Voyages

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Published by University of Ottawa Press

Moodie, Susanna and John Thurston.
Voyages: Short Narratives of Susanna Moodie.

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THE QUIET HORSE;
A DOMESTIC SKETCH

"A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

Mrs. Harrowby had taken it into her head that she must pay a flying visit to her husband, who had been absent for some weeks from home, superintending the arrangement of a very complicated mercantile business, which had involved his brother-in-law in bankruptcy.

There was no immediate necessity for the premeditated visit of Mrs. Harrowby to the city of N ——, but she suddenly formed the wish of going thither; and, like most of her sex when placed in similar circumstances, she determined to go.

The city of N —— was thirty miles off; and Mr. Harrowby, when at home, resided on a small estate in the county of S ——, which he amused himself by cultivating. A most expensive recreation, by the by, to one unacquainted with the practical and useful science of agriculture, and who derived his information upon the subject entirely from books. The poor folks called him the gentleman farmer; the rich laughed at his speculative turn of mind, and prophesied his ruin. Well, he was absent and every thing at Harrowby was at a stand still. Mrs. H. was dull, for she had never before been separated from her husband. The boys were rude and troublesome, and the heavy rains had clouded the fair prospects of an abundant harvest; and without the master, all went wrong together.

"I wish your father were at home," said the anxious
wife, to her eldest daughter. "If nothing happens to prevent it, I must positively go and see him to-morrow."

"But, Mamma, what horse can you take? The gardener has ridden Billy to Ipswich, and will not be back before to-morrow night. The mare Phoebe is lame, and Wellington has been so recently broken in that it would be very dangerous for you to attempt to drive him."

"Well, I know all that, Eliza. I would not drive Wellington for a thousand pounds: but there are other horses in the stable besides that wild thing."

"You are not surely speculating upon the cart-horses? You had better hire a post-chaise from the village."

"Phoo, phoo! how your father would stare to see me drive up to his lodgings in a post-chaise. He would imagine that some one was dead; that some calamity had happened in his absence. Besides, think of the trouble of sending all the way to W— for the chaise. The useless expense. No, no. I have a plan of my own worth two of that. Run, Harry, to the stable, and tell old Coulter that I want him."

Harry, a bright-eyed, fair-haired, imp of six years old, scampered off to do as he was bid, and quickly returned with the old man.

Coulter was the driver of the team of five Suffolk sorrels, only used for farm work. He had lived for seven years in a small cottage upon the estate, and regarded the three horses he had in charge with as much affection as his own children, bestowing more pains upon them, in currying, brushing and cleaning, than he had ever expended on his own person during a long and laborious life. Joe Coulter was a tall, lank-haired, athletic-looking man, on the wrong side of sixty, wrinkled and weather-beaten, but strong and active still. His face bore a striking resemblance to the physiognomy of his favorite animal, and had a simple honest expression.

Pulling the front lock of his rusty black hair, as a substitute for a bow, and scratching the back of his head with his left hand, the worthy peasant drew himself straight up at the back of Mrs. Harrowby's chair, and drawled out, in the true Suffolk whine, "Missus, here bees I. What are yer commands?"
"Joe, I want to go to N —— to-morrow, to see your master. What horse can I take for the journey?"

"None, as I knows of," returned the old man, shaking his head. "Work and pleasure require different servants. Master's riding hoss is away. The mear is lame, and that ere Wellington is perfectly unmanageable. And now, though I'm sure ye'd like to see measter, I'm afraid that ye must bide at home."

"But I'll do no such thing. I have set my mind upon going to N ——, and I mean to go. What should prevent me from taking your fore-horse, Sharper. He is a beautiful animal."

The old man started a pace or two back, in utter amazement. "Take Sharper! The Lord save us. What put it into yer mind to take him? Why, Marm, he's as wild as the old un. I do think that the soul of a lord has some how got into that beast. Like all handsum folk, he's so proud and so tricky, and he do rear and plunge, and caper about like a mad thing. It is as much as I and my boy Jonathan can do to hold him in, when he have a mind to go his own way. He'd smash the chay all to shivers in a brace of shakes. Although," and the old man's eyes brightened "he's a bonny beast, and 'maist fit for a gentleman's carriage; he'd kill you and the young missuses in the twinkling of an eye."

"I certainly will dispense with his services," said Mrs. Harrowby. "But what of Boxer?"

"Why, Marm, he do well enough as middle hoss in the team. He's as dull as tother's spunky. Sharper starts him, and Captain drives him on. He's so fat and lazy-like, it would take you two days going to N ——."

"And Captain?"

"Aye, he's the quietest beast. He's gentle as a lamb. A child might drive him. If you take any of my horses, it must e'en be the colt." For so Coulter designated a horse ten years old, who happened to be a colt when he came to the place; and the colt he still remained in the old man's estimation.

"The colt let it be; and mind me, Joe, let him be well fed and well cleaned, and in the chaise by six o'clock.
to-morrow morning. In the plated harness, he will look almost as well as Billy."

"Na, na," said the old man, "there is about as much difference between them as between you and the cook. Every hoss has his own place; and the colt is about as fit for the chay, as I be for the tea-parlor. If you take man or beast out of the situation God meant him for, you do him a bad service." And with this eloquent harangue, old Joe Coulter retreated to the stable, to prepare his darling for the alarming prospect of the morrow.

Great were the preparations for the approaching journey. Mistress, and maids, and young ladies, were up by sunrise, making ready for the great event; gathering choice fruit, and collecting all sorts of dainties for the absent owner of the mansion. As to old Joe, he was stirring by daybreak, brightening the chaise harness, and braiding her long flowing mane of the unconscious victim of female caprice; and after all was done, and the old man declared that the colt looked a perfect beauty, that his skin shone like satin, and he'd not disgrace a carriage, he found more difficulty in preparing him for the journey than he had at first anticipated. The plated harness was far too small for the vast proportions of the ponderous beast, and had to be let out to the utmost extent into which a hole could be punched in the leather. The shafts of the slight and elegant vehicle were far too tight, and greatly curtailed his powers of locomotion. The poor animal looked sadly out of place, and cut but a sorry figure in his ill-fitting finery.

"I knew how he'd look in your trumpery," cried old Joe, shaking his head, "Just as Nan would look in Missuses best silk gownd. It don' t fit him; and how can they 'spect for him to look himsel. And then as to going; them shafts be so tight, they hold him like a vice, he can't draw a breath in comfort. He'll puff and blow along the load, like them ugly black things at sea, that turn about like a cart-wheel, that the fishers call pomposses. Well Captain, boy, (patting him affectionately,) yer a gentleman now. How do ye like the gear?" The horse rubbed his white nose (for he had the misfortune to have a white face) affectionately against the
caressing hand of the old man. "Aye, yer a sensible cratur, as wise as a human and as queeat as a child; but I do pities ye from my very soul. When these women folk do take a notion into their heads, they are the most unreasonable animals in the world."

His colloquy was here interrupted by the appearance of the mistress, with two of the young ladies and the maid servant, bearing a hamper full of good things from the farm.

The girls were in high spirits at the prospect of their ride, and they laughed and joked alternately with their mother and the maid, at the appearance of their equipage. The great size of the horse elevated the forepart of the chaise to such a degree, that it seemed in the very act of falling backwards.

"Is it safe, Joe," asked Miss Sarah, pausing on the step and looking doubtingly at the old man.

"It can't go over while the boss keeps his legs," said Coulter, sulkily; "an its no trifle that would capsize him."

"He looks just like an elephant in harness," cried little Anna, clapping her hands and bursting into a merry laugh, as she bounded into the chaise. "I am sure we need not fear his running away with us."

"He is very queeat, very queeat," muttered old Joe. "He'll go as he likes, in spite of ye, and no mistake."

Mrs. Harrowby now mounted, reins in hand; and though the horse presented the loftiest portion in the strange group, and their seat slanted inconveniently back, and had a very awkward appearance, she was not a nervous timid woman, and she apprehended no danger. Bidding Coulter let Captain's head go, she lightly touched him with the whip, and in a cheerful voice urged him forward. She might as well have tickled the hide of a rhinoceros with a feather, or spoken in Greek to a Cherokee Indian. The quiet horse neither felt her whip nor understood her language. He shook his mane, pricked up his ears, and whisked his long tail into the laps of the young ladies in the carriage. Anna, mischievous thing, was in convulsions of laughter; while Mrs. Harrowby, provoked by the obstinacy
of her Bucephalus, applied the butt end of the whip to his fat, round back, and so far forgot her breeding as to exclaim, in no silver tone, "Get on, you stupid brute!"

The energy of her address set the great animal in motion; and in a pace between an amble and a high trot, he floundered round the carriage drive that led to the front of the house, and plunged into the road.

"Hold him up well, Marm!" was the last exhortation of old Joe, as his shaft-horse jolted off at a tremendous heavy gallop. "He's cruel hard in the mouth: and the Lord send ye a safe journey home."

"Amen," ejaculated Miss Sarah, who considered that the prayer of old Joe was not indispensable under existing circumstances. "Dear Mamma, do you not think that we had better return? It will be impossible to drive that horse thirty miles."

"I'll try my best," said Mrs. Harrowby. "I don't choose to be conquered by a brute." And on they went, at a pace so hard and rough that they were soon as much out of breath as the astonished horse, who, never accustomed to any vehicle but a heavy waggon or a dung cart, seemed to feel very much in the same predicament as a dog with a tin kettle tied to his tail. The shafts held him so closely, that his huge frame panted and swelled as if it would burst, at every step, the impediments that restrained him; and he often stopped, and shook both shafts and harness, with an angry impatience quite incompatible with his character of a quiet horse. Out of the heavy ruts he refused to go; his mouth was as hard as leather, so that to make him quarter the road, while passing other vehicles, was an operation attended with no small difficulty and danger; and then he hung his head so low, that he looked as if he were momentarily contemplating making a somerset, in order to free himself from his galling position. Fatigued with jerking the reins, and urging on the brute with voice and whip, poor Mrs. Harrowby's vexations did not end here. Every idle fellow that passed had some uncourteous remark to make upon the driver and her steed.

"Hard work, that?" cried one.
“Prime lady’s horse,” said another.
“Hollo, old lady!” vociferated a third. “What will you take for yer hoss? I want a racer to enter at Newmarket. Isn’t he a spanker for the Derby?”

Tired, mortified, and thoroughly disgusted with the doings of the quiet horse, yet, like a true woman, determined not to give up, Mrs. Harrowby consoled herself and her girls with the idea, that they were not known in that part of the country and need not mind the provoking speeches of a set of vulgar fools. As to the girls, they were just young enough to laugh at their misadventure, and to regard it as an excellent frolic.

But to return to Captain. When he had succeeded in toiling up a hill, he took the liberty of stopping as long as he thought fit, in order to recover himself and take breath; and it required the united efforts of the whole party to urge him on; and when he did make a start, he went off at a ferocious pace, which threatened to jolt them to pieces. At every farm yard he stopped and neighed; and once, when it unfortunately happened that the gate that led from the road had been left open to admit a load of wheat, he rushed with headlong speed to the barn, and it required the farmer and his men to force him back into the road.

At mid-day, they had only accomplished fifteen miles of their journey; and after dining and resting, and feeding the unmanageable animal for two hours, at an inn by the road side, with heavy hearts they proceeded on their journey. Mrs. Harrowby’s head ached, she was tired and out of spirits, the fair Sarah was busied with her own thoughts, and even the gay Anna had ceased to laugh at Captain and his absurdities.

The shades of night were darkening the beautiful landscape, which spreads far and wide round the ancient city, when the travellers caught a glimpse of their temporary home, and blessed their stars that they had been conducted thus far in safety; but their trials were not quite ended. The horse, who had been brought up in the country, and had never been in a large town in his life, was strongly agitated, and shewed unequivocal symptoms of
alarm, when turned into the broad and lamp-lighted thoroughfare. He snorted, reared, and rushed from side to side, refusing to yield the least obedience to the feminine hand and voice that strove in vain to guide him and restrain the impetuosity of his movements; and would in all probability have been the death of his driver, had not the reins been grasped in a bolder hand, and the ladies rescued from their perilous situation, by a gentleman to whom they were known.

"My dearest Betsy," cried Mr. Harrowby, after the first affectionate salutations had passed between him and his wife and daughters, "what tempted you to risk your lives by driving over with that horse?"

"Ah, my dear John, I will allow that it was very foolish — but I did so long to see you; and I apprehended no danger, when Coulter assured me that Captain was such a quiet horse."

"And so he is, when confined to his proper place, in the farm yard; but there is always danger in taking either man or animal out of the sphere, where education and circumstances can alone render him useful, as you have proved, my dear old woman, by your late experience."

Three days passed happily away at N ——, and no one remembered Captain, but the servant who supplied his wants in the stable. The fourth morning was a glorious day for the harvest, and Mr. Harrowby reminded his wife that the service of Captain would be required at home.

Once more the mighty brute was forced between the narrow shafts; and Mrs. Harrowby, with less confidence in his gentle propensities, undertook the task of driving him home. The man servant led the horse beyond the bounds of the city, and saw him fairly started upon the turnpike road. But so impatient was the country-bred horse of the restraint and imprisonment of the close stable at the inn, that he needed neither whip nor voice to urge him to return to the beloved haunts of his youth, and the comrades who shared his daily labors. He literally set his face homeward, and his pace kept time with his wishes. He bounded forward at the top of his rough ungainly speed,
making his anxiety to reach the anticipated goal known to the travellers by his loud and frequent neighing. The nearer he approached his native pastures, the more eccentric did these manifestations become; and when at length within half a mile of his own stable, his shrill signals were answered by his comrades from the field, the poor brute jolted along with a velocity which shook the occupants of the chaise up and down, with that rolling motion of a ship struggling through a short heavy sea.

"Thank God! we are once more safe at home!" cried Mrs. Harrowby, to the gardener, who had ridden to meet them upon Billy: and the affectionate animals saluted each other with almost human sagacity. "I did not think that it was possible for a quiet horse to make so much noise."

"You forget, Mamma, that he belongs to the farm-yard," said Anna, laughing, "and the moral that Papa drew from our adventure. 'No one looks well or acts well out of his own sphere.'"

Victoria Magazine 1 (1848): 265-68.