

## ***Racing Maxims and Methods of Pittsburg Phil -- by Edward Cole (1908)***

### **CHAPTER 7 -- Treatment of Horses**

Many owners and trainers make mistakes and frequently spoil a good horse by not snaking him happy in his surroundings. A horse is just like a person in this respect. To do his best work, he must be contented. Whenever I bought a horse my first object was to find out his disposition. I have watched him closely in his stall, watched his eating, whether he had a good appetite, or minced at his meals. Any failing he had I would always try and remedy in some way or another. A horse that is not contented in his stable cannot take on flesh or be happy. Horses will not permit certain stable hands around them and they will even shirk their meals if interrupted by any one they do not like.

Belmar was a horse that was very hard to please. I knew he was a very good horse, but I knew that there was something wrong with him. He never seemed to run the race that I believed he could run. I bought this horse from Mr. Galway, thinking I could manage him and bring out his best qualities. Almost every moment I had to spare I would spend around Belmar's stall. I told my brother, William, that if ever we could get at the horse's disposition he would win a lot of races. We tried to please him by putting a companion in his stall in the shape of a rooster. He did not seem to take to the rooster and we tried a cat and a goat. Finally, a little fox terrier playing around the stables ran into the stall and Belmar seemed to take to him at once.

After this, if the fox terrier was away from Belmar, the old horse would sulk and whinny for him to come back again. When Belmar was lying down the little old fox terrier was always lying on his shoulder and the two always slept together. It got so that the fox terrier could be placed on the withers of Belmar and he would trot around the shed with the dog on his back. No sooner had Belmar become contented with his surroundings than he began to run good races. If I remember rightly, Mr. Vosburgh, unquestionably one of the few high class handicappers this or any other country has ever seen, had Belmar handicapped at 95 pounds in races before I got him. So much did the horse improve that he won seven straight handicaps without being defeated, and each time his weight was increased until in the last of his winning series he carried 128 pounds. In other words, he had jumped from the bottom to the top of the ladder in the handicap division, and it was all due to his being made happy and contented in his surroundings.

There was always something very noticeable about Belmar at this time and that was his excellent condition after a race it was very rare to see him oiling up distressed and it is for this reason that I am egotistic enough to say that I improved Belmar faster than the handicapper put on weight.

I never bought but one horse in my life that did not win any races for me I can safely say that every horse I ever owned improved after I had him long enough to study his disposition. A horse should be made comfortable at all times There is no animal so near like a person in disposition as a horse. They are positively human in their conduct at times. A trainer should use his best efforts

to control a horse with a nervous disposition, for it is exceedingly hard to make them take on flesh and do well. The mind of a horse should be easy. He should not be anticipating anything, he should not be teased or in any way abused. Like a person, if irritable or excitable, he loses flesh and is incapable of his best efforts.

It sometimes takes months to get at the true disposition of a horse. Exceedingly close watch must be kept on him and every effort made to make him understand what is wanted of him. When a horse is fit to race it is almost cruel not to race him at least once a week. A horse expects to race if he is a thoroughbred. It is his nature, and if he is not raced he is disappointed and fretful.

This is very logical and has its resemblance in the eagerness a gamecock shows to fight. There is no time that a gamecock is not ready to get into a scrap if he is fit, and it is the same with a thoroughbred. He is high-strung and must be raced, and what is more, while in this condition he will improve with racing, and the work keeps him from being fretful, which is the main point in keeping a horse up to his condition.

This does not mean, however, that a horse will keep on improving after a certain time. When he has reached the keen edge of condition he will begin to go back. An oarsman, or a pugilist, or any other human being, who has been keyed up to the top notch by continued effort will go stale. That happens also to a horse. It will, therefore, be seen that the critical eye of the trainer should detect when to let up on a horse and not expect to keep him in first class condition forever.

There is one instance that I can recall in particular. It was at Brighton Beach where the condition of a horse after a race was so palpable to me that it made me win one of the biggest bets of the year. It was the race in which the horses Proper and Rigodon ran. Proper beat Rigodon; but in watching the horses return to the judges, as I always did, I saw that Proper was very much distressed, while Rigodon did not appear to be in the least exhausted. He just took a couple of long breaths, then pricked up his ears, and looked up and down the stretch as unconcerned as if he had not been in a race at all. Shortly after this occurrence the same two horses ran again. My observations had shown me that Proper would not run as good a race the second time, owing to his being so much distressed after his prior racing, while on the other hand Rigodon would improve considerably. I naturally had quite a large wager on Rigodon, and Rigodon won very handily.

It looked like a serious change of form, and so it was. There was considerable newspaper criticism about the two races, and quite a number of very smart men could not understand why Proper should beat Rigodon so handily one day and be so badly beaten by the same horse a few days later. In my opinion it was nothing else in the world but a case of Rigodon improving and Proper having gone back: or in other words. the first race improved one horse considerably while it had a very distressing effect on the other.