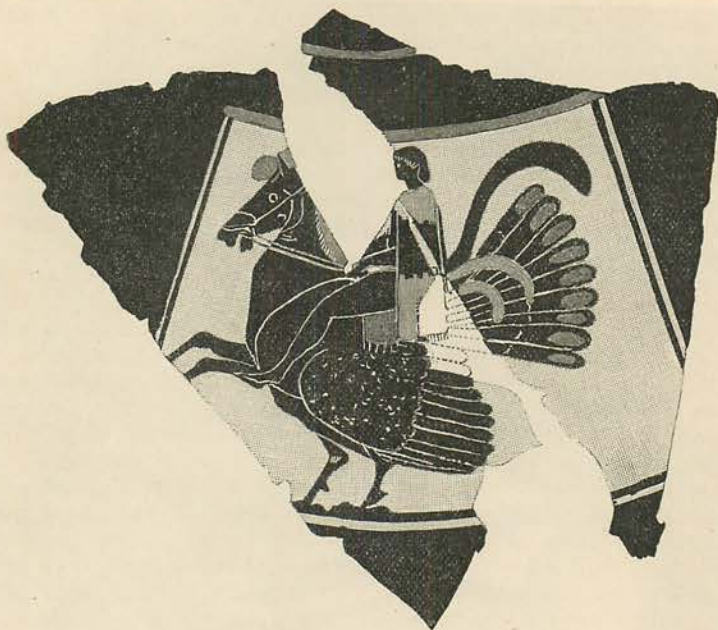


A COCK-HORSE.



REPRESENTATION OF A COCK-HORSE ON AN ANCIENT ETRUSCAN VASE.

A PRETTY little girl was dancing on my knee—or rather my knee was prancing up and down to amuse the little chatter-box with the motion of a quick trot—while unconsciously I was singing the old Mother Goose roundelay:

“ Ride on a cock-horse
To Banbury cross,
To see an old woman
Ride on a white horse;
Rings on her fingers,
Bells on her toes,
She shall have music
Wherever she goes.”

When at this point I stopped; for the little girl is not, after all, so very little, and the healthy country life she leads gives her a solid weight much beyond her years. As the violent motion ceased, she looked me in the face, and noticing my hesitation about continuing the gymnastic exercise, she thought awhile, then suddenly asked:

“ Uncle, what is a cock-horse?”

“ A cock-horse? Why, a cock-horse is—”
And there I had to stop, for on second thought I perceived that I really did not know the exact definition of a cock-horse.

These *enfants terribles* do sometimes ask such odd questions as to puzzle the best of us. Accordingly, as I am never

ashamed to acknowledge ignorance, and in fact I consider it a part of the education of children to teach them that we are not universally learned, I took down Webster, saying, “ My dear, I know not the correct definition of a cock-horse, but the dictionary will tell us,” and turning the leaves, I came to the word:

COCK-HORSE.—A child’s rocking-horse. A high or tall horse. Raised or lifted up, as one on horseback. Lofty in feeling; exultant; proud or imperious; upstart.

“ Our painted fools and cock-horse peasantry.”
—Marlow.

That did not strike me as very satisfactory, for it gave no explanation of the origin of the word, nor any other information about it. Therefore I took down Worcester; but he gave no better clew to it, for his definition was very similar to Webster’s, viz.:

COCK-HORSE.—A tall kind of horse. Proudly; elevated as on horseback; triumphant; exulting.

“ Alma, they strenuously maintain,
Sits cock-horse on her throne, the brain.”
—Prior.

I examined other dictionaries, encyclo-pædias, etc., without any better result, when accidentally, looking over the illus-

trations of some archæological pottery of ancient Etruria, I came across the representation of a fragment of the upper portion of an archaic vase—amphora—with, not a little girl, but a handsome youth, riding a *real cock-horse*. Now, at the least calculation, this broken vase dates back two thousand five hundred years. For further information in regard to it the reader was referred to the Annals of the Roman Institute of Archæology for the year 1874. I consulted them, and the following is the result:

The painting on this fragment of pottery represents a youth riding an animal, or rather a chimæra, like the Pegasus, the gryphon, the centaur, whose forward part is a horse, and the hinder part a cock. He is prancing with his equine legs, the cock wings half open, and the tail spread out. The youth, clothed with a mantle fastened round his neck of a dark ash-color, lined with purple, curbs him with his bridle. The severe but accurate design, the black figure of the animal upon a reddish ground, the finely cut lines, and the brightness of the coloring point it out as of archaic Greek art, and assuredly original. It was found in Etruria, the special place not mentioned, and is now in the Etruscan Museum of Florence.

The Greek gave to this fantastic animal the name of hippalectryon, or horse-cock, to signify its double nature; but there is great confusion among classic scholars of antiquity in regard to it, for some believe it to have been a very big horse, others a superb cock, others a gryphon, others a coat of arms, others a sea-monster. Their difference arose from the fact that there was no mythological legend attached to this animal, as there was about the Pegasus of Bellerophon, or the hippagryphon, so that it never became a common type in ancient art, and is of very rare occurrence among archæological remains.

It is only by Aristophanes, in his comedies, among the classical Greeks, that we find mention of this animal. In his comedy of *The Frogs*, which is a satire upon the decline of tragic art, he introduces Æschylus and Euripides disputing before Bacchus in Hades as to who should occupy the first place in tragedy. Euripides criticises his rival for introducing upon the scenes gryphons and other impossible monstrous animals, upon which Bacchus adds that he had been puzzled and kept awake whole nights trying to find

out "what sort of a bird the *equestrian cock* with auburn wings" might be;* and Æschylus replies: "How ignorant you are! It was painted as a sign upon the ships." A little further on Euripides derisively affirms that "he never had gone so far as to feign in his tragedies, as Æschylus had done, *horse-cocks, goat-deers*, etc., which are only to be found embroidered in Persian carpets."

From these passages we learn that the cock-horse was a naval symbol, and also that it was not of Greek but of Oriental origin. In proof of this the figure riding the cock-horse in the Etruscan fragment is dressed in Asiatic, not Greek, costume.

Where Æschylus introduces the cock-horse is not known to us, for most of his tragedies are lost, and there is no mention of it in those left, unless the four-footed bird ridden by Neptune in his tragedy of *Prometheus* was meant for the cock-horse.

It is curious, however, to notice that the meaning of cock-horse, used as an adjective, according to our lexicographers, viz., "lofty in feeling, proud, upstart, exultant, imperious," is found twice in Aristophanes. In his comedy of *The Birds*, joking upon somebody who from a person of no account had risen to a high station, he compares him to a *cock-horse*; and in *The Peace* he ridicules a general "bearing three crests and robe of liveliest purple," who, he says, "if at any time he has to fight, flies first as a *cock-horse* swift, shaking his crests."

Now who could have supposed that our Mother Goose nursery story of a cock-horse had such a venerable, classical, and archæological origin?

A FAREWELL.

Good-by! God speed thee on thy way
Across the waste of waters wide!
Fair winds and seas the ship betide,
With starry night and cloudless day!

Good-by! from sight, but not from heart.
Though half the world may intervene,
In love, and hope, and trust serene,
We nevermore can be apart.

God keep thee in His tender care!
On the firm land or rolling deep
He giveth His beloved sleep,
For His strong love is everywhere.

* Aristophanes's *Frogs*, 982, 987.