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EVILS OF MODERN STABLES*

James Irvine Lupton
(1884)

INTRODUCTION

Portions of veterinarian James Irvine Lupton's book on horse management that deal with the problems of confinement husbandry practices have been selected as a significant historical record of humane concerns that were documented one hundred years ago. While the author's descriptive prose may lack scientific "objectivity," it does express a common sense morality and the subjective and intuitive observations and conclusions of an experienced veterinarian who clearly respects and understands the horse. His words bespeak of a bygone era where the care or husbandry of animals was both an art and a science, a discipline based upon empathy, compassion and factual knowledge. How far indeed have we progressed, ethically and technologically, in improving the husbandry of domesticated animals, such as the horse, since 1884? While conditions may be more sanitary and diseases better understood, prevented, and treated, it is a fact that stabled horses in 1984 are too often kept under comparable conditions of extreme deprivation and show the same behavioral pathologies that Lupton so clearly describes.

M.W. Fox
Editor

**From Mayhew's Illustrated Horse Management (1884), revised and improved by James Irvine Lupton, M.R.C.V.S., author of several works on veterinary science and art. London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 13, Waterloo Place Pall Mall, S.W.*

THE EVILS WHICH ARE OCCASIONED BY MODERN STABLES

It does not require any vast expenditure of thought to discover that life is action; "to be," is synonymous with "to do": therefore, it is a sheer necessity of existence that an animated being must be doing something. Such is the primary consequence of existence. Thus, to breathe and to move imply one act; since, if the lungs cease to dilate, respiration immediately terminates, and, with it, animation comes to an end. Yet, it remained for mortal perversity to rebuke the first principle of established philosophy, when stables were built, in which a breathing animal was to be treated as it were an inanimate chattel.

Nature, like a kind mother, is to this day endeavouring to teach her wayward children a plain truth, which they may hourly behold enforced by visible examples. The wilful brood appears to be in no hurry to learn. Man still treats the horse as though he honoured the quadruped by enslaving it; and ennobled a life, by conferring upon the animal the title of his servant. He acts as though, by such conduct, sufficient reason were exhibited why he should oblige the creature to resign its instincts and relinquish its desires.

The equine race, when in a wild state, are gregarious, or congregate in herds. Man captures such a quadruped and places it in a stable, built to enforce the extreme of solitary confinement. The plain is the natural abode of the herd; on their speed depend both their pleasure and their safety. Man ties the domesticated horse to a manger, and pays a groom to enforce absolute stagnation upon innate activity. The "panting steed" is the most timid of living beings. Man insists the charger is possessed of extraordinary courage; he declares it delights in the tumult of battle; and he esteems it a glorious achievement to brutally coerce the timorous sensibility. The mild-eyed horse is, perhaps, the most simple of all the breathing beauties which adorn a wondrous world. Man declares all of the gentle breed have dangerous propensities, and are most inherently vicious.

Before subjugation, the creature fed off the surface of the earth. Man builds a house specially designed for the captive, in which the corn is placed on a level with the chest, and the hay is stationed as high up as the head. The animal is gifted with affections; it longs to gratify their promptings; it yearns for something upon which its abundant love may gush forth,—a fellow-prisoner—a goat—a dog—a cat—a fowl;—no matter what,—so it be some living object, on which may be lavished that excess of tenderness which, confined to its own breast, renders being miserable. Man esteems it his primary duty to clear the stable of all possible companionship; but the creature which would re-

joyce, were it only permitted to worship its enslaver, he rarely approaches without a loud voice, a harsh word, or a harsher blow, announcing his presence to the captive.

The inhabitant of such a prison, a domesticated horse miserably drags through a shortened life, under human *protection*. The nearest approach it can make to freedom is its period of labour. It always rejoices to quit its confinement; but, enfeebled by imprisonment, and subservient to man's exactions, it ever gladly returns to the place of its sorrow. In proportion as its limbs are finely made, and its actions are graceful, is it prized. It is never esteemed for its instincts, or credited with intelligence. It lives in so limited a space, that, in comparison with the dimensions of its abode, a man in a sentry-box dwells in a mansion; or a lion in a cage roams over a domain. A reasonable and an intelligent being commands his horse should be fastened to such a spot, and supposes that a living organism is to endure the confinement, which does not permit the body to turn round; that animated functions are to exist where most ordinary exercises are rendered impossible: nevertheless, he anticipates the creature will appear bounding with health, in answer to his requirements.

To be sure the prisoner, although its head be fastened (a restraint not imposed upon the most savage of carnivorous beasts), is permitted now to bear upon one leg, and then to change it for the other. It may perhaps lie down or stand up, without provoking chastisement. Neither head nor tail is forbidden a *proper* degree of motion. But at this point all indulgence is exhausted. It is tied to a rope two yards in length; but it may not go even to the extent of its tether; neither may it move close up to the manger; both acts are equally unpardonable: a properly behaved animal should stand quietly in the centre of its compartment, and always remain there when not lying down.

It is beaten, if its head be raised just to peep over the paling, to exchange a rub of the nose and to give, as well as accept, a warm stream of fragrant breath to and from its nearest fellow-misery. It must taste the full flavour of its captivity: no trivial act may distract attention from the horror of its position. It must lie down where it stands; and stand where it laid down. It must not display the grace and ease of motion with which it has been endowed; nor must it indulge the kindly feelings Providence has gifted it with. If the owner of the horse does not recognize the exquisite adaptation of sight, so as to infract the minutest particle, and to view the most distant object, the sensibility of hearing to which movements are audible, when to the duller perceptions of man no sound vibrates on the air; the keenness of scent, which can appreciate qualities in substances which to human sense are devoid of odour; the fleetness of motion which was permitted as a pro-

tection, the ease of which the most perfect machinery has failed to rival;—how can he expect his servant to inquire whether such attributes were given by Nature, only to be fastened by the head or to be confined within a space in which absolute stagnation must ultimately induce bodily incapacity.

Such a true “*Vis inertiae*” can alone be varied by the hours of labour and the periods of feeding. All pastime is unlawful; the most innocent amusement must be practised silently and in secret. Certain animals, however, try to get through the long hours of enforced idleness by quietly nibbling at the topmost rail of the manger. Large portions of tough wood are often removed after this fashion; and, to him who can rightly interpret signs, a thick post bitten away, fibre by fibre, will present melancholy evidence of that longing for employment, which could induce so great a waste of perseverance; for animals are naturally great economists of labour.

Other prisoners will endeavour to cheat the time by licking their mangers, apparently in the hope that some stray grain of corn may have escaped previous attention. The soft tongue of the horse, passed over the hardened surface of the wood, occasions no noise. Often a few grains will have lodged in the corners; then the effort to displace these affords a long game. Others, from want of something to do, or from finding impure air and inactivity do not, in accordance with the general doctrine, promote equine digestion, learn “to crib;” a few, from the operation of the like causes, become perfect as “wind suckers.” All “speed the weary hours” as they best can; and many heads are turned around to discover if it be feeding-time again; not that they are hungry, but eating is an occupation, and they sadly wish for some employment.

Certain quadrupeds, under these circumstances, adopt a habit, which is the more remarkable, because hours of tedium have generated the like indulgence in human beings. Mortals, when compelled to remain stationary, and forced to preserve silence, often strive to kill time by rocking to and fro, or by “see-sawing” their bodies. Such a pitiable excuse for amusement is very common among the little people whose undeveloped limbs are perched on high forms, and in whose hands are fixed very uninteresting primers, from which the infant mind wanders into vacuity during the hours of imprisonment which occur in those pleasing places termed “Preparatory Schools.” The horse, also, when forbidden the pleasures in which Nature formed it to delight, will move its head methodically from one side of its stall to the other, and will continue thus engaged for hours together.

So exciting a pastime, most sane people might deem to be harmless enough; but by the arbitrary notions of rectitude entertained with-

in the stable such custom is punished as a vice. A horse which "seesaws" is said to weave, and weaving is, by grooms, esteemed highly culpable, and is usually corrected with the lash.

Can human perversity conceive a life without a pastime, and vexatiously impose this terrible fate upon the creature whose existence is devoted to man's service? When in the field, the horse is never idle. The only amusement of the simple animal lies in its perpetual occupation. What a despairing sorrow must therefore afflict such an existence, when dragging through its time under the fostering care of the enslaver. Yet how proudly do some intellectual beings boast of their stables and of the ceaseless attention lavished on their studs. What is it this assiduity realizes to the creature on which it is expended? Stagnation to the active, and solitude to the gregarious. Movement draws down punishment, as it were a fault. Any attempt to while away the tedious hours is esteemed "a vice"; sensation must be checked, and feeling, man insists shall be suppressed. But who, among the millions of intellectual masters, sufficiently understands the quadruped, over which they all usurp authority, to regard the huge bulk of that endurance, as the embodiment of the acutest form of every possible earthly misery?

Perpetual inaction also occasions waste of food: the horse, wanting exercise, stares at his provender, but has no appetite; the hay piled up before it is nothing more than matter out of place.

Desire is needed to give value to such abundance; and a non-reasoning being cannot be expected to prize that which it does not require. It cannot eat; but it lacks amusement. The hay is before it. In sheer idleness, a few stalks are pulled from the rack. Of these, one may be leisurely masticated; but the remainder, after having been twisted about the lips, are allowed to fall upon the litter. The sport is followed up until the rack is emptied; and the creature is a little happier, under a conviction that it has escaped from absolute stagnation.

The sin, if there be any, certainly must remain with the man who piled up the provender before the animal which was without an appetite.

Simple natures, when entirely disengaged, generally make their own employment, and that employment, being intended for a passing amusement, commonly consists of what thrifty people designate "mischief." The knowledge, that displeasure will follow upon discovery, may spice the proceeding which otherwise might want interest. At all events, so it is with children; and it may be thus with animals. When a heaped manger is before a satiated quadruped, the impossibility of feeding makes the creature meditate upon the uses to which the grain can possibly be applied. None can be discovered. The head of the captive is tied, and the manger is fixed. At length, in carelessness of spirit, a mouthful is taken from the heap. The portion cannot be swallowed,

so the lips are moved, and, as they part, the corn falls over them upon the ground. This may not be a very exciting recreation; but the prisoner is restless with repletion. It cannot sleep; and the grain passing over the lips, in which equine feeling concentrates, produces a slight and a novel sensation.

Can any man seriously pronounce that an animal, standing in enforced solitude and compulsory idleness, is to blame for such conduct? Boys, during their school days, when wanting appetite, or having unnecessary food before them, will not they, in satiety, play with needless abundance? Are men to demand that prudence from an animal, which we should certainly not anticipate in the young of our own species? Yet the child enjoys a certain amount of confidence; and its misdoing is, therefore, aggravated by a certain abuse of trust. The horse is confined between boards, and enjoys not the smallest personal liberty. The severity of captivity argues, that no reliance reposes upon the captive's discretion. All responsibility is lost when all freedom of action is denied. Yet the poor prisoner is cruelly beaten for playing with food, although the true fault rested upon him who was too idle to give the exercise which would have generated appetite; and was too lazy to proportion the animal's sustenance to the requirements of its situation.

Another so-named "vice" of the horse is frequently the occasion of more serious results than any of the before-mentioned accidents. No person has hitherto explained why the skin should be more irritable by night than during the daytime. Such, however, is the case with horses, as it is with men. A quadruped, in the morning, is often found disfigured by the hair being removed from comparatively large surfaces. Itchiness has provoked the animal to rub itself against any prominence, or to scratch its body with the toe of its iron shoe; this indulgence has caused the blemish.

Itching and scratching are numbered among the worst "vices" of the stable. Such faults, however, are only discovered in their effects; the groom never estimates, when flogging an animal for this wickedness, how far the abhorred sin may have been produced by stimulating diet, by want of exercise, and by impure atmosphere. No! he clothes up the body of the animal; shuts every window; stops every cranny; and locks the stable door for the night. The last meal being consumed, and the quadrupeds not being inclined for sleep, they one and all begin to itch. Legs are nibbled; necks are rubbed; and tails are lashed. At length one is sensible of an irritation behind the ear. The head is turned toward the side; the body is curved to the full extent; and the hind leg brought forward. Then, the groom not being present, the toe of the hind shoe can touch the part, and the horse luxuriates in a hearty titillation.

When the head was turned toward the quarters, however, the collar-rope, being attached to the halter, was also stretched in that direc-

tion. The hind foot having performed its office, a desire is felt to return to the natural position. The attempt is made; but this is found to be impracticable. The creature strains against the opposing force, but its struggles only render its comfortless attitude the more fixed. The truth is, that while devoted to the act which allays cuticular irritability, the pastern has slipped over the collar-rope. Such a mishap not only fixes the leg, but fastens the head. With the neck bent and one leg disabled, the animal cannot exert half its power; neither can simplicity comprehend the source of its unnatural constraint. Long continuance of the position becomes painful; alarm seizes upon timidity; the struggles grow desperate; and the poor quadruped, at length, is cast with terrible violence upon the straw which had been shaken down for its repose.

The strongest testimony, however, against stables, as such buildings are at present erected, is perhaps borne by the animals which inhabit those places. The horse is a delicate test, which man would do well to attentively observe when he is desirous of ascertaining the healthfulness of any locality. Naturally it is all animation and gaiety of spirit. But, however much these qualities may be esteemed, such equine recommendations will soon fade before the joint influence of impure air and close confinement, although you may groom and feed at discretion. The natural period of life is diminished one half, while much more than half of the remaining years is rendered useless by age, prematurely brought on by inappropriate treatment.