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Aids in Military Equitation

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AIDS IN HORSEMANSHIP

DEFINITIONS, &c.

Aids in horsemanship are the indications by means of which the horse is made to understand by the rider what he is required to do. They consist of the correct motions of the hands, application of the legs, and disposal of weight, to direct and determine the horse's movements and paces.

The **Bearing of the Reins** is a light feeling on the bars of the horse's mouth, which is increased or relaxed as required. A double feeling of a rein means the double bearing of the bit on one bar (or side) of the horse's mouth, retaining a light bearing on the other. The leading-rein is the one which bears the double feeling, indicating the direction. The supporting-rein balances and assists the power of the leading-rein. In doing so it retains its normal bearing, but is pressed against the side of the horse's neck by being carried over towards the opposite hand.

The **Pressure of the Leg** is an elastic application of the lower leg (inside the calf), according to the horse's temperament. Support from a leg is the amount of pressure required either to keep the horse up to hand or that which holds him against an increased pressure from the opposite leg (directing), and prevents him running away from it.

Disposition of Weight is the correct disposal of the rider's weight in conforming to the horse's movements. In the direct paces it should be so placed as to give the maximum of ease to the horse and rider. In turning, circling, lateral movements, etc., it must be inclined so that the weight of both is in the same plane (i.e., as in riding a bicycle).

Displacement of Weight is the shifting of the normal balance of the horse and rider in a given direction. By this displacement the greater weight is placed over a particular support or supports for the purpose of lightening the remainder of the mass.

The **Spur** is to enforce what the leg pressure failed to do. It is only to be used for this purpose.

The use of the **Voice** is invaluable in training the young horse, the tone being sharp and coercive, or modulated to a soft and coaxing one where necessary.

The **Whip** should only be used in conjunction with the voice, and then only by a trained horseman.

(The voice and whip, for obvious reasons, are not permitted in ordinary riding, but only in training the young horse, or re-breaking a refractory one.)

The command "**Attention**" to the cavalryman means attention on the part of the rider to the work on hand, and attention on the part of the horse to the rider, so as to be able to move off instantly in any required direction at a given signal. The characteristics of cavalry are combined in the man and the horse—the superior intelligence of the one and the mobility and power of the other. The rider, in direct sympathy with his horse, instantly communicates his wishes by means of the Aids.

The **Normal Position of the Rider** is upright in the Centre of Balance. The weight, being centrally disposed, can be brought forward or backward, and to the right and left, in conforming to the horse's movements, or in displacing it for the purpose of lightening the forehead or haunches.

(To lighten the forehead is to put greater weight on to the haunches, and vice versa.)

The horse is said to be **Collected and Balanced** when his powers are concentrated and entirely controlled between the hand and leg of the rider; and, being neither in front of nor behind his bit, he may be said to move within himself. He must stand square on his feet, with the weight equally distributed

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over the four supports. His head placed at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees to the ground, with his nostrils roughly in line with the withers, so that his range of vision is not restricted and in order that the bit may rest efficiently on the bars. He must be sufficiently supple and obedient to the Aids that the slightest increased bearing of the reins will bring him on to the leg, and a similar pressure from the legs will put him up to hand.

(His head must be raised, because it is his natural lever of balance. If carried low, speed and action are diminished, and the greater weight is over the fore feet. This must not be confused with the extension of the head and neck as the point of balance advances in the faster paces.)

At "Attention" there must always be a slight bearing of the reins and a similar pressure of the legs to collect the horse. In applying the Aids this bearing or pressure is increased or relaxed to indicate a movement, the normal light feeling being resumed when the object is attained. In obedience to these indications the horse follows the line of least resistance. Not only must the hands and legs work together in a tactful manner, but one hand or leg must support, balance, and assist the other hand or leg; otherwise to increase the bearing of one rein and to relax the other entirely is to give the bit an imperfect bearing on the horse's mouth, and want of support from a leg will make the horse uncollected.

The "Feeling" of a horse's mouth and flanks must be done in a light "take and give" manner, and the working of the hands and legs in unison is called Equestrian Tact. Every horse has a fine mouth and responsive flanks to commence with. It is only when the sensitiveness of the bars of the mouth has been destroyed through continual pulling by bad hands, and the feeling of the flanks ruined by constant kicking with the heels or "niggling" with the spurs, that a horse is said to have no mouth and to be spur-proof.

(The Aids should be practised at first with both hands on the reins, and afterwards with one hand only, as a cavalryman must be able to control his horse with one hand whilst the other is free to use his weapon. The bearing of the reins and the lines of direction are the same when used in one hand as with two, but they require a little finer application. The sword hand may assist the bridle hand, if necessary, whilst still holding the sword.)

The Position of the bridle hand or hands is governed by that of the horse's head, though raising or lowering them for the purpose of placing the head is higher horsemanship. But when the body is leant back for lightening the forehead, they should be raised, and lowered in proportion when it is leant forward. When leaning to the right or left, the hand to which the movement is made should be lowered. With two hands on the reins they should be a little lower than the elbows, and about eight to ten inches apart, with the knuckles to the front and the wrists rounded; the little fingers of each dividing the reins, with the top or bridoon reins outside, the spare ends being passed over the forefingers, with the thumbs firmly on them and pointing inwards. When the reins are held in one hand it should be in front of the centre of the body, with the little finger just clear of the saddle, the knuckles to the front, and the thumb pointing to the right. A line drawn through the closed hand, from the thumb to the little finger, should be perpendicular in the direct paces, but in lateral movements it should point to the right or left front, with the back of the hand up or down, according to which rein it is required to shorten.

The Movements of the bridle hand or hands are made from the flexible wrist and also the bent arm, which, though steady by the side, should not be constrained, so as to have perfect freedom of action. Smaller movements are met by the playful use of the wrist, wider ones by the extension of the bent arm.

The Lines of Direction of the bridle hand are—Forward, Backward, and Diagonal. To ease the reins, turn the fingers towards the horse's head by straightening the wrist. To feel them, turn the fingers towards the body by rounding the wrist. To double the feeling of the right rein, retaining a supporting bearing of the left, turn the thumb towards the body, and pass the hand slightly to the right, bringing the left rein against the neck. To double the feeling of the left rein, turn the back of the hand down, with the little finger towards the body, pressing the right rein against the neck.

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THE AIDS

To Collect a Horse (Position of Attention).—The simultaneous application of the hands and legs in the same proportion, whereby the horse is collected by their alternate actions in a "take and give" manner.

Walk—March.—Ease the reins and increase the pressure of the legs. When the horse is in motion the hands and legs resume their normal feeling.

Trot.—The same as for Walk, the pressure of the legs being increased according to the horse's temperament.

(The Aids for "Walk" or "Trot" from the "Halt" or "Trot" from the "Walk" are similar, the momentary easing of the reins and increased pressure of the legs giving place to the normal light feeling when the pace is attained.)

Walk from Trot.—Feel the reins equally in a "take and give" manner, with sufficient pressure of the legs to prevent halting.

(When it is required to reduce the speed from one pace to another—i.e. Gallop to Canter or Trot-Out to Trot-Short, or from any faster pace to a slower one—the Aids are similar to the above, the increased bearing of the reins being supported by sufficient pressure of the legs.)

Halt.—Lean the body slightly back and double the feeling of the reins, the horse being kept up to hand by strong and equal pressure from the legs. The Aids are relaxed when the horse halts.

Canter.—Bring the greater weight on to the haunches for a moment by leaning the body back, at the same time increasing the bearing of the reins slightly, but keeping the hindquarters well under by a pressure of the legs; then ease the reins and throw the weight forward, at the same time closing the legs as strongly as necessary. The Canter is a pace of three time, in which the footfalls are as follows:—When cantering to the right the sequence is—(1) Off fore; (2) Near fore and off hind; (3) Near hind. In cantering to the left it is—(1) Near fore; (2) Off fore and near hind; (3) Off hind.

(A horse is "**cantering true**" when, cantering to the right, the off fore leads, followed by the off hind; and to the left, the near fore followed by the near hind. He is said to be "**cantering false**" when, in working to one hand, the opposite leg leads. He is said to be **disunited** when a foreleg is followed by the opposite hind leg. Most trained horses break into the canter too readily, and nearly all favour one leg or the other, the majority being right-footed, preferring the off to lead. The difficulty is to make a horse lead with either at will.)

Canter to the Right (From the Walk or Trot).—First turn the horse's head slightly to the left, and incline the body to the left rear; then bring the head back and throw the weight over to the right front, at the same time easing the reins and increasing the pressure of the legs, the left one the stronger, each movement accompanying a pace of the horse. When cantering true, the hands, legs, and weight return to the normal.

(The first movement brings the horse's right shoulder forward and lightens the off fore leg; the second brings the weight quickly back on to it, obliging the horse to put out that foot to recover his balance, while the stronger pressure from the left leg forces the mass to follow in that direction. These movements follow so quickly as to be almost simultaneous.)

Gallop.—As for Canter. The rider should sit down in the saddle and keep an increased pressure of the legs (which should remain quite still) just behind the girths, the movements of the hands and body accompanying those of the horse, the forward thrust being taken off by the muscular pliability of the rider's back.)

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