

DRIVING.

THERE is now no branch of a lad's outdoor education of greater importance, not only to himself, but also to others, than that of an ability to "handle the ribbons." Not a bagman, small tradesman, or man of business, but would be ashamed to say that he was incompetent, if in fair health and strength, to pilot his own "trap." And yet, though so large a proportion of society,

aristocratic and bourgeois alike, can boast a smattering of the science, there is no pursuit in which perfection is proportionately so rarely attained.

The first requisite for a tyro is to learn to sit well (Fig. 1), and so to acquire the proper scope for his own power over his horse.

The seat should be above, or at least on a level, with the horses' heads, not below them; and it should, moreover, be so placed that the driver can use his legs and feet to restrain the pull of the horses if necessary, and that cannot be done if the reins pull down over the splash-board into the driver's lap.

Though most tyros begin their essay with a horse in single harness, yet in a general way it is easier and safer to drive a pair than one. If the single horse is

perfect in manners, all that has to be learned is to keep him straight, and to direct him without collisions. But if a horse has faults he is safer with a companion; though if the two have coincident faults, or could confabulate mischief together, they would be more dangerous than a single animal, yet it is in practice long chances against the two both doing wrong simultaneously. Each is a check on his fellow: the one may not want to bolt when the other does, or if one falls the other will probably keep his legs.

The tyro should take his seat uprightly and squarely, plant his feet well in front of him, grasp his reins firmly, and let his left arm play lightly from the *shoulder* (not the elbow), his elbows both well squared. Nothing looks so slovenly, or entails such waste of necessary power, as a slouching back, and hands sunk in the lap.

The whip should not be always used because it is handy; it is wanted to make a horse take hold of his collar if he shirks, and to feel his bit if he hangs back when there is difficulty in navigation. Unless he runs up to his bit there is little or no communication between him and his driver. The whip should be used from the wrist, not from the arm; a lash delivered from the shoulder is far less effective and much more ugly than a stroke from the wrist. A good fly-fisher never makes a bad whip in this respect.

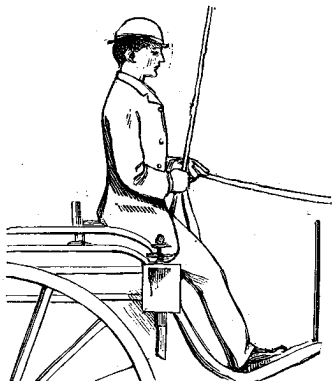


Fig. 1.—A GOOD SEAT.

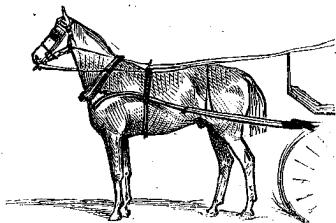


Fig. 2.—HARNESSED.

Let the beginner commence by casting an eye over his harness (Fig. 2); at first, rather than he may learn by inspection the place for everything and that everything is in its place; but later, when he has passed his apprenticeship, he should still do the same, and this time with a master's eye, to see that nothing is wanting before he mounts to his seat. Let him note that the breeching, if in single harness, is neither so loose as to be useless, nor so tight as to hamper the action of the horse and to rub the hair off. Let him see that the rein is on the proper bar of the bit; else, if the horse has been accustomed to be driven from one bar, and his biting is suddenly altered, his manners will probably change at the same time. If he is driving double harness, let him note the length of his traces, and see that his horses are properly "poled up," else the carriage will overrun them down hill.

In very light single two-wheel harness, breeching is sometimes dispensed with, and the holding back done from the saddle. It looks more elegant, and shows more of the horse; but of course it adds to the wear and tear of his fore-legs down hill, by throwing the whole weight of retention upon them, instead of letting the hind quarters bear their share with the breeching; and with a heavy load such a system is unsafe, however good the horse may be on his fore-legs.

Having cast a careful glance round his harness, the driver will then proceed to mount.

Let him take the reins in his hand before he mounts the box, then, when seated, let the "near" or left-hand rein (N) pass between the forefinger and thumb, the "off" or right-hand rein (O) between the fore and middle fingers—palm of the hand uppermost (Fig. 3). Then let the grasp of all the fingers close tightly on the loop of the rein, which should pass out under the remaining fingers. Though the grasp should be tight the touch should be light; let not the exercise of the muscles of grip confuse the driver into adding to this a tug from his shoulder upon his horse's mouth. However light a horse's mouth is, or supposing he is a slug, that does not take his collar and run up to his bit, still the driver should always *feel* the mouth, else he has no control over him in sudden emergency if the reins are hanging loosely. There is more danger in driving a sluggish or dead-mouthed horse in a crowd than a free goer. The latter runs up to his bit at once, and so feels your orders; the slug does not feel, and may interpret a touch of the reins to direct him into an order to stop in the teeth of a Pickford's van, or on a level railway crossing in sight of an express. Whipcord must keep a slug to his collar, and so to his bit, or the absence of constant communication between his mouth and his driver's hand may lead to collisions.

And now in the seat, and the grasp of the reins first secured, let the tyro make a start; not in a hurry, not with an instant dose of whipcord—a word of encouragement to his horse should suffice at first. Let him learn to allow free room for his own wheels in turning corners or passing obstacles: he has got two things to provide for, his vehicle as well as the horse. Better give a wide margin at first than collide; though before long his eye will guide him, and he need not then make himself conspicuous as a greenhorn by giving too wide berths at corners and rencontres. Go steadily round a corner; remember there is such a thing as centrifugal force; and a two-wheel vehicle, high hung, may easily be upset to the outside by a hasty whisk round a sharp corner, even without the help of a bank to lift the inner wheel.



Fig. 3.—TAKING THE REINS IN HAND.

Then, as to the rule of the road. If he meets anything coming the opposite way, he must take it on his right hand; if he overtakes it, on his left; if he is overtaken he must keep to the left, and be passed on the right.

"The rule of the road is a paradox quite,
For if you go right you go wrong, and if you go left you go right,"

is an old saw which he may bear in mind as implicitly as do sailors the rhymes which tell of the rule of the road at sea.

Down hill he should progress carefully, especially when on two wheels, for then the extra weight of the cart hangs on the pad or saddle on the horse's back. A stumble and fall will probably break the shafts, certainly cut the horse's knees, and may pitch the occupant over the splash-board. Let him hold well in, sit well back, play firmly and lightly with his hand, ready to hold up sharply in event of a stumble. Even a sure-footed horse may make a false step from the pain of a loose, sharp-pointed bit of stone cutting his frog. A judicious and timely support from the rein may save the horse and preserve his balance, by thus suddenly shifting part of the weight of his head and neck on to the carriage itself.

Next to a powerful seat, the mouth of the horse and the lightness of the hand upon it are the requisites. "Half the value of a horse is in his mouth" is an old maxim. Few owners are aware how much "manners" depend upon the biting and handling of a horse. Shifting the rein from one bar to another makes all the difference in the going of the horse. The mouth is the link of communication between him and his driver; the bit must control him without fretting him, and the touch of the hand, unless light, deadens its own injunctions.

As the whip progresses in his craft, he will note many other minor details, apart from mere safety, which conduce to the welfare of his horse and carriage also. Though he is bound by rules of road at rencontre, he may choose his own path when all is clear; he need not take his share of rolling into shape newly-laid stones, if a smoother passage presents itself. Even if he cannot altogether avoid stones, he may yet ease the draught if he can manœuvre only one wheel on to a smooth surface.

FOUR-IN-HAND AND TANDEM DRIVING.

For the benefit of the aspirant to four-in-hand or tandem driving, we may append the following explanation of how to hold his reins.

Let him take up his reins thus (Fig. 4):—The near leader's rein (NL) between his thumb and forefinger, the off leader's (OL) between fore and middle, the near wheeler's (NW) between fore and middle, the off wheeler's (OW) between middle and third fingers. Thus, the forefinger parts the leaders' rein, the middle finger the wheelers', the near or left-hand rein in each case uppermost. (We have seen the driver of a mail, and more than one horsebreaker, adopt a different grasp, viz., the wheel reins as before, the leaders divided by the three centre fingers of the hand, so that the off-leader's rein passes between the third and little fingers, the other three reins in the same places as in the grip we first described. But this last grip, though it

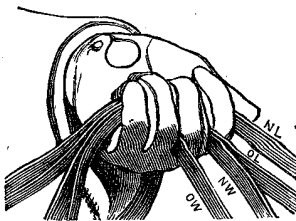


Fig. 4.—THE FOUR-IN-HAND GRIP.

separates the reins with a little more clearness than the former grip, exercises but little power over the off-leader's rein, and is therefore not to be recommended, and, in fact, may be styled unorthodox. That first described is the only grip to be adopted.)

Once on the box, he must take up his reins to suit the mouths of each of his team, and when he has once got the proper feel he should never part with it. If his horses are overdoing it, and require a stronger pull, he must not pull all the reins through his hands at once. If he does, ten to one he will lose the feel he has taken so much trouble to acquire. Let him take the reins into the parted fingers of his right hand firmly, an inch or two in front of his left, and then pass his hand in front and grip once more. Thus he retains his feel, with a stronger pull than he had before.

In selecting his horses for their places he should, of course, choose strong animals for wheelers; at the same time his leaders should always be fast trotters, and should be such that, with the lighter work they have to do, they will never tire before the wheelers. A tired wheeler may be dragged home by the rest of the team, but a tired leader blocks the whole concern.

In regulating his speed, or increasing his pace, he should first bring his wheelers up to his leaders; and the latter will soon get away in their turn, but he should never begin by forcing the leaders away from the wheelers.



Fig. 5.—A SLOVENLY LASH.

The handling of his whip will be a special study in itself, and he must devote some patient hours, standing on a chair, to acquiring the proper play of the wrist before he can be a workman in this respect. His lash, when not in use to hit a leader, should be caught at the point in the fingers of his right hand, as it returns from the stroke, and with a turn of the wrist should instantly be twisted, from the point upwards, round the crop of his whip, so that the surplus lash, from the top of the crop to the end of the twist, hangs in a close double thong from the top of the stock, ready for application to the leaders. Nothing looks so slovenly as to see a lash hanging as open as a letter U from the top and centre of the crop; added to which it is almost useless for punishment in such a position (Fig. 5). The play of the wrist, to catch the point and instantly to knit up the lash, must be a special study of itself. Always hit a leader below the bar, else it takes a dozen strokes to land one effectual punishment. Also put the freest leader on the near side, where he will be more under control.

Just as a pair of horses are safer than one, for each checks the vagaries of the other, so similarly a four-in-hand is an easier task than a tandem. A tandem leader, more than any animal, requires a good mouth, and a tight hand upon it; otherwise the whip may suddenly find him turning round and staring him full in the face, with a horse-laugh, which would be shared, at the driver's expense, by all lookers-on (Fig. 6). At the same time, since there are plenty of well-broken tandem leaders and steady wheelers to be found in livery stables and private houses, where a four-in-hand is not procurable, a tandem is a good and accessible school for an aspirant to commence upon, if, having mastered single and double harness, he seeks to soar higher.

Turning corners will be the bugbear of a tyro. He must learn to turn each pair on the same spot, letting the wheelers come up to where the leaders turned, before he attempts to turn them in the same direction. Each pair should turn in the centre of the road, otherwise one pair or the other will turn in the gutter, or thereabouts—an ugly, and possibly a dangerous, performance. A turn to the right is comparatively easy. In turning to the left, the right hand must not be stretched across to pull the leader's reins outwards, but the rein should be taken up quickly with the right hand, pulled in, and nipped at a shorter length in a loop between the thumb and forefinger of the left hand. The right hand is then liberated to steady the horses in the turn by touching the off rein, and to direct

the wheelers. So soon as the leaders have completed their turn, the left thumb is raised, the near rein slips back to its original length, which has been gripped all the time in the palm of the hand with the other fingers, and the length of the rein is *in statu quo*. But this can be shown far better by a practical illustration than by a verbal description.

If the aspirant really would be a master-hand in time, he must study his duty not only from the box, but from the harness-room and coach-house, and must



Fig. 6.—AN AWKWARD TANDEM LEADER.

understand the tools that he is working with. He must look to his harness himself; half the manners of his team depends upon the harness they carry. He should see that his pads are well stuffed, and free from gall; that each horse is suited with his collar, and, above all, with his bit, or he will have no delicacy of mouth, and it will then be impossible to keep the team evenly to their work. Sheer whip-cord will never effect this.

Apart from the injunctions here given to those who attempt the higher branches of the art, a few standard maxims to all who

essay to take a rein in their hands, or to sit by those who do, will not be out of place. *Imprimis*, come what may, short of horses bolting straight to a precipice, never jump from a carriage. If horses bolt, stick to the seat. If a collision or upset is to ensue, the carriage must strike the ground or the obstacle before its occupants; till it is reached, nothing can strike them. Thus, care must be taken to hold tight, lest the concussion should fling them out and they fall in the road. For one accident that occurs to persons sitting in overturned carriages, ten happen from leaps from the same while in motion. A road conveyance has never the momentum of a railway train. Its inmates need never fear that any force of collision will so shatter it as to crush them also. The horses act as buffers to the shock. Broken glass is almost the only danger; therefore, in a runaway brougham instantly lower the windows, and then *sit tight*.

Learn how to put your own horse into harness, and how to take him out again. This will be of much use to the "young whip," for he will sometimes find himself in a place where no one is in attendance to take charge of his horse at the moment.

Get a gentleman rather than a groom to instruct you; the latter will probably know far less than a good horseman and whip, and will, from want of education, have less knack for teaching what little he does know. For one good rider or coachman among grooms, there are scores among gentlemen.

Avoid familiarity with grooms, and do not let study of the ins and outs of the stable induce you to cultivate stable slang and stable acquaintances.

Nothing is more undignified than for a master not to know from his own practical knowledge when a groom is right and when wrong; to find fault without much cause only gives ground for excuse for the servant when the latter is really to blame. Never to find fault, when fault exists, makes the servant practically the master.