

WARD C. S.

HINTS ON DRIVING

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Hints on Driving

HINTS ON DRIVING

BY C. S. WARD,

THE WELL-KNOWN “WHIP OF THE WEST,”

Paxton Stables (opposite Tattersall’s)

It has been said, and not, perhaps, without reason, that a man who is conscious that he possesses some practical knowledge of a science, and yet refrains from giving the public the benefit of his information, is open to the imputation of selfishness. To avoid that charge, as far as lies in my power, I purpose, in the course of the following pages, to give my readers the benefit of my tolerably long experience in the art of driving four horses—an art which I acquired under the following circumstances.—

My father was a coach proprietor as well as a coachman, and, I am proud to say, one of the best whips of his day. He gave me many opportunities of driving a team. I will not, however, enter into all the details of my youthful career, but proceed to state, that at the early age of seventeen I was sent nightly with the Norwich and Ipswich Mail as far as Colchester, a distance of fifty-two miles. Never having previously travelled beyond Whitechapel Church, on that line of road, the change was rather trying for a beginner. But Fortune favoured me; and I drove His Majesty’s Mail for nearly five years without an accident. I was then promoted to the “Quicksilver,” Devonport Mail, the fastest at that time out of London. It must be admitted that I undertook this task under difficult circumstances—involving as it did, sixty miles a night—since many had tried it ineffectually, or at all events were unable to accomplish the duty satisfactorily. It is gratifying to me to reflect, that I drove this coach more than seven years without a single mishap.

Getting at length rather tired of such incessant and monotonous nightly work, I applied for a change to my employer, the well-known and much-respected Mr. Chaplin, who at that time had seventeen hundred horses employed in coaching. His reply was characteristic. “I cannot find you all day coaches,” said he; “besides, who am I to get to drive your Mail?” I must say, I thought this rather severe at the time, but, good and kind-hearted man as he was, he did not forget me.

Not long after this interview, the Brighton Day Mail being about to start, he made me the offer, to drive the whole distance and horse the coach a stage, with the option of driving it without horsing. Like most young men I was rather ambitious, and closed with the former conditions. The speculation, however, did not turn out a very profitable one, and, the railway making great progress, I sold my horses to Mr. Richard Cooper, who was to succeed me on the box. I was then offered the far-famed Exeter “Telegraph,” one of the fastest and best-appointed coaches in England. My fondness for coaching still continuing, and not feeling disposed to settle to any business, I drove this coach from Exeter to Ilminster and back, a distance of sixty-six miles, early in the morning and late at night. After driving it three years, the railway opened to Bridgewater; this closed the career of the once-celebrated “Telegraph.” But those who had so long shared its success, were not inclined to knock under. My

brother coachman and myself, together with the two guards, accordingly started a “Telegraph” from Devonport to London, a distance of ninety-five miles by road, joining the rail at Bridgewater, thus making the whole journey two hundred and fifty miles in one day. At that time there was a coach called the “Nonpareil,” running from Devonport to Bristol.

The proprietors of this vehicle, thinking that our’s would take off some of their trade, made their’s a London coach also, and started at the same time as we did. We then commenced a strong opposition. I had a very good man to contend against—William Harbridge, a first-class coachman. We had several years of strong opposition, the rail decreasing the distance every year, till it opened to Exeter. The “Nonpareil” was then taken off, and they started a coach called the “Tally Ho!” against the poor old “Telegraph.” Both coaches left Exeter at the same time, and this caused great excitement. Many bets, of bottles of wine, dinners for a dozen, and five-pound notes, were laid, as to which coach would arrive first at Plymouth. I had my old friend Harbridge again, as my competitor. The hotel that I started from, was a little farther down the street than the one whence the “Tally Ho!” appeared, so that as soon as I saw my friend Harbridge mounting the box, I did the same, and made the running. We had all our horses ordered long before the usual time. Harbridge came sailing away after me; the faster he approached, the more I put on the steam. He never caught me, and, having some trifling accident with one of his horses over the last stage, he enabled me to reach Plymouth thirty-five minutes before he came in. My guard, who resided in St. Albans-street, Devonport, hurried home, and as the other coach passed, he called out and asked them to stop and have some supper; they also passed my house, which was a little farther on, in Fore-street. I was sitting at the window, smoking, and offered them a cigar as they passed—a joke they did not, of course, much relish. The next night they declared they would be in first; but it was of no use, the old “Telegraph” was not to be beaten. Thus it went on for several weeks; somehow they were never able to get in first. We did the fifty miles several times in three hours and twenty-eight minutes (that is, at the average rate of a mile in four minutes and nine seconds, including stoppages), and for months together, we never exceeded four hours.

Still, in every contest, one party must ultimately give in; that one, however, was not the “Telegraph.” We settled our differences, and went on quietly for the remainder of the time, occasionally having a little “flutter,” as we used to call it in those days, but we were always good friends. Should this narrative chance to meet the eye of some of those who used to travel with us in bygone times, they will doubtless well remember the pace we used to go.

After a few years, the railway opened to Plymouth, and many gentlemen asked me to start a fast coach into Cornwall, promising to give it their patronage; I accordingly started the “Tally Ho!” making it a day coach from Truro to London, joining the rail at Plymouth; this was a very difficult road for a fast coach, but we ran it, till Government offered the contract for a Mail; we then converted the “Tally Ho!” into a Mail, and ran it till the rail opened to Truro. It will have been seen that I kept to coaching nearly as long as there were any coaches left to drive.

I had for some years given up driving regularly, having taken the Horse Bazaar at Plymouth, where I used to supply officers of the garrison with teams, and give them instructions in driving; this I still continue to do, and in every variety of driving. It gives me, indeed, much pleasure to see many of my pupils daily handling their teams skilfully; not a few of them giving me good reason to be really proud of them, as I know they do me credit. In my description of my driving career, I stated that I had never had an accident; I ought to have said, no serious casualty, never having upset or injured any one; but I have had many trifling mishaps, such as running foul of a waggon in a fog, having my whole team down in slippery weather; on many occasions I have had a wheel come off, but still nothing that could fairly be termed a bad accident.

During the last twenty-five years I have been engaged keeping livery stables and breaking horses to harness, and in that period I have had some very narrow escapes. In one instance, the box of a new double break came off and pitched me astride across the pole between two young horses; I once had the top of the pole come off when driving two high-couraged horses; a horse set to kicking, and ran

away with me in single harness. As I was of course pulling at him very hard, my feet went through the bottom of the dog-cart, he kicking furiously all the time. Fortunately I escaped with only a few bruises. On another occasion, in single harness, a mare began kicking, and, before I could get her head up, she ran against the area railings of a house in Princess Square, Plymouth, broke both shafts, and split the break into matches; myself and man nearly went through the kitchen window, into the arms of the cook; she did not, however, ask us to stop and dine.

I could mention many little events of a similar kind, and consider myself very fortunate in having never had anything more serious than a sprained ankle or wrist during my tolerably long career. I will now commence my instructions.

RULE I. SELECTION OF THE TEAM

The first thing the pupil should do, is to select four horses as nearly as possible of the same temper. Never keep a puller, for it takes your attention from things that require all your care, makes your arm ache, in fact, does away with all pleasure. I should recommend hiring or purchasing four horses that will give you no trouble, and when you can pull them about, and do nearly as you please with them, you can then get your permanent team, which will require a very judicious selection, particularly if you intend to pride yourself upon colour as well as action. I was told by a gentleman, that he was ten years, getting a perfect team of black browns; he did not confine himself to price, and he certainly now has a very nice team—and they ought indeed to be perfect, after all the time, labour and expense that have been bestowed upon them.

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