



# Remarks on French shoeing, by an English shoeing smith

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FALSE philosophy, from its glitter, is sure to attract more notice from the public, than the more slow and patient workings and investigations of truth. Ptolomy's false system of astronomy gained a decided advantage over the more philosophical and wary truths of Pythagoras, and was hardly received till confirmed by Copernicus, and the irresistible demonstrations of Newton in later times.

As much ado has been lately made about French shoeing, with unparalleled effrontery and ignorance of the subject, as though some new and unknown art had suddenly burst upon the world, with properties attributed to it that never in the least belonged to it, and which statements and assertions, boldly advanced, have much misled the public; so it appears necessary to relieve the public from this delusion, to let the scythe of criticism pass over it, and reduce this luxuriant plant to its proper dimensions, for not a little confusion has been created by it; it has also served to debase our shoeing very much, by introducing into practice a worse shoe, and a still worse mode of nailing, than we ever heretofore had been used to, and which has rendered of late more severe curbs, branches, and bits to our horses than we ever recollect to have seen before. As to the French mode of shoeing, it is in reality nothing different from the English, but in being more coarsely executed, arising from causes we shall presently state, and in fact, is differing nothing in principle from it.

Let us first examine the pretence for introducing French shoeing among us, and we shall see his grounds are as bad as his reasoning is false; for he states, on very loose authority, if authority it can be called, that the French have few or no lame horses from their mode of shoeing. Certainly, nothing is easier, with some men, than to make assertions; and pity it is, often, that both time and labour is necessary to disprove such assertions, even though idle and groundless. Any one has only to go into France, as we have done, and properly examine their horses' feet, and he will find lame horses enough, and feet hideously elongated from contraction generally. And also their best writers and veterinarians have admitted and lamented the miserable state of their horses' feet. No one has more ably written in France on shoeing than Lafosse; and what does he say?—he first complained of the general ill effects of shoeing, and after stating the fact, was led to apprehend that it proceeded from the want of pressure on the frog, and so laid the foundation of that absurd doctrine which has proved such a seduction and pitfall to our English veterinarians, and produced such a train of misconception and evil,—and with these views he was led into the use of the low-heeled shoe. Now, there would have been no occasion for all this, had their horses gone, as this writer states, "almost invariably well." Has he never heard of such a word in French as *Encastalure*? Perhaps not; or, if he saw it, would he probably understand what it meant, the very evil complained of in all their works, from Soleysel to Bourgelat;

nor, perhaps, has he ever heard of the grand French proposition of Soleysel, of cutting open the heels, slitting them to the bone, and fastening in the opening a wedge, and healing the parts under its operation of keeping them distended! Does he know the phrase, *reserrement des talons*, among the French?—perhaps not. This writer, indeed, seems solely to have depended, in making these monstrous assertions, on the vague hearsay accounts of some officer or officers, whose names or grade he does not favour us with. These assertions, being roundly made, many, very many, people have been deluded by them, and have run after them, and the veterinarians also, and men more particularly of the army: since as it came from behind Carlton Palace, they have especially echoed these doctrines through the country.

Let us now proceed to examine the French shoe, and we shall see that it is nothing more or less than the English shoe, more summarily and less artfully made, and generally of a saucer or bowl shape, that is, cupped within and convex without; the nail holes set wide from the rim of the shoe, the last invariably smaller than the rest, and without any fullering; as dispatch is their object, and they are inclined to little trouble, if it can be done without, they simply turn round the iron to the figure of the foot, and without fullering it, as we have stated, drive almost in the middle of the width of the shoe a great square stamp for the holes, and then perforate it with a less one, or tool corresponding to our pritchel, knowing very well, as their iron is not over good, that if they used their clumsy stamp near the outer rim of the shoe, they would almost infallibly burst it out: and this gross proceeding is set down by our author as the result of intelligence and refinement. And, in respect to the fullering also, we cannot forbear giving here, in its defence, the remarks of an intelligent writer on this subject. "In order to give the nails a better hold, I fullered the shoe deeply, which appeared to have this advantage, that it brought the heads of the nails into a closer approach to the hoof, and the head of the nail was not so liable to be entangled in the stamp-hole, and, in its final adjustment, be forced by it out of the direction it had previously received. It now occurred to me that several advantages belonged to our old English custom of fullering, which I had not before comprehended or understood: one was, that the nails ranged more in a line, and the holes could be pritched finer or nearer to the exterior of the shoe, without being so liable to burst it out, and also that a greater liberty was given in pitching or planting the nail when about to drive it. The pritchel bumps in the rim of the shoe were not near so large as when the shoes were not fullered, or the trouble so much in reducing them." So that by going back to old French ways, which had been long improved upon by English mechanics, we are not likely much to advantage our art.

But what is curious is, that after all these eulogies on French shoeing, he quits the French shoe for a foolish mongrel of his own invention, with fantastical variations from it, and which are equally demonstrative of his good taste. Instead of a cup or bowl-shaped shoe upwards, for such the French use, we are presented with a shoe, above, with a flat or nearly flat surface, and below, with a concave one, being the late St. Bel's shoe, which had been much tried, by his recommendation, on the first establishment of our veterinary college in 1792, and for very good reasons, after a fair trial, abandoned. And, when all things are considered, it will be found about the worst form a shoe can receive; for it is true the horse will go

almost as well in one form as another of the shoe, if it has only the property of a wide web and a good nailing, that the precise figure of this non-essential part admits of endless quibbling about. The narrow bearing of such a shoe as St. Bel's on the ground made it severely felt by the horse, and was the cause of its being thrown aside; it also, by wear, became of a figure the most unfit of any, that of the underside of a ring severed in the plane of its lying flat on the table, which afforded a very slippery narrow bearing underneath, after it was a little worn in its outer bearing rim.

To this shoe of St. Bel's, at least as to its general figure, was added, with infinite address, the coarse French nailing; thus combining about the two most unfortunate propositions that could have been united in one shoe.

Throughout his very confident performance, in which he sits, as it were, in judgment upon his compeers, as though he had before time done something very great to obtain him this elevated seat; yet we believe his exploits in Oxford-street, or in Newmarket, the theatre of his operations, in no way entitle him to this, for he appears hardly to understand the first elements of his art, or that the foot is elastic, and that the sole, on receiving the weight descends, as much as the shoe at least will permit it, and that the dirt or stones lodged in it will be easily forced out, if a concave figure is given to this upper surface of the shoe, but not so well if flat, which has occasioned all the most able writers on the subject uniformly to prefer it,—as Lafosse, James Clarke, Moorcroft, &c., who invariably recommend as much distance as can be conveniently obtained between the sole and the iron; and the shoe flat to the ground is evidently preferable, as it affords a more extensive surface of bearing, which gives greater ease to the horse; and as to stability of bearing, in real use, no one could tell the difference. The wide web also brings the pressure as from a distance, which tends to make it the less sensibly felt; and hence it is that a wide webbed shoe or the bar shoe is so easy to weak feet, and affords such extraordinary relief: all those advantages are lost by concaving the shoe towards the ground, without any adequate return. Its wear is also much longer when flat.

Again, this property of extensive bearing on the ground is not to be carried to an excess, to the exclusion of other advantages, as it is in what is called the Persian shoe, where the iron is made clumsily to cover the whole foot, covering it up from the soil and air, and giving it a slippery surface. In sands of great depth, however, it may be advantageous, by not sinking in so deep; but this is not the case with English roads, however it may benefit in the deserts of Arabia.

Next as to the nailing: this is done, in the French shoes, in a very gross manner, obliquely across the axis of the foot; the nail, inserted strongly within the sole, is directly not so much up the hoof as obliquely outwards, and is brought out very low down. This mode of nailing requires less skill and pains, and is necessary to a shoe made as we have described, with the holes in the middle of the web or width of the shoe, but is not, we apprehend, the manner of nailing that would be advised as the best possible under the given circumstances of a shoe properly made.

This question of nailing would resolve itself into one of sound carpentry, and this, we apprehend, would direct the driving of the nail in a direction nearly perpendicular to the axis of the hoof, deviating only a few degrees from it, so as to secure the coming out of the nail at a given distance up the hoof, perhaps an inch and a

quarter, or an inch and a half, as the best possible height and direction that a nail could receive. The nail, in this direction, would more firmly sustain the shoe, and would be in no danger of being uneasy to the animal; whereas, in the French cross nailing, a pressure towards the vein is to be apprehended, and the security of the shoe cannot be so great as with a nail driven more uprightly, or almost parallel to the direction of the wall.

This nailing, forsooth, is also taken by this writer for a refinement; and being a lazy way of doing it, and requiring less address and skill than putting in a nail upright, am sorry to say has had too many imitators; for there can be no reasonable doubt, one should apprehend, that for strength and ease, as we have before stated, the upright nailing is the best. This clumsy cross nailing is not, perhaps, of quite so much consequence to the strong footed horses of France (at least formerly\*) as to our finer and more blood-like footed horses in England. This French method is, however, we are glad to see, among our smiths already loosing ground again, and the English method of nailing is again adopted. And was it not for the thin shanks of the French nails, and their large obtuse heads, which often play in their large holes, horses would be much more often lamed by them than they are. It is curious to observe, that the French, in driving their nails, use a hammer the very reverse of the English hammer, having a heavy broad-faced head, and a short small pair of claws, and the first blow they give they generally drive it in more than half way.

It will be obvious, we believe, to any one capable of fairly viewing the subject, that no advantage is likely to be gained by adopting French customs; and the French themselves are astonished at the bold assumptions and assertions of this wordy *parvenu* of the veterinary world.

Another point of pretended improvement, about which a great fuss is made, is turning up the shoe in front; and as this is professed to be done to avoid tripping, a lamentable and almost constant evil, so it obtains for him a great attention, and takes hold of the imagination of the inexperienced surprisingly. The objections to his proposition are these,—that, in general, in taking away the toe they take away too much, and rob the horse of his best support, often carrying it so far as to let the shoe rest on the sole, it is certainly a mighty natural sort of proceeding if he trips with his toe to take it away; but we cannot join in, from dear bought experience, with such a wholesale proceeding; for we know full well that it is not in general the length of the toe that makes the horse to trip, but the benumbed and bound-up state of the general hoof; and that he will not trip, no not even with a long toe, if the foot be unconstrained and at liberty, as many a one must have witnessed when their shoes had been on long, and had obtained a degree of liberty by wear. Often these men, by grossly taking away the toe, not only cause the horse to trip worse, but to tumble also, that this removal of the toe and turning up of the shoe, is much more liable to be injurious than beneficial. The toe removed, the horse loses also a portion of his fulcrum for progression; for there is no doubt he can take hold of the ground better with a sharp toe than without it. But the great objection of all is, that when once you quit the level line of the shoe, or remove the toe to a greater or less angle in front, this angle or surface is with the greatest difficulty fitted with iron; this difficulty is sometimes overcome by the rude measure

\* Their breed of horses having been very much improved lately.

of burning it to it, at the risk of scorching the interior of the foot. The French themselves, to whom the objection had been mentioned, readily admitted this difficulty of fitting the toe so removed, that little or nothing will be obtained by this apprehended improvement, though it is a ready pitfall for all young novices in the art. The toe of moderate length, or rather full, practice has shewn us to be the best.

This turning up of the toe of the shoe in front, out of the level of the rest of the shoe, is, we apprehend, a practice of very great antiquity, perhaps coeval with the commencement of the art of shoeing, and proceeded, possibly, from their having to do with naturally worn feet, which, being defricated, or deeply worn away at this part, required some sort of adaptation of the shoe to this natural figure.

To a great deal of jejune nonsense in this work,—which, if he had waited a few years more, his experience might have taught him better,—there is a small matter of pilfering to be added to his account, and, what is worse, from an author he has pretended to decry, and which must not be passed by unnoticed. This is a truly base and miserable copy of Mr. Bracey Clark's interesting and beautifully executed plate of the coffin-bone of a horse that has been long shod, and of one in a state of nature, exhibiting the extraordinary effects the shoeing has upon this bone. Now, this curious discovery is purloined without the smallest acknowledgment, and this from a living contemporary who merited to be treated far otherwise. It is also perfectly useless, as it is unattended with any of those valuable remarks, which in the original are seen to accompany it.

So that it would appear, that adopting French shoeing, would only be going back to customs old and gross, and long since much improved upon by our English smiths. But so earnestly desirous are some to become authors, that rather than not write, they will choose to hazard a bad cause, at least one they have hardly had time to consider. We should be sorry to deal severely with any, but surely such works as these very much obstruct the opening path of knowledge, and deserve some reprehension. The great business and difficulty of shoeing has been only blinked at in this wretched performance,—for the great and crying evil every where is *contraction*; and will French any more than the English shoeing remove this? Certainly not. Then what has been obtained by all this blundering stuff about French shoeing.

These remarks, written some years ago, have not been published solely on account of this one miserable writer, but to check, if possible, the general mania for authorship on this subject, from hands of little experience, and heads of still less judgment.

*Menalcas.*