

## THOROUGHBREDS AND HORSE MEDICINE

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Early in April we deserted the lounge for a few days and took off up to Lexington, Kentucky, to visit some four-footed friends with which we have become hopelessly entangled. Springtime in the horse country of central Kentucky is a heady tonic with a rural flavor of narrow, winding, tree-lined pikes and manicured pastures. Neat fences are spiced with blossoms of white and dark pink dogwood.

Horse people, and particularly those involved in all aspects of the thoroughbred industry, are a cheerful and outgoing group. They are infected with a common, unfaltering optimism that can take the unexpected loss of a \$30,000 two-year-old with the shrug of a shoulder. They can dream enthusiastically about the ten-thousand-to-one chances that a \$500 weanling colt will win the Derby three years later. In the track kitchen at Keeneland, the early morning conversation center and a focal spot of racing, breeding and training activity, you may sit down to a breakfast geared to the prodigious appetites of those who have been up and outdoors since dawn. There, for less than a dollar, you might tackle a water glass full of juice, cereal and milk; two eggs with eight slices of bacon; buttered toast and jelly; a heaping mound of hashed potatoes; and coffee. The common subject of horses makes a shamble of social strata. You may find yourself sitting across from a collared clergyman with your elbow in C.V. Whitney's saucer at a table that includes a broken down ex-jockey now employed as a hot walker, a pert newspaperwoman, a blue-jeaned cowboy, a congressman, and a seedy stall mucker. There are no problems but horse problems. and the conversation flows freely.

Our trip was not without its medical aspects. While there we consulted with an owner and trainer of horses about whether or not his racing mare should have surgery to remove an ovarian cyst that seemed to interfere with her running. Another day we visited an unhappy-looking mare of our own which, then three weeks beyond her expected foaling date, still showed no signs of producing. We also spent a couple of hours with Bobby Copelan, a breezy, energetic young vet, extremely well trained and capable. He talks in rapid, profane bursts through a cheek bulging with a huge wad of chewing tobacco. Bobby flies his own plane and commutes between his leased farm in Lexington and three or four racetracks. He drives a Cadillac at breakneck speeds and in general gets around faster and covers more territory than our own Bob Vaughan. He was jumping with excitement that day as he showed us his newly finished operating room with its brand new, massive, red and chrome operating table that tilts hydraulically. We toured the still unfinished scrub room and doctor's dressing room, gazing at the new recovery room with its cushioned floor and foam rubber padded walls.

Although there is competent and modern veterinarian knowledge and treatment available, it is hopelessly overtaxed in coping with the volume of horses and the many medical ailments of the thoroughbred. Even today a large majority of the animals still have their infirmities treated by home remedies and tonics that have been handed down from generation to generation. Occult powers are still called upon by many breeders who invoke the Zodiacal Signs. Fresh cow manure in burlap sacking tied around an ankle will drain an infection down from the knee and out through the hoofs. Special mud and clay imported hundreds of miles from Saratoga, New York, smeared on inflamed legs will cool and heal them better than saline compresses or Kentucky mud. Torn muscles and ligaments, bursitis, periostitis, arthritis, myositis, and tenosynovitis all usually get a "blister" treatment first, with the application of strong, counterirritant agents to produce a "scurf." If blistering fails, then out comes the firing iron. In firing, point cauterization with the actual cautery is carried out at one- to two-centimeter intervals all around the leg for a distance of six inches or so above and below the localized area of pain. Not only is the affected leg fired, but the opposite unaffected one also, so that the horse will not favor the ailing leg by putting all his weight on the other, thereby subjecting it to undue strain and possible injury. There are skin lighteners, salves, herb tonics, and blood builders, secret formula liniments, patented pastes, liver strengtheners and kidney flushers. There are diseases known as the strangles, the snots, and the wobbles.

Woe to the frisky colt, which is unruly, masturbates, has a wandering eye, is too temperamental, is too dull, won't learn his lessons, sulks, won't eat, fights the bit, runs too slowly, runs too fast and burns himself out too quickly, stall walks, bites his groom, or dislikes his trainer. It is the knife for him. Castration is the universal cure for all problem colts. The young fillies of similar temperaments escape this indignity by virtue of the anatomical unavailability of their gonads. They often will find that their vaginal orifices have been sutured shut with wire to keep out cool breezes that might distract them while running. Paradoxically, in the human animal, it is the female whose sex organs fall before the knife; while the male's accessible ones are seldom in jeopardy.

Horse psychiatry is a field in which horsemen of all types excel. Trainers are all board certified. A canny trainer can delve into his horse's cerebration and discover by the way he cocks an ear, switches his tail, or nibbles at his breakfast oats whether or not the horse is worrying about an upcoming race next Saturday. The trainer will carefully avoid pitting his charge against a horse that has beaten him consistently, since he is certain that his horse can spot that particular adversary in a field of twelve starters, develop a defeatist attitude and end up with a broken spirit and an inferiority complex. Due to their varied qualifications, owners, trainers and jockeys often quarrel among themselves over psychiatric interpretation and methodology. They develop antagonisms somewhat comparable to those evident among the shock therapy, injection and tranquillizer pill

school; the psychotherapy and group therapy adherents; and the aloof psychoanalysts. Most of the time, however, it does seem that the Id of the racehorse emerges triumphant. At the end of his day, after being washed, cooled down, walked, curried, pedicured, petted and soothed by his loyal, man servant groom, the horse will eat his fill and bed down for a comfortable rest on the fresh hay in his just cleaned stall—leaving his owner, his trainer, and his jockey to carry their frustrations and complexes on into the night.

Once he has survived his ailments and the medieval medicine practiced on him and can tolerate the probing of his psyche, and if he has escaped the knife, the thoroughbred racehorse can look forward to a pleasant and pampered life. He will be waited on and catered to day and night by a retinue of devoted men. If he is at all good at what he was bred and trained to do: RUN, he will be retired at an early age and rewarded with a long life at stud duty. He will live evermore on special diets and in lush, green pastures, in comfortable and often luxurious quarters and with free medical care at the hands of experts. During his five working months each year, he will lord it over a harem of handsome, handpicked mares who will be served to him one by one (each pre-tested to insure compatibility and satisfaction) for his sole, personal enjoyment. During the other seven months he may run, romp, rest, eat, get fat and contemplate his next year's work.

During the spring, a stallion cannot count on having his weekends free. While we were in Kentucky this time, we watched our stallion, Nouredin, at his work on a pleasant Sunday afternoon. Although Jack McGee, who was with us, commented that it was a humbling experience, there was a note of envy in his voice. We guess most of us would be happy to settle for reincarnation and a return to earth as a thoroughbred stallion; but, like Polk Land says, “It would be just our luck to come back instead as a "teaser.”\*

*\*(For the benefit of the uninitiated, a "teaser" is a frustrated, lowbrow stallion. Prospective mating mares are paraded before him. If the mares are unreceptive, he gets kicked at. If they are unwilling, he never gets across the teasing-board or over the fence to reach them. Sometimes, if he's lucky, he may get to watch.)*