

HOW COACHING HAS PROGRESSED

*A lively review of coaching history at the time of the coming of the railway*

*Stage Coachmen in the 18th Century.* - It is indeed gratifying to contemplate the change that has lately taken place in the whole system of the *road* - and it is a most *humane one*. The old-fashioned coachman to a heavy coach - and they were all heavy down to very recent times - bore some analogy with the prize-fighter, for he stood highest who could hit hardest. He was generally a man of a large frame, made larger by indulgence, and of great bodily power - which was useful to him. To the button-hole of his coat were appended several whipcord points, which he was sure to have occasion for on the road, for his horses were whipped till whipping was as necessary to them as their harness. In fair play to him, however, he was not solely answerable for this; the fine spirit of his cattle was broken by the task they were called to perform - for in those days twenty mile stages were in fashion; and what was the consequence? Why, the four-horse whip and the Nottingham whipcord were of no avail over the latter part of the ground, and something like a cat-o'-nine tails was produced out of the boot, which was jocularly called the 'apprentice'; and a shrewd apprentice it was to the art of torturing, which was inflicted on the wheelers without stint or measure; but without which, the coach might have been left on the road. One circumstance alone saved these horses from destruction; this was the frequency of ale-houses on the road, not one of which could then be passed without a call. Our old-fashioned coachman, however, was a scientific man in his calling - more so, perhaps, than by far the greater part of his brethren of the present day, inasmuch as his energies and skill were more frequently put to the test. He had heavy loads, bad roads, and weary horses to deal with, neither was any part of his harness to be depended on, upon a pinch. Then the box he sat upon was worse than Pandora's, with all the evils it contained, for even *hope* appeared

to have deserted it. It rested on the bed of the axletree, and shook the frame to atoms, but when prayers were put up to have it altered, the proprietors said, 'No; the rascal will always be asleep, if we place his box on the springs'. If among all these difficulties then, he, by degrees, became a drunkard, who can wonder at his becoming so? But he was a *coachman*. He could fetch the last ounce out of a wheel horse by the use of his double thong or his *apprentice* and the point of his lash told terribly upon his leaders. He likewise applied it scientifically; it was directed under the bar to the flank, and after the third hit he brought it up to his hand by the draw, so that it never got entangled in the pole-chains, or any part of the harness. He could untie a knot with his teeth and tie another with his tongue, as well as he could with his hands; and if this thong broke off in the middle he could splice it with dexterity and neatness as his coach was proceeding on its journey. In short, he could do what coachmen of the present day cannot do, because they have not been called upon to do it; and he likewise could do what they never try to do: - namely, he could drive when he was drunk nearly as well as when he was sober. He was very frequently a faithful servant to his employers; considered trustworthy by bankers and others in the country through which he passed; and as humane to his horses, perhaps, as the adverse circumstance he was placed in by his masters would admit.

A wonderful change has taken place in the English coachhorse, as well as the sort of horses put into other kinds of harness, but this has been progressive. Fifty years ago the idea of putting a thorough-bred horse into harness would have been considered preposterous. In the carriages of our noblemen and gentlemen the long-tailed black or Cleveland bay-each one remove from the cart-horse - was the prevailing sort, and six miles an hour the extent of his pace; and he cost from £3 0 to £50. A few years back a nobleman gave seven hundred guineas for a horse to draw his cabriolet; two hundred guineas is now an every day price for a horse of this description, and a hundred and fifty for a gentleman's coach-horse. Indeed a pair of handsome coach-horses, fit for London and well broken and bitted, cannot be purchased *under* two hundred guineas, and even jobmasters often give much more for them to let out to their customers. In harness

also we think we have arrived at perfection, to which the invention of the patent shining leather has mainly contributed. A handsome horse well harnessed, is a noble sight; and is it not extraordinary that in no country but England is the art of putting the horse into harness at all understood? Independently of the workmanship of the harness-maker, if our road horses, were put to their coaches in the loose, awkward fashion of the continent, we could never travel at the rate we do. It is the command given over the coach-horse that alone enables us to do it.- *Quarterly Review*.