

RIDING.

EDUCATION for the saddle should precede, if possible, that of harness—for horse as well as man.

A child may begin to learn riding from the time that he has mastered his first spelling-book; but though the education may be thus early, it should not be taken to any excess, or it may stunt or deform physical growth.

Within due bounds it is not only healthful, and inculcative of nerve and self-reliance, but valuable in after life. Nevertheless, a boy who spends too many hours in the saddle instead of running after hoop and ball, and using his muscles all round, will stunt his growth and deform his legs; and a girl may similarly cripple her growth, and contract a crooked spine.

First, let the beginner learn how to take up the reins before mounting. They must be held in the left hand, knuckles uppermost (not undermost, as in driving); then, if a single rein (Fig. 1) divide the reins with the middle finger, the off or right-hand rein passing between the middle and forefinger, and the near or left-hand rein being grasped by the middle and remaining fingers, while the thumb is clenched below where the rein passes out through the top of the grasp.

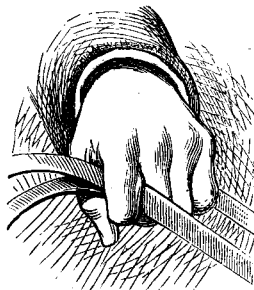


Fig. 1.—SINGLE REIN GRIP.

If a double rein (Fig. 2), let the snaffle (s) be first taken up on the middle finger, and then let the curb (c) reins pass in a similar way on each side of the *third* finger; let the loop of the reins come out *below* the thumb, which thus divides the reins distinctly, so that the rider can discover which of the two to tighten when required, by drawing them through his left hand by means of the right. Then, with the reins in the grasp, it is safe to mount (or take a hand up, if the rider is too small to reach the stirrup).

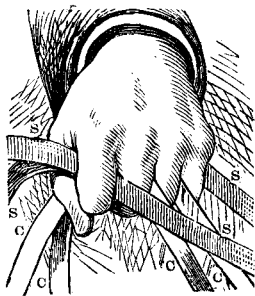


Fig. 2.—DOUBLE REIN GRIP.

To mount in the orthodox manner, place the left hand on the pommel, then the left foot in the stirrup, then the right hand on the croup of the saddle, and with a spring from the right foot, still on the ground, rise and settle in the saddle.

With a beginner it is best to give the earliest lessons without stirrups (Fig. 3); this teaches him to use his lower limbs to cling to the saddle, while a man walking beside him can lend a hand to steady his balance if required. The canter (though an artificial pace in the horse) should be the first alteration of pace from a walk.

During early walking lessons let the pupil keep the toes in, the leg flat, the knee tight to the saddle, gripping the saddle with the side and not the back of the calf, as well as with the knee and lower portion of the thigh.

The body should be square and upright, not stiff, as if a poker had been swallowed, but playing from the hips with each motion of the animal; shoulders square, not slouching; left hand down, just close to the pommel, right hand holding the whip (butt uppermost), just in front of the right hip, ready either to use the whip if required, or to aid the left by drawing the reins through the grasp or strengthening the pull when wanted,

A few days' walking practice, *especially without stirrups*, will do much towards bringing into play those muscles which give the power of grip on the saddle, and towards teaching the limbs instinctively to adopt the postures above indicated.

Now begin to use the stirrups. For ordinary riding do not thrust the foot "home" in the stirrup, up to the instep, but rest the ball of the foot on the bar of the stirrup (Fig. 4). By this time, having learnt something of the grip of the saddle, the pupil will feel what length of stirrup he requires, and will first settle his grip, and then adapt the stirrup to the position of his foot.

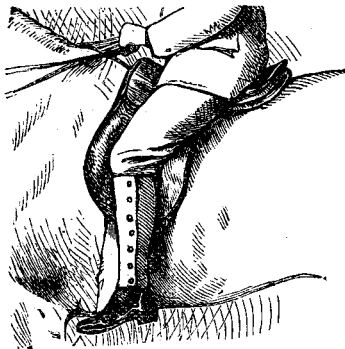


Fig. 3.—SEAT WITHOUT STIRRUPS.

If he has *begun* to learn with stirrups he will depend on them from the outset, and ride either too long or too short (most probably the former), and not having been obliged to rely upon his grip, may take months, or even years, in feeling, if indeed he ever do so, the position of his legs, which gives him most power over his seat.

Self-taught riders who begin to ride with stirrups usually find that they require to shorten their stirrups periodically, as they gradually acquire a grip, in position as they acquire the right use of them from day to day. Their seat is thus continually shifting; and they no sooner think they have acquired what they want, than they find that they can improve still more with a shorter leather and consequently stronger grip.

All this time is wasted, and the seat often spoilt permanently, by allowing the grip to follow the stirrup in the first instance, instead of making the stirrup follow the first acquisition of grip.

And now, with confidence inspired by the acquisition of grip on the saddle, and with the feet in the stirrups, heels down, toes in, it will be time to progress to a canter.

If the pupil be a child the teacher should ride or run alongside with a leading rein attached to the pony, in case the rider should lack strength to restrain the pace, and pull up when wanted. The learner should sit well up, and "give and take" with the back at each motion of the animal; let him keep the knees tight, and hold on by them only, and not seek to support the body by the rein—that is meant to guide the horse, and to support him in case of a false step, not to support the rider.

By letting the body play gently from the hips with each motion of the horse, that unsightly bumping up and down upon the saddle, so conspicuous in the horsemanship of a "Mossoo," will be avoided.

The trot, though a more natural pace to the horse, requires, for the sake of comfort, a less natural motion on the part of the rider, and is therefore best

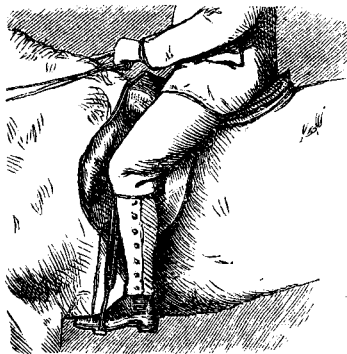


Fig. 4.—SEAT WITH STIRRUPS.

postponed till the latter has begun to feel more at ease at the paces of walk and canter.

In trotting, the rider should "rise" in his stirrups (Fig. 5). This means that his legs should play slightly from the knee-joint in time with the trot, raising the body from the saddle during one step, and lowering it gently to touch the saddle on the next. Slight motion suffices, and it facilitates this, both for man and horse, if the rider lets the small of his back play in a little as he rises, carrying his chest forward, and bringing his centre of gravity also forward for the instant, so as to let it be more over the line of knee and foot. If his centre of gravity lies too far back, then he adds to the strain on his legs to keep him from sitting down again before the time, and tends to make himself remedy his balance by holding himself up by his reins, a pernicious habit for both horse and man.

This play of the back should be very slight, and naturally done; not a mountebank sort of bobbing in and out of the stomach, but an easy and elegant play of the muscles of the loins, giving and taking with the action of the horse, and thus varying the position of the centre of gravity according to which part of the body at the instant supports the most weight. A

practical illustration from an elegant horseman would, however, explain more in half a minute than this description can convey to a tyro.

The rider must rise first sufficiently to allow for this play of the centre of gravity; but he must not exaggerate the action into a stand up and sit down again between each step of his horse. The feel and play of his own muscles must guide him. As before, a careful notice of the action of a good horseman will at once open his eyes practically to what here on paper may seem a rather puzzling theory.

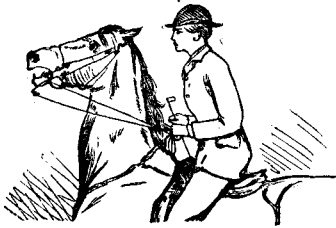


Fig. 6.—HANGING ON BY THE REIN.

couraged, then the more you pull at him the more he will want to pull at you. A light bridle-hand implies constant and instant communication between horse and rider, to direct and control. A heavy hand is like a constant cry of "Wolf!" it leaves no margin for direction when really required. Moreover, in the event of a stumble or a false step, prompt and timely support from the reins aids to shift the horse's centre of gravity farther backwards, and so to save a fall. When you pull up, do so with a firm and steadily-increasing pressure of the rein; not with a jerk—the latter spoils the horse's mouth and manners also—though you really do not seek to *lift* the horse's head high up, but simply to afford him a



Fig. 5.—RISING IN THE STIRRUPS.

The time will arrive when the lad will be able to control his pony without the leading-rein, and to pioneer for himself along highways and byways. Then let him bear in mind certain aphorisms, due to the well-being of horse and rider alike.

Always "feel" your horse's mouth; do not hang on by the rein (Fig. 6), but touch lightly. If a horse is a slug, he will want to stop when pulled at; if high-

support to his neck when outstretched in his effort to save his balance. A stumbling horse at once drops his head and neck. Pulling him up eases the weight on his shoulders, and so aids his recovery. When the neck has reached its full stretch the support of the rein is of value, to keep the weight of the neck to the back, instead of letting it once more hang from the shoulders, before the horse has fully regained his balance.

Do as you would be done by, viz., do not rattle along hard roads, still less loose stones; even if the horse is not your own, you cause him pain. If you want a horse to last you, use him fairly; a trot or gentle canter is pace enough on hard macadamised roads. The trot does not cause so much concussion to

fore legs—unless the animal is artificially high-actioned—as a much slower canter does. If you want to go faster, look out for turf or a soft piece of riding-ground.

Do not let a horse catch cold any more than you would yourself; if he is in a perspiration, and you have to stop, keep him moving gently till he cools, or have a rug put over him.

Don't give him water when he is hot; it will cause him to break out in unsightly lumps, and perhaps worse than this may happen.

Don't be in a hurry down hill; at anything approaching a steep gradient pull up and walk, or you may both come to grief.

Don't be so vain and foolish as to keep working a horse up slyly with spur or whip, and holding him in, that he may show his action. Those who understand horses will at once "spot" you, and set you down a fool for your pains.

On the same principle, do not fret a horse with the curb, so long as you can ride him on the snaffle.

Look out where you are going; don't be star-gazing; and if a brickbat should lie in the middle of the road, don't ride at it—for choice.

If you put up at an inn, and have no servant with you, see your horse fed—trust not ostlers; they are as wise in their own generation as the unjust steward, and will not hesitate behind your back to rob Peter to pay Paul.

If you have a horse that will canter with the wrong leg (*i.e.*, left) foremost, hold him short by the left rein, so as to bring his right shoulder forward, then touch him with the spur, and he will probably break into the right pace.

If he "shies," coax, and even lead him up to the object of his terror, that he may smell at it, and so reassure himself. Do not lose your temper with him, that only adds to his fright.

If a horse bolts, and bores his head down to get the reins free, try to get his head up by sawing his mouth with the snaffle, and then hold at him. Anyhow, do not lose your presence of mind, nor seek to throw yourself off; sit tight, and

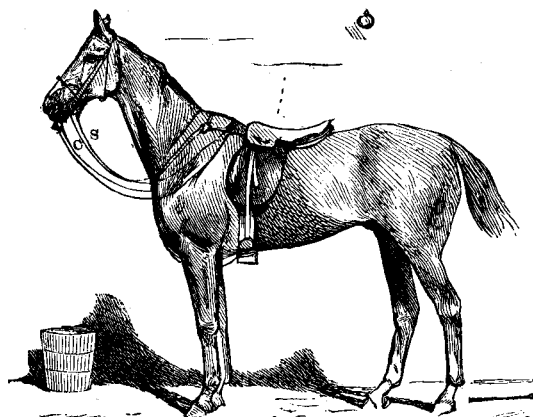


Fig. 7.—SADDLED AND BRIDLED:—s, Snaffle; c, Curb.

pay extra attention to guiding him in his career; though he cannot, perhaps, be immediately stopped, he may be steered.

If a horse has a trick of taking the bit in his teeth (*i.e.*, of taking the cheek of the curb in his mouth), pull it out with a lateral motion of your hand, low down on the rein, and in future ride him with a lip-strap.

This latter appendage is usually a safeguard.

Many horses that have no vicious intention of bolting learn the trick of protecting themselves from the pain of the curb by picking up the cheek of it with their lips, so that one side of it lies against their teeth.

See that your saddle fits your horse, is well stuffed, and does not press on his withers. Every horse is not comfortable in every saddle, any more than you would be in everybody's clothes (Fig. 7).

If your horse has any tendency to sore back, see that the saddle (after the girths have been slackened) remains on his back till he is cool.

Use a bit suitable to your horse's mouth and manners; half his manners, and with them half his value, lies in his mouth.

Don't use spurs until you have acquired sufficient seat to keep your heels down and toes in, else you may be hanging on by them, driving your mount mad, half disembowelling him, and risking your own neck.

And now, having acquired confidence and command of the horse for ordinary purposes of what may be termed "domestic" equestrianism, it is but natural that the next aspiration should be to ride to hounds.

In the case of a lad and pony it will do to turn him loose in the hunting field to follow his leaders as best he may; to stick on if he can, and to tumble off if he can't. If he is a "good plucked" one, such a *contre-temps* will not injure him, and his feather weight will fall light at the worst. Besides, he will thereby learn how to fall, an art in itself. As Assheton Smith used to say, "Any fool can fall; the thing is to know how to fall;" and if a horseman really rides up to the motto "Be with them I will," he will often, what with a tired horse or an impracticable place, be compelled to ride for a fall, or to lose his place in a run.

A few lessons in private, in a riding-school or in the open, will soon give him confidence; and if his heart is in the right place he will then be able to make his *début*, and gradually to improve by practical experience, without being necessitated to hold himself up to public ridicule in his earlier essays.

On some steady old fencer, who has no idea of refusing or of rushing, let him ride at his first obstacle. His "hunting" seat should not be quite the same as that which he would adopt for a long plain ride, or park parade. The stirrups should be a hole shorter, and the feet well home in them (Fig. 8), up to the instep. This will bring him well down in his saddle, and though he will lose the elasticity of ankle and instep which, with the stirrup under the ball of the foot, makes all motions of the horse, especially the trot, play so much easier upon the human frame, he will have at once a firmer seat, and avoid the risk of losing a foot from the stirrup as he alights from a fence.

Let him come steadily at the fence (Fig. 9), allowing the old hunter to take his own pace. It is a mistake to make a habit of shoving a horse fast at a fence, unless there is a chance of his refusing, or width to be cleared on the farther side. It teaches him to rush, a habit which some day, in a cramped corner, may bring him to grief, and, moreover, when by any chance it becomes really necessary to negotiate a place at a slow pace, the horse, from want of being driven, fancies



FIG. 8.—FOOT HOME IN STIRRUP.

his rider irresolute, and probably refuses. Get a lead given you if you can, and it will give you confidence.

Keep the knees well in, hands down, body upright. Do not lean forward as if to see what is on the other side of the fence. Sit still till you feel the horse raise his fore-quarters to the jump; then, as he springs with his hind-quarters to project his whole body over the fence, throw your own body well back, so as not to be canted forward on to the pommel, and perhaps out of the saddle, by the concussion of his alighting.

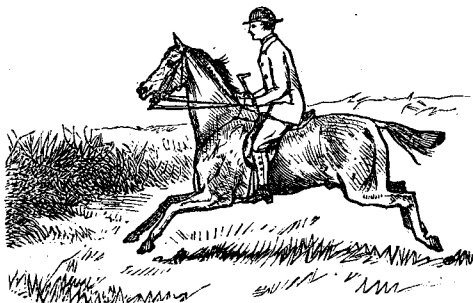


Fig. 9.—COMING TO A FENCE.

We have known some riders, of both sexes, who from fidget, nervousness, or awkwardness, could never get themselves to swing the body well back by the ordinary motion, but always sat forward, as if trying to see where the horse was going to place his fore feet, and as a matter of course got canted forward (if nothing worse), in an ugly and uncomfortable manner. In such cases the natural balance may be acquired by teaching the rider to strike the horse with the right hand on the haunch as he rises to his fence. The whip should not be used if the horse does not require it, but the blow struck with the open hand. This will swing the body back; at the same time the hand, striking against the haunch of the horse, will there stop, and so prevent the body from losing its equilibrium by the hand swinging round behind it unsupported.

Give the horse his head as he rises to his fence, not by dropping a slack rein (else you will jerk him in taking it in upon landing, or not take it up at all, and so lack control), but by letting the arm play quickly and freely out from the shoulder as his neck stretches out. Then, as he lands, play the arm in again, ready to control him, or to support him in case he should blunder on landing.

Do not allow yourself nervously to snatch at the rein as the horse rises, as if to save yourself from slipping back out of the saddle. That will only cramp the horse's action (for he must stretch out his neck to jump), balk his spring, and bring both you and him to grief.

An easy hurdle or two will be the scene of your first essay. When you have learned to sit still and not to show daylight over the saddle at such easy obstacles, attempt something bigger, and go sometimes a little faster at your fences, that by seeing how much ground you have cleared on the landing side, you may acquire confidence to ride at fences that involve width as well as height, brooks, &c., and may judge the pace at which to go at them. The greater your fence and the deeper your drop on landing, the more must you sit back (Fig. 10). This pre-



Fig. 10.—SITTING BACK AT THE DROP.

caution, and the tightest grip with your knees that you can muster for the instant, will not only maintain elegance and security in your seat, but will be a safeguard against your being shot unexpectedly over your horse's ears should he suddenly refuse (still worse should he whip round into the bargain), especially when you are going fast at an obstacle.

If you do fall, remember a golden maxim, *stick to your reins*, unless your horse kicks you or you are stunned by the fall.

Throw your heart over a fence, and the horse will be pretty sure to follow it. The least indecision in your own mind instils itself instantly into your action, and the horse feels that your mind is not made up. If you are undecided, too probably he will also be in the same mind. The more you ride the more will you feel how instantly and unconsciously the *will* of the rider communicates itself to the horse.

When you have gained confidence sufficient, both in your horse and yourself, to ride at ordinary fences which you know beforehand are negotiable, you will be ready to present yourself in the hunting field. Once there you will be astonished to find how, when the blood is up with excitement and example, both of you rise, literally, to your work. Hesitation and refusal should there be out of the question for ordinary and practicable fences; certainly, if you do not demur, your horse is not likely to do so for you, when he sees his own species leading him the way in which he should go.

Above all, as we have repeatedly said, the hand cannot be too light, especially in negotiating awkward, cramped, or "soft" sort of places. It is astonishing what can be done by a light hand and a heart in the right place.

To teach a tyro to ride to hounds by mere book-work would be a sheer impossibility. Lessons in that line should be practical, not simply theoretical. However, a few standard maxims may be recapitulated, and borne in mind. Some of these maxims concern his own welfare, some that of his fellows in the field.

For the sake of his duty towards his neighbours, the last-mentioned claim prior notice.

Let him keep his own line, and avoid some such fate as that depicted in Fig. 11. By that we do not mean necessarily that he is to cut out his own line for himself, or to ride straight. If neither his own powers and nerve, nor the capacities of his mount admit of it, he is welcome to ride to a leader, and to dodge in and out like a hare from field to field, if he will. But he should scrupulously avoid crossing any other rider at a fence, or attempting to take an obstacle at a time and at a place that is not his own. If the place that falls to his lot in a fence does not suit his nerves or his powers, he must at least wait till the coast is clear before he attempts to deviate from his track, and to poach upon that of somebody else who has made a more wise or fortunate selection. Neglect of this will bring himself, as well as others, to grief, and burden the perpetrator with unpopularity and most probably a good deal of uncomplimentary language to boot.

If he rides to a leader, let him keep at a safe distance in the rear, and not press upon his heels. The least that he can do in return for gratuitous pilotage is not to risk the limbs of his pilot by following him so closely that he must of necessity land upon him if the leader should fall at a fence.

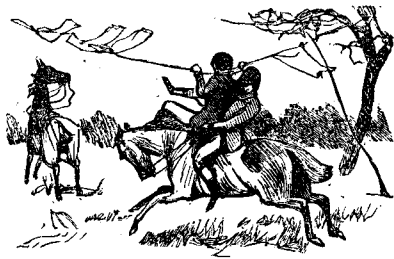


FIG. 11.—KEEP YOUR OWN LINE.

Also let him remember (1) not to head the fox, (2) nor to halloo until the fox is well away, else he will probably frighten him back into the mouths of the hounds, (3) also to keep his eyes and ears open, for his own sake and for that of public information, if interrogated, whether he has seen the fox cross a ride, or steal away; if the latter, and in the middle of a run, let him note whether the fox looks clean and fresh, or lolls his tongue, and has a draggled brush—the latter will be the hunted fox. (4) Let him beware of overriding hounds.

For his own sake the tyro should bear in mind the following rule:—

To start well from cover; this he can do without rushing off the instant he sees a couple and a half of hounds on the scent. He must give the pack time to get clear and away, and then look out for himself. If the cover is a big one he will have scope for the exercise of his judgment. He must move about, to some extent, according to the direction in which the hounds are drawing, or running, supposing that they have found, and are rattling their fox about the cover. At the same time he need not go into the reverse extreme, and gallop up and down sticky rides all the morning, till his horse has nothing left in him for an afternoon gallop, when at last the fox is persuaded to break.

When the fox breaks, knowledge of the country goes a long way. Foxes often run much the same line—the same haven of refuge being known to more than one. Some old stager, whose weight of body and years in the saddle make him cautious of ugly obstacles, is often the best indicator of line to a tyro, and is worth watching while the hounds are drawing, or are pressing their fox in cover. He will take his stand at the most likely place. If, however, the tyro, with all these precautions, loses start, and does not hear how far the fox's point may be distant; when wind is south-west, scent burning, and soil squelching, it is better not to "bucket" in pursuit. If the gallop is to be short, he will have no time to catch the hounds before they stop; if it is to be long, he will reach the pack at last, only to retire again with a pumped-out horse. Better follow in the line, and wait his chance, when he sees far distant flashes of pink hurrying to his right or left, indicating a turn in the line; then let him cut the corner, and so regain his place.

The old standard rule when crossing a plough parallel, and not at right angles to, the furrows, is to ride down the top of the furrow, or rather of the ridge between the furrows. Being better drained than the gutter, it is presumed to be better going. However, in our opinion this depends to some extent upon circumstances, and the rider must let his eye and geological experience, if any, guide him in his choice. In stiff clay soil, after heavy rain, the gutter of the furrow is often more favourable than the top. The horse's feet sink deeper, it is true, but the soil in the gutter is more liquefied and less tenacious than at the top of the ridge. One foot depth in "gruel" is less holding than half a foot in thick "jam."

At water the tyro must go his best pace, and with his heart already on the right side of the obstacle, else his horse is pretty sure to divine the least hesitation of purpose in his rider, and refuse accordingly, in an annoying manner, on the brink. Most brooks have rotten banks and rat-holes in many places, and as a horse does not calculate upon such, but times his landing (even if he can cover more than the distance in view) to alight just clear of the water, he may come to earth, or even subside backwards into the water on landing on such ground. It is best, therefore, to glance round for a second, and choose a dry spot before putting his head at it.

Timber is always best negotiated slowly; there is usually no ditch on the far side to be cleared, so pace is no desideratum, and though low timber can be negotiated fast, so far as safety is concerned, yet to do so is to teach the horse to rush generally at timber, instead of approaching it slowly, timing his distance, and reserving all his powers for vertical rather than horizontal spring.

Avoid unnecessary fences; when hounds are running, horse and man have enough to do without going out of their way to court obstacles. When hounds are jogging from cover to cover it is principally the rough-riders, dealers, and farmers, who have young ones to school and sell, who "lark" over fences in sight of the field. Those also who have hired for the day, and want to make sure of their two guineas' worth, will probably play the same tricks, but only the horse gains in reputation, the man is looked upon as a fool for his pains by business-like sportsmen who have come out to see hounds meet, and not simply to air horsemanship, as if to show that they were not such fools as they look. If a gallop, with a certain modicum of fencing, is all that is required, better confine oneself to drags, aniseed, and red herrings, a pursuit that can be followed for as many shillings as a pack of hounds cost pounds in the year.

Even if the tyro is not timid, and is proud of his progress, let him beware lest he earn the dubious praise which old Jem Hills bestowed on Oxford undergraduates, who larked annoyingly on the heels of his pack on cold scenting Heythrop days—"Lord bless 'em! they fears nothing 'acause they knows nothing."

Not only for the sake of your own purse, but still more for that of humanity, even if money is no object, be merciful to your horse. Even if you are riding a livery-stable hack, whose hire covers risks and injuries, gratuitous neglect is inexcusable and unsportsmanlike. Granting that your own dinner-hour is due, house six miles distant, still that is no reason why you should grudge ten minutes' delay for a bucket of gruel and feed for the faithful slave who has toiled under you all day, and who, after eight hours and upwards with you in the saddle, begins to flag from weariness and emptiness of stomach. By the time he reaches home, without sustenance meantime, he may have gone too long to relish his corn, and may be off his feed for the next few days, unless you give way now to his necessities. Granting he is not yours, and the loss is someone else's, still you have a character for humanity and as a sportsman at stake. Many horses will drink warm beer, with or besides gruel, after a hard day; some will even relish "Old Tom" in the same way, others will loathe it, but when they will take it by all means let them have it.

On similar principles do not grudge a slow journey home, or to the nearest blacksmith's, if you have cast a shoe. It is sheer brutality to rattle a bare-hoofed horse home, and to injure him, perhaps permanently, to save half an hour's delay for your own dinner.

At the same time, beware of letting a very tired horse get stiff and chilled on his way home, especially if frosty air sets in after sundown. The sudden chill, especially in crossing an exposed upland, may paralyse the action of the heart, and make him sink from exhaustion, whereas, had he been warmly clothed at the moment with your mackintosh coat across his loins, he could have crawled home safe to his stable. We speak in such a case of a horse when too tired to raise a trot to keep up his circulation.

But though care should thus be taken not to suffer the circulation of a tired horse to become chilled and stopped, the owner should be careful not to put a disdressed horse into a *warm* stable. The more air the animal has the better in such a case. If his body is well clothed, the windows and doors are best kept open till his exhaustion passes off.

With these final remarks on the duties of a rider in the field to his neighbour, his horse, and himself, we leave the tyro to do his best to improve by practical experience the concise teaching on the subject which is all that our space can admit of.