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## FIRE HORSES.

EVERYBODY knows that a fire-engine horse is a large, strongly built, handsome animal, with a broad forehead and an intelligent eye. He wears neither check nor blinders, and is never blanket-ed, except when he stands out in the street; but his coat is nicely groomed, his hoofs are well oiled; he is usually in the pink of condition; his social affec-

tions and faculties are highly cultivated; interested looks follow him when he takes his daily exercise; and, seen in full progress to a fire, he is an object of respect and admiration, almost of terror.

His work is different from that of any other horse in the world, and it requires a peculiar combination of qualities. The fire steed must be able to

draw an extremely heavy load at a smart gallop; in short, his function is that of a running draft-horse. Engines, with the men who ride on them, usually weigh about 8000 pounds, or four tons: some are a thousand pounds lighter; others as much, or nearly as much, heavier. The chemical engines are less ponderous, varying from 2500 (this kind employs but one horse) to 7500 pounds. The hose carriages attached to the fire engines, and drawn by one horse, are, as a rule, about half the weight of the engines, but sometimes much more. Two-wheel carts were formerly used for this purpose, but they have been superseded, in Boston and in most other cities, by four-wheel wagons, which, though not so picturesque, are much easier for the horse, inasmuch as none of the weight comes upon his back.

Hook and ladder trucks, with their men, vary in weight from 4350 to 10,600 pounds, the only truck which reaches these last-mentioned figures being hauled by three horses, harnessed abreast. There is another very heavy one, weighing 9535 pounds, which is kept on Harrison Avenue, and is drawn by two huge grays, — one of the largest spans in the department. The engines usually fit the horse-car tracks, which is a great advantage; whereas the hook and ladder trucks are too broad for this, and they are so extremely long that a large part of the weight is far from the horses, which of course makes it harder to haul; but, again, the load is more "springy," not so dead as that of the engine, and the two kinds of apparatus are, on the whole, probably about equally difficult to pull. Some of the longest trucks, as most of my readers know, are provided with a sort of steering apparatus for the hind wheels, so that the helmsman, who sits immediately above the axle, is able to turn them sharply in going around a corner. By this device the necessity of a "wide" turn is avoided, and the driver is able to "cut" the corners as

closely as if he had an ordinary length of vehicle behind him. Sometimes a tough spiral spring, made of steel, is inserted in the trace of a fire horse's harness, near the whiffletree, the object being to lessen the strain at starting. This extremely ingenious device enables the horses to exert their strength against a yielding connection, instead of against a dead weight, — a certain momentum being acquired by them before the whole load moves. It is on the same principle that the couplings which unite a train of loaded cars must be somewhat loose, in order that the locomotive may start the train. Motion is then communicated from the first car to the second, and so on (as the spectator may readily perceive); whereas, if all the couplings were tense, the whole train would have to start at once.

In the city proper, where most of the runs are short, the whole distance is usually covered at a gallop, except where some hill or obstruction intervenes; and this performance tries the animal of whom it is required through and through, so that if there be a weak spot in him it is soon discovered. In the first place, he must be big and heavy. Boston fire horses vary from 1200 to 1600 pounds; very few, if any, quite reaching the maximum, and most of them weighing about 1400 pounds, — rather less than more. But the fire horse must also be active, as well as big and strong; he must have good feet, good wind, and finally, to execute his ordinary task, he must be in hard condition. When the horses are first bought, they are almost invariably fat and soft; but they are immediately assigned to a station, without any training or preparation. Consequently, they must be humored, and, if need be, restrained somewhat, during their first months of service. Should they be driven hard at this time, they might easily become "touched in the wind," or otherwise disabled; and this sometimes happens through careless or



unskillful driving. The best and strongest horse in the world, if out of condition, cannot safely be called upon for an extraordinary effort. (There is a hint here, by the way, for fat or elderly people who persist in running for trains.)

Elsewhere the weight of fire horses is commonly about the same as it is in Boston. In Cambridge, in Lynn (which has an excellent department), and in Providence they have none over 1400 pounds; in Chicago the limit is given as 1450; but in Brooklyn comparatively light horses are used, their weight varying from 1150 to 1350 pounds; and the veterinary surgeon attached to this department states that he prefers those approaching the minimum.

As a rule, short-legged and short-backed horses are the best for drawing engines. It is indeed a general equine principle that "weight-pullers" should be formed in this way: they are more nimble, take shorter steps, recover themselves more easily, than longer-legged and longer-striding animals. The trotters who make fast records to skeleton wagons (much heavier than sulkies) are almost invariably of such a construction. I have been told of a pair of tough roans built thus, and weighing not much more than 1200 pounds, who could pull a heavy engine at wonderful speed; but, unfortunately, the near horse had a habit of balking on the threshold of the engine house, when harnessed for a fire, which so delayed the apparatus that his subsequent speed did not make up for the time lost, and he was retired to private life.

One of the best, oldest, and lightest engine horses in Boston is also built on this model. He is a rather plain, brown fellow, weighing only about 1175 pounds, with a strong, short back, splendid shoulder, and stout limbs, with big knees and short cannon-bones. His expression is extremely gentle and intelligent. At present he serves as the off horse on the chemical engine in Bulfinch Street, his mate being a handsome dapple gray,

with white flowing tail. The brown horse is reckoned by the engine men to be twenty-two years old, having been in the service for many years. I suspect that there is some exaggeration in this statement, but he is certainly an old horse. His mate is ten, and considerably larger, but the two step well together, and make a fast team. Their driver assured me that he had once given the protective company a fair beating on Washington Street, in a race to a fire.

Of the gray horse, a good and, I believe, on investigation, a true story is told. In the same building with the chemical engine is an ordinary fire engine, the two "houses" being connected by hallways. At one time the gray horse was transferred to the other engine, and put in one of the stalls behind it. In the middle of the first night after this change had been made, an alarm of fire was sounded. The men tumbled out of bed, rushed down to the engine floor, and found the other horse standing in his place by the pole, ready to have the collar fastened about his neck; but the gray was missing. They looked in his stall, but it was vacant; "neither hide nor hair of him" could be found, and it seemed clear that the animal had been stolen by some bold thief. Presently, however, a horse was heard moving about in the adjoining house, and it proved to be one belonging to the chemical engine, which had already gone to the fire. He was of course immediately put in the place of the missing beast, and the engine finally got under way. The fact was that when the alarm sounded, and the doors of the stable flew open, the gray had gone to his old place on the chemical engine, and pushed aside the horse already standing there, who, finding that he was not wanted, returned to his stall. The men, in the hurry of the moment, harnessed such animals as offered themselves, and were off without discovering the mistake.



There is a reason why ladder-truck horses should be taller than engine horses: the apparatus which they draw is at a much higher level from the ground than is the bulk of an engine, and consequently a low-standing animal would waste part of his efforts in pulling downward instead of pulling forward. Some ladder-truck horses are shaped in one important respect like Maud S., Sunol, and other fast trotters and runners, namely, higher at the rump than at the withers, and with long hind legs. This is not considered a good conformation for a cart horse; but it seems to answer well where, as in the case of a ladder truck, horses are required which have strength, height, and speed.

Such being the kind of horse needed for fire engines, let us now visit a new recruit in his quarters. The weather being warm, the doors of the house are open, a rope being stretched across the entrance. Directly in front of us stands the engine, a polished mass of copper and nickel, with scarlet wheels. The driver's seat is a small box, just big enough to hold him, and behind it, rolled up separately, are strapped the blankets. The harness is suspended from the ceiling in such a manner that it can be let down when the horses stand under it. Back of the engine, and some yards distant as a rule, a partition, composed chiefly of doors, runs across the house. Behind this partition are the stalls; the horses facing the engine, and the front of each stall being a door, with a window in it. Bridles are worn night and day, the bits being slipped out when the animals eat their oats, but kept in while they chew their hay. Some few horses, whose mouths are tender, are bridled in the stables, with the bit hanging loose.

Now, then, we will suppose that an alarm of fire strikes, the hour being midnight. The horses are lying down, out of sight and fast asleep; the men

are upstairs in bed, — all save one, who dozes in a chair beside those mysterious telegraphic instruments, grouped in a corner near the front door. The gas burns brightly, but there is not a sign of animation about the place. It is all so miraculously clean, so neat, well ordered, burnished, and polished, so nearly deserted, so absolutely quiescent, and yet so brilliantly lighted, that it appears rather like an illusion than a reality. The engine might be the huge and magnificent toy of a giant. It looks much too fine for real use. But, as we were saying, an alarm sounds, and the scene changes. In a corner of the ceiling, near the front door, is a circular opening, through which, rising from the floor, there passes a shining brass pole. When the men are called out, they throw themselves on this pole, and come down like a flash of lightning; the feet of the second man almost touching the head of the first, and so on. The horses scramble on their legs, the doors in front of them fly open, and out they rush, their heavy iron-shod hoofs thundering over the floor. Each horse goes to his proper place; the driver, from his seat, lets down the harness; two or three men standing at the pole snap the collars together, fasten the reins to the bits, and off they go. There is nothing more to be done: the girths are not used in running to a fire; the traces are already attached to the whiffletrees and the polestraps to the collars, so that the fastening of two collars and four reins constitutes the harnessing. Often, perhaps commonly, the horses are harnessed and everything is ready for a start before the gong has finished telling the number of the box. Half a minute is about the maximum time for companies in a first-class department to make ready and leave the house; and the ordinary time is, I believe, fifteen or twenty seconds. The fire marshal of the Chicago department informs me that, "on the test of a certain engine, with men in bed and



horses in stalls, the hind wheels of the apparatus crossed the threshold in eleven seconds." For the Brooklyn department the time is given as "from four to eight seconds, according to distance of horses from the engine."

To teach a green nag to come out of his stall at the signal and range himself alongside the pole is not so difficult as might be imagined. We will suppose that a span of new horses are assigned to a certain engine, the old pair, as is the custom, being taken away at the same time. The surroundings are strange and more or less terrible to them, but they are handled very gently and carefully, and gradually lose their fears. The schooling begins at once, the driver being assisted by the other men. The ordinary signal is given, as if for a fire; the stall doors open; the horses are led out, put in position, harnessed, and in a few minutes led back; and then the process is repeated perhaps half a dozen times. Great pains are taken that the animals shall not strike against anything, or by any means become frightened. The unusual spectacle of a harness suspended in the air is apt to disturb them at first, but they are led slowly up to it, induced to smell of it, to inspect it on all sides, and thus to learn that it is perfectly harmless. In the same way they are accustomed to all the other objects about them, being continually patted and encouraged. The chief traits of the horse are the great strength of his memory, especially of his faculty of association, and his timidity. The fireman's task, therefore, is first to convince his pupil, by gentle treatment, that no harm threatens him, and then to establish a connection in his mind between the proper signal, the opening of the stall door, and a progress thence to his station by the engine pole. After being led to their positions what it is thought may prove a sufficient number of times, the horses are allowed to come out at the signal, of their own

accord, a man standing behind to touch them up a little if they do not start promptly when the gong sounds and the doors open.

Of course no two horses learn with equal rapidity, and the difference between them in this respect is greater than might be supposed. Two weeks constitute about the average period of instruction, during which time two or three lessons a day are given: but horses have been known to learn in one lesson; and others, again, have been months in arriving at the same proficiency. A pair of gray horses, newly purchased for the East Street engine, in Boston, were led out three times in the manner just described. They were then left to themselves: the gong sounded, the stall doors opened, and the pair trotted out, each going to his place alongside the pole. They had caught the idea at once. These horses are remarkable not only for intelligence, but for strength and speed. They are both, and the off one especially, of a type different from that of any other fire horses that I have seen, being very tall (the off one is seventeen hands) rangy, slightly wasp-waisted, and having fine, thin necks and small, well-bred heads. They are great gallopers, and the hose-wagon horse has hard work to keep up with them; but this too is a remarkable animal. He is one of the oldest horses in the department, having served ten years, and being, naturally, a little stiff in the legs; but his strength is so great and his courage so good that even these powerful, flying grays cannot draw away from him. He is a big brown horse, with a great shoulder, the best of short legs, and a noble countenance. His original cost was the unusually large sum of \$450, but the bargain has proved a good one for the city. Old as he is, being sixteen or seventeen years at least, he is thought to have made the best run of his life a few weeks ago, galloping all the way from East Street



to Battery Wharf, a distance of a mile, or more. A little blood trickled from his nostrils when he pulled up behind the engine, but otherwise he seemed none the worse for the immense exertion.

Another big horse, of the greyhound type already described, — that is, having long hind legs and standing higher at the rump than at the withers, — was four months in learning the business. He is a gray, with a long, rather coarse head, and small "mouse" ears out of proportion to his size, for he weighs 1380 pounds; but this evidently mongrel beast is not altogether devoid of intelligence, being steady enough on the street to serve as a leader when three horses are used, and on one occasion he allowed the whiffletree to fall on his legs without starting to run. This horse is used with a ladder truck, and his education was finally accomplished by fencing in his path from the stall to the pole with ladders, a method often employed.

Sometimes, it is not want of mind, but nervousness, which makes a fire horse slow to learn the trade, just as some nervous children have difficulty in applying their minds. Such was the case with Peter, a well-bred black horse, used for many years in Boston with the ladder truck in Fort Hill Square. Peter was a noble, strong, spirited animal, and, once taught, he became as prompt and trustworthy as any horse in the department. On one occasion, shortly after his purchase, Peter, exasperated by the schooling, broke away from his instructors, jumped cleanly through an open window without touching the sash, and ran down the street in search of amusement. At another time, while waiting in the blacksmith shop, his shoes having been taken off, but not yet replaced, Peter heard the twelve o'clock alarm strike. This, he knew, indicated the hour of his dinner, and accordingly Peter made off, without saying By your leave to the smith, and presently appeared at the

ladder-house door, neighing for admission.

This fine animal met with a sad fate not long ago. While running to a fire, he came into collision with one of the protective wagons, and his leg was broken in two places, so that he had to be shot where he fell in the street. Something even worse happened several years ago to a fire-engine horse in Boston. He was struck by the pole of another engine, which came out of its house just as the first engine dashed by; the force of the blow, unknown to his driver, broke the animal's leg, but he kept on, traveling, of course, on three legs only, and pulling his share of the immense weight behind him, till the place of the fire was reached, nearly or quite one quarter of a mile further. Then the poor beast dropped to the ground, never to rise again. The fire horse is subject to accidents like these, but we must remember that the fireman's danger is greater yet.

It happens occasionally that a horse is bought who proves to be altogether too nervous for the business: he is in a continual state of tension, will not eat unless taken out of his stall, and is so worried with apprehension of an alarm that it is impossible to use him as a fire horse. In a few other cases, the nervousness, though not so extreme, is sufficient to disturb the animal's health, to impair his digestion, to prevent his taking the needed amount of rest, so that, eventually, he too, after being doctored, perhaps, for an imaginary disease, is transferred to some more peaceful occupation.

Now that we have seen how a fire-engine horse is instructed and where he lives, it might be interesting to know in what manner his daily life is ordered. He takes breakfast, in Boston, at five or half past, in some houses as late as six o'clock, — the meal consisting, as a rule, of two quarts of oats. After breakfast he receives a thorough grooming, and about



ten o'clock he goes out to walk for an hour, with an occasional trot, one horse of a pair being ridden and the other led. At half past eleven or twelve he has dinner, — two quarts of oats again, which also is the allowance for supper, at half past five or six. Some old and delicate horses have nine quarts of oats per day. Usually a bran mash is given once a week, and in some houses a little bran is fed every day. In the afternoon the horse has another hour of exercise, supposing that no fire has occurred. Hay is allowed at night only, and in most of the houses it is fed from the floor, so that the horse can eat it while lying down. For several reasons this method is far better than feeding from a rack, especially for the fire horse, who takes a long while to eat his hay, inasmuch as the bit remains in his mouth. In most cities the grain allowance is about the same as it is in Boston, although in Chicago the horses are fed just twice as much, twelve quarts per day, and in Brooklyn, as I am informed, the allowance varies from twelve to eighteen quarts, which is excessive. In Chicago, it would seem, the fire horses do more work than is required in Boston. Ten companies in the heart of that city average thirty-six runs per month; whereas in Boston the average varies, according to the situation, from eight or ten to twenty-five runs per month. In the suburbs many companies do not go out more than once a week, on the average. The hour for bedding down varies from half past five to eight P. M., at the discretion of the driver. It would be better to make this duty obligatory at the earlier hour, and better yet if the bedding were left under the horses by day as well as by night, especially in the case of those companies which do the most work. The more a horse lies down, the longer his legs and feet are likely to endure; and by the supply of a soft and perpetual couch he can often be induced to lengthen his hours

of repose. At eight P. M., it is the custom all over the city to call the horses out and harness them to the engine, and at this time visitors are apt to drop in. Both firemen and horses are always well known in the vicinity, and many civilities pass between the neighbors and the occupants, human and equine, of the engine houses. The children especially are friends with the horses, calling them by their names, and often treating them to candy and other luxuries. In fact, whenever a fire-engine horse is introduced to a stranger, he expects to receive some dainty, and will poke his nose into the visitor's hands and pockets; nor is he easily discouraged by failure to find anything, being evidently convinced that nobody would be quite so mean as to enter his stable without bringing at least a lump of sugar or the fraction of an apple.

There is a handsome gray horse in the Mason Street station, in Boston, who has a great liking for ice, and, when out for exercise, he can never be persuaded to pass an ice wagon without first thrusting his head in behind and helping himself to a small piece. It is needless to say that the firemen (whom, by the way, I found invariably civil and intelligent) make great pets of their four-footed companions, and are a little inclined to exaggerate their good qualities, — "the finest pair in the department" being discovered in almost every engine house. There is, too, a favorite horse at each station, — not always the strongest or handsomest, but the most affectionate, docile, and sociable; and the visitor is always taken first to this animal's stall, whose virtues are thereupon extolled with generous enthusiasm.

From December to April every engine house contains an equine guest, as an extra horse for making up a "spike team," in case the streets are blocked with snow. Usually this horse is not owned by the department, but is loaned by an ice company or a contractor, —



his keep being reckoned as payment for his services. The new-comer does not serve as a leader: one of the regular team is put in that post, the extra horse taking the other's place at the pole. Some of the engine horses show great intelligence and discretion as leaders. On one occasion a spike team was dashing through a narrow street, where there was barely room to get between a wagon on one side and a light carryall, with women and children in it, on the other. The driver found that he had no control over his leader, and feared a bad accident; but the horse threaded his way so carefully and accurately that the engine swept past the carriage without touching it. When the engine stopped, it appeared that the leader's bit was hanging loose, and that he had served as his own driver.

This same animal—a big bay horse on Fort Hill Square—is also credited with some clever work in his own interest. Immediately in the rear of his stall was a slide where the oats came down, as he had full opportunity to observe at feeding-time. But how could he get them? He was confined in his stall, not of course by a halter, but by a rope stretched behind him, and fastened by an ordinary open hook. First, he discovered that, with some difficulty, he could turn in the stall far enough to get hold of the rope with his teeth, and after many attempts he succeeded in unhooking it. It was then an easy task to step across to the slide, pull it open with his teeth, and thus set running the reservoir of grain above. Two or three times he was found, after achieving this feat, standing in a deluge of oats, and industriously stowing them away in a compartment furnished by nature. But the firemen checkmated him by putting on the rope a snap hook, closed by a spring; and there it may be seen, at once proving the occurrence and preventing its repetition.

There is another sagacious leader,

called John, one of a span of large, handsome, dark mottled grays, used on the Dudley Street ladder truck. These are among the very finest horses in the department: they are strong and symmetrical, with small, clean-cut heads, large eyes, and courageous but gentle expression. John, especially, is as kind as a dog, a favorite with the women and children of the neighborhood, a great pet of the firemen, and quiet as a mouse in the stable, but on the street full of life and animation, and playful enough to have thrown, at one time and another, everybody who has ridden him to exercise, except the captain. John's sense of discipline is so strong that he draws the line there. While used as a leader his stall is different from the usual one; and when, on one occasion, having occupied it for some weeks, the third horse was dispensed with, and John was put back in his old quarters, he rightly and sagaciously concluded that his former place on the engine should be resumed, and accordingly, at the next alarm, he ran to the pole, instead of going in front.

The finest engine horse that I have seen is, I think, the near one of a dark gray team used on the Salem Street engine, in Boston. This is what horsemen call "a big little 'un;" that is, a stout animal on short legs. He is a comparatively small horse, standing 15 hands 3 inches, and weighing 1320 pounds: but he is big where bigness is required. He has a broad chest, a tremendous shoulder, deep lungs, a big barrel, a short back, and strong hind quarters. His legs are flat and clean, his feet of just the right size, and he has a broad forehead and an intelligent eye. Possibly his shoulder is a little too upright, and there is a suspicion of hollowness in his back, but otherwise he seemed to me an ideal engine horse. His mate is handsomer in some respects and more gentle, but a trifle too long in the back and legs.



Beside the engine, hose-wagon, and ladder-truck horses, there are others, used to haul coal and supplies, to carry men and tools for the repair of wires, etc. These are chiefly old, partly broken-down animals, no longer fit for the hard and rapid work of running to fires. Then there are smaller nags, weighing from 950 to 1050 pounds, employed by the engineers in their light wagons. These horses, especially such as are used by the chief engineer, get more practice in running to fires than any others, and they become very clever in picking their way through a crowded street; breaking into a gallop whenever they see an open space before them, and pulling up promptly to avoid collisions. The tough, intelligent, short-stepping Morgan is excellently adapted for this purpose, and one of that breed has been used for eight years past by the veterinary surgeon connected with the department. At least, this animal came from Vermont, and bears all the marks of the Morgan strain. Another, used by the district engineer on Dudley Street, is of about the same size and pattern, and of the same gamy disposition.

The protective (insurance) wagon steeds, though not, strictly speaking, belonging to the fire department, should not be disregarded in this account. They show more "quality" than fire-engine horses, weigh less (about 1150 pounds), stand higher in proportion, and would look, if their tails were docked, like powerful coach horses. There are two protective wagons in Boston: one in Hamilton Street, in the heart of the city, which weighs, with the men, about 7800 pounds; and the other, which is much lighter, at the South End, on Broadway extension. One or both of these wagons respond to every alarm of fire in the city, so that the horses attached to them do a great deal of work. On a certain Fourth of July, one of these companies was called out on nineteen different occasions in the twenty-four

hours; the horses not becoming cool enough throughout that time to be fed, and being supported by draughts of bran and water.

The arrangements in the protective houses differ, for the worse, from those of the fire department. The stalls are in the main room, where the wagon is kept, and at the back of the building is an entrance, the doors of which are apt to be open. The animals are thus exposed to strong and frequent draughts, very bad for horseflesh; and they are also continually annoyed by the noise, by the glare of lights kept burning all night, and by the coming and going of visitors and officials. The object of this arrangement is, of course, to save time; but if the horses stood six feet farther back, and were protected by a partition, probably only one or two seconds more would be required to bring them to the pole. Moreover, they are so often out at night that the suggestion already made in regard to engine horses applies with more force to those engaged in this service, namely, that bedding should be left under them at all times. In the South End house the stalls are open at both ends, so that the horses stand in a thoroughfare for cold breezes; and this was formerly the case in the Hamilton Street station. In the latter house there were for eight years a very fine pair of grays, who were sold, not for unsoundness, but because they were worn out by want of rest. One of them also became vicious. The fact is that, with the possible exception of man, the horse is the most nervous animal in the world, and the least able to endure continual and multiplied annoyances. These grays were last seen drawing a hack, and they have probably long since passed to some lower and more painful stage of equine degradation. Their places were taken by a fine chestnut and brown, well-bred, strong, and speedy horses. At the South End station there is another cross-matched



pair: an oldish gray, a very fine animal still (whose mate fell a victim to pleurisy), and a handsome young black. In fact, the horses of this department seem to have been selected with great judgment.

Connected with a fire department there is usually a veterinary hospital, and in Boston this is situated on Tremont Street; being a part of the building in which ladder truck No. 12 is stationed. It consists of a single box-stall and several straight stalls, but the health of the horses is looked after so carefully that these accommodations are quite sufficient. When I visited the place it contained but two patients. One was a fine gray engine horse, who, while running to a fire, came in collision with a "tow" horse, and was thrown down. His knees and hind legs were badly cut, but none of these injuries proved serious, and he was soon on the road to recovery. The other patient, also an engine horse, was suffering from a bad leg, caused partly by improper shoeing, and partly by the state of his blood. With the exception of these two, all the horses in the department, numbering about two hundred, were in working order, — an excellent showing.

Fire horses, as a rule, give out first and chiefly in their feet. Standing so much as they do on wooden floors, their feet have a tendency to become dry and hard, but this is counteracted by a permanent stuffing of tar and oakum, held in place with a leather pad. Almost all the fire horses of Boston wear these pads, and usually on the hind as well as the fore feet. In other cities, the same result is accomplished by periodical stuffing of the feet with some one of the many materials which horsemen use for this purpose.

<sup>1</sup> Possibly this result might be accomplished satisfactorily by the Charlier process, which consists in channeling the wall of the foot at its base, and inserting in the circular groove so formed a steel shoe. By this method the walls

The worst trouble, however, arises from the concussion produced in the foot by the hard paving-stones of the city. This is bad enough for any horse, but especially bad for the fire horse, because, owing to his great weight, his galloping speed, and his heavy load, he pounds his feet with tremendous force. Often a pair of engine horses whose feet have begun to give out are transferred to a suburban station, where, the roads being less hard and alarms less frequent, they go on very well for some years longer. Great pains are taken with the shoeing, which is under the direct charge of the accomplished "vet" employed by the department. Horses used in the city proper wear corks on all their feet, to give them a better grip on slippery pavements, car-tracks, etc.; but in the suburbs corks are dispensed with, the shoes without them having this advantage, — that they let the foot down lower, so that it supports the weight of the horse in a more natural position. The frog of the foot is intended by nature to lessen the concussion by receiving part of the blow itself; but with an ordinary shoe, especially with one having corks, this function of the frog is very imperfectly discharged, the frog being kept off the ground by the shoe. What the city fire horses (perhaps I might say, what horses in general) need is some method of shoeing which will protect the wall of the foot, and at the same time allow the frog to come in contact with the ground.<sup>1</sup>

Fire horses also throw their shoes very frequently, catching them in car-tracks and other projections. In fact, a team can hardly go to a fire without losing at least one shoe between them; and the continual re-shoeing tends, of course, to wear away the hoof. It is desirable,

of the foot are protected as with the ordinary shoe, but, the foot not being raised from the ground, the frog comes into play, just as if no shoe at all were worn.



therefore, to make it grow as fast as possible, and for this purpose it is kept well oiled. Every driver has his own specific, upon the peculiar and wonderful properties of which he will descant with much enthusiasm; but the best of them is probably not more efficacious than a rag tied about the coronet, and kept well moistened with cold water.

Despite the severity of their occasional labors and the hard usage to which their feet are subjected, fire horses in Boston last a considerable time. They are bought, usually, at the age of five or six years (costing about \$325), and they remain in service, on the average, about seven or eight years. In other cities their duration and cost are about the same. In Cambridge, where few of the streets are paved, fire horses are said to last from seven to ten years; but in Brooklyn this period is put as low as six years, — about the length of time that a car horse endures.

In Boston there are at least half a dozen veterans of ten years' standing, and some who have served as fire horses even longer than that. The old hose-cart horse in East Street, of whom I have spoken already, has a record of at least ten years' service. There is another seasoned hounhnm on Harrison Avenue, — a dark chestnut, of the same heavy, low-standing shape, who has seen twelve winters in the business. About five years ago it was thought that he ought to have an easier life, and accordingly he was transferred to an outlying station, where fires seldom occur. But on the occasion of the first alarm to which he responded the old fellow bolted, and made a complete wreck of the hose cart by dashing it against a stone wall. This was his protest at being removed from the house to which he had become accustomed, and from the society of his familiar friends, human and equine; and so he was put back in the old place, where he still remains in full employment. He is reckoned to be

seventeen years old, and he has a contemporary in the Dartmouth Street station, also a hose horse, who entered the department in the same year.

This is "Grief," so named because of his melancholy aspect. He has a way of standing with his fore legs wide apart, his head hanging down between, and a doleful expression of the face. A visitor, who saw him once in this attitude, remarked that he would make a good "image of Grief," and the name seemed so appropriate that it was adopted by common consent. "Grief" is duly inscribed in large letters over his stall, and as "Grief" he is known through the department and to all the neighbors. Grief is a remarkable horse; in color a rich mottled brown, and in shape much resembling the other old horses already described. He has a massive, well-formed shoulder, strong, straight fore legs, powerful hind quarters (too long a cannon-bone, however), a good neck, slightly arched, a rather intelligent, clean-cut head, but mulish ears. His peculiarity is a philosophical, phlegmatic disposition. He has a hearty appetite and a sound digestion, but he never shows the least impatience for his meals. Other horses paw and neigh when they hear the premonitory rattle of the oat-box, but Grief never betrays the least sign of curiosity or interest. The children of the vicinity often come to this house to give the horses candy, and the span of bays who draw the engine always recognize their benefactors, and will follow them about the stable. But Grief, though glad enough to be fed, never takes the slightest notice of any visitor beyond swallowing what is offered to him. He sleeps a great deal, ruminates still more, and allows nothing outside of business to disturb or excite him; and hence, no doubt, his excellent state of preservation.

But Grief wakes up when the alarm strikes. However long or steep the road, however fast may gallop the stout young



bays in front, he always keeps up with the engine. The strength and nervous force that he accumulates in the stable Grief expends lavishly on the way to a fire. His eye is then full of spirit; his expanded nostrils display the red glow within; his neck curves to the task; his splendid shoulder strains against the collar. He looks twice the size of the horse that was dozing in his stall a few minutes before. Arrived at the scene of action, he draws up as close as possible to the engine. Grief likes to get where the sparks fall in showers about him, and there he will stand, shaking his head to dislodge the burning particles, pleased with the shrieks and roar of the engine, with the shouts of the men, with the smoke and flame of the conflagration. At the fire in Boston on Thanksgiving Day of last year, the engine which he followed was burned within twenty-five minutes after it left the house; but Grief stood by it, firm as a rock, till the flames came near and he was led away.

The patriarch of the department is, however, not Grief, but another horse, stationed in East Boston, and called Old Joe. His age is variously estimated, but I gather that it is at least twenty years, and possibly twenty-four. Joe is not so impassive as Grief; he is more like the rest of us, being swayed by curiosity, touched by social affections, and dependent upon society. He has a gentle, intelligent, courageous eye and a good head and ears. His great age is indicated by an extremely hollow back, but otherwise he is still a grand-looking horse. He, too, is a mottled bay or brown, and not unlike Grief, except that he is even larger. In fact, the four old fire horses whom I have particularly described would have made a great team in their youth,—broad-chested, deep-lunged, rather low-standing, short-backed fellows, with immense shoulders, roomy stomachs, and strong hind quarters. Joe is now an engine

horse. His mate, though in comparison with him a mere colt, is, in truth, an oldish beast; and the two agreed some time ago that they would trot out no more from their stalls when the alarm sounded (having, as it seemed to them, done that sort of thing quite long enough), but would proceed from the stable to the pole at a dignified walk. This resolution has been kept. The firemen have tried to hurry them, but without success. Rattan rods (such as school-boys used to be whipped with) are hung behind their stalls, and descend automatically when the alarm strikes; but the old horses laugh at this gentle flagellation; they refuse to hurry their pace, and, alone among the fire horses of Boston, they advance with slow and measured step from the stable to the engine house.

The only remaining question which we have to ask is this: What becomes of them all? What fate is in store for Old Joe, for Grief, for that veteran hose-cart steed in East Street, who gallops with his heavy load till the blood runs from his nostrils? When thoroughly worn out, fire horses are sold, or, more commonly, handed over to a dealer in part payment for new animals. In some cities, in Brooklyn, in New York also, I believe, they are disposed of at auction; and inasmuch as a certain distinction attaches to them even in decrepitude, they always bring a little more than they are worth as beasts of burden. At most, however, they sell for a song. Broken-down horses are bought by poor men; they have scanty fare, little or no clothing, hard boards to lie on, and, commonly, severe toil to endure. The cast-off fire horse must sadly miss his good oats and hay, his clean, warm stable and comfortable bed, his elaborate grooming and gentle treatment, his companions, brute and human, the caresses and sweetmeats to which he was daily treated. Removed from all these luxuries, his life broken up by a sudden and painful



revulsion, we may be sure that the equine veteran, who spent his best years in helping to save our property from destruction, must very shortly present a spectacle of misery and despair. The next

bony animal that the reader sees pulling a tip-cart may be a once proud and petted fire horse, for whom the only possible boon is now the axe of the knacker.

*H. C. Merwin.*

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