

John Kitching, The Evil Effects of the Bearing Rein

Publication/Creation

c 1850s-1870s

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

THE EVIL EFFECTS OF THE BEARING REIN.

"A few weeks ago two horses were drawing each a load of coals up a rising ground in the suburbs of our city. The hinder horse had the bearing rein swung loosely on his neck, and the animal was hanging his head forwards, and by throwing his weight into the collar, was dragging his load steadily and without undue strain on his muscles and joints. The foremost horse, with his ton of coals, was braced up with a tight bearing rein, his head cramped and raised, his mouth fretted, and every joint and muscle starting and strained at each step he took. The two men were talking to each other, and the carter of the hinder horse was heard by the writer to say, 'Bill, go and give thy horse his head; he'll pull that load easier.' Bill went and slackened the bearing rein. 'Give him more,' said the other. Bill went and gave him all he wanted. The horse immediately did his work in a way which conveyed the relief he felt as clearly as if he had said, 'There, thank you; I'm all right now.' We would commend to every one who has the charge of a draught horse when he is at work, the advice which Bill received and followed,—'Bill, give thy horse his head; he'll pull that load easier.'"—*York Paper.*

The practice extensively prevails of fastening up the heads of horses engaged in drawing loads with a bearing rein. The following lines are written to shew that this practice is founded on the most erroneous principles. The persons who do it have no cruel feelings towards the horse, and are not aware of the injury they inflict upon him. They do it partly from thoughtlessness, and partly from a pure mistake as to its effects. I mean to shew that a bearing rein inflicts upon horses engaged in pulling a gross cruelty, and keeps them in a state of continual torment.

First. If a horse pulling a load has his head held in by a bearing rein, he cannot throw his weight into his collar, and is hindered from giving his body that position which is the most natural and effective. He has to pull by the strength of his muscles only; the weight of his body is lost, and so much pulling strength thrown away. What remains is exerted at a great expenditure of the horse's powers and health, to say nothing of his comfort. The consequence is that his limbs and muscles soon become strained and distorted. His knees are bowed forward and his hocks backward. If a man pulls a load by a strap across his shoulders, he bends his head and chest forward, and relieves his legs; a horse does the same when he can, and ought always.

Second. It injures the horse not only in the way described, but the confinement of the head in a constrained position, whilst the heart and lungs are excited by work, hinders the breathing and the circulation of the blood in the head. These effects make the horse uncomfortable, and he becomes restless and irritable; in fact his head aches and pains him, and he gets many a violent jag and blow just because his driver cannot understand the cause of his restlessness. I have seen many horses standing at public-house doors and other places, in this uneasy state, and by-and-by set off in their desire to get home and be unharnessed, when the driver has rushed out and punished the horse for his own error.

Third. The bearing rein inflicts unceasing torture upon the animal in another way. By holding the head upwards it puts the muscles of the neck on a constant strain. They become painfully uneasy and tired. If the horse cannot bear it, he rests the weight of his head upon the rein, and his mouth is violently stretched. Thus he only exchanges one torment for another. I am not making fancy sketches—every word of my description is a truth. I have seen many splendid and valuable

horses, worthy of a better fate, tossing their heads incessantly, and champing their mouths into a foam from the intolerable uneasiness of this cruel bearing rein. To sum up in a word: the bearing rein lessens the horse's strength, brings on disease, keeps him in constant pain, frets and injures his mouth, and spoils his temper.

These facts are gradually becoming known to intelligent drivers. Nearly all the York cabmen have left off the bearing rein. I have conversed with some of them on the subject. One of them said: "It was a cruel thing, and kept the horse in punishment. When he was tired of holding his head up, and let the weight of it fall on the rein which was hooked on the saddle, it made the top of the shoulders sore from dragging the saddle upon it." If the weight was so great as to make the hide on the withers sore, how must the mouth have suffered from the strain on the bit! It is a very common thing to see horses' mouths worn away for an inch or two by the constant grinding of the bit against the corners. Many carters have a violent way of thrusting against the bit with all their might, and haggling against it in backing their horses, thinking, in their unfeeling impatience, that the horse can as easily thrust a load backwards as pull it forwards—a very ignorant mistake.

There are but two reasons commonly assigned for the use of the bearing rein. One of them is that it keeps the horse from falling by holding him up. The practice of the York cabmen is a sufficient answer to this notion. The truth is, if the horse stumbles, the bearing rein prevents him from recovering himself. Nothing that is fastened to himself can prevent him from falling, because it falls with him. The other reason commonly assigned is that the horse looks so much better with his head held gracefully up. Perhaps a soldier looks better with the stiff, old military stock propping up his chin. But how does he feel? Can he fight any better with his neck jammed almost to apoplexy to give him this soldier-like uprightness? The horse has to work very hard for his living, and he has a right to be so harnessed as to do his work in the way most easy to himself. It is a heartless mockery to set a poor beast to work his hardest, and tie him up into a cramped position that he may look handsome whilst doing it.

For these reasons I say—Away with the bearing rein.

J. KITCHING, M.D.

