

MISTAKEN KINDNESS

How often is a horse pensioned off and with the best of intentions turned out to grass for the rest of his life. Sentimental writers speak of the dear old horse spending a comfortable old age “roaming the peaceful green meadows in luxurious idleness”. Is not this something of a fallacy? To begin with, meadows are by no means always green, nor are they by any means always a well-chosen paradise for old horses.

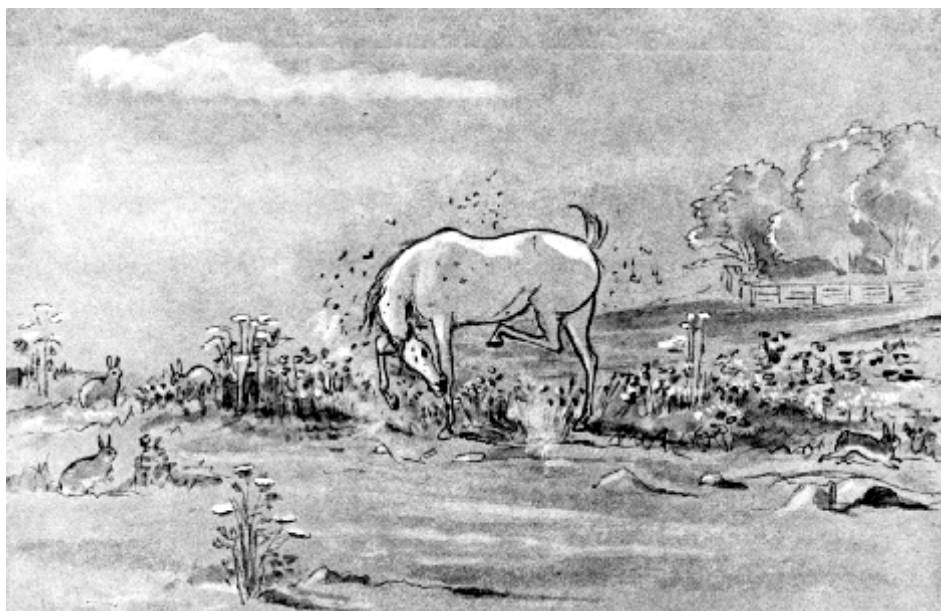
A horse spends his working life under shelter, is well fed and well groomed. Old horses require more care than young ones; they must have their teeth filed evenly and loose teeth removed. Their food must be softer and they must not be exposed to extremes of temperature. Yet it is when they require extra care that all care is withdrawn and he is expected to fend for himself. Just when his joints are stiffening and his teeth are beginning to fail him, all grooming ceases; his rug is pulled off and he is taken from a life of comfort and turned out to graze in the green meadows of the sentimentalist. He has been used to human society but is now condemned to solitude or to the company of other horses, which is completely uncongenial. Many horses, accustomed to being talked to and ridden by their masters, are excessively bored by their own kind.

They miss human companionship and often mope seriously for some special person to whom they are attached. Sometimes they have been driven for years with a favourite stable companion, but they are ruthlessly separated from their old home stable and sent to a life which is unnatural to them as camp life would be to an old city magnate.

There are few things so depressing as the sight of an old horse standing miserably forgotten in an unsheltered field, huddled up with his back to an icy wind and trying to keep life in his half-starved body; or soaked nearly to the bone by incessant rain and standing in a field sinking over his fetlocks in mud and slush and unable to lie down. Or again unable to escape from the summer



torment of sun and flies. Summer shelter is just as necessary as winter shelter. In summer one finds horses turned out in many unsuitable pastures. Sometimes they are the sentimentalist's ideal “green meadows” but on closer inspection, with precious little to eat.



Other fields are bare, barren and brown, wired in on a slope from the steepness and discomfort of which the horse cannot get relief. Or he is left on the top of a hill exposed to gales from all sides in winter or to the blazing sun in summer, pestered by hundreds of flies, unable to eat or rest, stamping himself into laminitis on a grassless iron earth, blinded by glare and dust and incessantly walking round and round and swishing half a tail which has no hair to swish. When the flies disappear at sundown, the midges and gnats begin, and the state of well-bred fine-skinned horses is truly deplorable, driven frantic with irritation and their skin covered with lumps from the bites of innumerable insects.

Yet, this is the “peaceful old age” reserved for our pets! Slack, miserable and weary they lose flesh, hang their heads and endure to the end, and their appearance is accounted for by the fact of “old age”. Old horses are always like that! Unless an owner can provide his old horse (or any horse for that matter) shelter, food and water, the horse is far better kept in a stable – or shot.

Frankly, this happy-green-meadows existence, although well meant is a very doubtful kindness. Proper shelter, food and attention to the horses coat, and especially to his teeth is the best reward for the faithful service of an old friend. If you are not able to give this to him, he is better humanely destroyed by a Veterinarian.

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