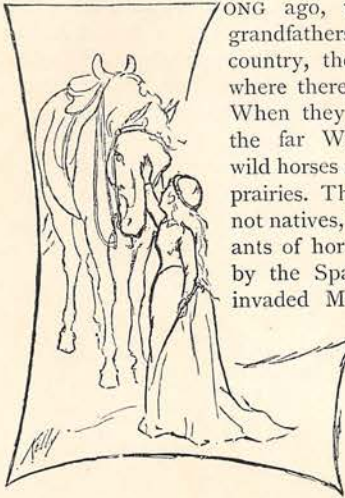


LEARNING TO RIDE.

BY CHARLES BARNARD.



LONG ago, when our great grandfathers came to this country, they found a land where there were no horses. When they pushed out into the far West, they found wild horses roaming over the prairies. These animals were not natives, but the descendants of horses brought over by the Spanish when they invaded Mexico. Some of

these Spanish horses ran away and became the wild horses of the plains, or, as they are called, mustangs.

To-day this is the great horse country of the world. Nowhere else are these animals so cheap and plentiful.

Now American boys are as brave and active as any in the world, and learned travelers tell us they know more than any boys yet discovered in the solar system. Likewise, the American girl is sweet and good and true—as bright as any girl in Europe. For all this, American boys and girls do not, as a rule, ride horseback. It is true, some country boys, east and west, ride fearlessly and well, but the majority of boy and girl riders have climbed, by the aid of a rail-fence, on the back of a farm-horse, and when they were mounted the horse either laughed in his mane or ingloriously tumbled the rider over his head. It is very strange that in such a land of horses so few boys and girls know how to ride. It is a mistake to think that, when Dobbin has been brought to the fence and you have climbed on his back, this is riding. Not even the most uncommonly bright girl or the most learned boy can ride without instruction. One has to learn this art, just as one must learn to play the piano or to mount a bicycle.

Let us consider the horse, see what he is like, and then, perhaps, we may learn what it means to ride. A horse is an animal with a large brain, and, though he seldom speaks, you may be sure he thinks and has a mind of his own. Besides this, he has four legs. These are important things to remember—he stands on four legs and can think

for himself. He also has ears, and, though he is not given to conversation, he hears and understands much that is said to him. He also has a temper—good or bad—and may be cross and ill-natured, or sweet-tempered, cheerful, patient, and kind. In approaching such a clever creature, it is clear a boy or girl must be equally patient, kind, cheerful, and good-natured. Unless you are as good as a horse, you have no right to get upon his back.

Of course, there are bad horses, but they are not fit for riding, and are used only to drag horse-cars or do other common work. All riding-horses fit for the society of boys and girls are good horses, not merely for walking or galloping, but morally good—gentle, kind, patient, careful, and obedient. Any boy or girl, over seven years of age, with a brave heart and steady hand, and also sweet-tempered, gentle, kind, and thoughtful, can learn to ride. All others must sit in a box on wheels and be dragged about.

Come, all boys and girls who love fun! Let us go to the Riding-school. Baby can come, too, and sit with Mamma and look on, while the others mount the ponies. The school is a large hall, with a lofty roof and a floor of sand or tan-bark. At the sides are galleries and seats for the spectators. Adjoining the school is the residence of the amiable horses and charming ponies the pupils use in taking their lessons, and it may be truly said they make a large and happy family. There are more than a hundred of them, and each one has been selected for his gentleness and sweet temper. They have nothing to do but to carry the scholars in the school-room or in the park. They certainly live in the best society, and it is not a matter of wonder that they are very polite and of the most agreeable horse-manners.

First of all is the saddling-room, a corner of which is shown on the next page. This is where our horses and ponies are harnessed for us. At the right, the man is just taking the saddles from the elevator on which they come down from the harness-room upstairs. At the back is a view of the school-room. Behind the man are three of our ponies. Another is looking this way. He certainly has a pleasant face. He will do for Nellie, as she is a beginner and rather timid.

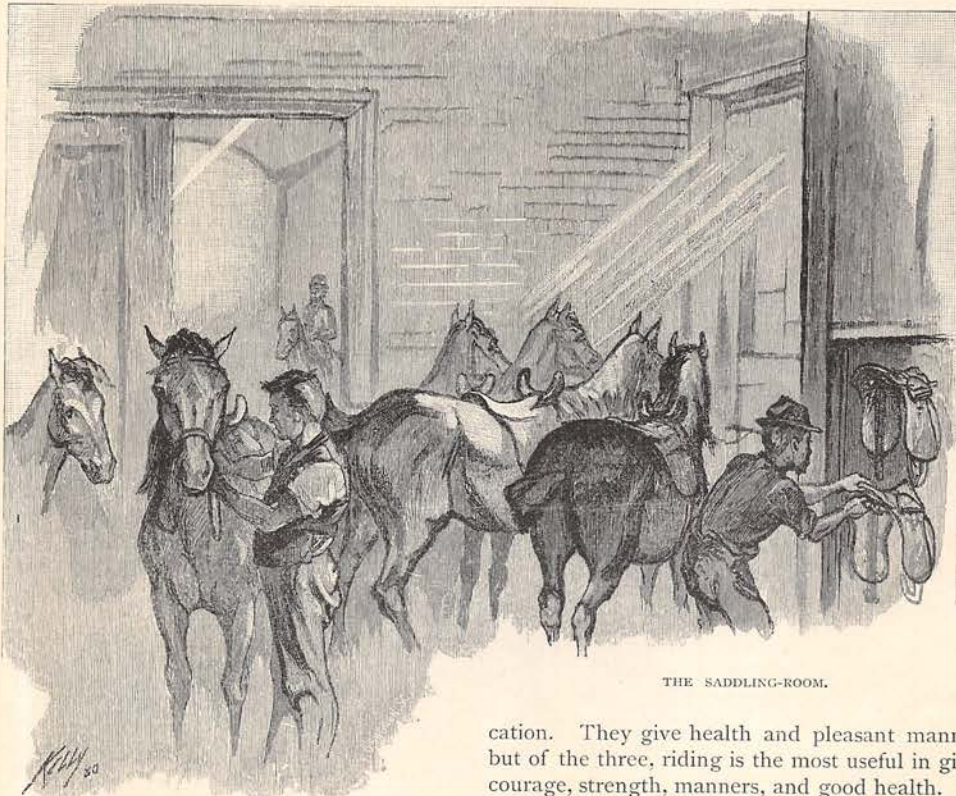
Mamma and the baby go upstairs and find seats in the gallery, where they can look down on the school. Nellie and the girls go to their dressing-rooms to put on their habits, and the boys, includ-

ing Master Tommy, go to their quarters to make ready for the mount. When all are ready we meet in the great school-room. Here we find the head master and the assistant teachers. It is a queer school—no books or slates, and the teachers with small whips—for the horses only. Each teacher has four pupils, and Nellie falls to the lot of the head master of the school.

"Now, Miss, there is nothing to fear. See! The old fellow is as gentle as a lamb. There's no danger whatever." A fall in the riding-school is as rare as citron in a baker's cake. Still, she is afraid, and requires some urging to consent to be lifted and put on the pony's back. "Take one rein in each hand, pass it between the little finger and the next, and over the first finger, with the thumb resting on top. Do not touch the saddle nor pull hard on the reins. You must keep your seat by balancing yourself as the horse moves, but not by the reins."

all about it, but the teacher seems to have a good deal to say to him about something. The others, with merry talk and laughter, are mounted at last, and the teachers lead the horses and ponies slowly around the ring, showing each pupil how to ride correctly.

This horseback riding is a curious art, and you can not master it in one lesson. Such lessons of an hour each, three times a week, for three months, is the usual course required to make a really good rider. To make the horse perform fancy steps, leap hedges, and that sort of thing, requires from one to two years' study in a good school and much out-of-door practice. Like learning to dance, it consists in the art of holding and carrying the body gracefully and naturally. Very few boys and girls in this country ever learn to walk naturally and gracefully without instruction, and to dance or ride one must go to school. Walking, dancing, and riding are parts of a good edu-



THE SADDLING-ROOM.

"Hello, Master Tommy! You are over-bold. You look like a mouse on a mountain on that tall horse. Get down and take a pony of your own size." Tommy, by the way, rode the farm-horse to water once last summer, and he thinks he knows

cation. They give health and pleasant manners, but of the three, riding is the most useful in giving courage, strength, manners, and good health. Our great fault in this country is that we do not know how to be natural.

The body is the house we live in. It is a pretty good house, and should not only be neatly clothed, but be carried in a correct and natural manner. No one thinks of wearing torn clothes or living in

a tumble-down house, and why should we not stand and walk, or sit and ride, in a natural and graceful manner? We are so made that if we do things in the right way we shall always find it the easiest way also, and that it will enable us to be natural and graceful at the same time.

The art of riding teaches all this, and once learned is wonderfully easy, and becomes as much second nature as walking. It consists of two things: a good seat and guiding the horse. By a good seat is meant a secure position on the horse. For a boy it means to put both legs over the horse, with the upper part of the leg bent slightly forward, the lower part hanging down, with the foot in the stirrup and the heel slightly lower than the toes. Sit erect, with the body free to sway in every direction on the hips. For a girl, the right leg is thrown over the horn of the saddle, and the left hangs down like a boy's. Her body is really on a pivot, through the hips, and must freely bend forward or backward, or on either side, without moving in the saddle. With a little practice, even timid

of the class with the teacher. She is looking at him to see how he holds the reins. She has got over her fright in mounting and looks quite like a young horse-woman. The others follow in pairs, a boy and girl together. Last of all, on the left, is Master Tommy at the foot of the class. With all his haste he goes rather slowly. Take them altogether, they make a very handsome cavalcade.

The horse, as was remarked, has four feet and a brain. Riding consists not only in a good seat, but the art of teaching the horse to give up his will and to do, not what he wishes, but what you wish. So you must come to an understanding with the horse—learn his way of thinking and his language. Left to himself, he might go the wrong way, or stand still and go nowhere in particular. It might be very pleasant for him, but this is not what we want. So in the school you are taught all the words of command: to start, to halt, to trot or gallop, to change step, and to go to the right or left. To tell it all would fill a book, and we can only now observe, in a general way, how a horse is managed. It



"QUITE A CAVALCADE."

girls like Nellie soon learn to sit securely. Now she is safe and comfortable, and it is a pleasure to look at her.

Here is the entire party, with Nellie at the head

is done both by voice and by motions of the hand and body. For instance, the word is given to start or stop, but the rider's body must be moved slightly on the hips to help the horse. To turn to the right

or left, the reins are turned very slightly, the body is bent in the opposite direction to that you wish to take, and the horse's side is touched gently with the

The moment you get on his back you observe that the motion is very different from walking. As he has four legs, and as you sit between the two pair,

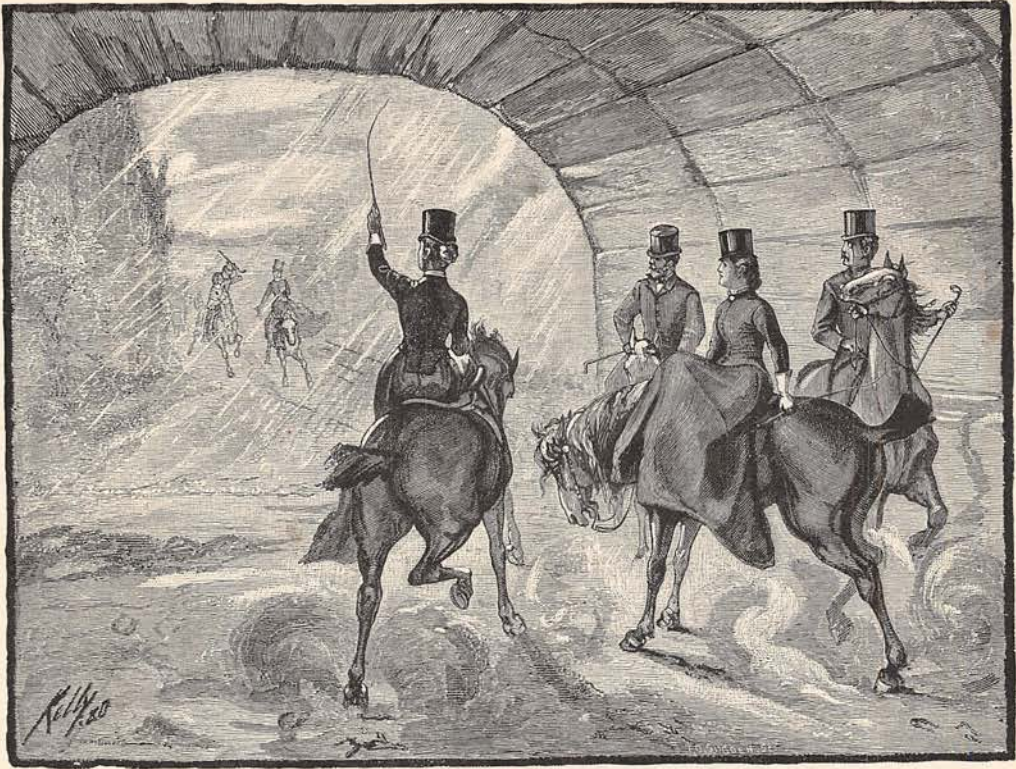


A LESSON IN LEAPING FENCES.

foot. Boys use either foot, but girls use only the left foot, and touch the horse on the right with a riding-whip. This is the merest hint of what is meant by learning to ride, but it is enough to show what is done in the riding-school. The horse has a mind of his own, and, though he surrenders his will to the rider, he yet watches where he is going and always has his wits about him. He will not willingly fall or stumble. He will not step on you should you fall on the ground, nor can you drive him against a wall or down a steep bank. A steam-engine has no mind, and will run into a ditch or into the river just as readily as on the rails. A horse has a brain and can use it, and so in riding he thinks for himself and the rider, and will not follow what he knows to be wrong or foolish commands.

you are really at a place between four points of support that are continually moving. This you have always to remember, and to ride gracefully you must conform to every motion of your horse. If you wish him to turn sharply to the right and change his step, you lean to the left. This throws your weight on three of his legs and leaves the right fore leg free, and, as it moves more easily than any other, the horse steps out with that foot first. But, to give you all the details would only weary you. The best way to learn is to go to a riding-school, or else to have a good teacher at home.

After several weeks' study in the school the pupils are taken out in the park, along the bridle-paths. On the next page is a picture of one of the advanced classes out for a practice ride.



REFUGE FROM THE RAIN.

They have been caught in a shower, and have run under a bridge to get out of the rain. Two of them have been beaten in the race with the shower, as you will observe.

Sometimes boys and girls from English families come to the school with a note from home saying they must be taught to ride in the English style—that is, learn to leap fences and ditches. So Master Percy Fitzdollymount and his sister, the Honorable Mary Adelaide Fitzdollymount, are given lessons in leaping over a low fence. Why do you suppose they do this? In England, the grand people who own the land go hunting for hares, rabbits, and foxes, and ride roughly right across the country, over fields

and hedges, destroying the farmers' crops and doing a great deal of harm, all for the sake of a race after a fox or a rabbit. They never think of paying the farmer for the damage, and they call it fine sport. We have none of this kind of riding in America. There is no need of learning to leap on horseback over a fence here, and if we did so, very likely the farmer would make us pay a fine for trampling on his crops.

Last of all, here is Nellie, just as she fell asleep in her riding habit, after her first lesson. She seems to be dreaming of the great horseshoe that surrounds her head like a glory. Let us hope that she will be a brave horsewoman, and that the shoe will bring her good luck.

