

AN ENGLISHMAN'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS  
OF AMERICAN TROTTING.

To the genuine sportsman, in the true acceptation of the word, sport of any kind, so long as it is sport, never comes amiss. He is as keen with a couple of wire terriers in a rickyard killing a cat in February, as he is at the cover's side in the month of November, sitting on his throne of imperiousness from Tattersall's, waiting in the down-wind side, whilst fifteen couples of the best bred hounds in the world are making poor R. yard's home too hot to hold him. His pulse beats just as quickly, when in a spanking breeze with his sheets hauled aboard, the blue water dancing merrily over her lee-rail, with one reef down in her mainsail, and just as much anxious as she can stop a r under, he sets his little salt-hen for the markboat, a twenty mile dash to seaward, as it does when he creeps up within shot of a lonely stag on the rugged hill after a long and tedious stalk; yes, to such an one, in whatever shape and form it comes, all is sport. It was with such feelings as these that I accepted the kind invitation of an influential sporting friend in New York to accompany him to the Summer Meeting of the Hudson River Park Association at Poughkeepsie, feeling certain that there must be something very much more attractive in these trotting races than the garbled descriptions I had heard and read in the Old Country would lead me to suppose.

Railway stations are more or less the same all over the world, and I don't think the Grand Central Depot of New York is any exception to the rule. On arrival there I found the same individuals anxious to take charge of your luggage, the same itinerant vendors of periodicals, the same grave looking consequential officials, the same fussy old woman, nervous about being too late for the train, and mounting a strict guard over her luggage, the same paterfamilias with a family of half-grown-up daughters going away from the heat of New York, the same bustle and activity, everyone making for the platform at the same time, as anywhere else. What I did gratefully miss was the oppressive difficulty which one is subjected to in England of getting a comfortable carriage. Here, thank goodness, in this great country of progress, talent, and industry, where time is money, and speed the maximum omnium, where even people abbreviate long words in conversation because, as I was told by a lady, they "can't spare the time to put all that in," they have changed all this. An official stands on the platform with a plan of the carriage, he shows you what seats you can have, and those that are occupied, so that when you get into the charming, airy, sociable, saloon carriage you don't have any plethoric gentleman or irascible old lady darting at you, with "That's my place sir, that seat is engaged." Accordingly, I soon found myself seated, and the train making its way through the deep cuttings and tunnels between New York and Harlem. Emerging from the last tunnel I found myself crossing the Harlem River, dear to the boating fraternity of New York. I wish Mr. Willing, or any of our great advertising agents, had been with me, they might have learnt a lesson of profit and instruction. Every available rock, post, tree, and wall being plastered with advertisements; pills, ointments, and bitters seeming to have the best of it. At King's Bridge, after passing under the handsome aqueduct that helps to supply New York with water, I caught a glimpse of a lovely little bit of scenery. In the middle distance, the King's Bridge Hotel, perched upon a rock overlooking the tranquil waters of the river, and half hidden by umbrageous foliage, an undulating landscape of foliage fading away in the distance, backed by towering masses of white cumulus clouds, their edges blazing in dazzling whiteness under the fierce rays of a noon-day sun, while the foreground was enlivened by various craft at anchor and small boats.

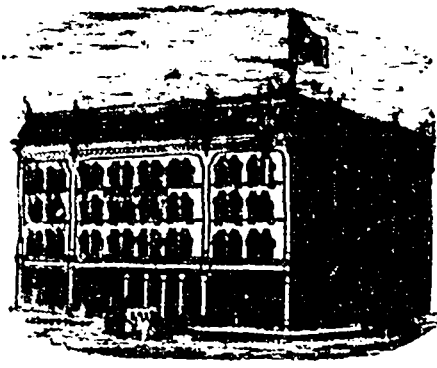
At Spuyten Duyvil I got my first glimpse of the Hudson. May I be permitted a few words descriptive of the impression that was made upon me when the mighty panorama first caught my eye, as the train sped round the somewhat abrupt curve? Well, perhaps I had better not, for what poor words of mine can ever add to a picture which has been drawn by poets that are immortalized in the history of the country? Suffice it to say that I have seen nature in all her grandeur, in almost every portion of the globe, but never have I been so impressed as when my eye first rested on the mighty bosom of this noble river, studded with forest and afterschooners, their white sails glistening in the sunshine, and bellying out to the soft southerly breeze, as they worked their way up the river. And now the train hurries me on past Peekskill, to the scene of Lup Van Winkle's adventures under the shadow of the mighty Storm King, just the place where the gallant Andre was taken during the War of Independence; past West Point and its military precincts, and so on until I found myself at Poughkeepsie, which, by the time, I had learned to pronounce, to save time, in the proper manner.

Those of my countrymen who have never had the advantage of passing any time with American families in their own homes, know very little of Americans. Their experience, like Mr. Hopworth Dixon's, and that class of men who pretend to describe America and Americans, is generally picked up from the ever fluctuating stories at a hotel, the heterogeneous masses on board steamers, or travellers on saloon carriages. From such descriptions I was led to expect a very different class of beings from the one I found, although I am free to confess that I have never seen the American mob, as described by them, in no very small quantities. An American lady and gentleman in their own house are different from the impression which is first made on the stranger by his contact with the

seem to come more readily to the end of my pen. Horses walking about in clothing, solemn looking earnest knots of dust-dusted gentlemen, with a strong element of the professional tout about them; black stable boys hissing away as they cleaned their harness; short, trim, wiry little figures, with that unmistakably horsey look that dubbed them at once as drivers; auk-kies scattered here and there, horses just coming in from their work and others going out, completed a picture at once novel and interesting.

The first thing that struck me was the apparent carelessness with which the door of each horse's box was left open; most of the animals standing with their heads out inviting the caressing hand of any blackguard who chose to molest them. Yes, there they were, the horses upon whom public money was to be freely laid out, who carried the hopes, and perhaps the last cent of many a poor devil who had piled it on as his last chance; open to the free inspection of any lounging loafer rolled along. No. 4 box held a favorite who had just come in from his work, and was rolling, after being scraped down, making it very apparent that the boxes were far too narrow for such an operation; in fact, if two boxes were knocked into one, there would not be more room than we consider necessary for a racehorse, more particularly when he is in strong work. The ventilation also of the boxes was not what it ought to be, especially in such a climate, for, to enable a horse to have perfect quiet, a most essential thing after hard work, the door of the box must be closed, or a blanket hung across the entrance. Nervous horses know as well as possible what is going to happen, and as soon as they see a crowd of people, a sulky, or anything else that their eye has been accustomed to connect with a racecourse, they begin to scour, break out, get fidgety, and consequently lose their condition. This was most truthfully illustrated at Poughkeepsie. What, too, is to prevent a man from sending Sambo round to the nearest bar for a drink whilst he drops a powder into the horse's bucket of water? or who will be able to find out how that jagged nail was fixed in the pad of the harness as it hangs carelessly on a nail within reach of everyone. The bridle too, with its bit on, cleaned as bright as silver, invites the unscrupulous passer-by to smear it with the most approved drug. Just fancy, thought I, the two first favorites for the Derby or Leger placed at the mercy of the sporting fraternity of England, like I saw Thorndale, Adelaide, or Slow Go? So I came to the conclusion that there must be more honesty about trotting in America than we can lay claim to for racing in England, an opinion which further experience, I am sorry to say, did not enable me to endorse. The next object of interest was, of course, the sulky. Built almost entirely of hickory, these fairy vehicles are at once a marvel of lightness and strength, almost impossible to conceive. The wheels seemed to me to be about five feet in diameter, and the total weight averaging from 40 lbs. to 50 lbs. Passing from the sulkies to the harness, I saw some curious inventions, the most notable being a pad upon the girth, so as to prevent a horse with unusually high action from striking himself about the region of the heart. This I was told was an invention of Dan Mace, the George Fordham of the American trotting turf.

And now it was time to have a look at the track as the morning was rapidly advancing. The first horse that came by was the renowned stallion, Smuggler, and I must confess I was not very much impressed with his appearance. He was going round the track at about half speed, and seemed to me to go very sore on his near front leg. In his action he dishes with his fore foot and goes very wide behind, but his stride is marvelous, and as he swung by me at an approved pace, he looked to me more like a winged horse than anything else. When he pulled up I had a good look at him, and felt surprised that upon the very day he was to run, in all probability a punishing race, he had got such a grueling, in fact, his condition was, in my opinion, simply wretched. He showed signs of unmistakable distress—his stomach was drawn up to his back bone—his lightness here made more apparent from the want of that extra rib, which, with but few exceptions, might be said of the other horses. This surprised me as Smuggler is as deep as a well from below the withers; but the result of his running that day proved that I was not far out in my calculations. Next to Smuggler came Thorndale. He was, in my opinion, the nearest horse on the course—I mean of his class, viz., half-bred. As he stood still, to permit his driver, Mr. Dobble, to get up, I had an opportunity of running the rule over him. If anything, Thorndale's condition was as much too big as the other horse's was too light, especially about the neck; but his trainer had evidently managed to get some of the beef off his ribs, and develop his muscular quarters and grand forearm. Thorndale's action when extended is, in my opinion, not trotting, and had I been judge I should unquestionably disqualified him; but it appears that this sort of skipping action has been freely permitted, and therefore, of course, to what is allowed there can be no objection. Thorndale went through as severe a handling as Smuggler, being sent a severe buster twice round the track. I walked back with him to his stable, and I must confess that had he been my property, nothing should have induced me to have run him on that day. It is impossible for any one who has been in the habit of training horses to deny that severe work on the day of a race is more weakening to a horse's constitution than anything else. In a flat race a horse has only one effort to make and he has done for the day, but in trotting a horse is often called upon to compete in many heats at a pace, which calls all the energies, muscular development, powers of staying and breeding into operation; it is then to be



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