me—with that ribbon of springy turf waiting at the bottom for you to land on it with one tremendous bound, and all ready to flip you halfway up that boring, farther slope at the full gallop. And that is a flip which lets you get the view from the second hill-

top a good two minutes before you otherwise would; and gives you, all the sooner, the nutty scent of sun-filled gorse-bloom which —I am in a position to assure Mr. Kipling—is just as much a part of the smell of Dawn in Paradise as is "our close-bit thyme."

Off you go, then! At the full trot almost at once, at the canter much too soon; one hopelessly uncontrolled lurch into the air before you have reached the bottom, and then you and your horse have kicked the grass ride behind you and are going full split, hell-for-leather, up the farther slope. The last few strides produce a lamentable exhibition of "bellows-to-mend," but, the top once reached, you are out of the saddle—girths loosed, your horse's head turned to the breeze—before an old-fashioned equitation instructor could so much as produce his glibbest oath.

Your horse soon recovers. Within a couple of minutes his teeth are tearing at the short grass beside you; he is treading on the reins which you hold in one hand as you lie at full length looking at the larks above you, and he threatens every moment to stamp upon your face. It matters very little. Even you will never be able to school a horse not to tread upon his reins in these circumstances. As to your face—why, you and the gorse and the close-bit thyme are in Paradise! What has *your* face to do with *that?*

And below the Downs, in the Weald, these same temptations come. I remember once seeing one of the few men for whose blood I have ever thirsted for more than a week at a time, jump a five-barred gate almost from the standstill, on someone else's horse, without premeditation, in the course of a quiet hack ride. The thing outraged me; but that was because I could no longer despise this man from the bottom of my heart as I had always done hitherto. And it was because I knew that a five-barred gate has to me proved a temptation very seldom indeed.

The temptations to which people like me fall are very skimpy sins against proper schooling, but I fear that they are, at least, sins. To interrupt a quiet ride through the woodlands for the pleasure of snatching at the chance to put your horse across a little

"pop," wrenching him round on his hocks to send him at it all uncollected: to scramble into the saddle while your horse walks on (when you've just spent an hour training him to stand still while you mount); and to do this just because you want to scamper across the field three seconds quicker in order to see which way that last covey of partridges has flown—all this is very wrong.

At least . . . I suppose it *is* wrong? It is, after all, a question of discipline. Discipline among men is the dry bones of leadership, and if you know your own limitations as a leader you have to train your men or your horses accordingly. These solitary rides are essential, in order that our horse may get to know us: if, as a result of them, our horse learns that if we say a thing once we don't always mean it, it cannot, I think, be helped. As long as he realises that if we say a thing twice it has got to be done, this is as much as we amateurs can hope for. For our purposes, it is, after all, enough. Our horses are neither our slaves nor our business partners: they are, by force of circumstances, our companions, and if they like us as well as we like them they are capable of becoming our friends.

We and our horses get to know each other during the solitary, schooling hack-ride; we are more likely to become friends, if at all, during the solitary ride home from hunting. To my mind, grinding poverty is the only sound reason for riding a horse to the meet instead of going, ourselves, by car. On the way out, your horse neither desires nor encourages your companionship: he wants to be free to go snorting along, jumping out of his skin with excitement to think that *at any moment* during the next few hours he may hear, at the covert-side, that intoxicating, that heart-set-pounding holler which precedes the two seconds' lull of indecision and culminates in the racing of thudding hoofs for the first fence of all.

To fail to ride your horse home is a very different matter. If you are a terribly rich person you may be right, I suppose, in thinking that you can pay other people to look after your tired horse a great deal better than you can do it yourself. If you are

a terribly busy one it is, perhaps, justifiable to take the view that you and your horse could not have a day together at all unless you bustled away as soon as it was over. It is probable that, in either case, you yourself miss more than the horse does.

For, of all the solitary rides, the long ride home from hunting is really the best of all (provided, always, that you have schooled your horse to *walk*). A sixteen-mile ride home with or without an entraining interlude, when horse and man are very tired, is the finest imaginable training in patient and sympathetic horsemastership, but (since patience and those things are not, in themselves, wildly attractive) all this has its compensations. It is above all, I think, at such quiet, solitary times that the love of England enters into a horseman never to be drawn out of him again; not to be scorched up by Eastern sun nor frozen by snows of the north.

It is a good many years now since my horse and I, upon a winter's evening, having accomplished ten of the miles which separated us from "home," stood in a gateway of the Heythrop country and considered this England question. For some reason, I remember that particular gateway, although I have no recollection as to what sort of a day's sport we had, nor do I know in what part of the Heythrop country we stood. But there was a touch of frost in the air and the smell of the English countryside: except for the partridges which called from the high ground above us, and a wisp of smoke from a fire in the valley below, we had this world to ourselves. Suddenly, as we looked out on our heritage, an old fox going on his unlawful occasions topped the stone wall in clear view and galloped across our front. I tried him with a low holler, scarcely loud enough to make my horse prick his ears—but loud enough for *him*. Checking himself in his stride, he spun round like six acrobats (six spin faster than *an* acrobat)—and he sat there for a full minute, in the middle of the field, looking at us and—I remember this distinctly—laughing at us. And then he silently slipped away, and was lost in the dusk and mist.

Now that I come to look at it, I suppose that this last para-

"TO INTERRUPT A QUIET RIDE THROUGH THE WOODLANDS."

graph will have misled you. You will have expected that my horse and I saw some Great Thing, even if you suspected that I should prove no more capable of describing it than was my horse. You will have thought that, at least, across the silence of that winter's dusk, we heard The Horns a-blowing: the horns, I mean, of the hunters who have now gone over the hill, and of whom country people tell us that they return at such quiet times, taking what we thought they had lost, as and when they will. But, whatever my horse may have heard, I am afraid that I have nothing grand to tell you about it. It is only that if you yourself have such moments within your own recollection, you will know how important they afterwards become; and how those gateways and places, visited in solitude save for the company of your horse, invite you, when other people become a nuisance, to return to them alone and "Rest thy unrest in England's lawful earth."

For society, after all, *is* sometimes fatal, and to something more than the teaching of manners to your horse.

X

ANIMALS CAN ENJOY

IT is an appalling fact that the planning and fitting of stables is steadily, rapidly and *obviously* deteriorating—while nobody does a thing about it. It is a question of comfort and convenience, or, rather, of discomfort and inconvenience, and it is inexcusable. Opinions may vary as to whether the new country houses of to-day are comfortable, but it is the unanimous verdict of all horses that the new stables which accompany those houses are hideously uncomfortable.

In these days of labour-saving devices it may be necessary that the houses themselves, in the country, should be furnished, fitted and decorated as if they were something between a London flat and a Palace of Fun, full of automatic machines. The chief objection to it seems to me to be that the modern country house can never be allowed to grow shabby—whereas, in the old days, it was a case of the shabbier the better. Only when the pattern of the wallpapers became so hopelessly faded as to be practically unrecognisable did the house itself begin to attain that atmosphere which is the peculiar property of the old country houses—a very comfortable thing, in which many flowers, log fires, a little tobacco smoke and books, all play their part. I can quite see that it won't do to allow your new country houses to grow shabby. If your powder blue painted walls and your "smashed-egg" ceilings get a bit flaky, or if your nickel-plated liquid-soap attachment drops off your interiorly plumbed wash-basin, something has to be done about it. I am not saying that the modern country house is not efficient: I am merely suggesting that it is not, properly speaking, a country house.

The stables, on the other hand, are not even efficient. I suppose that by the time the architect, decorator and owners have

thought of a new name for the colour which the decorator has painted the bathroom walls, everybody is feeling too tired to do any more thinking. The planning of the stables is, therefore, left to the builders' office-boy.

Even so, I do not think that the new stables ought to be as bad as they are. People's tastes can be fearful and wonderful, but the distastes of horses are sound, simple and perfectly well known. It is the more intolerable that there should to-day be springing up, all over the country, stables which offend against every right principle of horse-housing.

They divide themselves—these abominations—into two main classes, according to whether few or many horses are to be stabled. In the first case, the horses' home is slipped in, as it were, at the last moment, to form a foundation for the rooms of the chauffeur and his wife and to fill in any space not required by the garage. The chauffeur and his wife are kept awake all night by the rattle of headstall chains and, roof-ventilation of the stables having been rendered impossible, the horses are subjected to a slow but effective process of asphyxiation. It can be little (or no) consolation to the horses when the architect (as generally happens in this type of stable) seeks to gild their sepulchre with a nice line in sporting weather-vanes. The weather-vane is the least offensive thing about the stable—it serves, after all, the useful purpose of distracting attention from the stable itself—the trouble is that the golden weather-vane is almost invariably the outward and visible sign that, within the sepulchre, this mania for decoration will have expressed itself in glazed tiles.

After all that has been said and written about glazed tiles in stables, it is almost inconceivable that they should still be found there. It is, no doubt, one of those evils which are wrought by want of thought; but if a man who contemplates putting glazed tiles into his horses' stalls would only chain himself and his architect to the wall with their noses up against a looking-glass for an hour or two, he would get some idea of what a horse feels like after twelve months of glazed tiles.

The second type of unsound stabling is more common, largely because it is cheaper. It consists merely in a low-pitched range of (winter) ice-houses and (summer) ovens, masquerading as loose-boxes—all match-boarding and wire-cut brick. At one end (and, therefore, not even conveniently placed) there is an inadequate bunk-hole intended to do duty as a forage store—and at the other a combined saddle-room and boiler-house in which the grooms can keep their minds from dwelling on the miseries of their own discomfort by watching the steam from the boiler destroying the condition of the saddlery. "Animals can enjoy," declared Jean Paul, "but only men can be cheerful." The statement is, of course, a profound untruth, but it is a fact that people who ought to know better will cheerfully condemn their men and their animals to live in conditions which rob them of all possibility of enjoyment.

In stables that are being built to-day all the old idiocies are being committed—all except one: it does seem at last to be understood that a horse is not a giraffe; and that if you specially want to throw dust in your horse's eyes there are simpler ways of doing it than by giving him an overhead hay-rack. But the other crimes —faulty ventilation, stall floors steeply sloped from front to rear, no separate loose-box for sick horses, sick-box doors opening inwards, no arrangements for hot water or the drying of clothing, no living-room for the men . . . the crime-sheet can be extended indefinitely, but—just to pop in one more charge—let us add, "stall partitions too low." If this last seems a weak note on which to end my scream of abuse, I can only say that I wish you had been present to see Bridget Watkins, ears laid back, the whites of her eyes showing, seize the Exmoor pony by the backbone in the grip of her yellow teeth and, before anybody could stop her, shake him till he screamed in agony. I've no doubt the Exmoor pony had been annoying Miss Watkins for weeks past. Bridget was not a "naturally" (whatever that may mean) vicious mare; but the thoughtlessness of the stable architect had presented her with the time, the place, and the infuriating one, all together.

Probably no one man can hope ever to complete the official curse on stable architects: individual experience will always be able to add another curse or two, and may not give sufficient emphasis to some of the existing ones. Borrowing Mr. Jorrocks' formula, we may say, for instance, "*Con*-found all architects what make our sick-box doors open inwards": but it requires a veterinary surgeon who has found himself on the wrong side of the door, with a mare "down" and *in extremis* on the other side effectually blocking the doorway—it requires that a man shall have found himself in this situation before he can deliver this particular curse at all adequately.

On the question of ventilation there is room for a certain amount of disagreement. I was interested to hear, some time ago, that the proprietor of an important hunting stables was keeping a large number of his horses in a disused aeroplane hangar. I was interested to learn this; but what I was glad to learn, at a later date, was that the hangar had been burnt to the ground. My glee presupposed that all the horses were saved and that the insurance company concerned lost enough money by the fire to enable a first-rate, old-fashioned stable to be built in place of the hangar. For the hangar itself I had no regrets: the proprietor might declare that his horses had kept fitter there than anywhere else, but I could only see the danger that this hangar fad would encourage the private owner and his architect in their lazy, "animals can enjoy" ways.

The fact is that horses must be given homes—not mere "standings." Aeroplane hangars may be all very well for the big commercial stables, but even in the case of these I personally find the *ensemble* of, for instance, the great barns in which the railway horses live extremely depressing. Perhaps it is due to the circumstances in which I have seen them. A tutor of my youth with Socialistic leanings used to promise me, as we sat in his snug rooms paying an easy tribute to his vintage port, that "a time will come when, if the gondoliers of Venice strike for higher pay, not a lamp will be lit in the streets of London." Twice in my

life has this now happened—or, to be exact, what has happened is that the railway stablemen have been compelled to desert their stables, and their horses, because a miner or a motor-driver has had a row with his employer.

On each occasion I have found, when visiting these stables, what appeared to me to be a high standard of efficiency—ventilation good, lighting quite good enough, forage excellent, bedding adequate: a lack of hoof-picks and watering headstalls my only reasonable ground for complaint. If the whole place seemed to me to have chiefly the atmosphere of a well-run orphanage, it was due, I suppose, to the fact that the horses' real guardians had gone on strike with the gondoliers. In consequence, the 'Orphan in a Hangar' effect was heightened, while the efficiency of the establishment was temporarily diminished by the inefficiency of some among the eager volunteer helpers. Taken as a whole, we made, I fear, somewhat indifferent substitutes for the real stablemen. Quite apart from myself, there was the immaculately dressed little man who put up such a poor, if valiant, show with the heavy stable barrow, in trundling which he fell on his face at least twice in every journey: there was the boy who *would* take his horses to water at a smart trot down the whole length of the stable, running the gauntlet of fifty pairs of heels, most of which managed to land a kick or two on his unfortunate charges. And there was the man who arrived on a bicycle and refused to be parted from his bicycle, but followed us all about saying that he was prepared to "carry water to the poor suffering creatures" (the one thing which was both unnecessary and impracticable). He kept telling me, I recollect, that it was "In Newman." I naturally supposed that he was referring to the Cardinal or the billiard-player, and to some informative treatise which one or the other of them had written upon stable management in Strike time: it was only when he varied this by saying it was "*very* In Newman" that I realised he was (quite unjustifiably) stigmatising the humanity of the absent stablemen.

It was—or I hope it was—all this which made it impossible

for me or the railway horses to feel as if we were in a stable at all. I hope and I believe that when the proper stablemen came back those railway horses lost their look of gloom, became as cheerful as horses always do when they are enjoying themselves.

But I must insist that the aeroplane hangar type of stables must only be adopted where it is a matter of economic necessity. If and when you build your new stables, I beg you, therefore, not to build them on the lines of a Poor Law Institution, a 'Cottage of Gentility,' or a jerry-built villa—but to remember that animals can enjoy and that horses like to be cheerful.

They cannot be cheerful if their coachmen, grooms and helpers are sulky and dissatisfied, and this is the reason why a man's notion of how to run a stable must be as sound as his plan of the stable itself. "A good servant knows his place—he also knows yours!" That is a saying which has the merit of appealing equally to employer and employed. The saddle-room (except for an occasional, once-a-year swoop) is no place for you—that should be obvious; but too often it is no place for the men, either.

A very little consideration of the requirements of a stableman's working day should enable people to provide saddle-rooms showing greater convenience at no greater cost than that of the abominations which are provided to-day. Having done so, and having picked your stable staff carefully, leave them to get on with the job. In the wisdom of Sancho Panza it is written: "Every one is as God made him, and very often worse": a slow-witted groom grows rapidly witless when his blundering footsteps are dogged by an employer who clings to the pathetic belief that if you want a thing done well you must do it yourself. I have known only one man who was able successfully to act as his own stud-groom while paying another man to act in that capacity. And he—besides being the most completely reckless horseman of his generation—was an exceptional man in every respect. His favourite breakfast, I recollect, was half a cup of tea and two large cigars.

I am not suggesting that a man should allow himself to be

ruled by his groom or his stud-groom; but it does seem to me that if, for example, you privately think that it would be better for the bay mare if her three feeds were divided into five, you should think privately twice before insisting on this—particularly if your establishment is a small one. Your horses' happiness—and, therefore, their condition—will depend very much on your groom's contentment; and anything you do which has the effect of lengthening your groom's working day may indirectly diminish the cheerfulness of your horse.

This suggestion applies only to such alterations or innovations as you may be tempted to make by way of experiment, where the better course or treatment may be said to be a matter of opinion. On the other hand, there are certain things in regard to which a man must take a firm stand if he has any feeling for the comfort and happiness of his horses. If, for example, you find that your groom likes a nice, over-heated stable with the horses rugged up to cooking point and living permanently in an atmosphere loaded with ammonia—then you must make it quite clear to your groom that you and the horses *don't* like it. If he fails to respond there are only two courses open to you—either you must sack your groom outright or you must sell your horses. Those who choose the bolder course after, perhaps, years during which they have silently suffered the growing impudence of their groom, are apt to act a little unfairly when they do act. "I wonder what you would do without me?" remarked one of this type to his employer, with a complacent smile. "We shall soon know *that*," retorted the employer. "I am going to do without you from this day week!"

An incident of this kind may make a pleasant break in the monotony of life for employer and employed, but it upsets what should be the even tenor of your horses' existence. My own idea is that the more a master (to use a word now almost meaningless)—the more a master leaves to his men, the better for his horses. I recollect a dog-cart mare which made a perfect habit of standing on her hind legs in the most determined fashion whenever she was

required to stand still for one moment. Within a fortnight of the arrival of a new coachman she became as mild as milk and, for the first time in her life, she could be driven in double harness with complete safety. I, in my silly way, thought all this was due to the magic of benevolent treatment—really, it was due to opium. This I did not discover until the departure of that particular coachman let the saddle-room cat out of the bag: and, since the mare appeared very much happier when drugged, I could only regret that I did not, myself, know the correct dose to give. It is a sort of ignorance which has been very tantalising to me all my life. Not long ago I was given an infallible cure for coughing. On examining the recipe I discovered that it contained, among other things, what seemed to me enough tar to cover the London-Brighton road. A hideous doubt assailed me: was it intended that the treatment should be internal or external? Too proud to enquire, I allowed the horse to go on coughing.

But those of us who have not the knowledge of a stableman can exercise the imagination of a horsemaster. This has its compensations. If we don't know how to make a physic ball we shall, at least, be prevented from throwing physic balls at Satan—at the Satan who finds mischief for idle mouths and hoofs to do. To take only two instances (by which, of course, I really mean to take the only two instances I can think of) I myself know, beyond all question, the cause and the cure of wind-sucking and of weaving. The cause is boredom; the cure, cheerfulness.

The people who are supposed to be authorities on these things will tell you that weaving and wind-sucking, or crib-biting, are incurable. They don't attempt to hedge: "Once acquired they are never forgotten, and are incurable." Now, this short statement contains one large lie and one unwarrantable assumption. If Paul, a pony, and Dandy, the weaver (who was undoubtedly the best horse the world has ever known—without the world being aware of it), if these two could speak for themselves, they would blow my trumpet for me. I can imagine the tidings being circulated with all that generous absence of restraint which

distinguishes the notices in my country paper: "Good News for Local Residents! Mrs. (as the case might be) Tells How She Was Cured Of . . ."—you may remember the sort of thing, with all its appalling details. "I was a confirmed crib-biter," Paul, the pony, would begin. "When I was not biting my crib I was sucking the wind. I gulped and I grunted, or I grunted and I gulped. They tried everything—muzzles, hollow bits, stuff smeared on the manger, even that abominable neck-strap, with the thing which stuck into my gullet when I tried to arch my neck for gulping purposes . . ." Then, I suppose, he would go on to talk about his digestion, or his indigestion, and how we wasted a lot of time discussing whether the crib-biting caused the indigestion or whether it was the other way about. Finally, he would want to let you know how it happened that life became a joy to him again, and wind-sucking a waste of time.

Dandy the weaver would have a similar tale to tell, but I would rather that neither Dandy nor Paul told you just how they were cured. If, realising that your horse is bored, you are too lazy to think out ways to cure his boredom, you must be a Jean Paul person, with no ambition to build—and no right to enter—one of those stables which a man can enjoy because in it his horses are cheerful.

But I refuse to believe that this is the case. I will take it for granted that, knowing all time is lost which might be better employed, you will stop worrying about the discomfort and the decoration of your new country house, and will lose no time in making your stables such as are a joy to visit at all times.

And the best time of all is the night time: in late summer, when heat and flies make it impossible to keep horses out at grass any longer and when the nights are beginning to cool. The stables are full and the stable-yard is empty: the men have not yet returned from whatever form of night-club is most popular in your village.

> . . . Night is on the hills and the Great Voices
> Sweep in from the sea. . . .

Quietly you slip out of the house: the little black spaniel, all snufflings and scurryings, comes racing to your low whistle, and across the dew-marked lawn you make your way to the stable. In silence you move from one open half-door to another, listening to the even, unhurried scrunching noises of horses in their quiet enjoyment. Finally you turn to the big, detached loose-box where a particular friend of yours lives. At the sound of your voice he comes to meet you, and, drawing a great snorting breath of happiness at the wonder of the night, he stands there, telling you all about it.

And there, I think, we will leave you—in "such society as is quiet, wise, and good." The black spaniel, growing jealous, will see that you do not stay too long: and the black spaniel will be a less embarrassing companion than we should be as, later on, you stroll back towards the house in the peace of the summer night—trying to connect up that saying about "such society," and feeling that these poets have a knack of getting hold of the heart of the matter.

> Thoughts that burn like seraphim
> Throng thine inner world to-night.
> I love all that thou lovest,
> Spirit of Delight!

If in those thoughts you have mixed up Shelley and Mr. Alfred Noyes—and black spaniels and next hunting season—it won't matter very much. Perhaps it will even help you to go back and see the beauty in the smashed-egg ceiling of the billiard-room.

XI

JUST WHAT DID HE DO?

IT has been established that nobody can think of two opposite things at one and the same time; but if you cannot think of ham and bread-and-butter, you can think of a ham-sandwich, and it is certain that at the moment when you are about to leave the saddle involuntarily you grasp at a sandwich of thoughts.

"O dear!" you think (mildly enough), "here am I leaving saddle!" Then you slap down a slice of ham—"I don't *want* to leave the saddle." But the other piece of bread-and-butter follows: "I'm afraid it's all going to be very *unpleasant*," you say to yourself, gobbling your sandwich at a mouthful. It then is.

If we forced ourselves to think entirely of the ham, I am convinced that seven tosses out of ten would never occur. I have a lively recollection of the only occasion on which I jumped an open ditch in a steeplechase. It *was* the only occasion, so I think about it pretty often. The elderly, rather muzzy-looking fellow whom you meet every now and then, talking to himself, slightly red in the face—that is me, thinking about it. I like to imagine that I had miscalculated, that I did not know it was the open ditch which we were approaching. There is, unfortunately, no foundation for any such suggestion.

We will pass over the earlier phases, please, and come to the moment when I was hanging head downwards, my face some eighteen inches from the ground—like (but not very like) a galloping Cossack picking up a handkerchief. At the moment I heard, as it might have been, a voice from another world, a yell of delight from a member of that Public which congregates on the popular (grief) side of open ditches. "'E's *off!*" roared the voice, with a bellow of joyous anticipation. That stung me. By this time

"IT'S OFF" ROARED THE VOICE

the only contact between self and horse was preserved through one blunt rowel-point of one spur. It served. As, with a series of grotesque contortions, I hooked myself back, plunking my one trustworthy spur into the saddle with pick-axe blows, I realised with a sense of the deepest shame that I need never have left the saddle at all. I *had* known we were approaching the open ditch: and all the way down the slope to it I had been saying to myself, "O dear, I am about to leave the saddle." I am not proud of that performance, but I am glad to remember it, because it is pleasant to think of the disappointment and annoyance caused to the man who shouted "'E's off!" On the other hand, I am definitely proud of a toss which I deliberately planned and carried through to its crashing conclusion—at the age of fourteen, abouts.

If you have ever been fourteen, you will know that at this age you are allowed, in response to your entreaties and against your own secret wishes, to ride a horse which is *rather too much for you.* I went stag-hunting on mine. We traversed the first field—a 80-acre one—at a little over a thousand miles an hour. There was no question of being able to stop the horse, of course, but as the Hunt disappeared to the northwards (I was travelling due east at the time), I realised that there was just a chance of my being able to steer him on a sort of Wandering Jew's course through the ages. For a long time—perhaps for years—I did so. There was a mounted groom with me—a good, kind man, but the father of a family: to do him justice, I do not think it entered his head to try and stop my horse for me. I suppose it was when we had swept past him for the fiftieth time (and each time he hailed me, as the jolly captain of a Thames steam-boat might hail the mad crew of a destroyer running in ever-widening circles full split for the rocks) it occurred to me that, after all, this could not go on for ever. At the lower end of the field were several lines of slag in heaps. Hitherto I had put both hands to my off-side reins on approaching this territory, and hitherto I had succeeded in skirting it. Now I swept it into my scheme of things. My horse continued to carry his head on a line parallel with the ground, but for

the next four rounds or so he was able, with diabolical ingenuity. to achieve a circle which was not interrupted by a slag-heap. But not on the fifth round, by no means on the fifth round.

It gives me the greatest pleasure even now to remember how humbled he looked with his head in the mud, sideways, while I sat up and adjured him from the position of safety to which I had been catapulted.

The first was (nearly) one of those semi-voluntary, pessimistic falls such as, I am told, the steeplechase jockey achieves. Indeed, it is clear from the picture-paper snapshots of professional jockeys engaged upon their profession, that they have long since made all the necessary arrangements for quitting the saddle. In no other way can you explain the pea-in-a-pod positions which, according to the George Washington camera, our jockeys adopt in riding over fences. Small blame to them. It is their profession. If a barrister, for example, were liable to be flung into the well of the court at any moment during his speech for the Crown he would probably make his speech on all fours.

The other fall was a genuine "voluntary." The purely involuntary "voluntary" is, of course, a misnomer. You, as well as I, have probably cut that kind of voluntary at least once—in circumstances which reflected the greatest possible discredit upon us. In my case I should prefer to leave it at that.

The real, *Crashing* Falls are, perhaps, not for us, certainly not for me. But as one who would like to feel safe in claiming, in undistinguished company, that he has stood on his head upon the threshold of greatness, I should be glad to know whether your idea of what a crashing fall really amounts to coincides with my own. My private belief is that the genuine, All Sir Garnet, Crashing Fall is a *delightful* thing. Saying so, I snap my fingers, touch wood, murmur an incantation, and respectfully ignore the unpropitious sprites. Evil thus averted, I restate my belief. You who have known the total absence of discomfort involved in the process which ends in your awakening from a dreamless sleep to find yourself in a cottage hospital will know what I mean.

For myself, I did not achieve the dignity of a cottage hospital. I was riding a match in some sports of sorts, and the programme, with pre-war vulgarity, said it was for five pounds a side. We had thought of calling it five thousand pounds: it would have made no difference: neither of us had got five pounds, and it was well understood between us that nothing more than a modest dinner was involved. I regretted this intensely at the sixth fence—when I found myself leading by three fences. I already called it *four* fences in my own mind, as I saw that the sixth fence consisted merely of a line of dissolute-looking sheep hurdles.

It was explained to me, afterwards, that the strengthening of the obstacle with two iron crowbars lashed together with wire had been a totally unauthorised and, in fact, accidental proceeding. I dare say it was: but I once found an iron bedstead accidentally left in a point-to-point fence which some of us were shortly due to negotiate.

But my point is that the crowbars caused me no inconvenience whatever. At one moment I was thudding along over the ground as gay as a grig: the very next instant I was sitting *on* the ground, while kind-hearted supporters told each other to "give him air" as they trod upon me in their anxiety to see what I looked like dead. I felt, I recollect, immensely flattered. It was not, perhaps, a position of dignity, but, except that the doctor kept turning back my eyelids (and would not say why he did it) and then set my collar-bone crooked—except for this, I must honestly say I had nothing to complain of. Ever afterwards, to hope for sudden death has seemed to me only sensible. Sudden death with, say, forty years' warning. In fact, much as I always admire a bold horseman (from a respectful distance) as he rides for his crashing fall, it is his common sense which I admire—not so much his courage.

Seven tosses out of ten, then, occur because the rider is not concentrating his thoughts upon remaining in the saddle; and another two of those ten are due to the rider's determination to *leave* the saddle. There remains the tenth fall.

"*Just what did he do?*" This I recollect as the engaging,

brass-tacks heading under which the American Army entered their soldiers' war records. Applying it to those tenth tosses, we find the question unanswerable; but this need not prevent us, any more than the "'E's off!" public, from getting as much pleasure from that tenth toss as from the other nine.

This pleasure in a fall is a particularly unselfish one: it is, that is to say, other people's falls which give one most pleasure. Of the many tosses which I am glad to remember as having been taken by other people, there are two which occur and recur to me. The first was that of a friend of mine who had the heart of a tiger and the eyesight of a (blind) bat. It was not so much a fall as a third bounce.

People who hunt six days a week have no conception of the glories of one day a lifetime. I met this man after he had had his day. He was one of those people who are so hopelessly short-sighted that they can only expect to recognise their friends by the tone of voice in which they are abused for cutting them. He asked me for a cigarette, saying that he had left his case in a ploughed field, under a stone wall.

"But it was *under* the stone wall," he protested in answer to my enquiry: "the cigarette-case and my spectacles. And by then I had got the Master's horse."

It appeared that, having never hunted, and scarcely ever ridden, in the whole course of his life, he had gone to stay with relations who had never done anything else. He was a sensitive man, and the impression that his relations thought him a queer fish was strengthened when, coming down to breakfast, he saw them looking at the clothes in which he proposed to ride the horse they were about to provide for him. Then he overheard his host giving instructions for a *different* horse to be provided—and that seemed to have annoyed him. He vowed, he said, that wherever his host went he would go.

"And so I did!" he declared triumphantly. "Until after I knocked him over the second time."

"Knocked him——!" I began.

"THAT WAS REALLY THE TROUBLE; IT TURNED OUT IT WASN'T MY HORSE.

"It was a pure accident," he said testily. "Anyhow, I suppose hunting people expect to get an occasional tumble? *That* wasn't the trouble."

He told me the trouble. It seemed that his host "took to hanging back" after this, and he therefore transferred his allegiance to the Master. He and the Master took the first two stake-and-bound fences side by side, I gathered, and when the Master's horse hit the next obstacle (a post and rails) good and hard, the Master spoke to my friend. My friend told me what he said.

"I suppose he was only joking," he remarked. "Now, the next fence wasn't a fence—it was a stone wall. Whether my horse actually *hit* him, or whether we only jumped across him, I'm not sure. We all had a tumble. It was really the biggest tumble I'd had at all. My spectacles flew off and I lost my crop and my hat (but I found my hat again, by treading on it). And I found some of my money, but I couldn't find my cigarette-case. Do you know"—he peered at me in a short-sighted way—"one gets frightfully excited out hunting. I really didn't much bother to look for the rest of my things! Nor did I stop to see how the other fellow was—the Master.

"I ran to find my horse. He was quite close by, as it happened. At least——" He blinked at me. "That was really the trouble! It turned out that it *wasn't* my horse—it was the Master's horse: I honestly didn't realise it until it was too late."

I have always wanted to know just what that "too late" signified, but he was in such a hurry to go and buy some more spectacles that, at the time, I could get nothing further out of him. When I next met him he was again too busy. He was trying to learn by heart some sentences printed on a sheet of cardboard. They started, in huge letters: "THE PORTER ANSWERED, THIS MAN IS IN A JOURNEY FROM THE CITY OF DESTRUCTION TO MOUNT ZION." And they ended in little, tiny letters: "*And now Mr. Sagacity left me to dream out my dream by myself.*"

That was in the year 1915, when he had at last found a doctor who had promised to pass him for the Army if he could convince

him that he was not, for all practical purposes, blind. In the temporary absence of the doctor he had borrowed the latter's sight-test card and was getting it by heart, trying to remember not to say "this man is on a journey," when John Bunyan had written "in a journey."

He, apparently, did remember, for I heard of him as (characteristically!) "looking for" his battery during a month of March when a certain confusion existed. I feel sure he found someone else's battery, if not his own. I met him again the other day: but I found that his memory is not so good as it used to be—I do not think that I can now ever expect to learn what happened after he misappropriated the Master's horse.

The second of those tosses which recur to me also remains unexplained. It was at Oxford, and we had both arranged to win our first Grind. With the idea that it was only proper to discuss such momentous matters in a secluded spot, we drove a tandem out to Woodstock, where we compared our plans.

I do not recollect what our plans were: I only remember that we galloped the tandem the whole way back and that the beer at Woodstock was black. The two facts, however, bore no relation to each other.

We both gave up smoking for several hours before our respective races, but even this did not enable me to finish better than fifth in a field of seven. To be perfectly honest, I was not so much last of the first five as first of the last three.

But the other man—what a triumph that (nearly) was! He was riding a great striding grey horse and, three fences from home, as he approached the water, he, on his grey horse, was the only competitor in sight. Just what *did* he do? I could never make it out. I only know that, having taken the water in his stride, the grey horse turned a complete somersault, got up, and trotted contemptuously away. His rider had retained his grip of the reins, but, unfortunately, he had also retained the bridle: by some gymnastic process the horse had succeeded in shedding both rider and bridle simultaneously.

Then the crowd began to "boo." That is the worst of crowds —and race crowds are no exception: one minute you are tickling your crowd in the ribs, and it roars with *Moujik* laughter, the next moment you have annoyed it, and it bashes your brains out. The rider of that grey horse sat on the ground at first, looking uncomprehendingly at the booers: when he realised that they booed him because they had failed to make the odds at eight to one, and apparently regarded him as having deliberately knocked his horse down and pulled the bridle off it to spite them—he got up. A heavy snaffle-bridle swinging loose with the reins held short would, I suppose, make a tolerable weapon. He was not a large man, and the motive power behind that swinging bridle had therefore been generated by the explosion of all his highest hopes in a confined space. The crowd, as he walked towards them, seemed to appreciate this. They ceased to be a crowd.

We arranged, that night, that we would meet to keep this day in memory and to decide just what it was that we had each done wrongly. It was understood that we were to meet very often—much oftener than once a year.

It was in 1916, I think, that I saw in an old newspaper that he had been killed in action. Two years later I was riding through that extremity of desolation which is achieved when the armies have swept onwards and the dead ugliness of war alone remains. I still had a good ten miles to go before I need expect to arrive at even the mildest kind of danger zone; but any comfort which I might have got from this was largely discounted by the fact that my horse was tired, underfed, unclipped, and that he coughed most damnably at every ten yards and stumbled at every five. He had just achieved the periodical cough-and-stumble combined, and with the callous brutality which war breeds (especially behind the lines) I was wondering whether I was angry enough to jag him in the mouth once again, when I saw that a broken slab of marble lay almost in the middle of the road.

It was a tombstone—or half a tombstone. His name was on it (not the horse's name—*that* I should have welcomed)—the name

of the man whom I had arranged to meet. A French *pavé* is no more likely to be paved with tombstones than is the road to hell with good intentions, but there it was—as large as life: or as small as death. They had carved upon it, together with his name, some account of just what he did do; but the statement was broken in half, and half of it was missing. It seemed better to ride on.

So that, even now, I do not know what he did.

XII

RIDING ON THE DRAGON

YOU and I, with our fixed ideas about people whom we do not know, are apt to handicap ourselves unduly in the proper study of mankind. Until lately I had supposed that Mr. G. K. Chesterton, for example, would never be given a polo-pony mount in a Scurry Race at Ranelagh—would scarcely even welcome the offer of one. But, if you examine the introduction to "The Everlasting Man," you will agree with me that to state this finally would be ridiculous.

It is not merely that, when talking of men, Mr. Chesterton says it is "better to see a horse as a monster than to see it only as a slow substitute for a motor-car." It is not even that he reaches the somewhat staggering conclusion "that we might almost say that the handsomest compliment to a man is to call him a horse." My now firm belief that Mr. Chesterton has the soul of a horseman is founded upon his statement that ". . . We shall have again a glimpse of St. George; the more glorious because St. George is not riding on the horse, but rather riding on the dragon." You know what that means? It means that Mr. Chesterton must have spent almost as long as you and I have done, hanging over the rails of Rotten Row on a London Sunday, watching Englishmen riding their dragons. In no other way could he have seen the glory which is involved in that most lamentable, unnatural exhibition.

There are those who seek to gild the Rotten Row ginger-bread by assuring us that the Row is not really Rotten at all; it is *La Route du Roi*, and Emperors and Kings have ridden down it. Indeed, there was a time when the daily papers were treating us

to the Rotten (Row) reminiscences of at least one ex-Emperor, whose solicitude for the continuance of our Empire—Row inclusive—was, in all the circumstances, in as doubtful taste as the Row itself.

Personally, I am out of sympathy with the type of mind which delights in twisting the "Goat and Compasses" back to "God encompasseth" (to say the least, an extremely *unlikely* name for honest countrymen to think suitable for that of their inn); I refuse to suppose that the Row is anything but Rotten. It does not prevent me from hoping that it will never be abolished, when here, within a few hundred yards, we have for long been able to put into quarantine all that is most terrible in saddlery, horses and horsemanship. If the Row were swept away, it is impossible to estimate the damage which might be done by such a lifting of the sluice-gates, by the letting loose upon the country-side of this flood of Everything Incorrect.

It is easy enough to scoff. Let us, therefore, scoff.

With every wish to keep alive the spirit of chivalry, you must admit that the ladies in brown drain-pipes are really the worst of all. Among the great discoveries of the twentieth century one must place very high that which enabled the bootmakers to abolish a horseman's calf without inconvenience to the horseman. In face of this discovery what possible excuse can these ladies have for afflicting us with the terrible, the nauseating sight of one or more brown—or sometimes even clay-coloured, drain-pipes, banging about on their horse's flanks? The Stowasser legging is admitted to be the most horrible thing of its kind in existence, but even the men who coil biltongish luggage straps round their legs to keep those slabs of leather in the wrong place—even they do not offend, to the same extent, our every sense of what is correct. With those other legs flaunted in our faces we can scarcely find heart to object to the rest of the glaring errors in dress displayed; but the breeches call—indeed, they shriek—for special attention. One must not, however, underestimate the difficulty of building a good pair of breeches and it is perhaps fairer to dismiss these jerry-built ones

"REALLY THE WORST OF ALL

more in sorrow than in anger. "How *melancholy* are my poor breeches," is a classic quotation and, perhaps, a sufficient comment.

People oppressed with this sense of melancholy have from time to time flung out suggestions for brightening the Row. The most obvious and usual suggestion is that a line of hurdles should be run across the whole width of it at a number of different points. Attractive as this scheme is in these times of unemployment, I fear that the very fact that the number of smashed hurdles would involve a maintenance staff of several thousands of men, must make the cost prohibitive. But because we have to cut our cloth to suit our coat, it doesn't mean that we can't *have* a coat. It would be comparatively cheap to set up paper fences. They would be in the style of those sometimes seen at the more lively gymkhanas—enormous representations in paper of all the largest leps in the world: huge banks, 5ft. 6in. stone walls, colossally built-up fences. There could be no possible objection. Riders who have the courage to come out riding as they come out riding in the Row, would surely never be so cowardly as to refuse to negotiate a paper open ditch. Even when the worst happened—as, of course, it generally would—it would be a matter of "more dirt than hurt."

On the other hand, I agree that nothing must be done which might leave us with an empty Row. There is nothing else which even remotely resembles a full Row, in the Country or the country; and it is, as I say, essential that this should be a permanent exhibition, and one which is not allowed to go on tour. But an empty Row on a December day resembles an old-fashioned picture of hell—dismal, desolate, to the last degree. One cannot even see shadowy horsemen riding those waste places, for the Row horsemen and horsewomen must be seen in the flesh to be believed.

In most hells it is true that tradition assures us there is still hope, and it is certainly a fact that even on the worst days one, every now and then, gets a glimpse of what one may call the occasional O.K. How he comes to be there, that perfect horseman on the perfect horse, with every item of clothes and saddlery just right, it is impossible to say. He does not fit into the general

picture, but he does raise a sort of hope in hell, that some day it will be all right, that these others will learn lessons from him.

I expect that it is merely the necessity for exercise which brings him there. Personally, I dislike exercising in the Row more than most things. For some years I was in the habit of going, before breakfast, to proceed at speed (and to the fury of the mounted policeman), on a horse which covered the whole of the long stretch to Hyde Park Corner in three bounds. I used to implore his groom to believe that sixteen pounds of oats *per diem* was of no more use to a horse kept in London for exercising purposes than it was to me. He merely thought that I was trying to be cruel to the horse by cutting down his corn. He thought nothing of the cruelty to myself, compelled to sit in a London office for the rest of the day wishing I had had an appetite for breakfast.

That was my own horse and I had the greatest affection for him. I had no affection at all for a horse which was sometimes lent to me by an otherwise kind-hearted man who had the sense, himself, to stop in bed. He (the horse I mean) was totally incapable of proceeding by bounds, and such exercise as was got was obtained by practising bending, down the line of trees. He had only one side to his mouth and he carried his head, permanently, at right-angles to his body. The sole interest of the performance lay in estimating in advance whether I should succeed in banging his head against the trees more often than he scraped my knees. He did not resent having his head banged; he was a Cockney horse of character—bad character.

A far more engaging Cockney was a small, hog-maned pony of the name of Timothy Titus. All his life had been spent in London and the Row, until one day he made an astonishing journey to the country, to be ridden home across the downs. The mistrust of a London child in getting milk from a cow instead of a jug was nothing to Timothy Titus's horror of the downland turf. For nearly every yard of the four miles to be covered before he struck a road again his mode of progress was to imitate, amid a crescendo of snorts, the action of a horse which has landed

"THE NECESSITY FOR EXERCISE WHICH BRINGS HIM THERE."

in a bog. A very trying ride for all concerned. We have the authority of Marcus Aurelius (or of his translator) for the statement that "A fleet horse . . . does not make a noise." From the context it would appear that what Marcus really wrote was "does not make a song about it." Marcus, after the manner of Mr. Chesterton, was comparing men and horses to the disadvantage of the former. Many of the Row's fleet horses make a noise, but none of them makes a song about it. One is repeatedly astonished at the modesty of the Row horses as they proceed along that lugubrious round with their chirruping companions. Well might they cry, as the riding-school proceeds upon its way, "Behold, all men, how Patience, Virtue, and Forbearance conduct themselves in the presence of a mouth-jobbing madman."

But, still, there it is (for what it is worth—and it is worth, negatively, a great deal)—St. George Upon The Dragon. There is a silly phrase, much in vogue with writers: "He rode like a centaur," they claim for their hero. To some extent they are probably right, for a centaur, in the nature of things, could not ride at all. Those horsemen and horsewomen of the Row will never ride like centaurs, but of them one may say that a very fair proportion display something of the valour of St. George; especially as their horses will never be other than dragons to them.

With this inspiring reflection, Mr. Chesterton and I can lightly vault the railings and make our way home. As we do so we shall pass that bronze tablet, clamped to the barrack wall, to the honour of a soldier who, as the inscription runs, "gave his life for others" in those seemingly unlikely surroundings. Can it be that the spirit of the Row is itself capable of inspiring acts of sacrifice like that of this man who turned a bolting horse to that crashing fall over the Row railings, rather than risk injury to his fellows?

I am afraid not. *That* chivalry, one must suppose, belongs to, and is learnt in, wider dragon-lands.

XIII

CUSTOMERS AND CLIENTS

THERE is a terrible practice which is gaining ground among those of us who are tradesmen (big and little tradesmen)—the practice, I mean, of calling our customers "clients." It is a part, I suppose, of what has been most disgustfully described as "the urge to advancement," a thing at once silly, inevitable, pathetic and completely understandable. It seems that any profession—with the possible exception of that of Christianity, if the pessimism of the clergy is to be relied upon—is now commonly regarded as being, essentially, a higher thing than any trade: in consequence, every week you may see it announced at a business luncheon that yet another trade has been "raised to the dignity of a profession." Anybody who is not yet sure of his position is, naturally, very anxious that other people should respect it, but when once you start what we may perhaps agree to call "the rot," there is no telling where it will end. From business it has already spread to recreation; and if you need proof of this statement you will find it in the fact that additions are now being made almost daily to the list of games which are miscalled sports.

I object to it. I am terrified at the notion. It seems to me inevitable that if games are to become sports our sport will, more and more, tend to take on the characteristics of a game. The danger, in case you have not appreciated it and by way of illustrating my meaning, is this: I myself am known as the worst games player in England—not, perhaps, well known, but known. "He is the *worst* cricketer. . . . He is quite the worst golfer . . ."—how often have my ears glowed red when people have said these things. But has any one of us ever heard himself described as "the worst

hunting-man?" Never! The thing, as you say, would be ridiculous —*but for how long is it going to remain so?*

Until this customer-client complex developed, the position was perfectly clear: Hunting, shooting, fishing—these were sports, and you could divide them by something more than a comma, or not, just as you pleased. Racing was racing, and the rest were games.

The test was a quite simple one. If it was possible to establish a "record" in your sporting game, it could never be a sport. The possibilities of sport are unlimited, and the very fact that records are possible in games shows us their limitations. I do not know what is at present the record score in, for example, a game of Rugby football—but any good mathematician could work out for us what is the highest possible record. He would imagine—if it were not too painful to do so—an International team opposed by fifteen people of about my own calibre: provided he had his multiplication table handy and knew the shortest distance to be run in order to score a try, it would be the simplest thing in the world to make the necessary calculation. And only the "three-times" table would be required; for no team playing against me would stop to convert a goal at two points when they might be using the time to get several more tries at three points each.

The sports have no such limitations; records in sport are impossible. For example, the weight of a salmon can, properly speaking, bear no relation to the sport of a day's fishing. It has long since been proved that the size of a fish is entirely dependent upon the imagination of the fisherman: it is a thing, that is to say, wholly incalculable for purposes of record, and, for this if for no other reason, human nature being what it is, fishing will always remain a sport.

At first glance one might think that shooting was perilously near the border-line. I myself knew a young shooter who, on a hot September morning, shot fourteen flying partridges with one barrel of a 28-bore gun. It was a good many years ago, but I do not think that I shall ever forget that shot. At that age we were, perhaps, a little jealous of each other's achievements, the least bit

quick in pointing out each other's shortcomings in sportsmanship; in the previous field, desperately anxious to equal his bag (of one partridge, up to that point), I had picked my bird with particular care. I chose the last bird of the covey as they skimmed over the roots in front of us, and I remember that it did just flash through my mind that the bird was a very poor flyer, even for September. I gave it two barrels, and tried to appear neither proud nor surprised when the bird fell. But, when I saw the slow smile of the old keeper and the quick grin of my young companion, I began to wish vaguely that it had *not* fallen. . . .

As we walked on, I bent down to pick up my partridge . . . and did pick up my young (September)—pheasant. I felt very red in the face as we trudged through the rough high grass of the next field, and I considered, desperately, what I could do to make the other boy forget this hideous incident. I was still considering when, with the horrid unexpectedness which partridges which I am walking have always displayed, an immense covey suddenly exploded at the other boy's feet.

There were, I suppose, four or five good coveys in that pack—an unusual sight so early in the season—and as the other boy fired it was as if he had cut a hole in a brown curtain. The silence was strained when we began to pick up the birds. It was *too* strained. At about the seventh bird we began to giggle: at the ninth bird the old keeper began to giggle. Wiping his eyes as he picked up the thirteenth, he waved his retriever on into the next field. In two minutes she topped the five-barred gate again, the fourteenth bird in her mouth.

I judge it to have been a record. It was not sport: "Lord! What a game!" was what the old keeper said about it, and, technically speaking, I believe he was right.

But, however dangerously fishing and shooting have approached the sport-games' border-line from time to time, hunting has always hitherto kept well clear of it. In hunting there are no "records" to make you and me ashamed of each other's performances.

In saying this, neither you nor I will forget Monday,

December 22nd, 1884, when the Belvoir Hounds met at Harby. You will remember that Frank Gillard, the Belvoir huntsman, described the run from Harby Covert to Welby Osierbed as by far the finest he ever saw in the "best season on record." The Belvoir had covered eighteen miles in an hour and thirty minutes, with a seven-mile point, when "the Quorn Hounds and 'field' suddenly appeared upon the scene"; and the old grey fox of Harby Covert went a way from Flint Hill with forty-five couples of the combined packs after his brush.

To Gillard, hunting the combined packs, this twenty-six mile run on "the finest line in Leicestershire" may well have seemed a record, "a fox-hunting masterpiece." Is it a record to you or me? Certainly not. That great authority, Mr. Henry Davenport, in reminding us of this Belvoir-Quorn hunt, has complained, more in sorrow than in anger, that you and I have no standards nowadays, that our "brilliant gallops" would have been set down as false starts in the days when Frank Gillard was carrying the horn. If this is a true criticism (and, coming from such an authority, it seems to have a nasty sting of truth in it), you and I must *at all costs* not listen to it. We must fight to the last against this setting-up of standards. For it has been the charm and the glory of our fox-hunting days that you and I have retained so vivid a memory of these false starts of ours that we are able to lump the whole lot together—and think of them as the run of our lives.

I know quite well what has happened. Mr. Davenport and his friends have overheard what you were saying when hounds checked, that time in Merroby water-meadows. You were a little flushed, if I remember rightly, and you were certainly talking rather fast. But since you had come the last two miles at racing (or hell's bells) speed and had flown five great, hairy fences and smashed a gate to smithereens in the process, I personally thought you were being rather quiet about it all.

It has to be remembered that fox-hunting is only kept alive by the existence of you people who hunt to ride. Of those who know enough to ride in order to hunt—to give themselves the pleasure of

watching hounds at work—the number is so small that if compelled to rely upon them for its support fox-hunting would die a rapid, if distinguished, death. For that reason I would, in any case, beg you to go on having your "brilliant gallops" even if I were not terrified lest this clamouring for standards should eventually succeed in turning our sport into a game.

Besides, I am not altogether prepared to accept this criticism of you. I myself am one of those tiresome, shilly-shallying people who are frightened to give the lie direct to the Masters, but history sometimes rushes in where fools fear to tread: Sheltering myself behind the history of 1806 onwards—in which exact year it is now laid down that "hard-riding came into fashion"—I cannot find that those who talk about standards have a leg on which to standardise. The fact is that the whole trouble arises because, so far from always burbling about "brilliant gallops," we, to-day, are inclined to use almost painfully sober language in describing our sport.

For example, I have noticed among recent press cuttings two paragraphs headed 'Hunting. Many Fine Runs.' "Now, Misters," I say to myself with babu-like excitement, "we will show you a something!" But what do I find? The Bicester had "a good afternoon hunt," the Middleton "an excellent hunt of 50 min."; with the Southwold, "Hounds provided two enjoyable gallops"—I pick these as being among the more enthusiastic descriptions of what the details show to have been a great day's sport. Is this any language for "Many Fine Runs"? If you think it is, I would ask you to look over my shoulder at a twenty-page pamphlet called "A Few of my Most Favourite Fox Chases in East Sussex, by John Kent of Southease"—written "for private circulation" one hundred years ago. John Kent didn't have 'enjoyable gallops': "We run that slapping chase, which lasted one hour, without a check . . ." says John Kent, "This was a most tremendous day," "Here was fox-hunting in all its splendour." A "Splendid Chase" of twenty-five miles in two hours and ten minutes was "a tiptop thing, not a horse could live with them." But when a very distinguished authority on fox-

hunting in the Leicestershire of to-day tells us of performances rivalling and excelling those of John Kent, his language is hopelessly moderate. He confines himself, for example, to a quiet observation that he has "seen hounds run five miles in seventeen minutes, which," he says, with a restraint which would have been very painful to John Kent, "would be at the rate of at least sixteen miles an hour." It would not: it would be at the rate of seventeen and eleven-seventeenths (I do hope I am right) miles an hour—and if there is to be much more talk about standards John Kent and I would be better pleased if he called it twenty.

Now, supposing that we were ever foolish enough to risk making game of our sport by trying to work out exact comparisons between the distances, points and times of 1806 and of to-day—how much farther should we get? I am thankful to say, no farther. This would be no affair of stop-watches and multiplication sums: the unfortunate mathematician who was confronted with *this* sum would have to work out a problem in algebra where x was the clipping-machine, barbed wire, and patent manure of to-day, and y the abominable horse-mastership and bad draining of 1806. And if the answer to the sum were found to be "a lemon" at half-time or sooner, that would be to bring sport as near to games as can safely be done.

If I have insolently suggested that there is a smack of snobbery in the present-day anxiety to make trade a profession, I have freely admitted that fear of being judged inefficient is at the back of my personal objection to having sport regulated as a game. But, whatever my personal motives, these hysterical cries for altered standards *must*, somehow, be suffocated. Trade must remain trade, and the professions a gamble between super-tax and starvation: games must be games, calling for efficiency and concentration, and bidding us get on or get out. And the sports must continue to provide a haven of refuge for those of us who, too stupid for trade, too clumsy for games, unable to profess, yet have a love which seeks expression for the country things, the country ways, and the country men of England.

Among the unauthenticated sayings of the Virgin Queen is her celebrated reply to a visiting royalty who was tactless enough to suggest a game of chess. "The only game," announced the Queen (who had never learnt to play chess but, naturally, didn't want to say so), "the only game that I play at—is *the Bloody Game of War.*" Now, if Elizabeth was no games player, she liked sport and she loved England. I am, as you will have gathered, a muddle-minded person, but it seems to me that through this sports-games tangle there runs a thread which, if one of you can seize and tug it, will straighten out the whole thing. One end of the thread is a boy who shot fourteen flying partridges with one barrel of a 28-bore gun, and, *via* Elizabeth of England, the thread runs on. For, at a later date, this same boy decided he would be a soldier, playing at war; and in due time he attended for that loathsome form of inquisition, the *viva voce* examination.

They asked him only one question, and they asked it in French, requesting, in their fiendish way, a reply in that same language. "What," they demanded, "is your reason for wishing to join the English Army?"

When he told me about it, I groaned. It was so obvious that the question called for a flow of impassioned Gallic; there should have been some reference to the strategy of the Little Corporal, to the iron discipline of the Duke, the glory of Britain in Arms: it would, perhaps, have clinched matters if he could have ended by standing upon his chair and singing to them a battle-song—"Malbrouck s'en va t'en guerre." But I knew that his vocabulary, his grammar and, above all, his accent were totally unequal to the strain. I waited, in horror, to hear in French his official reason for wanting to join the Army.

"I only said three words," he explained (but, with his execrable accent, he made them sound like four)—"I just said 'Pah Sker Le Sport'!"

To the eternal credit of the examiners they passed him—in French! They ploughed him in algebra. I suppose they were not satisfied that he could work out those x y sums fast enough to lead

a troop of cavalry. As a matter of fact they were wrong. A year or two later, sport, or England, or something, called him back to war from the other side of the world, and he had led away his troop while the examiners in Whitehall were still wrestling with a sum in x and y. It was not games that called him back; for war, while still bloody, had ceased to be a game since Elizabeth's day.

The thing, as I had hoped, is straightening out. It amounts to this. Sport must not become a game, a thing of records and standards—because, if it does, I shall not be asked to play any more. Games must not be called sports, since we cannot always be serious and there is something at the back of sport which is a rather serious matter. And finally, if we cannot keep humbug out of trade we must at all costs not let it work its way into recreation.

So far as fox-hunting is concerned, if it comes to the worst the fox himself must save us. I believe he will. To me it is inconceivable that "the old customer" will ever allow himself to be known as "our esteemed new client."

XIV

HALF A BRICK

THE original "'alf a brick" was to be flung at the head of "our new parson," if I remember rightly. But it has always been the privilege, as well as the inclination, of a Briton to heave half a brick at the head of anybody who does unpaid work for him, tirelessly and unselfishly: on the principle, I suppose, that half a brick is better than no bread.

I have had a half-brick ready for some time past, and I want to heave it. You may behold me propping myself against the wall of my mental public-house as I proceed to do so. A most unedifying sight.

It is the judges who are the trouble—the judges at local horse shows in the country. I am thinking particularly of the most local of our own local shows; but, as far as I could make out last summer (from consultation with other do-nothings who, like myself, are full of complaints), it applies to all local shows. I and the other do-nothings do not mean it to happen again this year, if any mischief we can make will prevent it.

There are too *many* judges. I am quite aware that the heartburn statistics would be alarmingly swollen if some of us were not asked to judge. (I am not referring to myself. We do-nothings are fully inoculated to heartburn by this time: besides, we would rather have heartburn than be doing something.) But the fact remains that, in addition to those who ought not to be asked to judge, there are plenty who ought to be asked *not* to judge.

Resisting the temptation to mention our local names, I must plead for certain definite sacrifices. I would especially call your attention to the very large judge who persists in planting himself on his shooting-stick at all the more inaccessible places in turn, and can never be found when his verdict is required by his

colleagues. It is he who, screened by the biggest of the built-up fences, roars to the competitors to canter while the main body of judges, on the opposite side of the ring, is begging them to trot.

The result, of course, is that they do neither; every horse is pulled violently back on his hocks half a dozen times in each round, their riders lose their tempers, and the do-nothings are treated to a realistic representation of a goods train being shunted by a mad engine-driver.

The conscientious judge is another whom we do not want to see again this year. He takes so long to separate the competitors that we all go away and have tea—only to find that, in an agony of indecision, he has suddenly come to a decision. In consequence, we have missed the best part of the jumping.

The light-hearted judge ("As I say, it is just a bit of sport") must go, and it will be easy to weed out quite a number of others from among our just judges—just stupid judges. But, whoever else goes or stays, the man with the megaphone *must* be abolished.

Invariably he does one of two things: either he makes his announcements to only two points of the compass—to each point half an announcement—or he infuriates us by persisting in articulating every syllable with the exaggerated emphasis of a pedantic telephone girl insisting on the fife-niner pronunciation (preparatory to giving you nine-five). He must be replaced by a Broadcaster with a microphone.

It is also part of our complaint that there are too *few* judges: too many when they are not wanted, too few when they are. The judges, as a matter of fact, ought to be kept in a pen. As soon as competitors were in the ring and on the first note of the "charge" (a trumpeter would be happy to be borrowed for the purpose from the nearest cavalry regiment) all judges would be released. At the fixed time limit, and on the sound of the "dismiss," all, except one specially trained judge, would be hounded back to their pen. This could quite well be done by the hunt servants, who would be mounted in readiness.

The rule would be that not more than five competitors were

to be left in the ring when the "dismiss" sounded, and the specially trained judge would be given an extra three minutes in which to place these five. If he failed to place them, the trumpeter would be instructed to appeal to us do-nothings at three-minute intervals: as soon as he got a thumbs-down decision, he would draw his sword and remove the specially trained judge, skewerwise, at the trot.

The five competitors would then only get "highly commended" rosettes. This would encourage them to be quicker in getting judged—it is often their fault—and, in the meantime, would represent an appreciable saving in prize-money.

Another thing. Half the time we at the ringside have not the faintest idea of the standards by which the competitors are being judged. Now that the Hurlingham Committee have succeeded in making polo popular, surely the horse show people can make judging intelligible?

It would add immensely to the pleasure of us do-nothings if, after a quick glance at the card showing the standardised requirements for ladies' hacks, we could look up to bellow "Dir-tee!" as the red rosette was handed to the wrong lady. I don't say we couldn't do it as things are, but at present we feel a certain diffidence. It would be removed if the relative importance of manners, action, and so forth were shortly laid down on the card, and the relative marks appointed.

Incidentally, horse show committees need not make Hurlingham's flattering mistake of omitting explanation from programmes allotted to the members' stands. I am sure that the lady will secretly agree with me whom I recently heard pointing out to a friend from the lordly elevation of the members' pavilion what she called "the kicking-strap which they wear." A pony with a breastplate was passing at the time.

And the standardising of conditions would cheer things up in lots of ways. All the authorities seem to be agreed that, for example, a hackney should be, first and foremost, a saddle horse. If the thing were set down in black and white on the show pro-

"ALWAYS ONE SMALL GIRL WITH THE UNMISTAKABLE MARK OF THE PROFESSIONAL SHOW RIDER

grammes, there could be no shirking the consequences: on entering the ring every driver would be required to yank a saddle out from under the seat, pop it on the hackney's back, and ride away into the country for two hours. He could, if he preferred it, take his cart with him, and with any sort of luck we should all have gone home by the time he came back. It would work upon the principle of an inverted Marathon, and would make the hackney classes much more enjoyable.

I agree that there might be difficulty in persuading our own local judges to accept other people's ideas of what does and does not constitute a horse. If it proves an insuperable difficulty, I insist that they must, at any rate, declare quite honestly the arguments by which they themselves arrive at their frequently staggering decisions.

Going by the result of last summer's light-weight hunter class, our local programme note for the class this year would run:

> (1) First prize will be given to the flat-catching brute which Colonel B. (whom we all dislike so much) is showing. If he doesn't get a first this time, Colonel B. will put it down to our spite, and will reduce his already insufficient subscription to the hounds.
>
> (2) No prize will be given to Mrs. X's Perdita. We know she won at Richmond or somewhere, but we don't need anybody to tell us what's what.
>
> (3) We shan't give a prize to old George Gammon's Blackthorn, because (*a*) we gave him one last year, and (*b*) as everybody knows, George is a friend of ours.

This last, of course, is typical of the English judge—in whatever line of business. A far better eleven than that which appears at Lord's could be made up every season at either University from those who fail to get their Blues because they happen to be personal friends of the captain. An Italian called Cicero said that "Justice is blind—he knows nobody." At our local show the judges, though possibly blind, certainly know everybody. In consequence, when

young Joe Hastings rides into the ring on old George Gammon's Blackthorn, he hasn't an earthly. Old George Gammon recognises this—but it is hard on Blackthorn and on young Joe Hastings.

I would only make one exception to the rule about laying down standards. No standards must be laid down for our local horses-in-single-harness class. To do so would spoil everything, and we should miss a time-honoured procession. It has, perhaps, more of the elements of a chariot race than a procession, but, as I say, it is time-honoured.

For the first lap the order is, first, Billy Stanton's old bay horse in a dog-cart (enters and continues at a smart gallop while Billy Stanton's relations, stationed at convenient points of the ring, are all shouting "Wo-horse!" and adjuring Billy to mind what he's about): second, something-or-other, which got a "commended" at Olympia (four spider-wheels and a general effect of greased lightning with slightly faulty hind-leg action, if you understand me): third, Dr. Bates' piebald cob and governess-cart and Dr. Bates himself, driving with all the enthusiasm which, as some of us take occasion to remark, he fails to show in going the rounds of his panel patients.

It makes a very close race, and in a good year we can produce at least a dozen other competitors showing as much variation in their way as can be found in the mixture of roosters and rocking-horses which complete the merry-go-rounds among the side-shows close at hand.

We are pretty good at side-shows, and it must be the last straw to the horses themselves when they see how many of us spend most of our time there. If we cannot judge horses, we know to within half a sovereign what we may expect to make on the coconut shy lettings. But I wish the committee would turn some of those superfluous judges on to rolling up the tent flies: in other countries a tent is regarded as, to some extent, a protection from the heat of the sun: at our local show it is deliberately treated as a bakehouse.

But I am almost forgetting our judges' supreme exhibition of

"HE . . . WHO ROARS TO THE COMPETITORS TO CANTER WHILE THE MAIN BODY OF JUDGES . . IS BEGGING THEM TO TROT."

stupidity. It occurs in the process of misjudging the children's ponies.

You know what happens. There is always one small girl, with already the unmistakable mark of the professional show rider, who gives a faultless and somehow nauseating exhibition on a circus pony. *She* gets a second—for being a bit too clever. Then there is the boy on a runaway pony with no mouth. He is generally awarded the first as soon as the judges can get together to stop his pony. He deserves it—his pony doesn't.

The rest are all boys and girls who are either in a very natural state of semi-hysteria and collapse from being set to ride totally unschooled ponies, or who amble happily and endlessly round the ring on their small slugs, which are constitutionally useless for the purpose for which they are required. Not one of the ponies is capable of satisfying more than two of the nine essential qualifications of a child's pony.

The judges' verdict stares them in the face—all the children should be given firsts, all the ponies should be sent to a pony-reformatory, and all the parents should be boiled alive. But never yet have I known this sentence carried out.

In fact, the children's pony class gets my final goat. I and the other do-nothings generally walk away in despair at this point, leaving the judges to wallow in their unpaid incompetence. So far from heaving our half-brick, we stuff it back into our pockets, realising that it would make no impression on such numskulls.

But there is just this about it. If the judges knew their jobs, half our competitors in the jumping competition would be ordered out of the ring within ten seconds of arrival—on the ground that their horses, not having been properly exercised for some six months, were a danger to the fences.

But then we should miss the exhilarating spectacle of Mr. B.'s leggy chestnut gelding disappearing with Mr. B. over the sky-line, *à la* Johnny Head-in-Air, having scattered jumps, crowd and coconut shies in the process.

That would be a pity.

XV

"COMPANY, VILLAINOUS COMPANY . . .!"

A FINE night, an object, a companion, and a horse who is a comfortable ride—these four are the essentials which are capable of making a peace-time ride throughout the night one of the most pleasant of undertakings. Unfortunately, the English climate, civilisation, men and horses, between them, conspire to make it a pleasure very hard to enjoy. How pleasant a thing it *could* be was first borne in upon me during a ride at night across Salisbury Plain, made in company with a man who, to do him justice, must have hated me quite as much as I hated him, while it lasted.

A number of us had been told to ride, in pairs, upon various compass bearings, so arranged that we were all to finish up at the same point, having covered, in every case, the same distance. The bad compass-readers and bad horsemen would, it was explained, take a longer time to complete the journey than would the moderately good ones.

Either we were drawn in pairs, by lot, or nobody else would ride with me: I think the latter, for when I learned who was to be my companion I remember feeling the resentment which one does feel against a man who has done you a kindness which you are not in a position to reject. I had looked forward to this ride, I was intensely anxious to be first home—and now I discovered that my partner was to be the one man of all those competing who was mentally incapable of reading a compass, physically unable to control his horse, and morally deficient of any adequate sense of shame that these things should be so. We might have agreed to go our separate ways, but the conditions stipulated that the riders should proceed, and must arrive, in pairs: "Company, villainous company has been the spoil of me"—with

an intelligent pessimism I foresaw that I should require to remember something of Falstaff's utterances more lurid than this if I was to be able to explain myself to the umpires and to my own satisfaction, when it was all over.

That night the name of "Porton Firs" became indelibly engraved upon my heart. For it was at Porton Firs, when the situation was extremely critical, that my companion, wailing like a banshee, suddenly shot past me in the darkness and disappeared from view.

I had just been congratulating myself that we were, after all, not doing so badly: it was by then midnight and we had made good some three or four only of the dozen points to which our compass ride was to take us, but we had done that much. Always, myself, an indifferent map and compass reader, I had found my clumsy efforts considerably handicapped by the struggle to keep my companion "in the plate." He was a very wide, thick and short man whose temperament and physical conformation should have entitled him to legal protection against ever being required to ride a horse. He should, in fact, have been definitely *forbidden* to ride, by law. All through the earlier part of that night I had divided such attention as I could ill spare from watching my compass, between snatching at his reins as his horse threatened to get away with him, and adjuring him, with hisses, to keep his mouth shut. But ever and anon his misery would overwhelm him and, regardless of official instructions as to silence, "Woe! Woe! *Woe!*" he would moan, speaking to his horse and the winds.

But he had been silent for some time before Porton Firs, and, riding beside him in the darkness, I felt a sneaking hope that the poor fellow was dead from shock and exhaustion, and would trouble me no further. Having cantered across the Plain for ten minutes and trotted for the past five, I had just pulled up and, fumbling with my map and hooded torch, was trying to calculate how far we still had to go in order to reach the next objective. My own horse was a wise and kindly old person who, as the result

of our solitary rides together, was well aware of my own limitations: he stood like a rock while I brought out my oil-floated compass and checked the luminous points. But the other man's mare was a temperamental creature who had been ridden to the edge of a nervous breakdown. The scatter-scurry of a flock of sheep, beating a hasty retreat upon finding us sharing the Plain with them, proved the last straw. Away she went.

Another hundred yards would bring me to our objective and, my good old horse walking quietly on, he and I duly arrived. We stood there for half an hour, listening. Twice in the darkness I heard the clink of a stirrup-iron and once the near-by champing of a bit: ignoring, in my desperation, the injunction of absolute silence laid upon us, I gave a low whistle. Each time I did so there was a pause while the unseen riders drew rein; but they were not *my* rider, and I heard them ride on again—and the last time I did this I heard a low laugh, as who should say "*That* must be one of us who has lost himself. The poor boob must wait for sunrise: we are not, after all, Samaritans."

But "Night is a good herdsman; she brings all creatures home." Just as I had determined to ride on alone in the attempt at least to hide myself—to make it impossible for dawn to show me to the world lost on Salisbury Plain—night and a whinnying mare brought my creature home. And the whinnying mare, coming to a sudden propping halt, deposited him, this dog's body, this cream-faced loon, at my feet. With whispered curses I helped him up, shovelled him, somehow, back into the saddle, succeeded in a frantic endeavour to mount my own horse while retaining control of his mare—and I rode on again at speed, feeling that for any help I could expect to get from my companion, his very presence only intensified my own solitude. Too kindly and sympathetic to resent my rudeness, he tried to explain to me in whispers, as we rode, what had befallen him; and when, intent on my compass and the urgency of the problem now before us, I made no reply to this, he began an interminable *Apologia pro vita sua* which would have melted the heart of a stone.

"BROUGHT UP SHORT, CAUGHT IN A CAGE OF WIRE."

But I was not a stone. I was a hot and cross horseman compelled to rely on my own powers of calculation and on my horse's schooled sense of discipline, in a desperate attempt to retrieve the situation.

It was my horse who, about three o'clock in the morning, began to give me a ray of hope. He continued to walk, trot, canter—and, for short sprints at a time, to gallop—always at the regulation pace. He stood stock still while I made yet another hurried calculation, and he refused to be flustered for one moment by the intermittent hysteria of the mare.

But just as I was beginning to think that the old horse might, after all, save the four of us from black disgrace, the worst happened. With a *tang-tanging* sound all round us we were brought up short, caught in a cage of wire. The next twenty minutes were a time of rage and despair: the mare, after her first terrified plungings, stood there trembling, sweating and snorting; my old horse, finding that his one valiant, indignant kick of protest was of no avail, quietly waited for me to do the necessary. Neither I nor my companion had a pair of wire-cutters, and we had, therefore, to unwind ourselves and our horses from our toils, foot by foot and inch by inch, in the darkness. Somewhere a cock began to crow, and presently it seemed to me that ten thousand cocks were crowing, heralding the dawn of our disgrace.

Labouring frantically, we got the mare free, we got ourselves free, only a single strand of wire now held us—but that had become firmly fixed between the shoe and the foot of my horse's near hind leg. We gave it up at last. We were by now so late that I calculated that all the rest of the competitors would long since have reached the final rendezvous and be well on their homeward way.

And then my good old horse, my most admirable old horse, suddenly gave one terrific kick, freed himself without any assistance from us at all.

It was our last chance. Our final objective, the rendezvous of all competitors, was a railway bridge in a valley below the Plain.

Late as we were, my companion and I had by now reached the last lap: if we could hit off the high road which ran somewhere a short mile to the east of us, there was, it seemed to me, still a chance that we could save—not our reputation, but our faces; and get back to stables a little before the dawn.

We plunged on. Within ten minutes we had made a clattering landing on the good macadam, my self-satisfaction at this performance being modified by the fact that my horse reached the road on his knees, *via* an unsuspected heap of granite. Down the road we pelted to within a hundred yards of the bridge: then, pulling up with a slither, I managed somehow to obstruct the Gilpin-like advance of my companion, so that we might make our funereal arrival, suitably, at the walk.

Straining to listen in the darkness, I heard the sound of low voices. It thrilled me. Was it possible that the umpire had *not* gone home? Was it even possible that we ourselves *were not the last to arrive?*

As we rode up the umpire spoke. "Who is that?" he demanded, "and why do you bundle down a hard high road as if horses were legless?"

"It's me," I said, "and—er—*him*. Can you tell me, please, if"—I searched my mind for the, next to ourselves, most dud combination among the ten pairs of competitors—"if So-and-so and Who-is-it were very much in front of us?"

"They haven't arrived at all," growled the umpire. "You are the second pair home: and, except that you bundle down a hard, high——"

But, drunk with the magnificence of our achievement and taking advantage of the darkness, I moved my old horse on to the grass and stole quietly away. There is (I am told) a loneliness of excellence which only those who have something of greatness about them can experience: but there is an excellence of loneliness which is good enough for me. In company with my great old horse, I heartlessly left my companion to listen to a lecture on strained tendons.

XVI

GIFT HORSES

ONE man's horse is another man's mad elephant. It is, I suppose, for this reason that a man will sometimes lend you his horse: either in the smug expectation of hearing subsequently that his notoriously good horse appeared in your hands to be an elephant, or in the wits-end hope that the elephant with which he has landed you may, after a period of misery which will not be *his* misery, be returned to him a horse. Even in those exceptional cases, where sheer good nature prompts the loan, only an hysterically emotional person can believe that there is *nothing* of *arrière pensée* to it.

It occasionally happens that a man will lend his horse or horses to another for quite a time, on the ground that he himself is ill, is "not hunting this season" or is going round the world. When you get on those horses you begin to understand why he is ill or not hunting; and after a week of them you are prepared to follow him round the world with a humane killer.

But where the loan is an extended one there is at least—on paper—an opportunity for you to play the wizard and gradually turn his elephants into horses. It is in the far more usual case, when you are lent a horse for a single day's hunting, that the situation seems uncontrollable, devoid of all hope.

A wise man of the East—or, perhaps, merely a retired colonel from Sweatypore way—has said:

> Better riding than walking,
> Better sleeping than riding,
> Better dead than sleeping,
> Best dead.

Probably this bilious view of life was engendered by a failure to borrow a horse from a pal, but it rests on a sound foundation.

I can remember a case of a man who, on the face of it, would have been better walking than riding, but as he died of that riding I am not sure whether you would call this an example or an exception. As a general rule the man who walks when he could ride may be said to be mad, and therefore best dead.

On the other hand, it is, so often, only a choice of evils. And it is, in the nature of things, one in regard to which a man has not *much* choice. I was once offered a race-ride by a friend upon a horse which was a very good horse and the apple of his eye. I am fond of repeating the fact to myself—partly because it sounds so grand and partly because the oftener I say "apple of his eye" the sillier it seems. Unfortunately, an hour or so before he made the offer, I had seen this man stretched out beyond the last fence of a race which the horse in question had been just-about going to win when he had elected, instead, to root the said fence in the most devastating manner imaginable and lay himself out beside his rider. When, later, this friend—this *fiend*—came up to me and asked me to ride that very horse next day, he was limping, his face was greenish and contorted with agony, and he groaned at intervals as he rubbed his back. With a grin of fury which I hoped the bystanders would mistake for one of pleasure, I had to accept his offer. I spent the rest of the afternoon in an unsuccessful attempt to start and encourage a rumour (evidenced by the offer itself) that, on top of everything else, he had got concussion of the brain. When he came to his senses, I said, he would not want me to ride the horse at all.

The disagreeable fact is that, unless the horse concerned is a well-known man-eater, a person *cannot* refuse these offers, and although the offer of a race-ride can be the most unpleasant offer of all, the loan of a horse for a day's hunting is sometimes a very terrible thing. Everybody, of course, knows about the beer which was "just exactly right, sir"—because if it had been any worse they could not have drunk it, and if it had been any better they would not have been offered it. Too often our grateful thanks for a day's hunting must carry this mental reservation with them, and

"YOU ARE UNABLE TO STOP THE HORSE YOU ARE RIDING."

yet to have refused the mount in the first instance would obviously have been a dangerous thing to have done: to attempt to pick and choose, to be caught looking these gift horses in the mouth—that is to run the risk of being left to walk, indefinitely.

But it is a waste of time to look at a gift horse anywhere except in the mouth. In the cases of which I am thinking you have no previous knowledge of the horse and nothing that his groom can tell you about him, as you prepare to mount, will help you much. The groom will do his best in the few moments at his disposal to fill in the large gaps in your host's description of the horse, given so casually and airily. "A delightful horse I always think him," your host will have said. "Almost a lady's horse. But, of course, he catches hold just the least bit and he's got a nasty—er, that is to say, a *funny* habit of not rising at his fences"—or as the case may be. The groom either elaborates this for you with pseudo-respectful glee or he replies to your enquiries with such obvious embarrassment as to convince you that your previous worst fears were ludicrously inadequate. It is something to be lent a horse capable of inspiring fear, but you do not always appreciate this unless you have been once or twice landed with a fat and unclipped woolly bear of a mount or a doddering, tripping screw.

Personally, I see no particular reason to worry about what the groom tells me of a horse's habits—*except* when he announces that I must have a care lest the horse "slips it" with me. The groom's impressions of other little failings may, after all, be false. If a horse "won't jump" this or "can't abide" that, it may be that he had indigestion or a sore mouth at the time, and it is always possible that he has not got either now. But a horse who makes a habit of "slipping it" with people is, to me, a very different proposition, for there is, to my mind, no moment quite so unattractive as that in which it is borne in upon you that, while no one in the world but yourself realises it as yet, you are unable to stop the horse you are riding. It is my practice to "ring the bell" three times (ugh, *ugh*, UGH!—like that) and to commend myself to the Patron Saint of Lost Children upon such occasions.

But it is merely a way of passing the time: it seldom influences the immediate situation.

Certainly the only comforting thing about the "slips it" caution, when it is handed to you with your gift horse, is that it does give you the excuse which good manners demand for looking him in the mouth. It is by then too late to do very much about it, but if your gift horse runs away with you there is a melancholy satisfaction in knowing why he is doing so, and if you have looked in his mouth you will probably have seen the cause. For what *things* we do find there!

My own degree of knowledge of the art of bitting is laughable, but so, I find, is other people's. It is not our fault. We are none of us taught anything about it, and the horse being the most good-tempered animal in creation, he will put up with a lot before he lets us see that our method of bitting him is making his life a misery. Even when we discover this his natural amiability continues to hamper our clumsy experiments. I often think how much simpler it would be if a horse would treat us to a disagreeable frown when we give him the wrong bit and only smile when we hit on the right one.

And yet, so far as I can understand, the facts of bitting should be clear enough to anyone who is intelligent enough to lend a horse to you or me.

You can ride a horse with a stick of barley sugar, a bell-rope or the fireirons in his mouth; but if you desire to employ a bit the double bridle is the only one known to mankind. It is the only method, that is to say, by which we can persuade a horse both to keep his head up and to bend his neck, and thus, when occasion arises, go as near to stopping him compulsorily as it is possible to do.

Our hosts may assist the double bridle with a martingale. If they are completely blind (in either sense of the word) they may be excused for attaching the (running) martingale to the snaffle reins—not otherwise, for it is the snaffle which in extremity drags the horse's head up and the curb which presses the bars of his

mouth *down*. The martingale, which intensifies the downward pressure, can only hinder the upward pull. That much is surely unanswerable. From this it follows that the plain snaffle is only half a bit; that the snaffle plus martingale is half a bit spoilt, and that the Pelham is not a bit at all. It is a thing which may be used by a lazy horseman of perfect hands and seat, or by a horse or a pony whose mouth is too small to hold a bit.

This knowledge I have laboriously stolen from other people at one time and another (though I doubt if they would recognise or affirm it, as stated by me) and I have done so largely in an attempt to justify my own failures with those gift horses which their owners think can only be hunted in a snaffle bridle. It satisfies me completely. It is my modest claim that I am nothing if not tolerant. My acquaintances may argue from this that I am nothing, but I also claim that any man who thinks that any horse has what he terms a "snaffle mouth" must be what good Queen Victoria used to call "a little cracky."

Of two other things the authorities, violently disagreeing among themselves, have convinced me. If we are known to be heavy-handed, it is absurd not to give us a *standing* martingale attached to the noseband in the hunting field (and not to have it fitted rather "too short" if the gift horse is really a puller). Secondly, a port in the curb bit is essential with nine horses out of ten, in order to induce them to leave at least the tips of their tongues under the bit, where they will take at any rate some of the pressure off the bars of the mouth.

If only our kind hosts all agreed with me up to this point, the terror with which we look our gift horses in the mouth would be replaced by nothing more than a cheerful interest in discovering which of the ten million possible variations in the double bridle had most appealed to our host's lorriner (and *that* is a good old word, too).

Not that our host or his bit-maker will ever satisfy us completely. We shall still have a whine or two in reserve. Why, for instance, is that snaffle a jointed one? And why, in the

name of all that is blue, should this curb bit have a roughened surface? Really, our kind hosts are sometimes unnecessarily tiresome!

I have done for myself, of course, by writing in this ungrateful way, but I hope that I shall not be considered in any sense a *vain* sacrifice. If I can no longer hope that somebody will some day lend me that horse of my dreams—the so-insultingly-termed "lady's horse," who will respond instantaneously to unexpressed wishes, keep galloping and jumping faultlessly and temperately all day and go walking and trotting quietly the whole way home—then I can only trust that *your* gift horses will all be of this stuff of which my dreams are made.

I shall not expect you to be grateful to me, but I should like to think that you will be grateful to your horse, if not your host. There are men who treat gift horses as such men treat "hirelings," remembering only that a hireling is worthy for to labour. It is a survival of the brutal old days of the sporting prints in which immaculately dressed gentlemen who have not turned a hair sit and belabour their unfortunate steeds to death and "The Death." "Symptoms of a Skurry in a Pewy Country," the title of that picture (in which everybody concerned appears to be mounted on a gift horse) is far more attractive than the picture itself. However much you may be provoked by your gift host, I trust we shall never see *you* "skurrying" across country after that fashion.

XVII

GROWLERS AND CARRIAGES

"WE are going to have one this time which will go *just as fast up-hill as on the flat!*" That was the lure which I remember as being (most successfully) dangled before me in the early motor-car days when a tour was suggested. It proved, unfortunately, to be a near-truth: that is to say, we went so slowly "on the flat" that when we were reduced to climbing the steeper hills backwards, in reverse, it really seemed to make no difference. And, anyhow, we went so fast down-hill—the risk of setting the car on fire making it inadvisable to apply the brakes—that the illusion of uninterrupted speed was fairly well maintained.

This promise that some day we should travel "just as fast" up-hill was the most powerful of the bribes which those who wished people to desert carriages for cars could hold out. There were other bribes. I remember, for instance, being told that the roads would never wear out: the wheels of all horseless carriages were to have india-rubber tyres on them, it seemed—like you had on the landau in London, only very much thicker. They would be so thick that it was probable that the tyres themselves would be immortal, too. We pondered upon these things as we tramped across the high road where the dust in summer lay a couple of inches deep. (Do you remember the scent of crushed nettles which, for some reason, was always associated with that dust?) It was not until the cars came and cleared the dust away by chucking it over the hedges upon grass and growing crops that we began to size up the situation more accurately.

For the countryman the coming of cars did not increase the amenities of life so rapidly as it did for the town-dwellers, and the latter were won over comparatively quickly. When people say that the 1914 war did no good, they forget that it abolished cab

whistles. Even that gain meant a loss to the children. To be allowed to take down the cab whistle which hung in the hall, to shake it for a moment to see if that mysterious pea was ready to play its part, then to stand on the top step and blow a succession of piercing double blasts for a hansom (unless the visitor was such a "ghastly idiot" as to want a four-wheeler)—all this was thrilling. When—as generally happened—two hansoms arrived at the same moment, and their drivers, in the intervals of bloodthirsty attempts to drive through each other, appealed to you fiercely for your verdict—that was to know the exhilaration of Power. For the taximeter cab you had to give three whistles, and it seemed to a child to be one of those things too good to last. It was. War abolished whistling, taxis abolished "growlers," and with the latter there faded into the cloudy past the memory of THE growler—the horrid old man, all whiskers and sou'wester, who sometimes drove you to parties in his window-rattling four-wheeler while the rain—it was always raining—lashed upon the window panes. He was invariably drunk, the Growler, and on receiving his legal fare he rolled off the box, clutching his untidy, short whip, and pursued you up the steps, to stand with his foot in the front doorway until he received his *illegal* fare. A rather frightening old man, whose departure may, perhaps, eventually, have reconciled children as well as grown-ups to the loss of the cab whistle.

But London streets are hell for horses (I speak with my rough tongue from my warm heart), and we can have little more regret for the departure of the well horsed landaus, the dashing victorias and the gleaming broughams than we have for the abominably balanced hansoms and cramped four-wheelers. But there was one Victoria carriage which some of us still like to remember. Outriders and big bay horses, Household Cavalry and large men in the Royal livery—and in the middle of it all a little old lady in black, going to catch a train.

It is the fashion to smile at the little old lady now, just as it became the fashion to laugh at her when first we realised that she had driven safely out of our lives: but some of us used to be mighty

proud if we could get a smile *from* her in those days. It was not unfitting that the carriages of lesser folk should have bowled out of London for good and all soon after the carriage of the little old lady had gone past for the last time.

In the country it was harder to reconcile ourselves to being pushed off the road by motor-cars, more difficult to make up your mind to jump up beside these gods in the machine. In the first place, the motor-cars, while abolishing distance, also abolished the roads—or the roads as we knew them. Driving a horse, we got to know every yard of the way within a five-mile radius of home: the steep pitch down by the chalk-pit, where a young horse trotting freely would prick his ears and crack his nostrils as the rabbits scuttled away into the brambles from almost beneath his feet, in the wispy light of the dog-cart lamps. The long rise towards the beech wood, with the critical point where the old tree-stump lay, at which point the grey pony invariably chucked his head up and refused to trot a step farther: the right-angled turn to cross the river bridge, where you drove into a blast of chill air and out of it again always at the same place, where the holly-bush stood in the cut-and-laid fence. On the box seat we were high enough perched to be able to look about us, and not so much preoccupied that we could not look below us.

For a time the coachbuilders did their best to reconcile us to the change by building motor-car bodies after the fashion of carriages—in much the same way as a budding vegetarian has his cabbage served up to him disguised as a loin chop. But it only gave us farther to fall when we crashed—and more occasions for crashing: so we were glad enough to come down below hedge level and to make up our minds that a car driver, like a troop-leader on parade, must have his eyes in front of him ready to pick up a second point before he has passed the first.

In this way we came to take our roads in a series of rushing swoops and to extend our acquaintance to the roads for twenty miles and more around us—but to-day we know every mile of them, no longer every yard.

The vast increase in the number of cars brings a similar increase in complaints of bad and bad-mannered drivers; but there is not, I think, a greater percentage of either than in the old carriage days. It was less irritating to be held up by a large covered horse-van, rumbling along in the middle of the road, than it is by a selfish charabanc—but that was largely because, in the case of the van, you had your remedy: if you had been exasperated beyond endurance, you were entitled, as you eventually squeezed your way past, to bring your whip down with a resounding smack on the van top. Mr. Kipling has laid it down that if you sting an engine-driver you sting the whole train: with a horse-van it worked the other way—if you slapped a van, the face of the van-driver, contorted with pain and fury, appeared instantaneously to receive your cheerful greeting.

Cheerful greetings were distinctly a feature of the old road journeyings, and the offer of a "lift" was another. Nowadays, if you give a man a lift, the next thing you know is that you are being sued for third-party damages for having piled him up at the cross-roads.

One misses, too, the old friendliness of the stables. To clatter under the archway on to the cobbles of an inn yard or to drive into the yard of a neighbour's stables was to be sure of a welcome. It is true that the warmth of the welcome to the driver personally might vary in proportion to the size of his previous tip on departure; but the horses of the bad tippers were not, I think, allowed to suffer by reason of their ownership. Any man driving his pony, his horse or horses into any stable yard might safely leave them to the tender, if unintelligent, care of any coachman or groom he found there. But if you drive your car into a strange garage, you have to take the precaution of removing the greater part of your engine and carrying it up to your bedroom if you want to be sure of finding the rest of the car ready for the road in the morning. And when you set out again, the most that you can hope for by way of stirrup-cup is that someone will be found to spill a gallon or two of water over the car's bonnet in a listless attempt to fill the radiator: the ceremony

of bringing your dog-cart to the front door for you, the sidlings and plungings, the parting salutation—all these are gone.

I think that the most rousing send-off which I myself ever achieved was accorded me by an almost total stranger, a distant neighbour who had the reputation locally of being a little short in temper, a trifle choleric. People had misjudged him, I thought, when we drove in to make some enquiry late one winter's night and the good fellow came and stood at his door in the wind and driving rain to see us off again—full of a kindly concern, as it seemed to me, lest we should miss our way in the dark. The horses were eager to be away, and with our coats turned up and the roar of the wind in the trees we could not hear distinctly what he was saying; but our hearts warmed towards him as, the pair going well into their collars, I swung the phaeton round the first corner and we saw that he still stood in the doorway, waving, as we supposed, his adieux, even calling after us. "Good-night," we shouted back, "good-night to you!"

"A *jolly* old man," I said to my companion.

"Yes," he replied, "but a bit noisy. I say! Was this the way we drove up?"

In a lull of the wind I suddenly realised that our wheels were no longer scrunching over the gravel, that our horses' hoofs gave back no sound. But from the house above us, on the contrary, there came from our "jolly old man" a bellowing such as an enraged baboon might emit.

To-day, of course, you could have applied your four-wheel brakes: in our case it was a clump of rhododendrons which chiefly stopped us. "You're drivin' right slap across the tennis-lawns, sir," said the groom, with a delighted giggle: "or p'raps it's the bowling-green. Very peculiar about 'is bowling-green, 'e is, they tell me."

Tearing at the brake handle, wrenching the horses round, we urged them forward. Hitting off the drive by a miracle, we pursued our way down it as nearly *ventre à terre* as makes no matter.

I can see now that we were in the wrong, that we should have

stopped. At the time I only realised that he would have killed us if he had caught us.

For the tired traveller or for those who had to make long journeys there was very little comfort in the days of carts and carriages. Lamps were always inadequate, dog-carts and ralli-carts were seldom properly balanced, and very few country carts or carriages were well sprung or had rubber tyres. To crown all, and, as if determined to subject his customers to the height and depth of discomfort, some Satanic coachbuilder, with gratuitous insult to members of the scholastic profession, invented the "governess-cart."

To these miseries of the mere passenger it only remained for the vagaries of the horses themselves to add the element of terror; and when, as not infrequently happened, your host's idea of "summering the hunter" was to put him between the shafts and send him to meet you in the station brougham—then your terror was apt to be well founded.

At the best of times driving was not very much fun for anybody but the driver, and, when the driver was a bad driver, driving was pure misery for the passenger. A man with bad hands is always a disgusting object; when we are riding, people can at least hide their faces as the heavy-handed pass and sob out their misery to their hearts' content, but it was not practicable to seek this form of relief to our feelings while sitting beside the bad driver, and the suppression of our agony made it all the greater. But the good driver—with the backs of his hands to the front, the slack of the reins caught up on his little finger, whip held with a divining-rod touch and at the one correct angle—the good driver was part and parcel of the poetry of motion as he nursed his horses and got their excellent best out of them.

Hands in driving, as in riding, were 99 per cent. a matter of sympathetic enthusiasm for getting the best possible results from your horses. And for the man with this enthusiasm and with good horses to drive, driving was the greatest possible fun. Dog-cart, phaeton, tandem or team—all had their separate attraction,

although, ever since it ceased to be usual to drive a coach at the gallop, I myself can never see wherein lay the attraction of driving a team. There is a place as well as a time for everything: the time for the coach-and-four has passed—the place for it is the forecourt of the London Museum. One must give to the members of the Coaching Club the admiration which is due to all martyrs; but to-day the expression on the faces of their guests and passengers—part boredom, part anguish—as they rumble along on their way to the Powder Magazine meet, only arouses in me the fury of the tumbril-gazing *canaille* of Revolution days. "*A la lanterne*," I scream, from the pavement, knowing that only pride and stupidity have brought them to the tumbril at all.

The *joie de* driving was a simpler thing than this, ranking, for those who have known something of all three, somewhere between the joys of hunting and of shooting; less exhilarating and exacting than the former, more friendly to nature than the latter. Provided always that your horse was neither unfit nor a constitutional "slug," a drive was full of possibilities, and it demanded from the driver (as well as the passenger) a certain amount of nerve, with, in the longer journeys, a high degree of horsemastership. Perhaps it is only those who have driven long distances in England who can appreciate all that was involved in setting out upon a forty-mile journey to be completed by dusk. To-day a forty-mile run between tea and dinner with a view to replacing, shall we say, a worn-out cocktail-shaker, would be all in the day's work; but in what we must now call *those* days a forty-mile journey was an adventure—and part of a man's training in horsemastership and country ways.

Some are born with motors, others—by way of instalment terms—achieve them, and to-day in the crowded state of our roads most people have motor-cars thrust upon them. There is not much room, and there is less time, for regretting the carts and carriages; but there is a little time. One of these days, in London, I am going to see if I can bring some of them back, or whether they are really gone for good. I shall buy a nice whistle with a pea in it, and, opening the front door at dead of night, I shall blow a shattering

succession of shrill double blasts. Then I shall listen for the sound of hansom bells and the quick clopping hoofs coming from all directions.

That is what I shall listen for. What I shall hear, of course, will be mostly policemen. But I've lost a good deal of my fear of policemen ever since I caught one hiding from a burglar: in justice to the Force, I ought to admit that he said he had been hiding to *catch* a burglar. Anyhow, as long as my whistle does not bring to life a Growler, it will be worth making the experiment.

"THE MAN WHO HAS HAD NOTHING BUT HORSE FOR HALF A LIFETIME CAN GET ALONG VERY WELL WITHOUT HORSES."

XVIII

OLD FIDDLES

IT has been misleadingly said that "there's many a good tune played on an old fiddle." By such specious generalisations as this have the makers of proverbs deceived us from time immemorial, stopping us watching a pot which promptly boils over, forcing us to be content with a tasteless guinea-fowl in the hand when a delicious brace of partridges is to be had for the poaching. One need be no great shakes as a fiddler to recognise that there are more bad tunes played on old fiddles than good.

I have been seriously disturbed by finding that a great authority on horses and horsemanship lays down that it doesn't much matter at what age a man learns to ride. Now this is just another of those mischievous, half-finished remarks which do so much damage. The maker of them must, surely, know that, having written this, it is necessary to add enough reservations and exceptions to ensure that his readers have completely forgotten what he first wrote; but, instead, he emulates the callous conduct of the author of "More Haste, Less Speed," who waited, you remember, until men had missed trains and opportunities for a lifetime before completing his sentence. "More haste, less speed—and the devil take the hindmost," is the most (and the least) that one can properly say.

It does not *at all* matter at what age a man learns to ride—provided that horses do not matter. With this all-important reservation I accept the statement—and you therefore need not trouble to fling in my face the names of all the famous horsemen who have got on a horse for the first time at the age of eighty or thereabouts.

I am well aware that they (or something like them) exist; I

have seen them get on horses whose Middle Name adequately pronounced would have brought tears of envy to the eyes of a Port Said street guide. They can ride horses rather than ride which myself I should prefer to be condemned permanently to a bath-chair drawn by a pair of knock-knee'd nanny-goats. But they know nothing of horses, and only the dry bones of horsemanship.

It is not a great while since an evening paper, old enough, and with a circulation big enough, to know better, told the world that the failure of a well-known racehorse was due to the fact that he had "hurt his ankle." The statement betrayed a state of mind which would have been no disgrace to childhood, or—in the case of a very old newspaper suffering from swollen circulation—second childhood; but it was one which, at the time, set all the Old Fiddles tuning up for a chorus of derision. For it is not in this kind of knowledge that the Old Fiddles are usually deficient. Such men are much too earnest of purpose for them to be guilty of mistakes like this. They enter upon this business of horsemanship with the same grim determination to succeed which a man must bring to all business nowadays—knowing that it would be cheaper, safer, more comfortable to stop in bed, but unable to think of a likely-sounding excuse for doing so.

By the time that these men have completed their education in horsemanship to their own satisfaction (and they are difficult men to satisfy), the things which they know about horses would fill several books. The things which they do *not* know about horses would not fill any book, for they cannot be written down. They are the things the knowledge of which gives a man that sympathy in dealing with horses which, without necessarily increasing his efficiency as a steeplechase rider, makes just the difference to his understanding of all that the words horses and horsemanship should connote.

They tell me that it is part of the belief of the bedouin Arab that on the Day of Judgment the sun will rise in the west. It is also part of his belief that on that day the power of human speech

will be given to all animals. Being among those who are optimistic enough to suppose that the "end of the world" might now arrive at almost any moment, I find it interesting to speculate upon the number of people who will be capable of sustaining a half-hour's conversation with their horses on that day. Personally, I think that the vast majority will be as tongue-tied as is an All-British conference of headmasters on the introduction to them of a deputation of French-speaking Frenchmen. They will not—these others—be any nearer to understanding the horse's point of view.

On the other hand, there *will* be people who can talk to their horses. They may even be able to discuss with intelligence the extreme inconvenience which will result to man and beast (I suppose they will still be beasts?) if the sun continues to rise in the west.

But the men who will be capable of understanding their horses better on the Day of Judgment will not be the men who have learnt to ride late in life; they will not even be the young men who learn to ride for the first time during their 'Varsity years (and who are among the most efficient of our point-to-point riders and polo-players). It will only be the men who have known horses from their boyhood onwards who will have this power.

Some even of these latter will not be fully qualified. To have the power in full degree a man must, at some period of his life, have lived with horses almost continuously; and he must *not* have done it merely as part of the business of getting his living.

The average dealer has no love of horses, nor have ninety-nine out of a hundred of the men who, in Australia or South America, have had to use horses throughout their business lives in order to get about the country. It may (or may not) be true that a 'busman takes a 'busman's holiday, but it is certainly true that these men when they go holiday-making prefer to frequent the places where a man is quite unlikely to meet a horse. (I say "unlikely" because, among my more sordid—if pleasant—memories, I have a lively recollection of a scholar of Oxford University staggering round the stage of a local theatre *carrying* the much-protesting, if

diminutive, pony which he had released from Cinderella's pumpkin coach. He soon had—and took—an opportunity to proffer the pony to an outraged Proctor and to him he explained, with semi-conscious pride, that he was "prominent susscriber sciety Prevention of Animals." The latter statement would, I am sure, have appealed to a retired Australian horse-breeder much more than the offer of the pony did to the Proctor.)

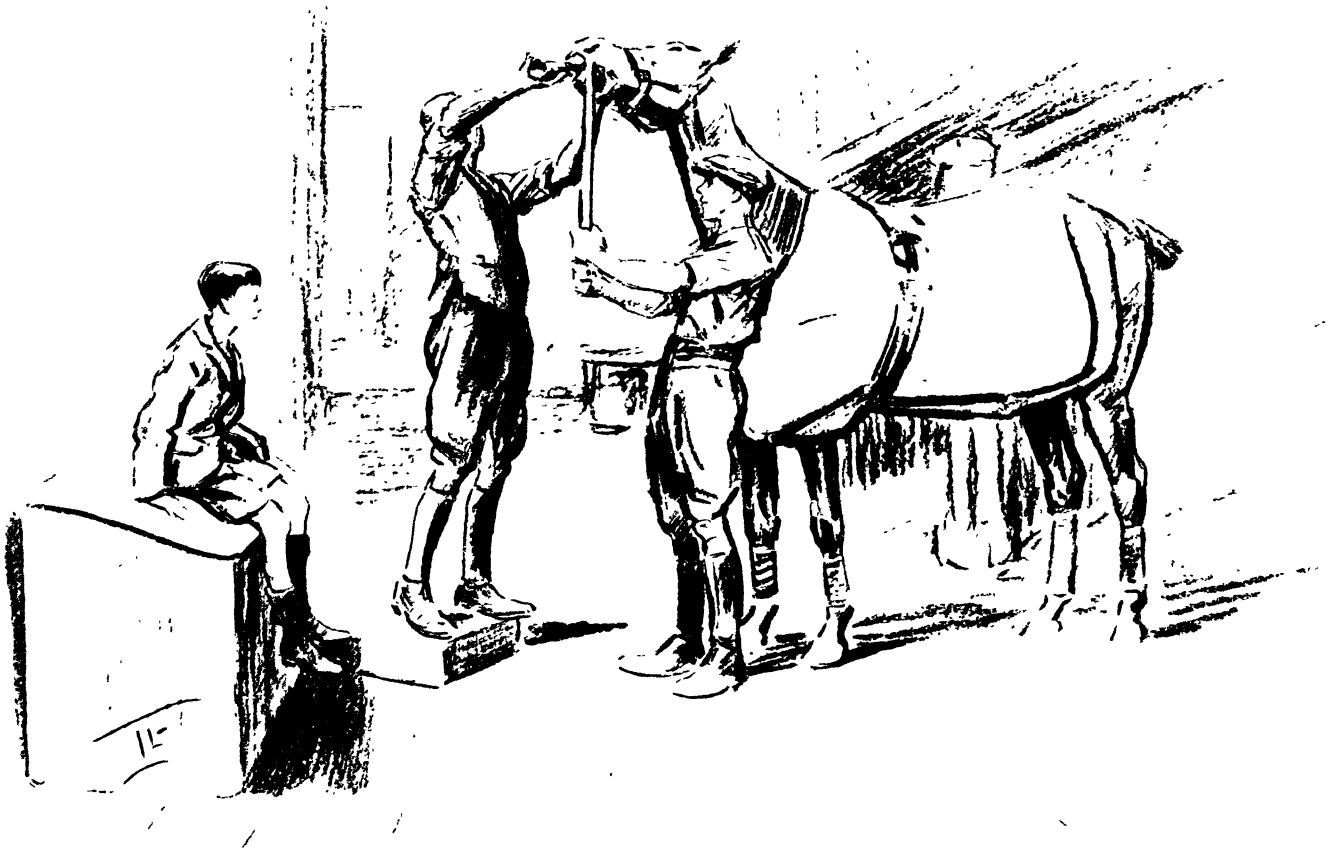
No! The man who has had horse, and nothing but horse, for half a lifetime can get along very well without horses, and he does not mind letting you know it. One may seek to entertain an ex-gamekeeper with a nice dish of boiled rabbit, and the offer will not be more than declined with thanks. It is conceivable that you would escape with a puck in the jaw if you were to invite a retired pugilist to spend his remaining years in strict training in order that he might engage in a series of charity fights for the benefit of the funds of the local women's institute. But ask the man who has swinked and sweltered among horses for forty years in Australia or South America why he is not public-spirited enough to hunt six days a week—and just *see* what you will get.

You will get it partly because these men are conscious that, for all their knowledge, there is something which other people know about horses and horsemanship which they themselves have missed, and they regret the fact that they do not quite understand what it is. The realisation of this will not, of course, help you much at the time.

But it will help you afterwards. It will help you to try to get for the Young Fiddles those things which the Old Fiddles will never now know.

For it will be clear to you that the Young Fiddles must have a chance to get tuned up in the proper atmosphere. They must be let run loose in the stables and the saddle-rooms and the long lofts above them. There, with their heads in a corn-bin and their feet waving in the air, they will acquire wisdom and understanding.

The corn-bin is there to remind them that it does matter at what age a man learns about horses; for, as soon as you can put



"THE YOUNG FIDDLERS MUST HAVE A CHANCE TO GET TUNED UP IN THE PROPER ATMOSPHERE"

your head and shoulders in a corn-bin *without* your feet waving in the air—it is too late. What stud-groom would allow a long-legged Old Fiddle to poke about in *his* stable, being a perfect nuisance, asking idiotic questions? And what Old Fiddle would have the strength of mind to sit in a manger for half an hour at a time talking to the horses?

But the Young Fiddle can do it—being less afraid of the stud-groom than the Old Fiddle and seeing, as yet, no more reason to be afraid of horses.

In return, the Spirit of Horsemanship makes him this gift of understanding, which can no more be set down in writing than it can be acquired in later years. But, if a man gets this gift, certainly he will hold fast to it; for it wakes for him the sound of a music known all across the world, and it is a music that shall play around him whithersoever the long years lead him.

XIX

GALLOPING HOOFS

THE point-to-point season is a good time. It gets us back to simplicity and to the frame of mind which Oliver Cromwell, as well as Mr. Baldwin, knew to be the essential foundation of thought in a nation of "honest men."

Oliver Cromwell wrote and talked a good deal about his "honest men": Mr. Baldwin appears to take them for granted. But Cromwell kept his "running horses," and, although he did go so far as to forbid horse racing in 1653 and 1654, he was too good a judge of the requirements of a horse soldier's training to have done it without a pang. He has the excuse that in his time the point-to-point had not been invented.

Oliver would have disapproved of the stall-fed millionaire (one understands that all millionaires are stall-fed) journeying up to Aintree in his Rolls-Royce to see the Grand National run. He would have thought there was something distinctly ungodly in jumping round four and a half miles of such a course in under ten minutes. It would have caused him a grim satisfaction to know that the millionaire, having forgotten to book a house twelve months before, would probably have to spend the night in the Rolls.

But Oliver, who sang songs to the Lord as he rode down by himself to reconnoitre the cavalry line of advance before Naseby, Oliver would have approved of point-to-point races. He would have known, as you and I know, that there is something in all the circumstances of the point-to-point that tugs at the heart of "honest men" and sets their pulses racing.

Galloping hoofs! It has always been so. Men have toiled hard to get and retain this thrill of racing horses, and they persisted because they knew that there was something at the back of it all which was pretty good for honest men.

People cannot go to Aintree and "have a ride round" as a pleasant break in their normal occupation of losing money in the City or of wondering what the Government are going to do for farming; but they can have a ride round in the point-to-point. With a minimum of training they can slough the cover of business misery for the silk jacket or pink coat of the point-to-point. And, with it, they will know again the thrill of galloping hoofs.

To the great John Jorrocks, soldiers were "nasty steeplechasin' beggars." They raised Jorrocks' famous percentage of danger in fox-hunting above the ten per cent. mark. Jorrocks was never lured into riding a point-to-point race; but, with all respect, I cannot help feeling that Jorrocks was a sportsman with the soul of a tea-dealer, not, as he always hoped, a tea-dealer with the soul of a sportsman.

The big horse under him, the horse that he has hunted all the season, just catching hold nicely, hocks well under at his fences—all the thrill of galloping hoofs, the rush and ecstasy of speed! Oliver, if not Jorrocks, would surely have fallen for it.

How did we get it, you and I, this love of galloping hoofs? It started a long time back, I find, and it was queerly mixed up with religion and dismal things like funerals: for the authorities say that the first we hear of horse racing is when Homer, in the Iliad, tells us about the burial of Patroclus. The readers of the Iliad are, ninety per cent. of them, boys at school, and eighty-nine per cent. of them unwilling. Homer should have studied the requirements of his public: in a book of a hundred and sixty thousand words he devotes a beggarly two thousand to racing.

It was with the coming of the Olympic Games, apparently, that things began to be properly organised. By the thirty-third Olympiad they are having mounted races; jockeys' names must be sent in to Elis at least thirty days before the race; owners and trainers will give their horses a month's preparation.

I am sorry to find that the ancient Briton was rather unenterprising in the matter; but King Alfred, who taught honest men to read, and put great thoughts into their funny-shaped heads,

found time for a ride on the flat, even if he didn't get going between the flags.

You can sit on the high hill above Lewes Racecourse to-day and, as you hear the drumming thud of galloping horses coming round the bend, you can almost hear the quick thud-thud of Alfred's shaggy ponies a little way away. Men tell you that he lived at Ditchling and raced on Plumpton Plain.

> He who gallops on Plumpton Plain
> Never deserves to gallop again,

says the jingle. It is clearly meant to run to a sort of galloping chorus, but it is not the gallop of a blood horse on the downs to-day. It sounds more like the little propping gallop of King Alfred's ponies.

I think that Alfred must have said it first—*after* his gallop, and as he sat his sweating, shaggy pony and looked out over the good woodlands of the weald, wondering what he could make of this England. Being a man with a serious turn of mind, he may well have thought it sacrilege, as he gazed upon the country which you see from Plumpton Plain, to spend his time other than in sitting always in a nasty wattle and mud hut making plans for so fair a land. But, if so, he forgot that it was the thrill of the gallop which had inspired him afresh. No doubt there followed a period of long office hours at Ditchling until someone had the wit to tell the King that a fellow over at Lewes said the Royal ponies couldn't gallop for burnt cakes.

But everything was on rather *too* amateurish lines until the Teutonic tribes took a hand. They and the Romans, between them, taught this country a good deal of what it feels about racing nowadays. You can see the marks of the Roman racecourses to this day. As you look at them you can realise what a relief it must have been for a Roman general in Britain to be able to turn his young officers' attention to consideration of what would win the 2.30, when otherwise they would have been walking the wall and wondering what it was that was beating Rome.

A very present help to honest men, the sound of galloping hoofs.

But Augustine didn't like it. The Christian Church said there was no connection whatever between racing and religion; and the sooner that was properly understood the better for everybody. Owners, trainers and jockeys were excluded from the fellowship; so were habitual racegoers. I don't know how they can have managed about the racegoers. I suppose that a priest had to attend every race meeting in his parish and note down the names. He would hardly take the serious step of exclusion unless they really were *habitual* frequenters; and one would expect that he found it necessary to attend a good many meetings before he was satisfied. He might even—if the local committee were not sufficiently enterprising—have decided himself to organise a point-to-point or two in order to collect his evidence. If so, it is possible that he gradually came to suggest that there "seems to be nothing inherently wrong, you know, in horse racing of itself. . . ." But in any case it got so serious that the Council of Arles, in its fourth canon, denied communion to charioteers. A staggering piece of work! It staggers even the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which says that it "became increasingly difficult to demonstrate wherein lay the un-Christianity" of racing; and honest men were busily finding Christian argument to prove the contrary.

So that, by 1174, we have one, William Fitzstephen, writing to tell us, in his "Description of the City of London," that races were held every Friday ("unless it be one of the more solemn festivals"). They raced where Smithfield Market now stands, on a certain flat piece of ground outside the gates—"Quidam planus campus re et nomine Smithfield quasi Smoothfield."

"Earls, barons, knights, and citizens" came to the races, and the horses were ridden by jockeys—"boys expert in the management of horses." That was what Fitzstephen called them, but the language the starter used about them was probably more in the tradition of that used by starters of the present day.

I suspect Fitzstephen of being not much of a man upon a horse.

He takes the trouble to explain the apparently astonishing fact that "the chief aim" of these jockeys "is to prevent a competitor getting before them." However, he may only have been writing down to the intelligence of his scholarly readers, for he is sufficient of a racing man to appreciate that at Smithfield "the horses, too, are eager for the race. Limbs tremble, impatient of delay they cannot stand still." The last time that I walked through Smithfield Market it seemed to me that the "Brighter London" schemes might well include the restoration of Smithfield racecourse and the removal of all that beef and mutton—at any rate, on Fridays (unless, of course, it be one of the more solemn festivals).

War stopped racing in those days much as it has done since, and, in Crusading times, honest men got their thrills in the tilt yard, and in the clang of metal on metal above the thud of galloping hoofs. But I suppose that brought them a bit too close to Mr. Jorrocks' one hundred per cent. War Risk, for they came back to racing again.

Indeed, they never quite left it, for, even in the reign of Richard I., we find that certain knights were riding, one Whitsuntide, over a three-mile course for "forty pounds of ready gold."

King John and Edward III. both kept a number of "running horses," but it remained for the city of Chester to get the sport going on the democratic basis. In 1512 Chester started public races, when the saddlers of the city presented a silver bell, "value, three shillings and sixpence or more," for him "who shall run best and farthest on horseback on Shrove Tuesday."

I am afraid there must have been some unpleasantness if those who had run further found they had not run better. But perhaps it was all properly arranged under a system of marks, like a military long-distance ride.

I fear, however, that this silver bell business started the rot which was to bring the excessive gambling element into horse racing (though not into the point-to-point, mark you). For, in

Henry VIII.'s reign, the Shrove Tuesday silver bell had been only "a wooden ball embellished with flowers and placed upon the point of a lance."

There was a bit of a set-back under Elizabeth. Gloriana was a woman who knew what the country could afford, and, I take it, she decided that it could not afford horse racing. Anyhow, she didn't patronise it; and I would rather think it was one of the things she gave up for England than that galloping hoofs made no appeal to a woman of her calibre. But the Stuarts set us alight again. James I., according to Youatt, started racing in Scotland. He did much for it in England, for he had a number of meetings at Croydon and Enfield, and even paid a long price for Markham's Arabian, a horse that was meant to win races and then go to the stud. Unfortunately, Markham's Arabian appears to have lost every race in which he ran. James was a cautious man where cash was concerned, and an angry one when things went wrong. I conclude that the post of trainer to His Majesty—during the time that Markham's Arabian was in the Royal string—was not among the more sought-after appointments of the Court.

From 1607 onwards, Chester was going strong with silver bells; indeed, in 1607 itself they made it a gold bell. In 1609 Mr. Robert Ambrye, sometime Sheriff of Chester, gave *three* silver bells, returnable—like a challenge cup—twelve months later. It was he who started the sweepstake.

In 1618 Chester had progressed on the road to ruin as far as subscription purses, and in 1624 we find John Bereton, Mayor, altering the course to "five times round the Roodee" for a bell "valued £8 or £10." A presentation cup this time.

It is a relief to turn for a moment from this welter of prize money to find Clarendon solemnly declaring that in 1648 a meeting of Royalists was held on Epsom Downs "under the pretence of a horse race." Really, of course, it was a horse race held under pretence of a meeting of Royalists.

But the thud of Alfred's ponies is beginning to be lost in

the jingle of gold and silver bells. Already you can almost hear the surge and roar of the ring, and I don't find much more of the thrill of galloping hoofs in the history books.

Except for a little surprise peep—at Queen Anne, of all people. I always thought of Anne as a sombre sort of woman. I put—

> And thou, great Anna, whom three realms obey,
> Dost sometimes counsel take, and sometimes tay

under my mind-picture of her. And I left her there, in a sort of mental Madame Tussaud's, with Anne of Cleves and other solid people, all taking counsel and tea together like anything, but never, *never* going to race meetings.

Then how do you account for the fact that her nutmeg grey horse Mustard ran for the Royal Cup of 100 sovs. at York in 1718, and her gelding Pepper for the same cup in the previous year? It makes Anne seem almost flighty.

But after this time racing seems to drop out of history and to begin a dull history of its own. We have "heats" being run in 1720, and "distance posts" being invented. In 1721 Flying Childers, in a trial over the Round Course at Newmarket, does the 8 miles 4 fur. 98 yds. in 6 mins. 40 secs. It leaves me cold.

In 1739 an Act of George II. prevents racing of ponies and any racing for prizes of less than £50. I grow colder.

When Colonel St. Leger, "who resided at Parkhill, near Doncaster," establishes the race that goes by his name, I freeze.

I am driven to thaw myself at the memory of a highly coloured sporting print (not of this century, but of not so *very* many years ago) portraying a run with the Bicester Hounds and, in the foreground, "H.R.H. mounted, *as usual*, on a Determined Refuser."

The legend and the italics are those of the artist; but the spirit which drove H.R.H. to hunt (even if he *did* prefer that it should be on a Determined Refuser) is the spirit which has animated a much more recent H.R.H. in the hunting field—the spirit of galloping hoofs.

So as you get on your old hunter to have a ride round in your

members' race at the point-to-point (and you can never tell—the old 'uns sometimes stand up longer than these nasty steeplechasin' beggars) you will not bother much about 18 Geo. II., cap. 10.

No. You will think of Oliver riding down alone to reconnoitre the Naseby advance. You will try to go down to the post a little ahead of the others, and—if the others can't hear you—I don't mind betting you will be singing.

And I hope that—like Oliver—you will have "honest men" *behind* you—the whole way round.

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