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Contributors

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DISORDERS OF THE FOOT

OF

THE HORSE.

BY BRACY CLARK, F.L.S.

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LONDON:

1839.

Having, at different periods, formerly, as experience and opportunity afforded the way, published an Account of several of the Diseases of the Horse's Foot; I now propose, for the greater facility of reference to them, and for the convenience of being consulted, to bring them all together in juxtaposition, in One Volume, adding thereto a few that were wanting to complete the series. Some little irregularity will accrue from their being published in parts formerly, and with no view to alphabetic order, not so much, however, as to preclude the adoption of that very simple mode of arrangement. And it is a sorrowful matter to be remarked, that nearly the whole series of these disorders proceeds from, and is the effect of, that abomination of the poor animal, and pest of the public, the shoeing, as it is called.

Although the words disease and disorder are often used indiscriminately, and as being perfectly synonymous; yet on this occasion, the derangements being of a truly mechanical kind, we have preferred, whether justly or not others must determine, to use the latter word in expressing the complaints of the feet of the horse, in preference to the former.

As the most frequent in its occurrence, and, therefore, of the most consequence to the public, we shall begin with the Contraction of the Foot.

No. 1.

ON THE CONTRACTED FOOT.—*Coarctipes.*

As the shoeing of the horse with an iron ring fixed on by nails has been in use for many centuries, without its principles being much attended to, or understood at least, so, it is clear that very few horses indeed could have escaped entirely, the consequences of its erroneous principle, if shod for any length of time. Since the retaining an highly elastic organ, such as the foot now turns out to be, in an immoveable barrier of iron, with nails on each side, and constituting together nearly a solid box, must inevitably produce lamentable effects upon the constitution of such a foot. And that such has been the case will be fully understood by considering the rapid destruction of the animals themselves that has taken place when so used, few comparatively reaching, or advancing beyond, the middle period of life, many not even attaining to this; also the numerous accidents, some of the most grievous character, which have been daily, aye and oftener than the day, accruing from it, but being seen through a mist of terms, and disguised almost from public scrutiny, by a tricky, specious language about it, strangely not obtain that serious attention they deserved, as to the real source of it. And it was also a circumstance most unfortunate for the public, as is usual indeed with abuses of nearly all kinds, that they were bringing grist to the mill of the artificer who was occasioning it, by the profit attending his pretended remedies, and his preventive measures, every one pretending to an exclusive knowledge in this respect. Although it is now clear that these artificers themselves had no true apprehension of the real source of the mischiefs they were occasioning. The affair affords us a most remarkable example of apathetic public indifference, extending through many centuries, concerning a flagrant abuse which interested in a primary degree, their pleasures, their property, and their lives.

The disease of contracted foot appears to be produced in the following way:—That the external iron circle of the shoe being nailed on the opposite sides of the foot, resists all motion of the hoof in these directions, the consequence of which is, that as the foot is deeply cleft interiorly at the sole, and extensively divided there, especially posteriorly, which cleft is extending beyond the middle of its arch, and has its vacuity filled in with an highly elastic organ of soft horn, the furch, so there being no extension or motion of the foot permitted outwardly, the whole action of elastic yielding is taking place inwardly on these soft parts; that is, when the sole, pressed upon by the weight of the animal's body, flattens, and obliterates in part this cleft, which action, if not bounded and confined by the iron ring, would take place outwardly throughout the whole extent of the hoof, and thus we get contraction of the foot, with a condensation and diminishing of the whole volume of the hoof, and of all its contents.

It will not be necessary here to enter more fully into this reasoning, as we have formerly devoted an entire volume to this all important service, and in the *Podopthora* will be found the exact quantum of annual diminution that a foot actually sustains when so treated, and that in a good, first-rate, blood horse's foot. By consulting the plates 9, 10, 11, of the last mentioned work, excellent examples may be seen of this disorder, and by comparing these feet with Plate I, or the frontispiece, being a view of that same foot as it first appeared at five years old, fresh from its Almighty Creator's hand, before it had been touched by the workers in iron, we shall discover the astounding difference. Also the very term contraction does not appear fully to meet the case, since it is not merely a simple diminishing of the foot, as any body may be seen to diminish by waste, or by drying up, but is a real, as the Latin term expresses it, *coarctation* of the foot,* or forcing together of all its parts; and not only so, but there is also an upward pressure of the shoe from the violent ramming on and clenching the nails, which, in some feet, produces an erosion and ulceration of the nut-bone, a little moveable bone, placed above the sole, and immediately over the furch; and this erosion takes place apparently, from the natural movements of this bone being prevented by the general condensation of all the matters of the foot, impeding the performing of its functions; see *Erosion* of the nut-bone, with examples, at the conclusion of the present series of disorders. Also, the arch of the sole, contracted in its dimensions by the exterior resistance of the nails, is driven up at its centre; the furcal margins, or ridges of the sole are thus made to approach each other, and to ascend nearer to the nut-bone, and hence is discovered the true cause of nut-bone disease, or of the above erosion, not before properly understood, but which cause appears to have escaped the notice of those who have written upon it.

Now, as to the remedy for the contracted foot, where this has gone on to the absorption of the coffin-bone, there never can be an entire restoration; however, such feet can be greatly relieved by a shoe that does not compress the foot, but leaves it with a good degree of liberty; and many examples of which relief, even with old feet, may be seen testified of by able and honest witnesses, in the book of testimonies appended to the work on *The Expansion Shoe*. And, in regard to prevention altogether, the *Stereoplea* may be consulted with advantage, which takes into consideration that part of the subject.

And if this art, as it is, must be ever continued, it ought to be practised only by men well instructed in the economy of the foot, and by a proper attention to science and rule, and not at random, as at present, by every blockhead, according to his simple notions, vastly to the detriment of the animal, and of the public security.

* From *con* and *arceo*, to force together.