

Famous Races and Race Horses of History

A Series of Incidents in that Wonderful Pastime Which Long Ago Won the Title "The Sport of Kings"

PART V.

The Suburban Handicap, 1904

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PRELIMINARY to this section, the fifth and last of the present series, it will probably be acceptable to the readers of this magazine, especially the old turfmen who have become the most joyous of fans, to insert a condensed history of the first occasions when it is known that the horse existed, and the first appearance of the English thoroughbred in our country.

We are indifferent about preserving our traditions as the English do. There are none more glorious. Things that happened under the Plantagenets, the Tudors, the Stuarts, are spoken of by Englishmen as of recent occurrence. Only a few months ago a cultivated lady wrote about a glorious ruby that sparkled in the seventh Edward's crown. It was in the helmet of Henry V. at Agincourt; before that it flashed from the sable shield of the Black Prince—perhaps at Poitiers and Crecy; was given to him by Peter the Cruel, who wrested it from a Moor who idolized the noble gem. The past has lovely haunts; there is a tang—a delightful dream-inspiring aroma diffused over the fast-fading fields of our brilliant turf battles.

The first horses mentioned in history is where Joseph the Hebrew took in exchange horses for bread during the famine. And, on the death of Jacob, his funeral was attended by "both chariots and horsemen." From Homer and from the ancient sculptures of Persepolis and Nineveh the horse was first used for draught, although the Iliad tells in glowing song of the exciting chariot races at the funeral celebration of Patroclus by his friend Achilles.

The horse early became a potent factor in battle. At the Exodus, in the reign of the fifth Ramses—last of the Eighteenth Dynasty, 1500 B. C., the pursuing army had "six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt and all the horsemen."

When the Israelites returned into Canaan—lying between Suez and the ridges lined with the cedars of Lebanon, the horse had already been domiciled, for the Canaanites "went out to fight against Israel with horses and chariots very many." Six hundred years after this date Arabia still had no horses, for while Solomon imported from Arabia silver and gold and spices, it was from Egypt that he procured horses for his own cavalry and that of his allied kings of Phoenicia. "The Shepperd Kings" of Egypt—a dynasty of invading conquerors of that "stranger race"—the Hyksos, (origin unknown) introduced the horse into Lower Egypt, making it a leading breeding district for the noble animal. The authorities agree on this, and further surmise that these Hyksos were intruders from eastern Abyssinia, where, around Dongola and Sennaar, a superior breed of Barb horses still exist.

Horses of Eastern Potentates hitched to cars with sharp scythe blades of the Assyrian conquerors came down on Israel "like the wolf on the fold." The iron chariots of the Phoenician kings of Canaan "fought in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo," when "the river Kishon swept them away."

Alexander charged at the head of his splendid cavalry with the spirit of a paladin of chivalry—this scion of the old

heroic stock of Hellas leading the onset on a horse of rare symmetry and grace.

Nothing in antiquity equals the equestrian groups from the Propylaea of the temple of Pallas Athene on the Acropolis, known now as the Elgin marbles in the British Museum. They are from the chisel of Phidias, surpassing infinitely in beauty of design and execution anything that has ever been or ever will be done in sculpture; carved from the pure Pentelical rock.

In Europe the rich plains of Thessaly and Thrace extending far away to the boundless pastures of the Ukraine and the valleys of the Dneiper and the Don, attracted breeder and animal at a very early date. In Media and Persia and Assyria the monarchs employed cavalry and chariots in war. In the second century various monarchs sent presents of horses to the rulers of Arabia. As late as the fourth century a Roman emperor thought two hundred Cappadocian horse the most acceptable present he could offer a powerful prince of Arabia. Even in the seventh century the Arabs had few horses. When Mahomet attacked the Koreish near Mecca he had but two horses in his whole army. Hence, the old idea that the horse was in Arabia in the ancient days must be abandoned.

The Cavaliers of Maryland and Virginia, rebels against England's laws and iron rule, were representatives of wealth and fashion prior to the Revolution, and took the first lead in the noblest amusement that ever stirred the blood or engaged the mind of man. Their descendants of to-day are the most equestrian in habit of all American citizens, and the result of the liberality of those early settlers is yet visible in the blood of the horses of those commonwealths. Horse racing began almost simultaneously in the two states. Previous to Braddock's defeat in 1753 the imported thoroughbred horse "Spark" was presented to Governor Ogle of the Maryland colony by Lord Baltimore, who had received him as a gift from the Prince of Wales (father of the third George). "Spark" seems to have been the first racer of distinction brought over. Governor Ogle also imported the great mare, "Queen Mab." This must have occurred before 1751, as the Prince of Wales died that

year. It appears to have been part of the duty of a governor of Maryland to keep a racing stud;— following Governor Ogle, Governors Ridgely, Wright, Lloyd and Sprigg were earnest turfmen and pillars of American racing interests.

More than a hundred years had intervened from the importation by Virginia gentlemen of the English stallion from whose loins sprung Boston, the hero of the first of this series, and the running of the most brilliant Suburban event (1904) in the history of that classic of the American turf. During that century the strange silent processes of nature abetted by the hand of ingenious man wrought from the steel and whipcord basis of those four-mile giants a finer, fairer type of equine perfection. Not capable of those crucial iron tests of heart and lung and limb of the four-mile champions of an earlier day, but infinitely superior in marvelous flights of speed and high finish of form. Hermis, the winner of the Suburban of 1904 has been selected by me as the ideal of that type. The wreath is deservedly bestowed on one of the mightiest thoroughbreds that ever graced the American turf. I witnessed the great race, and I append the impressions, yet alive.

I have often observed that my old acquaintances of the turf seem naturally to have fallen under the fascinations of the diamond. Why is it that the two sports attract the same devotees? Perhaps the same electric spark that thrills the being when a mighty struggle is witnessed in the homestretch is ignited when speed, brain, nerve, conspire together on the diamond. Anyway, brother sportsmen, what makes this throbbing at your heart; why do you insensibly unite your voice with the roar of the mad thousands; why do you lean forward eager as if some profound meaning lay in the performance of these brilliant sports? Is it the great leveling spirit of sport and strife?

THE SUBURBAN

In the Brooklyn Handicap, one month before The Suburban, Irish Lad and Hermis ran, head and head, the first mile of the distance in 1.39 2-5, and The Picket, whose rider was wisely trailing just in striking distance, or rather as near the

leaders as their marvelous speed would permit, "loosed a wrap" at the critical moment when he saw that the great rivals had done each other to death, and snatched the great prize from them both. The cry rose from the betting sheds that Hermis was faint-hearted,—a quitter. With wings of the morning the reporters sent it over the earth: "Hermis can't stay the distance."

The same horses were eligible to the Suburban. The brilliant son of Hermence and Katy of the West had a chance to retrieve his lost prestige.

On Friday, four days before Suburban Day, I arrived in New York, and saw Hermis with imperious and frictionless stride and a grace all his own, gallop to victory in the Brookdale Handicap, well ahead of the great Africander and Eugenia Burch. It was a great race, itself. It showed plainly, too, that Hermis was Hermis. And, the betting sheds and the sporting world knew that in full possession of his powers the horse did not live who could take his measure in a heart-breaking grapple from wire to wire at the handicap distance. The pride of his owner—Mr. Thomas, was wounded; Mrs. Thomas, who claimed Hermis for her very own, had cried; his trainer—young Will Shields, had "cussed"; and Arthur Redfern's reply to a taunt of a friend that his mount was not game, was,—*"Call Hercules a coward!"* Nothing less than the trailing in the dust of the colors of Irish Lad and The Picket could heal the wounds of fatal Brooklyn.

So, when the brilliant Suburban parade passed in review before the fifty thousand spectators, Hermis, in the flush of his Brookdale victory, hostage of promise for a mightier achievement that day, never appeared with so proud a crest, glistening a coat, or movement of such grace and invincible determination. The great betting element of New York stood their ground firmly and quickly made Irish Lad the favorite and The Picket a close second choice; no weakening on the gamblers' part. But the great heart of the people had cast away its former idol and today were worshipping at the shrine of Hermis. It was Hermis they had come to see bring back victory to the East. The famous duel in the Brooklyn when he and Irish Lad in the death-grapple

which Titans take in extremity, wrecking each the other's hopes of victory, had brought out these great hosts to see the Brooklyn avenged, and honor and supremacy restored to the eastern turf. Wild splendid tales floated on the ocean breeze across the sward between the two famous race courses, Sheepshead and Gravesend; tales of lightning fast work done by Irish Lad and The Picket. But the only point that secured a moment's recognition was, "Is Hermis in condition to run the distance." The answer of his trainer, young Will Shields, was "Hermis is ready to run the race of his life." His knightly owner, Mr. E. R. Thomas, approved the statement.

FIFTY THOUSAND SAW THE GREAT RACE

The soul of this great assembly was deeply stirred; distinctly apparent were their emotions of joy or sorrow as the varying fortunes of the giant contest presented themselves. A great crowd like an individual utters its cry of pain or its note of triumph. So with the backers of these champions as they put forth the last desperate effort to reach the goal which meant wealth, honor, and renown. In groups of flashy men and youths the breezy idiom of the betting sheds was heard—strange and marvelous vocabulary that robbed the common things of life with weird pregnant meaning. Nearby a caressing voice in exquisite diction expressed lofty sentiment, stirring incident, play of fancy. This intense occasion is impossible of lucid description. The iron mandates of beauty held sway there, too; dazzled the scene with brilliancy and glint and gleam, fresh from palatial abodes of wealth, diffusing an indefinable aroma which is the prerogative of beauty and love to dispense.

The short pitiful story of human life and folly is soon told, and the great Suburban is but a stirring incident to many of those whose destiny was cast with the rising of the barrier and the falling of the flag on that momentous occasion. Bright tears of gladness moistened the fringed lids of a lovely high-born girl who had wagered heavily on Hermis, and found an antithesis nearby in the fine old gentleman of the white hair who had backed Irish Lad to the limit. More than a

half million dollars were lost to the book-makers by wealthy men who backed Irish Lad. It was the ladies, the populace, the male and female theatrical profession that won their thousands on Hermis. Lew Fields and Lillian Russell alone won \$32,000. Plungers and pikers alike were gorged to satiety in the feverish desire to gamble. Both played their limit, and the spirit of hell rioted in bosoms where human reason had lost its bearings.

AT THE POST

Starter Fitzgerald received the princely company as they came to the barrier, and quickly placed them in position. With kindly words and manner he reminded the little riders that each must mind his own business and not speculate on what the other boys were doing. "Each of you," he said, "is to ride his own horse. Don't mind any other. I will take care of the others. Just mind your own business and we will get the best start you ever saw."

And they did. In less than two minutes he caught the field in line and pressing the button—shouting "come on," the great Suburban was started.

It may be well to give verbatim the instructions of Mr. Shields, trainer of Hermis, to Arthur Redfern, the brave Kentucky boy who rode the brave Kentucky thoroughbred to victory and fortune. Willis Shaw, who had the leg up on Irish Lad, had just been instructed to "lay within a length of Hermis until a half mile from home, and then cut loose and break Hermis' heart in a whirlwind finish." Redfern's instruction were in these words: "Arthur," said young Shields, "you are to take the track just as soon as the barrier rises, and you are not to surrender it to any one at any time. Don't you mind anything else;—get to the front and stay there. Don't ride your horse's head off if you are not challenged going down the back stretch, but if anybody gets alongside of you go right on." They were instructions emphatic and for blood. It meant that under no circumstances must Irish Lad be conceded the lead, for none other of the great racers could possibly have enough speed to get up to Hermis and live with him long enough for the challenge to be effective.

THEY ARE OFF

As the barrier rose, like eager coursers held in leash, Irish Lad on the inside and Hermis on the extreme outside, bounded from their fellows simultaneously, and fifty thousand throats cheered them to the echo, and every sane person there knew the Brooklyn was to be avenged.

Arthur Redfern obeyed instructions to the letter, and before a score of strides had been taken he was seen skillfully guiding his horse across the flying field, making for the inside rail. When the watches snapped twelve seconds they literally flew by the first furlong post, a 1.36 gait, the fleet chestnut having gained the coveted position, with Irish Lad at his heels. The Picket two lengths back leading the others. As they neared the turn Redfern took a steadying wrap on Hermis, sweeping the turn close to the rail, economizing every inch of space.

"Unleash thy crouching thunders now, O Jove," and see thy fiery darts left far behind by this noble animal. Two centuries of blood and breeding hurl defiance at his detractors who said he was faint-hearted and a quitter when he lost the Brooklyn. He fled along the level course swifter than an eagle's shadow on a mountain side; his ears erect and his giant stride working with the precision and rhythm of a perfectly balanced piston rod of a Corliss engine; a phantom of speed, a shadow flying along the landscape. He fled past the three-furlong post in thirty-six seconds, on to the half with that same amazing flash of speed. Striving to their utmost, Irish Lad and The Picket flying at dizzy speed, their great hearts burning like living coals in their breasts, three and four lengths back, bounded after the racing spectre in front of them. They might as well have pursued an angry cyclone trying to destroy the work of man and God. To ordinary race horses Hermis appeared as logarithms to plain mathematics. No gambler ever hankered for the feverish delights of the green cloth as the jockeys on Irish Lad and The Picket did to overhaul and vanquish Arthur Redfern on superb Hermis. But they were experiencing the weird emotions of the science of sciomachy—battling with a shadow. On and on Hermis sped past the seven furlong post in 1.25 and the mile in the

marvelous time of 1.38 2-5, a full second faster than the suicidal mile in the Brooklyn—yet no sign of abatement of the dizzy clip. With that frightful speed and regularity of stroke, he charged along, like a swallow skimming before the blast, like a leaf playing on the storm, gamely responding to every demand made on his rich inheritance of the centuries. As they entered the stretch for the final whirl for home, Shaw and Helgeson called earnestly on their game thoroughbreds and they settled themselves for a last mighty effort. They were chasing destiny with plates on. To have overhauled Hermis they would have needed the wings of the albatross. His speed was resistless. His courage was superb. The mile and a quarter was run in two minutes and five seconds—the record for the Suburban. The Brooklyn was avenged. In the run home The Picket passed Irish Lad by a neck, but got no nearer than three lengths of Hermis. In trying to break Hermis' heart Irish Lad had broken his own great heart.

Hermis was bought by Mr. Thomas in the zenith of his marvelous three-year-old form for sixty thousand dollars. He won many of the greatest stakes and handicaps of his day. Mrs. Thomas claimed Hermis as her own particular pet. When her friends crowded around her at the paddock where the racer was being unsaddled, she said: "Nothing ever pleased me more than Hermis' victory today. When they beat him I feel so blue I want to hide, and when he wins, I am so happy. But they can't beat him unless he is not feeling well."

The romance of Hermis' life began in old Kentucky. He was raised almost entirely by hand by Miss Engeman, daughter of his breeder. He was a very small colt, and such a cunning little fellow that the young lady fell in love with him the first time she saw him scampering about her father's paddock. He became her pet and received all the affectionate attentions that ladies bestow on their favorite dogs and horses.

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