

REMINISCENCES
of
BERT DRACH



JOHN A. SEAVERNS

To

Prof Hardman Earle

from

H. Drage

REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

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of
BERT DRAGE

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FOREWORD.

Sir Alfred Munnings in his Autobiography published in October, 1952, writes :—" Monday, 14th June, 1937. After lunch motored to Chapel Brampton to the famous Bert Drage saw his yearlings in some fine pastures saw some of his hunters. A very interesting old fellow and young and youthful for his age." !!

When you have read these reminiscences you will, I am sure, understand how Munnings felt. Bert Drage is no different today except 18 years have rolled on but he does not change. Oct. 1955



THE AUTHOR, 1955, AGED 88

CHAPTER I.

MY FAMILY.

I HAVE had a grand life—more hunting than any man living, I should think. I am writing this in bed (January, 1953). I had a fall about a month ago and fractured my thigh. I hope to get home in about two weeks. I have broken so many bones, but never my thigh before. I have broken my legs six times, collar-bone twice, ribs, both arms and pelvis, and cracked my shoulder blade. The broken pelvis was the worst.

I suppose I ought to give up jumping fences now, as I have lost my grip and probably I never ought to have come off. It was down-hill and a blind ditch on the take-off side. It unfortunately happened a long way from the road, and they had to carry me across some very rough fields and then put me down on the road-side to wait for the ambulance, and it was raining hard. Not very pleasant, but I was very fortunate in getting it set right away by a very, very good surgeon, and he tells me that I shall be quite sound.

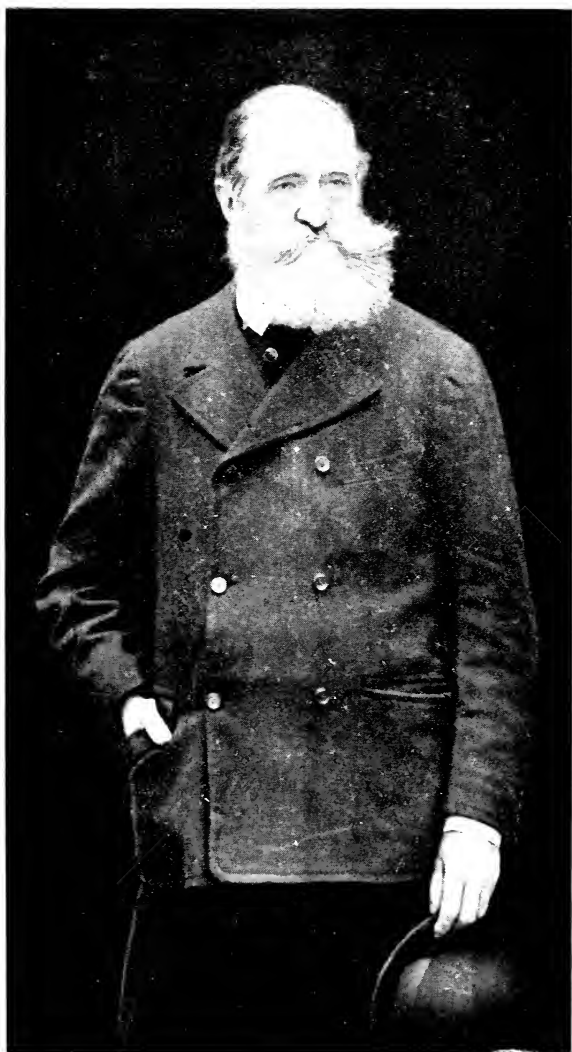
I think I ought to be very thankful for the way I shall finish my life. I have got a farm of about 350 acres, and I take a great interest in it and I don't let it worry me. I am out every morning at seven o'clock and I often have nine holes at golf

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in the week. At Chapel Brampton I very often play with Phil. Cripps, a great sportsman. Of course he gives me a great number of strokes. I ride every day and get a few days' racing. I don't expect to make much money farming, but it gives me an interest in life. My farming adviser, Mr. Messinger, really does all that is important to be done. I am undecided whether to give up hunting—I know what I ought to do, and that is just to go out on the pony and ride quietly about and see my friends and so get the exercise ; but can I do it ? I loved popping along and trying to keep near hounds—I shall see if I can be sensible and do what I feel is best for me. You see I don't want to become a cripple.

I was born at Hannington in Northamptonshire. My father had a farm there and also a lot of grazing land at Faxton and Mawsley. I had two brothers and two sisters. I was the second son, and I was born in October, 1867. My older brother, Francis Benyon, was about one year older, and my other brother, John, about two years younger. My sister, Mary, was about three years younger, and my sister, Nelly, about thirteen years younger.

We left our farm at Hannington in about 1880, and my father took a farm at Chapel Brampton, about four miles from Northampton. It was on the estate of Earl Spencer and had been occupied by my mother's brother, John Woods, who had an auctioneer's business in Northampton. Earl Spencer was a good landlord and a friend to all



THE LATE EARL SPENCER

MY FAMILY

his tenants. It was about 400 acres. Not a good farm, chiefly arable. My father had one brother, John Drage, who lived at a farm about one mile from Holcot. He had one son and two daughters. The son, William, was fatally injured by a fall hunting. He was a very fine rider. He never got a bad fall until about two years before the fatal one. Then, in those two years, he had a bad fall near Market Harborough and the following year he got very badly hurt in jumping some high rails not far from Cottesbrooke.

I saw it happen, but when he did not get up I got someone to hold my horse and went to him. I could see he was in a very bad way and I felt it was only a matter of minutes before the end, but as he still held on I got someone to get a conveyance and I got in it with him expecting the end would come before we got him home. But it was not to be so, and we got him to his home. I used to sit up with him through the night for about a fortnight. He was quite unconscious, but one morning before leaving I was talking to the nurse and we saw him just move an eyelid and he gradually, by very slow degrees, recovered. But it left him in a poor way and for a long time he had difficulty in walking, but by degrees he got so that he could ride a quiet old pony and then he started to go out hunting in a quiet way. One day he was tempted to jump a little fence, but there was sheep netting at the back of it and this gave him a terrible fall

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from which he never recovered. He was taken home, but he died in about a week.

All my relations had been fond of horses and hunting. When we came to live at Brampton my brother John and myself used to ride into Northampton Grammar School. My brother Frank went to the Wellingborough Grammar School. Later on he left, and John and I went to the same school. I was very happy there and very proud to get into the football team. We played soccer, and I remember I played inside forward. I really was not much good, but the man on the outside left was very good and he made use of me when he was in difficulties. I was very keen on the game. I think John left a little before I did.

My father financed the auctioneer business built up by my Uncle John Woods who died, and his son, Cecil Woods, then carried on with the business. When my brother John left school my father put him into the business, but he did not like it and so remained on my father's farm. When I left school I was put into the auctioneer business that my brother John had given up. I kept on for about a year and then I gave it up and stayed at home to help on my father's farm.

When my father died very suddenly in 1902, I found we had got over 1,000 acres of land to contend with. I was very fortunate in getting different people to take over all the outlying portions, and then I felt I would try to find someone to manage



WILLIAM DRAGE of HOLCOT

MY FAMILY

the 700 acres remaining. Failing this, I felt the best thing to do would be to keep only the 350 acres of the home farm on which we carried on our horse dealing, and which I felt we could manage without it taking too much time from our business—which really was the most important, and which we had gradually built up.

I knew there was a man named Messenger who was helping a farmer living not far from us, and I knew he came of a respected family and I thought he would be just the man we wanted if he would care to take it on. I had never actually met him, but I got in touch with him and he came to see me and we went all round the farm. I said: "Well, there it is—I don't expect you to make a lot of money, but do you think you could take it on and make us a reasonable profit? My father has always done so and there is money to carry it on." I remember I rather liked his reply. He said: "All right. If you like to take me I will do my best for you." And so we came to terms and he was with us for about 20 years when he got killed in crossing the railway. His brother, Richard, was at that time farming at Holdenby, and he carried on for us in his place, and still continues to-day. We were very lucky to have such practical and capable and honest men to look after our farming interests.

As I have related, I had two brothers. My older brother was so different to John or myself.

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He had no idea of the value of money spent freely. He went to the vet. college and very soon qualified. Then he was taken on as assistant Veterinary Surgeon at Windsor, but soon left and joined as V.S. to the 10th in Ireland. I forget how long he was with them, but not very long, I think. He left and came back to join The Blues in London, and I believe he was with them about 20 years. They were all very keen on hunting and polo. My brother was a good rider, but not so desperately keen about hunting. I think he played polo for the regiment.

I remember having a match with The Blues at Rugby. We played on the handicap. I think their side was Colonel Harrison, Geoffrey Bowlby, Lord Alastair Innes Ker and Lord Algernon Gordon Lennox. Our side was we three brothers and Dick Farmer. At about half-time we were well ahead, and they complained of the handicap, so I said: "All right, we will finish the match playing level." We won. I think we each had £5 on with the opposing player. I always felt I was quite a help to our side as I think my handicap was only about three, and I felt I could do such good work by interfering with the opposing back. John was a very good sound player.

My polo came to a sudden end in 1928. I was playing at Rugby and I had a fall and was knocked out. They took me to the Rugby hospital, but I understood they would not take me in as I apparently seemed all right. Anyhow, they sent me



BERT DRAGE GEORGE SUMNER Capt. A. PILKINGTON JOHN DRAGE

MY FAMILY

home and I had to go to bed for several days. I have several times been concussed. Once out hunting with the Cottesmore. They went away on the far side of Ouston Wood, and going down the first field my horse put his foot in a hole, and when I came round I found I was in a bed at Somerby.

My eldest brother, Frank, had two sons and a daughter. The eldest son was a fine fellow. Very good looking, a good rider and polo player, but he had an incurable disease and died when he was about 38. He married a daughter of Mr. Hames of Somerby. They have a daughter Elizabeth and now live at Ashwell. My brother's second son was killed in a motor accident in America. The daughter Betty was a charming girl. She married a very nice fellow from Kansas City. Betty used often to come and stay with us, and the husband would come over too. He was very keen on flying, and would hire a plane over here and fly about.

The first time I went up I had been playing polo at Rugby and he flew me home. I think I must have been very frightened, as I never went up again. I was to have flown home once from Biarritz, but I really was glad when the pilot refused to go up as the visibility was bad.

To return to my niece and her husband. She, as I said, stayed a good deal with us, but after her last visit she returned to America and her husband met her in New York to fly home to Kansas City.

REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

But the plane caught a high tension wire and they were both killed, so the whole family were wiped out except the mother who still lives in America. She comes over to stay with us about once a year. She is an exceptionally nice woman.

My brother John Drage married Nellie Argyle from Staffordshire about 1900 and was very happily married. They had three daughters, Violet, Maie and Susan. Maie and Susan followed hounds and in their childhood often rode green horses straight from the train from Ireland and became very keen on hunting and went well. They are all married and their children, who are now growing up, can be seen out with the Pytchley Hounds. Violet, during the last war, took over the management of her husband's farms at Moulton and made a very good job of it, and has enjoyed it so much that she has kept an interest in agriculture ever since and is a good judge of cattle. Susan worked for the W.V.S., during the war and became County Organiser with her sister Maie helping her. She did a wonderful job feeding the agricultural workers in the rural areas of the county as the W.V.S. representative and received grateful thanks from all the local authorities, Ministry of Food and Agricultural Executive Committee at the end of war. She even managed to show a financial surplus and, a committee was formed and the money used to purchase and endow a home for old people in Northamptonshire. This home

MY FAMILY

was Blessed by the Bishop of Peterborough and opened by the Duchess of Gloucester and is flourishing today. These three nieces have produced between them four boys and three girls and I must say that Alison, Belinda and Georgina do not disappoint me, either in looks or riding.

My brother John died September, 1950. I am afraid the last few years of his life had not brought him much happiness. He was so crippled with arthritis, and during the last year his eyesight failed him. I miss him very much. You see we started life together and did everything together—business, hunting, polo and golf, and we never had any serious quarrel. He bore his troubles with great courage and patience, and no one ever heard him complain. I think I am the only one of the family left. John was a fine horseman and no one could ride or show championship horses better. He also was very fond of golf.

In 1919, after the war, I remember I said to him that, as he and Dick Farmer were both married and therefore had more expenses than I had, if they liked I would hand my share of the business over to them, and I was prepared to give my whole time and attention to the business on the understanding that I lived free of all expenses at the Grange. I hoped and thought that by doing this they would take the business more seriously, and that with my free help that they would do well. I found myself working just as hard as ever. You

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see I never had any desire for great wealth. I had made and saved all the money I wanted. In making this change I felt it would relieve me of a lot of the responsibility, and that it would sort of buck them up, but I found I had made a mistake. You see the success of the business was, and had been for 50 years, my chief ambition.

I made a big financial mistake once. My brother Frank, through his wife's relations, owned a fair-sized coalfield not far from Kansas City. Money was needed to develop it, and my brother finally persuaded me, much against my will, to let him have a very considerable sum of money. I think it was about £10,000. I told him I thought it was very foolish and that I would promise to help him with a sufficient income to enable him to live comfortably, but if he had this money that he asked for to work the coalfield I should feel I had done all he could expect of me. They built some miners' cottages and got it working, but it ended in a failure. I have been very lucky in recent years, as my niece married Sir Hardman Earle, a stock-broker whose sound advice has done me very well.

My dear old mother died about 18 years ago. I was terribly cut up. She was beloved by everyone. My sister saw what trouble I was in, and after the funeral took me back with her to London for a week.

I attend church *every* Sunday morning. I am,



MARY DRAGE, MY MOTHER

MY FAMILY

and have been churchwarden for a good many years.

CHAPTER II.

HORSE-DEALING.

As a young man, I was very keen on hunting and was very upset when my father told us that we could not hunt on the opening day. I had so looked forward to it. As a result of this I decided to leave farming with my father. I agreed with my brother to try to work up a business in selling hunters and thereby get into the hunting field.

I had somehow saved about £100 and I said if we went broke I should try to get a whipper-in job. I was determined to hunt. Anyhow, we were very lucky. We bought two horses with the £100 and sold them pretty quickly for £300. We went to work very carefully and made about £1,000 the first year.

My father would not give us any capital, but he gave the Bank a guarantee for £1,000. He also gave up some of the farm premises which we converted into stabling. I worked very hard in those days, travelled about to buy horses. I would go to Yorkshire on the 6 p.m. train every other week. I bought some very good horses out of the Sinnington country. I got to know Bob Colling, who was a jockey in the North and who was very good in going round with me and introducing me to a lot of hunting farmers. Then

HORSE-DEALING

I was recommended to get in touch with a Mr. Arthur Topham who lived in York. So one evening I went to see him. I so well remember seeing him sitting in an armchair by the fire. I rang the bell, and we had a good talk. I arranged to pay all his expenses and to take a house in Dublin and give him a good salary if he would go and live over there and buy all the good horses he could. He agreed. I had found it too hard work and very difficult to do from England, and I was wanted too much at home.

I remember one very enjoyable week I had. I crossed to Ireland on the Sunday and hunted there three days. But I heard the frost was going in England so I got back to Dublin on the Wednesday night and crossed over to England. I forgot to wire my brother that I was coming, so there was nothing to meet me at Northampton. I had to walk home. I found my brother had arranged to take two horses and hunt in Warwickshire, so I went with him. We boxed to Daventry and had quite a good day, but when we got back to Daventry we found our box had been sent away, so we had to ride home. It was about 20 miles from where we left off. The next day I hunted with the Quorn, and with the Cottesmore on the Saturday. A pretty strenuous week.

As things went on, I felt that my brother needed some help in our growing business. A young friend of mine, Richard Farmer, was living on the

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adjoining farm helping his uncle. He was a fine rider and much liked by everyone, and he agreed to join us. I felt that one of us ought to get more in touch with people hunting in Leicestershire, so I took some stabling just outside John Gaunt station. Eventually I bought the stabling together with the house. I used to hunt three or four days a week there, and the other days with the Pytchley, and so got in touch with some very good customers. I never stayed at John Gaunt. I used to go down each morning by train and back at night. It was pretty strenuous work as the horses I had to ride there were chiefly horses recently over from Ireland, and then I had letters to write and things to arrange. So it was after eight o'clock before I got to the Red House where I lived, and then I had to be up at the Grange early the next morning. I was not physically very strong, but I was wiry and fit, and I just loved the hunting. I think I liked the Cottesmore country the best. I felt I could hold my own better in that country than in the Quorn or Fernie.

A great friend of mine, Major Hughes Onslow, gave me a very good tip. He said: "Let your horse gallop on down the hills, and don't hurry him up the hills." It was a hilly country and I found his advice was very helpful.

About that time I felt I should have to make a change with our buyer in Ireland, Mr. Topham. When I hunted from John Gaunt I came across two

HORSE-DEALING

brothers both dealing in hunters in a quiet way. They were William and Harry Gale. I felt they would not be too pleased to see me open up in their country. I felt it might be a friendly and wise thing to do if I bought a horse or two from them.

I felt that Harry Gale was just the man we wanted to live in Ireland and buy horses for us. I asked him if he would care to come for an outing with me to the Dublin Show. I said: "Of course, I will pay all expenses." When we got to the show I said: "Now, you look round and, if you see a horse that you really like, you just buy him without trying to consult me, or you may lose him." He soon found one and said: "I've bought you a horse." Not long afterwards, he came to me and told me he had sold him again at a good profit, and so I determined to try to arrange with him to go and live and be our buyer in Ireland. I can honestly say it was the best day's work I ever did.

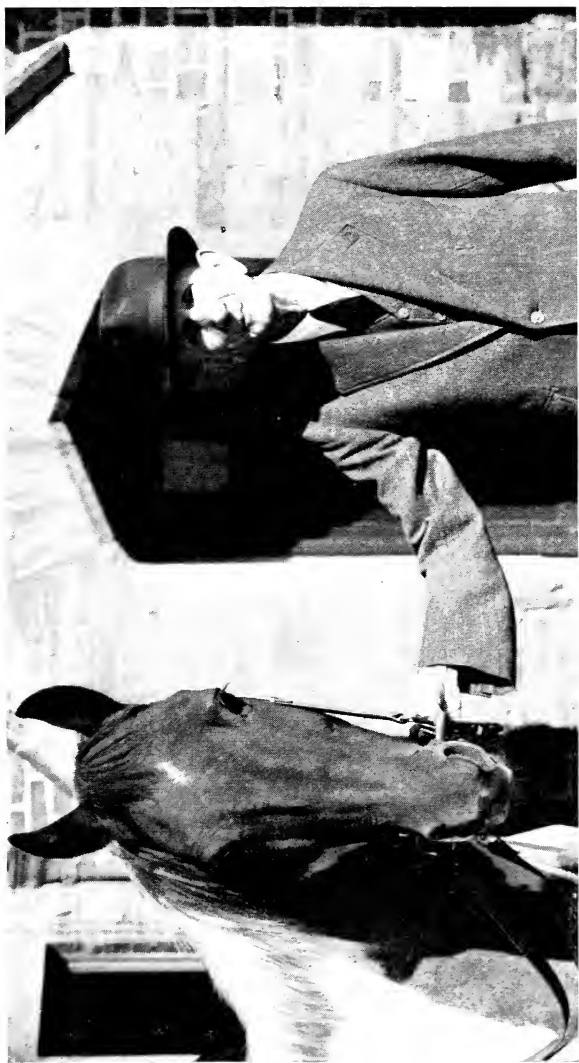
It was not a very pleasant job breaking this news to Mr. Topham, but I made him a good present of a substantial sum and I undertook to put him back in York free of all expense to him. I told him that, if he liked to act as our agent in the north of England, I would give him a good commission on all he found for me, but he felt that he would rather stay in Ireland and do a little on his own account. It ended disastrously for him as I felt sure it would, and he eventually came back to me and acted as our clerk.

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I was also very fortunate in my head man—Sam Adams. I could not possibly have had anyone better. It was funny how I came across him. He was working for a butcher in Northampton who had a pretty good horse he wanted to sell. He sent Sam out on him for me to try with hounds. I told Sam not to jump my horse, but just quietly to ride him behind and keep him fresh for me to ride when I had tried his horse. But I found Sam was not doing as I told him, but was joining in the hunt, so I pulled back and lectured him, but all I could get out of him was : “ All right, sir.” But it had no effect. I bought the horse and I took on Sam.

About that time (1885) we had six or seven horses stabled in rough boxes at the field barn. Sam did them all himself and lived in the barn. I put a cooking stove in and made it as comfortable as I could for him. I soon found out that Sam’s horses were better done than were our 20 best horses at home and, against my brother’s advice, I had Sam away from the barn and put him in charge of all our horses in the stables. I realised it was a bit risky putting this young man as head of all the others, but they soon realised that I meant it to be so, and it was a very great success.

Our horse dealing business grew to be one of the biggest hunter and polo businesses. When



SAM ADAMS

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the 1914 first world war broke out, we had close on 120 horses and polo ponies and were owed about £90,000. I remember on the Sunday I had been, I think, to Weedon. On my way back I came across Colonel Alexander, who was secretary to the Pytchley Hunt at that time, and he said : “ I don’t know if you are aware of it, Bert, but I happen to know that the army buyer has orders to come to you directly war is declared and to get as many horses as he can find in your stables.” So, in order to be prepared, I had the rugs taken off all the most valuable horses, and turned them out. I got in a good many that, for various reasons, were not so valuable. I also went round the countryside and got together all I could from various people. I remember the buyer turning up, without any warning, but, very fortunately, I was ready for him.

The buyer was Colonel McKie. No nicer or more capable man could they have found. I think he took 68 that time, and I so well remember that when he had seen 10 or 12 which were sent out to him for inspection he suddenly turned to me and said : “ When are you going to show me some of your own, Bert ? ” I hardly knew what to say to that. Anyhow, it went off all right, and I remember my brother seeming very depressed when he saw them go down to the station. I said : “ I don’t feel like that about it, John. Suppose

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you could have them all back, what on earth could we do with them?" I think we were about £3,000 losers over it.

We had some very good horses left, and sold them privately very well. I had a good order to find the Cheshire Hunt horses, and then we sent a good many to America.

Dick Farmer, joined up, and John volunteered but did not pass and I wrote to the War Office offering my services in the various horse depots. But they wrote back and said the way we could help them best was to collect all the suitable horses we could and give the buyer a show as often as we could. Of course, it just suited us, and we must have sold hundreds of horses and cobs and draught horses.

I set several capable fellows to work to help to find them, and I got Gale over from Ireland, too. The place was full of horses, and they were tied up all round the cattle yards too, and a lot in the fields.

We had visits from various army buyers, and it is gratifying to know that we never got censured for anything that we sold. Directly we could see that the war could not last much longer, we set to work to buy again, as I knew what a good demand there would be for hunters.

I took exception to the way two of our customers behaved. They wanted to return horses bought by them during the summer to hunt in the winter. This, I thought, was very unfair to me, as my



JOHN DRAGE receiving cup from late KING GEORGE VI and QUEEN MOTHER

HORSE-DEALING

business was finished and it was impossible to say if it would ever revive. One was Lord Castlereagh, and the horse he wanted to send back was a horse he had bought for Lady Castlereagh. He said it was a very poor performer and no use to Lady Castlereagh. He had mounted two or three of his friends on the horse, and that was their opinion. I did not want to have a row, and suggested that, in fairness to me, I should go down and have a day with the Cottesmore on him. I went to stay the night with Mr. Strawbridge, who was then Master of the Cottesmore, so that I should be on the spot for the next day. We had a very good hunt. I was careful not to take on anything too big at first, but when I got him going he carried me brilliantly, and I remember Lady Castlereagh coming up to me and saying: "I shall never send that horse back." So that ended well.

Then I sold a horse to an American hunting in the Duke of Beaufort's country. He wrote to me that the horse was no good to him and that he wanted to return him. I said before you do this I will come down and have a hunt on him. I remember I went to stay with the Rev. Jack Gibbs, a well-known sporting parson. Again I went very carefully to work, and only took on small places. But the horse soon regained confidence and carried me the best. You see he had not hunted in a stone wall country before, and my client had

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let him refuse. Anyhow, he kept him and liked him very much afterwards.

I had a rather interesting episode with the late Lord Lonsdale. There was only one way to do business with him, and that was to let him do just what he liked! It was all a bit difficult, but worth doing. I remember once the fox went to ground at Exton. I was riding a good grey horse, and I felt I should like to try to sell him to Lord Lonsdale. He was watching them dig the fox out, and I rode up to him and said how very much obliged I would be if he would just sit on my horse and tell me what weight he was up to, as, being a very light-weight, I did not feel quite competent to say. He said: "Very well," and got on him and rode him for a short time, then said he was not up to his weight. I thanked him very much, and said all I wanted to know was what weight he was up to, so that I should know who to recommend him to. Anyhow, that evening I had a message from Barley Thorpe telling me to send the horse to his stables. He was a great success.

I also remember having a wonderful hunt with the Cottesmore. I was riding a thoroughbred horse that we bred. He had not done much hunting, so I went very cautiously with him until he got confidence. We killed the fox near to Burrough, and that night I had a message from Barley Thorpe to send the horse to Lord Lonsdale's stables there. I told the man to tell Lord Lonsdale

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that I would do so if he wished, but that I was afraid he would be disappointed with the horse. He sent word back that he had watched the horse, and that I was to send him.

I had some very good customers in those days. I suppose Mr. Harry Whitney was about the best. I had an order from him to find about 30 horses for himself and his friends who were coming over for a season's hunting. I felt sure price would not matter, but I knew he would be very disappointed if the horses did not carry him and his friends well. None of them had ever hunted in England, and they were not very good riders, so I set out to buy all the best and well-hunted horses I could find. I think they were well satisfied. I remember giving £500 for one magnificent horse, and when I sent in my bill I put him down at £500. I did not feel I could ask for any profit on him, as he was terribly dear but I knew he would carry any of them well.

Mr. Whitney was out on him one day and so was the man I bought him off. He went up to Mr. Whitney and said: "I see you are on the good horse I sold to Drage. I wonder what he charged you for him?" Mr. Whitney said: "I guess that is hardly a fair question, but I will tell you what I gave if you will tell me what Drage gave you." Mr. Whitney told me all this, and it did me a lot of good.

One of the best friends I ever had, and also one

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of my best customers, was Captain Alfred Loewenstein. He bought every horse he had off me and paid good prices. He was a rich Belgian financier. I got to know him in this way. I bought two very good horses at Tattersalls, and someone told him of this and so he came down to Brampton and bought them. I found for him a very nice house and stabling and a small farm at Thorpe Satchville on the border of the Quorn and Cottesmore about three miles from my stables at John Gaunt. He and Major Burnaby, the future Master of the Quorn, became great friends.

Poor Alfred Loewenstein had a sad end. He fell out of a plane flying back to Belgium. This happened on a Wednesday. On the previous Sunday, he rang me up to say he was quite alone at Thorpe Satchville and would be glad if I would go and spend the day with him. I found him all dressed for riding, lying on his bed. We spent the day together riding about, and in the evening I left him and he went to dine with Major Burnaby. The next day he came to Brampton and spent the day with me on his way to London and on the Wednesday the tragedy occurred.

I felt his death very, very much. I liked him so much apart from all the advice he gave me financially. I remember so well that he said to me when riding round that he wondered why he went on with his big financial schemes as he at that time could have packed up with about £16 millions.



Capt. LOEWENSTEIN

HORSE-DEALING

Of course, after his death all his interests slumped to about eight millions. He was very, very kind to me, and we became close friends. He had a little steeple-chase course made at Thorpe Satchville, and we very often used to compete over this. He had a very charming wife, and a boy named Bobbie—both dead. Bobbie was killed flying.

We had another pretty good customer in Sir Henri Deterding. He was head of Shell Mex. One morning in the winter my brother and I were having breakfast and there was a tap on the door and, on opening it, I saw a short man, not very smartly dressed, with leggings round his trousers. He wanted to know if I had any hunters to see, so I went round with him and showed him two or three that I said I wanted £150 and £120 for. Then he asked me if I could not show him something better. I suddenly felt this man might be a millionaire in disguise, so I asked him if he would give me £500 for a horse, and he said he should like to see him. I suppose the fact of me wanting so much made him feel he must be a very good horse. Anyhow, he bought him and took him to hunt in Kent. He was a very good horse, but no earthly use to him. He was a thoroughbred horse called Sprinkle Me, and hit his fences rather low.

I soon heard from Sir Henri. He was very angry, and said that he had been told that we were a very respectable and reliable firm of dealers, etc., etc.

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I replied that I was very sorry he was disappointed, but that I did not know just what he wanted. If he would come up again I would do my best to fit him out with a horse that should suit him. So he came up, and I had a very suitable horse for him that I had bought in the Pytchley country—short tail black horse, easy to ride and a very good jumper. So we changed over, and it made a friend and a very good customer for life. He had two sons. One of them lives and farms near Daventry.

I remember so well having a talk with Sir Henri, and I said I thought he was making a great mistake in putting his son to work in London. I told him: "When you started, Sir Henri, I suppose you had not much money and had to work in the city. Now that you are a very rich man, what object is there in spoiling your son's life making him do something that he is not cut out for?"

The son was very fond of country life and sport, and I found him a good farm and a good house. I am sure he would tell you he has been very happy there. He was keen on race-riding and won quite a few steeplechases. He bought a horse from me that I think he won two races on in one day at Norwich. What with hunting, racing, polo, golf and farming, and a charming wife, I am sure he has had a very happy life.

Major Burnaby was a very good customer of mine. When he took the Quorn he got me to find

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all the horses and fodder, and a good stud groom. He was a charming man, and very much liked by everyone. He often made us laugh when controlling the field. I remember one day he called out : " Gently, ladies ! please let the good-looking ones go on, and the others more quietly." I remember, too, him calling out to a Major Johnson : " Hold hard ! please, you go so well and get too near the hounds, and, naturally, all the ladies try to follow you."

That reminds me of an incident one day when I was out with the Oakley. A member of the hunt, who rather prided himself on being a hard rider, was called to order by the Master, Mr. Esme Arkwright. " Hold hard there," he called out. " Nothing stops you only a fair sized fence." This, before all the field, hurt the rider's feelings very much.

I once had a very lucky deal. I bought a pony that I saw in a pony cart going along the road. I liked the look of him, and got the owner to bring him up to the stables and I had a ride and gave him £40 for him. He turned out an exceptionally good polo pony, and I sold him for £700 the same year.

We had a lot of very good customers, among them Lord Annaly for himself and the Hunt servants. I must mention another of them, Mr. Merthyr Guest who had the Blackmore Vale. I found the horses for himself and his wife and all the Hunt.

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It was not easy, as the horses had to be all greys. I used to go down and stay with them, and we drove a pair of grey horses to the meet. The old gentleman nearly always was smoking a short clay pipe. I once paid £500 for a horse for him.

I remember he wired to me to go and buy him the best horse I could going up for sale at the Leicester repository. I wired back : "What was the most I was to give?" "He wired back : "Refer to my telegram." So I bought this horse sent up by Mr. R. C. Swan. Mr. Swan was very annoyed with me. He did not want this particular horse to be sold, so he put £500 on him as he felt sure no one would go to that."

The late King George VI. was a very good customer, and no one could have been more kind or considerate. He was not what you would call a hard rider, but he was a very good horseman and went quite well. I remember there was a brown mare which I sold him that would occasionally refuse with him. He said to me : "You have a day on her." She carried me awfully well. It did not need a particularly good rider to keep her straight, but, you see, I knew the mare and had little trouble with her.

I remember we rode back together to Naseby Wooleys, where he was hunting from, and our present Queen, Elizabeth then a little girl, came to see us dismount. She asked me if the mare was going to have her pudding, as the groom was giving the



GERRY PAGE

LATE KING GEORGE VI

Miss RHODES

Sir STAFFORD K. HARMER
BERT DRAGE

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mare her mash. We went in, and the Duchess of York, now Queen Mother poured out tea for us. I remember so well her asking the Duke of York, how the brown mare went. He said: "Why, of course, she went all right." Anyhow, I thought it best to take her back, and sent him another in her place.

I was very sorry indeed when the King gave up hunting. I wrote to the King and told him that, if it would help, I would keep two or three really good hunters for him, and that all he would have to do would be to let me know when he wanted to hunt and I would have the horse at the meet. He wrote me a charming letter to say how much he appreciated my offer and how sorry he was he could not accept it. I have several letters from him and books he gave me with his best wishes which I prize very highly.

Here are some letters which he wrote and which express his sorrow at giving up hunting.

145, Piccadilly,

W.1.

May 12th, 1931.

Dear Drage,

I was sorry not to have had another chance of seeing you before I left Thornby, as I wanted to have a talk with you about the brown mare. But seeing that I had not a chance I am sending you a cheque for "Hildebrand" with the hope that you

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will send me a cheque soon for the brown mare when you have disposed of her. It is such a pity she turned out so badly after all our hopes, as apart from that one fault she is perfect.

I have got all the horses turned out now at Windsor and I hope that "Hildebrand" will look something different next season (if there is one).

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) :—ALBERT.

Glamis Castle,
Glamis,
Scotland.

September 17th, 1931.

Dear Drage,

Thank you for your letter and for your kind suggestion re my hunting this year. I fear that it will not be possible, and I must tell you the tragic news that I am going to sell all my horses at Leicester on October 31st. It is a very sad for me as I do really enjoy my hunting, and after all you have done for me it seems such an ungracious thing to do. But facts are facts and I must do it. I will send you my card giving particulars when it is printed, and you may perhaps know of some possible buyers of really tried out horses.

I shall miss my hunting more than I can say

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and this winter will be a long and depressing one for me.

Again so many thanks for your kind suggestion.

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) :—ALBERT.

Sandringham,
Norfolk.

10th January, 1952.

My dear Mr. Drage,

The King wishes me to thank you sincerely for your kind letter, which he much appreciates ; also for your good wishes for 1952 which His Majesty warmly reciprocates.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) :—A. LASCELLES.

Herbert Drage, Esq.,
Chapel Brampton,
Northampton.

I must relate a very pleasant experience I had at Newmarket. in 1950. It was on the July Course. I was in the enclosure, and saw rather a crowd of people coming along. I saw that it was the King and Queen, and so we all stood back to let them pass. But he caught sight of me, and beckoned to me, and both he and the Queen shook hands with me. I said how honoured

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I felt that he should do this. "Oh!" he said, "I like to meet my old friends."

When I was very young, I rode down to Kelmarsch several times to take a horse out hunting with the Fernie Hounds. He belonged to Mr. R. C. Naylor. He was Master of the Pytchley for a few years. I was to try to sell the horse, and I was to have all I could make over £300. As I said, I was very young and inexperienced, and really had no earthly chance of making £300 of the horse, but I was keen and, anyhow, enjoyed hunting on the horse.

I once got up very early in the morning to go out with the Quorn cub hunting. I had arranged to try a horse that belonged to, I think, the present Lord Radnor. The then Lady Helena Fitzwilliam had arranged it all. I liked the horse very much, but I found that he was a slight whistler. So I told Lady Helena that she must reduce the price. Funny that I should remember her reply. She said Lord Radnor was adamant about that being the lowest price, so I had to give it, and he turned out very well and paid us a good profit.

I think it was in the year the war broke out in 1939 that there was going to be a change in the Mastership of the Quorn. The present Lord Beatty had agreed to be Master. I remember we stood together as hounds were drawing Ashby pasture. Lord Beatty was telling me that he would like to rely on me to find all the Hunt horses. They found a fox and, early in the hunt, Lord Beatty

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had a very bad fall, and that ended the idea of him becoming Master.

During several seasons' hunting, we kept the horses that we had sold to Michael Beary and Fred Lane, and they hunted them from my place. Beary was a first-class man to hounds. We used to have quite a number of people in for tea after hunting. Their horses were stabled either with us or nearby. I was out hunting on two occasions when there were fatal falls. One of them was Hugh Owen, who was killed jumping a fence not far from Harborough. I was to have gone next. The other was one day when I was out with the Grafton. I forget the name of the rider, but the horse fell right on top of him and, before we could release him, he was dead.

Two further incidents occurred in my life—both connected with the late Lord Beatty. One relates to a horse I sold him, which he had a fall on when jumping a fence in cold blood. When he fell, the horse kicked him and fractured his jaw.

The other little incident happened one day when hunting with the Quorn. Hounds had gone along by the railway, and the field all stood crowded under the bridge. Then the huntsman wanted to come through, and, of course, the field made way for him. I tried to slip in behind him, but Lord Beatty drew across me and, in a very jocular voice, said : " No you don't, Bert."

We had some other amusing incidents connected with our business. We once sold a horse to

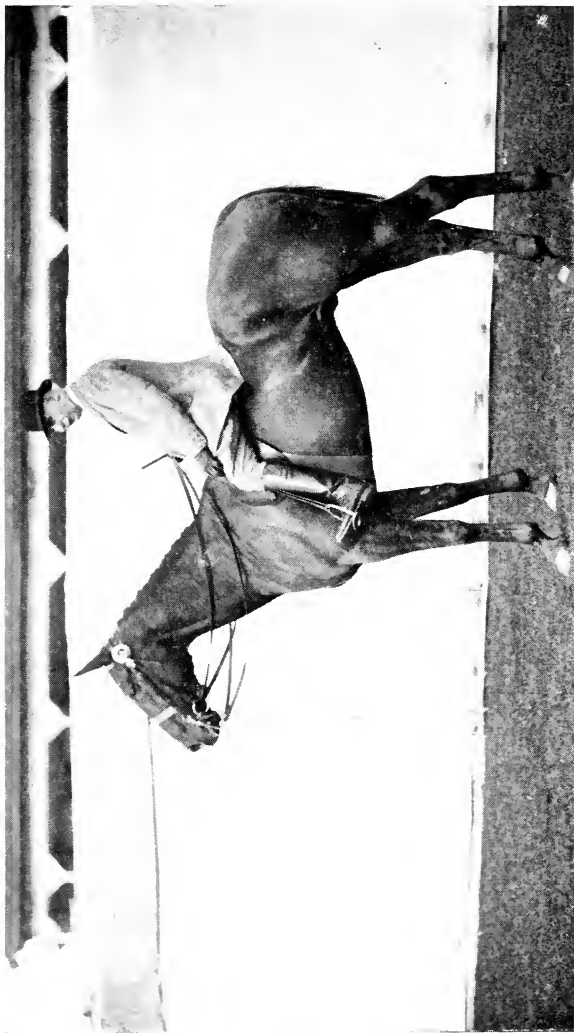
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Col. Lawson, but he rang up to say he wanted to return him as he had a hunt on him and could not get on with him. So he sent him back. He then came up and tried several horses, and this one among them. He liked him and bought him again! He didn't recognise him as the horse he had returned. When he got the horse to his stables his groom said: "Why, you have bought him back, master!"

Once we sold a horse to a Colonel Colman. It was the same horse that Colonel Colman had been to see in Norfolk. I remember selling a horse to a Captain Allfrey, and about the same time one to Lord Cowley. They both said the horses were no good, so I took them back and I sold the horse returned by Lord Cowley to Captain Allfrey, and the one returned by Captain Allfrey to Lord Cowley. When they met out hunting, they said to each other: "Why, that is the rotten horse I returned to Drage!" Anyhow, they were both well-satisfied, and, when arguing with each other about the respective horses, they made a match over the country near to Adam Gorse. It was a very good race, and I forget which won—only by a few lengths.

I have just read an account of the death of Mr. Cecil Sanders. He used to ride over from his home at Wollaston to hunt our horses with the Pytchley. He did them a lot of good, as he was a fine rider and went so well to hounds.

Another hunting man who I mounted about



HARRY GALE on JOHN PEEL, Champion at Royal Show, Windsor, 1939

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two days a week in Leicestershire was Phillip Hubbersty. He lived about six miles from my stable at John Gaunt and hunted every Tuesday and most Saturdays with the Cottesmore. He was a very good man over a country.

A very sad thing happened a few months ago—the death of Harry Gale. I had known him a great many years, and he worked for us buying horses in Ireland. I could not possibly have had a better man—so capable, so absolutely honest. I had the greatest admiration for him. He had not an enemy in the world, and he had a host of friends. He had lived in Northampton after leaving Ireland, and he always came over to pay me a visit two or three times a week.

Again I was very lucky in having such a good girl, Miss Marriott, in the office. You could not improve on her in any respect—so intelligent and capable, and so nice to everyone, rich and poor alike.

Show Horses.

Alarm	John Peel
Brampton	All Gold
Red Eagle	King Edward
Chatterbox	Bridge
Miss Peel	Chatterbox II.
Red Shanks	Wood Pigeon II.
Wood Pigeon	

CHAPTER III.

HUNTING DAYS. 1885-1953

DURING the course of my life I must have hunted with a dozen or more Packs of Hounds in many parts of England and Ireland and I call to mind the admiration I have felt for Huntsmen. They are a brave race of men and I would like to say that I think the most outstanding ones were Frank Freeman and Tom Firr. Huntsmen such as Leaf, Agutter, Laurence and Gilson were in the top class, but, at the present time, Stanley Barker is hunting his hounds as well as Frank Freeman before him. He has great patience, is a good huntsman and has a steady nerve—all these attributes are very necessary to make a good huntsman. Stanley is deservedly one of the most popular Huntsmen in the history of hunting I should guess.

Among the many good hunts I enjoyed was one from Sanders covert in the Pytchley country. They went away straight down to the Spratton brook. A Mr. Walton, who was hunting from Weedon, went at it, but the horse jumped short and he went in. I was about 18 at that time but very keen. I was riding a horse belonging to a Mr. Phillips who was hunting from Harlestone. I had a go and got over with a peck. John shouted

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to me : “ What shall I do ? ” He was riding a four-year-old, a very good young horse. I said : “ Send him at it, John ! ” He jumped it brilliantly. The whole field had galloped off to the Merry Tom crossing, and so John and myself were alone with hounds. I remember I was so excited, and did not pull up quite soon enough and so jumped a gate going on towards Spratton. Then they turned left, and ran on to Holdenby. No one with us.

Another very good hunt I had all to myself was one day with the Quorn. I was riding a very good horse of Captain Loewenstein’s. They found at Prince of Wales’ covert. I had the luck to get over a very nasty fence which the field had passed by, and so I was alone with hounds for quite a long time. I don’t really know why it should give one such pleasure to be alone with hounds. Hunting was grand in those days—no wire about.

Brother John was a very fine rider and went awfully well in his younger days. My sister was very good, too. She married Sydney Loder in ’18 and they always took a house in Market Harborough and hunted with three or four packs throughout the season. Her nephew, Giles Loder, was very keen, too, and went well to hounds. Both my sister and John were especially good on horses that wanted driving at their fences. I did better on a hot horse.

I had some rare fun hunting in America—

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especially on Long Island. I had the riding of all Mr. Whitney's horses which he had bought of me. I remember once being out with Meadow Brook drag hounds. The fences were all made of strong high timber. My horse had carried me brilliantly, but at this fence he took off a bit too soon, turned over, and gave me a bad fall. When I regained consciousness I was in a bed in a hotel in New York.

I enjoyed other hunts in America where they had what they call snake fences. In Long Island I found these snake fences about 4ft. 6 inches made of timber posts and covered fencing erected at right angles so that in taking off to jump, your horse must go either to left or right—not very nice on hard going! People over there were most kind to me. I stayed a good deal with Mr. Strawbridge. I returned to England with a lot of orders for horses.

Another good gallop I had from Brampton's Fox covert. It was in the cub hunting time. I was going to cross to America that day, but I felt I should like to go out for an hour or two. They found at once, and ran hard and straight to Crank and killed him. I galloped straight home and changed. My things were packed, and so I was able to catch the train at Rugby for Liverpool.

Another good hunt I must record from Sanders covert was right at the end of the season, and very late in the afternoon. They found at once, but came away towards Brampton, so I felt that was

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the end. I had just turned for home when I heard a holla away on the far side, so I started off with them and they ran hard and straight to, I think it was, Elkington. Anyhow, it was getting dusk when I pulled up at Cold Ashby. I rode such a good young horse, and sold him to Major Macdonald Buchanan. Sanders covert was a certain find in those days, and I remember three good hunts from there to Scotland Wood.

I once enjoyed a hunt very much from Hardwick Wood. They came away over the road and ran down towards the Red House, Hannington. I got the best of the start, but I came to a gate that I could not open. The field came tearing down, and I remember Lord Spencer said: "If you can't open it, let me come." Of course, I ought to have got off and opened it for him, but I had caught sight of the fence on the right as I came down to the gate, and so I just jumped the fence and went on alone with hounds.

They caught me up at Gibb Wood, and I remember Lord Spencer taking off his hat as he galloped by and said: "Thank you very much." Captain Bay Middleton was just behind him. He was very red in the face and shouted at me. I remember Lady Frederick was dining at his house that night, and she told me what Captain Middleton said, and how he had given me a bit of his mind. He was a fine rider, but he broke his neck riding in a point-to-point.

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A very good hunt was from Lilbourne, and hounds ran straight and fast across the old Rugby racecourse and beyond Ashby St. Ledgers 8 mile point. I pulled up there as I had promised to go with my nephew Charles to see some horses near Manchester.

I had a very bad fall in 1894. I was riding a horse of Sir James Penders. It was late in the day when they found a fox below Welford, and they ran bearing right over the Welford road towards Sulby. I came to a fence with a wide ditch in front, and one had to pop over the ditch on to a bank and then over the fence. I thought my horse was doing it perfectly, but something held him and he came right down on top of me. They killed the fox just close to where I lay. They carried me across the field and put me in one of the old four-wheel cabs and took me to a house in Welford where a hunting man lived whose name I cannot remember. But what I do remember was how very kind they were. My mother came over and used to sit up or be in the bedroom with me. I was there about two weeks when they took me home by ambulance and I was in bed the whole winter. This happened the first Wednesday in November.

I stuck it all right until one morning when my brother looked in as usual, all dressed for hunting. I completely broke down, as I felt I should never hunt again. I remember they gave me some



BERT DRAGE, 1931

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champagne, and that cheered me up. I lay awake one night, and I heard the doctor talking to my mother, who was sitting by the fire. I heard him say to my mother: "He shan't die for the want of attention, Mrs. Drage." Not very pleasant for me to hear. Then, one morning, I opened a letter directed to my brother, offering sympathy at my death. Funny how one remembers these things.

I got better by degrees, and eventually could walk about, but I was not to ride. I remember standing in the yard one day and a horse was being led round. I just could not resist the temptation to get up on him, and I started off down the home field and back full gallop, but I made a poor show of it that winter as I had no grip and so had to cling to the saddle with my hand.

That was a nasty fall when I broke my arm. I was hunting with the Cottesmore, and the horse fell and I got hung up. But, fortunately, when the horse kicked at me it released me.

I remember one day out with the Cottesmore I was riding a very good horse called Sprinkle Me. He was a good bold horse, but never quite got up at his fences. I was riding him and we came to the Whissen dine. I held back a bit, and rather funked it. A hunting man I knew who had got over it shouted to me to come on, and Sprinkle Me just skimmed over it. It was the same horse

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that, as I have recorded, I sold to Sir Henri Deterding.

I once had a fortnight stag hunting, and I so well remember being entertained by the father of the present Lord Fortescue. I fear I made a very bad impression when I said, during lunch: "I don't suppose you take this stag hunting very seriously, Lord Fortescue?" I remember there was dead silence. You see, it was to them the same as fox hunting was to me.

Another amusing incident I must relate. I was in the train on my way to John Gaunt. I had not shaved, and so I took off my coat and went into the lavatory to shave. The train pulled up at Brixworth, and I heard the station-master say: "It is only Mr. Drage, my Lord." Of course I had to come out, and there sat Lord Chaplin—very amused.

On one occasion when I broke my leg out hunting with the Quorn I was taken back to John Gaunt. My leg was bound up and I travelled home in the guard's van—a very unpleasant experience. I once had a hunt late in the day and had to ride into Nottingham and box my horse back to John Gaunt.

I can never forget riding to the meet one day with "Ikey" Bell. He would ride straight across country, and he took a nasty fall and arrived at the meet with his hat smashed and covered with dirt. But that did not trouble him. He was such a good fellow and a great friend of mine for

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many years. He came to see me a short time ago. He is very, very lame, so crippled with arthritis—but always cheerful. A very keen huntsman and very good over any country. I remember one day out with the Quorn we were drawing a covert lying below where we all stood. I think someone below thought he saw a fox go away and so he gave a holloa. Anyhow, off went "Ikey" down the hill and jumped the gate at the bottom, but hounds had not gone, so of course, he had to come back.

In 1911 there was a very good hunt from Badby Wood. Lord Annaly and Frank Freeman were having tremendous sport and I should like to include this hunt by recording Frank Freeman's own words.

"It was in 1911 in March. That was the year I killed one hundred and four brace of foxes, a record for the Pytchley country. We'd met at Daventry. There had been a lot of rain the night before, but it was a fine but cold morning. It must have been about twelve fifteen, just as I was beginning to fear Badby Wood was blank, that Ted Molyneux, who was my first whip then, holloaed a fox away by the lodge over the Banbury Road. He took the usual line out by Ryton Hill right-hand round Arbury Hill pointing for Staverton. Here a silly fellow holloaed in his face and he turned back for Badby Wood, but could

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not get through the crowd on the Banbury Road, so ran down beside the hedge towards Byfield where hounds checked. Mr. Paget, who lived at Brixworth then, was riding a new horse he could not hold, so he jumped it out of the road on the other side, where he saw Gaylass and Garnish hit off the line down one of those Fawsley doubles.

That Garnish was the best bitch I ever had. Hunt a line on the hardest dusty road, and always in front. Gaylass was her sister by Desperate ; they were both almost black with white collars. Garnish never bred anything half so good as herself, but Gaylass did. It was extraordinary how they picked the line through all that crowd on the road. I saw most of the field turn and ride up the road back to Badby Wood as I clapped my hounds over the road. They started to run like hell. The Fawsley doubles are almost unjumpable, and the hand gates delayed the field, which gave the hounds a real chance of settling down, not that they could have been interfered with much that day they were running that hard.

They just touched Church Wood, but they never stopped for a second, and I am sure they never changed there. Beyond Preston Capes they ran over an easy country into the heart of the Grafton. They only went through a corner of Ashby Bushes. At Adstone Bottom, about a mile or so on, there were a lot of falls—even Lord Annaly had a scramble there and lost his whip—

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but there was no time to pick it up. Garnish and Gaylass, and a light-coloured bitch called Dimple, I could see were leading, but you could have covered the whole pack with a sheet.

Near here Mr. Pat Nickalls and Mr. Tweed saw the fox only about four hundred yards ahead of hounds, going straight for the railway, which was crossed by Plumpton Wood, which would be about six miles straight from Arbury Hill. It is a great big wood, half the size of Badby, but the fox ran down the middle ride most of the way. Here I saw Postscript and Fatal turn sharp to the left. I don't think we could have changed there as they never left the line for a moment. They ran on, still going very fast by Woodend, pointing for Wappenham, to the railway straight over the brook. Lord Annaly was the only one to fly it, and I heard several fall in, and a lot of horses were too done to face it. I struck it lucky by a ford. There's a bit of a plough near Greens Park, but it did not seem to slow them down. Rarity, Garnish and Gaylass I noticed were still leading.

They left Weedon Bushes on the right and turned right-handed for Aswell Mill, and then turned left after crossing the stream, over some more plough, for what a Grafton gentleman told me was Crown Lands, a huge, great woodland. Just before we got there we ran into a little wood called Priests Hay, where hounds divided. I was a bit puzzled which lot were right, but I thought I had

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better trust the hounds who had been leading. Molyneux and Tom Peaker, who were both up, soon stopped the others, but two foxes had gone on and hounds divided again near the allotments below Silverstone Village. I at first thought my fox must have turned into Bucknells Wood and asked Mr. Paget, who was close to me, to stop the lot which were running between Crown Lands and Bucknells Wood.

Mr. Garrard, of Welton, went with him, and they jumped the gate which was wired up into the allotments, but my lot threw up, so I blew my horn, the first time I had used it since recrossing the Banbury Road, to prevent those gentlemen stopping hounds. I thought all was over when, as I had hoped, the fox did not run on but turned in at the furthest corner of Bucknells Wood, a tremendous grat place, bad scenting and full of foxes.

Here Lord Roseberry, Lord Dalmeny he was then, caught a glimpse of a beaten fox with a couple of hounds close behind him. He could not tell me which they were. I got the rest of the pack on to the line, and they carried it right through the wood and out on the Wappenham side. A man from the village told me the couple had hunted up to the hedge by a stream, where they had checked, and I was afraid he must have got in somewhere, which would have been a terrible disappointment to the hounds after such a hunt. I cast round to

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make sure and returned to the hedge, when I saw Rarity's hackles go up and she dived into the ditch and pinned him. He was a great greyhound of a fox, and had all his teeth—not at all an old fox. He went quite stiff the moment he was dead, and stood up to face the hounds. Molyneux was sure he was the same fox he viewed away from Badby Wood.

The time was two hours and five minutes from find to kill, a fourteen-mile point and about twenty-two miles as hounds ran. I think it was about half-an-hour after entering Bucknells that we killed, which shows how fast the pace had been. If Garnish and Gaylass were the hounds his Lordship saw in the wood they had never left the line for a second. Not a hound was missing.

I am sorry I cannot tell you much about the people. When one is hunting hounds one has no time or thought for anything else. I was luckily on one of the best horses I ever rode, called Starlight, who was quite fresh at the end, as were the two whips', which speaks well for Mr. Gibbs, the kennel studman. Not a single second horse arrived at the kill. They had all waited at Preston Capes.

I remember his Lordship kept the mask and gave Lady Dalmeny the brush, and Mr. Tweed, Mrs. Borrett, Mr. Romer Williams and Captain Elmhirst got the pads. The last two came up from Wapping Village just as we killed. I saw Captain

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Sowerby's little grey lying down in Bucknells Wood, but it recovered.

Lord Annaly ordered hounds home from here.

We had about twenty miles home, and his Lordship told us to go into the Pomfret Arms as we passed through Towcester; but Captain Elmhirst said we would have to stop at his place at Blisworth if we put in at twenty Pomfret Armses.

He rode on and had port and cake waiting for us in the road as we passed; as we were finished Lord Annaly passed us in cab he had hired in Towcester. There were not many motor cars or telephones in those days.

Mr. Tweed rode all the way home with the hounds to Brixworth, where we found some champagne and sandwiches in the feeding house, sent by one of the gentlemen who lived in the village.

I think it was the best day I ever had."

Frank Freeman

(I include this with the very kind permission of "The Field.")

I remember some good fun I had in Ireland. I went over with Captain Lowenstein. A well-known dealer mounted us, and, as I expect he felt that Captain Lowenstein might be a good customer, he put him on a high-class blood horse. I was on a much commoner horse. Captain Lowenstein was getting on very badly with his horse, as he was

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inclined to be hot and did not do the banks well. So he asked me if I would change horses. The dealer was not very pleased !

I once had a fall that shook me up. I was out with the Whaddon Chase, and, galloping up a field, a cow crossed me and it turned my horse over, I went on however !

Once I was riding a pony and standing near to a ditch. I expect I was standing over a wasp's nest, and the pony got badly stung and eventually kicked me off and broke my collarbone. I was never more than about 9 stone 7 lbs., and I think my bones must have not been very strong.

I must tell of a very good hunt I had with the Quorn. Mr. George Drummond kindly mounted me on two very good horses. They carried me brilliantly. We drew Prince of Wales Covert and found immediately, after a fast run we ran into the Belvoir country about a 10 miles point. I was so grateful to Mr. Drummond. It was from Pitsford Hall after the First World War that the Prince of Wales began his hunting, as the guest of Mr. George Drummond.

I had four or five very enjoyable days with the Old Berks. Tommy McDougal was the Master, and he eventually bought all his horses off us. He once had a bad accident. Standing on the platform to entrain he slipped and lost his foot. This did not stop him hunting however. He was real Beau Brummel.

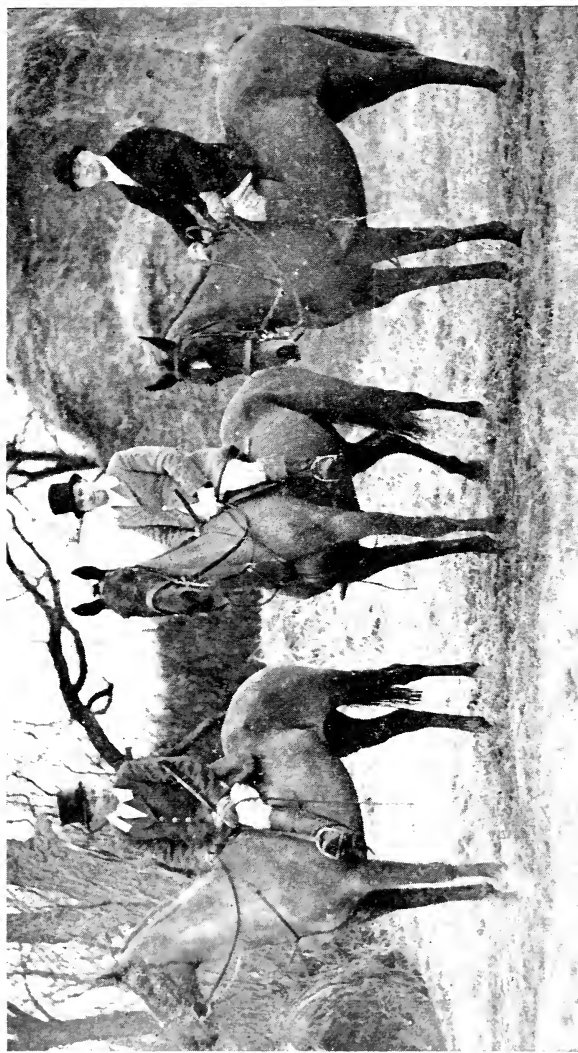
REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

I remember what was rather amusing to me. I had broken my right leg three times and the insurance company refused to insure that leg again. Then I had a bad fall, but this time I broke the leg that was insured, so, after that, they refused to insure me.

I should like to tell of another nasty fall I had. I was hunting with the Quorn, and I took on some rather high rails with a ditch on the landing side. I expect the horse, in trying to refuse, swerved, and Captain Frank Forester, the Master, was just behind me and knocked me and the horse over the rails. I remember all he said was: "Why the 'ell do you come in front of me on a refusing 'ors?—he had no 'H' in his vocabulary.

Since the last world war I have had some good hunting, principally with the Pytchley. I also have had some very good days when I went with that great sportsman Gerald Glover to hunt with the Quorn and with the Grafton. He used to box me to the Meet and usually mount me. He is very fond of hunting and no one goes better. He has some useful mares at his Stud at Pytchley House, where he breeds bloodstock and farms some 400 acres.

I have always been interested in the different styles adopted by various Masters of hounds and they do vary a great deal. I think one of the most popular Master of Hounds was Major Burnaby of The Quorn; also Charlie McNeil and C. W. B.



PHIL CRIPPS

GERALD GLOVER

BERT DRAGE

HUNTING DAYS

Fernie and Sir Charles Lowther and the third Lord Annaly, were outstanding. The best combination the Pytchley ever had were Annaly and Frank Freeman.

Having mentioned these names of famous Masters I cannot conclude without recording that in my opinion one of the best Fieldmasters is our present Master of the Pytchley, Colonel Jack Lowther. His quiet but commanding manner is respected by all.

I lost my dearest and best friend when Lady Frederick died in 1948. She collapsed just when her maid was putting her to bed. The doctor came over here at once and took Miss Carter back to be with Lady Frederick's maid. I felt her death very much. I had known her for 60 years. She and her brother bought all their horses from me. There was hardly a week passed that she did not pop over to see me or I went over to Lamport. She was beloved by everyone.

CHAPTER IV.

BLOODSTOCK AND RACING.

I WON quite a number of races on the flat with horses I bred. I had a very good horse called Prince Umbria. When I bought him I had not arranged who to send him to. I was walking up the street at Newmarket with Charlie McNeill. I was talking to him about this and I remember saying : " I wish I could get Fred Darling to take him." Charlie McNeill said : " Why, there is his father just in front of us. I will introduce you to him." And I so well remember Mr. Sam Darling (Fred's father) saying : " Why, I would start training again myself if my son cannot take the horse."

I had never seen Fred but I soon felt he would become a noted trainer. He won several races for me, but once he gave me bad advice. I was offered 6,000 for Prince Umbria, and, naturally, was very keen to sell. It was a large sum of money to me, but Fred was very opposed to selling him. He said that he thought he would be one of the best of his year. I felt I must give way, as, you see, Fred had brought the horse on and taken so much trouble with him. But he disappointed us, and eventually I had to take 700 for him. He won a race with a filly called Hardistone.

BLOODSTOCK AND RACING

I bought her very cheaply off a farmer and then sold her pretty well.

When Fred became such a fashionable trainer I wrote him that I felt my horses were not class enough for him to bother with. He wrote me a very nice letter back saying that he would always be pleased to train any horse for me. I forget just what other horses he had of mine, but I know he did very well for me.

I have had horses with several trainers—Basil Jarvis, Sadler, Leach, Vasey at Hambleton, Matthew Peacock, Captain Renwick and Peter Gilpin. I remember being very lucky with a race I won at Ripon or Redcar, I forget which. It took place on a Bank Holiday and I caught an early train from Harborough. When I got to Derby I popped out and sent a wire to Captain Renwick to put me £15 on. Then, when we got to Leeds, I realised that my only chance of seeing the race was to get a taxi straight to the course. Of course, the man at the gate wanted me to pay, and I said: "Do let me in, I've got a horse in this race." He said: "The race is just over." I met my trainer leading the horse in, and he congratulated me and said he had told a Mr. Wilson (one of his patrons) to put my money on. Then I came across Mr. Wilson, who also congratulated me and said: "I put your £50 on." He misunderstood Captain Renwick, who he thought said it was £50 I wanted on, so I won £300 as the horse started at 6 to 1.

REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

I was also very lucky with a horse I ran—I think it was at Wetherby. He was made a favourite and a Mr. Wilson, whom I have previously mentioned, was talking to me just before the race. He said how lucky I was with only about two horses in the stable and both likely winners, so I said : “ Why not buy my horse now before the start, and then you will have a winner, I feel sure.” We agreed on the price, but, I regret to say, he was beaten. I am afraid he never won.

I very nearly got into a lot of trouble. I had two horses in training at Newmarket, Ayot and Faiza, but with no success, and so I had them sent home in the autumn. Then I arranged with an old friend of mine, named Matthew Peacock, to take them, and I told him just to win any race he could with them, and sell them. He won with one somewhere up North and sold it. Then, as racing was nearly over, he sent the other one home to me. Naturally, I went to the box when it arrived and, to my dismay, I found he had sent the wrong horse. When I sent them to him one was a two-year-old and the other a three-year-old, and he had got them mixed.

I had an animal (I forget its name) in partnership with my sister. It was in a race at Hamilton Park. We met at Carlisle and then went on together. We won easily and I sold the animal to Lord Lonsdale for £700, which paid us very well. I remember winning a race—I think that was at Redcar. My horse was trained by Vasey at

BLOODSTOCK AND RACING

Hambledon. He was a very fine colt, but this was his first race. Somehow the public had heard a good account of him, and he started favourite. I think the price was 3 to 1. I had £300 on him. When the field came into sight he was leading and looked like winning easily, but the nearer they got to the finish the closer they got to him. But he won by a head. I felt he probably was not very game, and decided to sell him—also another, a very useful horse I had. They both made good prices, but I was well out as they never won again.

The one he won with was a year older than the race was made for, so he was carrying the weight of a three-year-old whereas he was a four-year-old. I was in such a fright, and I wired straight away to Weatherby's to say I was coming to see them with regard to what had happened. I felt if anyone got there before I had reported it I should probably be warned off. Anyhow, after my explanation they did not take it as seriously as I thought they would. I think I was right when I told them I would forego the stake which I could have stuck to if I had liked, but I felt it would have been very unfair to the man who was second. It is all reported in *Ruff's Guide*, I believe.

I got involved in another objection in the same year. I had bought a very good mare for Captain Lowenstein, called Lady Starlight, but he, for some reason, did not want to keep her. So I

REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

bought her from him and I sold a half share to a Mrs. Ambrose Clark. She was in a race at York. I wired to Mrs. Clark in America asking her if she would care to sell her share, which she did. This all happened a short time before the race, so, to avoid any trouble, I wired to Weatherbys office to say the mare was my sole property. She won all right, but Lord Glaneley, whose horse was favourite, was second and he objected to mine. His objection plea was described as wrongful-ownership. You see, this mare had just been entered in Captain Lowenstein's name and then as Mrs. Clark's. Anyhow, I met Lord Glaneley in the sale paddock at Doncaster the following week, and he said how much he regretted having to object: "But, you see, Bert, so many of my friends had backed mine, and so I was sort of bound to do it, but I had met Mr. Weatherby just before and he told me I had nothing to fear."

We went before the Stewards at Doncaster, and I remember Lord Hamilton was again the Chief Steward. Anyhow, they rejected the objection and fined Lord Glaneley £25. I remember meeting Lord Hamilton in the paddock at the races, and he came across to me and said: "Now, if I were you, Bert, I should give up racing. You seem to be all the time in trouble." He was a charming man, and a very good customer of mine.

I bred a very useful horse out of Wild Rose. I think we named him Rose Wreath, but as a

BLOODSTOCK AND RACING

yearling he developed spavin. I always feel that the most permanent cure of a spavin causing lameness is to let the animal gallop and trot as much as he likes in a field. What causes lameness from a spavin is the roughness of the bone, but if the horse uses the hock a lot it wears smooth and so is not so likely to cause lameness.

Anyhow I had the colt castrated and turned him out for six months. He got quite sound and I sent him to Bert Randall to train. He was a big colt and I thought the best plan was not to run him early in the year. I put him in four races right at the back end. I told Randall not to hurry but just have him ready at the back end. I remember his first race was at Leicester. When I saw him in the paddock I was very disappointed, as I thought Bert had hurried him in his preparation and I told him so as tactfully as I could, and after the race I should like him to go straight up to Peacock at Middleham. Bert rode him and won comfortably. I felt such a fool, and I told Bert that I was very sorry and that he had better take him back. I never had anything on him.

His next race was at Lewes, about two weeks later. He was favourite, and I backed him, but he was easily beaten. Then, in about a fortnight he ran again at Leicester and won. The next week he ran at Warwick and won again. The only time I backed him was when he got beat—not very clever.

REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

I once bought a half share in a very good horse called Alan Breck—he had been bought for 4,000 by Peter Gilpin and Donald Fraser. I was abroad at the time, so I wired Peter Gilpin that I would give him 4,000 for his share. So I was an equal partner then with Donald Fraser. We stood him at Donald Fraser's place for, I think it was, two years, and then sold him for 18,000gns. to go abroad.

The following are some of the bloodstock :—

Brood Mares.

Wild Rose	Self Sacrifice
Perfelra, Vol. 24—25	Bay Duchess, Vol. 22
Mesquite, Vo. 27	Harem, Vol. 22
Most Beautiful	Caltha
Frantic	Chalcedony
Miss Ray, Foaled 1910	Caragh
Judith, Foaled 1909	Tingitana
Bay Duchess, 22	
Harem, Vol. 22	

Racehorses.

Lady Starlight	Malna
Golden Miller	Rose Wreath
Sprinkle Me	Faiza
Merry Tom	John Lambton
Prince Umbria	Bay Duchess
Hardingstone 23	Brown Magic

BLOODSTOCK AND RACING

Chapel Brampton

Fiat

Rose Ronald

Spitalfields

Ayot

Chatham

Wild Oats

Palma

Prevail, see 1921

Osiris

CHAPTER V.

STEEPLECHASING WITHOUT TEARS.

I was once rung up very early one morning by Captain Loewenstein. He said: "I wish you would go down to Cheltenham to-day, Bert, and buy me the best horse you can that has some chance of winning the Grand National. So, of course, I went and I came across Percy Whitaker who was very much in the 'chasing world. He advised me to try to buy Easter Hero, which I managed with his help to do. I agreed to give 7,000 for him and another 3,000 if he won. He was in a £500 race later in the day, but I took him out of it as I felt if, by chance, he got beat I should not look to have spent Captain L's. money very well and if he won the £500 race it would not count for much.

I let Percy Whitaker have him to train, and I went down and saw him do some work over fences. I never saw a horse skim over them at such a pace as he did without hitting them. So I went with Capt. Loewenstein to Liverpool to see him run. It ended disastrously as he fell at the fence at the canal turn. The jockey said it was the people on the stand at the turn which put him off. I saw the race with Captain Loewenstein from the Grand Stand. No one could have behaved more sportingly.

He never grumbled or uttered one word

STEEPLECHASING WITHOUT TEARS.

of complaint but it must have been a great disappointment to him.

His next race was the big steeplechase in France. We had the same jockey, who was reckoned to be the best at that time. He fell at about the first fence, nearly opposite the Stands. Captain Loewenstein was very annoyed, as he had advised Percy Whitaker to get the best French jockey he could.

Another fine sportsman but unlucky owner who tried to win the Grand National was Lord Mildmay and his son Anthony. Here is a letter from him just after the 1936 Grand National which shows what a chancy business chasing really is !

Dear Bert,

You will have seen of the disastrous experiences of my son and his horse in the Grand National, and you will like to know something about what happened.

Through riding, last year, a chance mount, of the jumping powers of which he knew nothing, over the Liverpool course, my son had the most ghastly and crushing fall—broke his arm, two ribs, bad concussion with such resultant shock to the heart that the official doctor gave him up when he was brought by ambulance to the stand. He was desperately keen to ride this year, but I felt that the risk of a chance mount must not be run again. The one necessity was a good jumper, and such,

REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

I heard was "Davey Jones," which was one of the very few horses of the Grand National entry to come into the market, a horse with a quite beautiful fore-head and shoulders : and so, to cut a long story short, I bought him from the trainer, Grayson, at no great price, as he was tubed. He had won some selling races of small value on the flat, and had never run over a country before last October. Grayson stipulated, after the bargain was struck, that, before handing Davey Jones over to me, he should run in his (Grayson's) name in a steeplechase at Manchester, in which he had entered him. Grayson put up his own jockey, and a proper mess the horse made of the race, coming in nowhere—the jockey must have ridden him badly. I thought that I had been thoroughly "had." I never imagined that he would eventually run so well. You know the sequel.

Anthony dashed him off quicker than any other horse, and he led over the first fence, a considerable advantage in such a crowd of horses, five of which fell at the obstacle. I asked him what had emboldened him to make the running from start to finish for $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles, which had never been done before in this race. He answered that, after jumping off first and striding along in the lead, he found himself galloping at no greater pace than the horse (he knew) could go with ease to himself—at that very pace, indeed, no faster and no slower, which would enable Davey Jones to



LORD MILDMAY with "DAVEY JONES"

STEEPLECHASING WITHOUT TEARS.

get to the winning post in his best time. This being so, in his judgment it was obviously best to let him continue indefinitely to gallop along in front, where he would run no risks of being brought down by horses falling in front of him. As some of the most experienced of racing men have since told me, his judgment of pace was absolutely correct, for no one tried to get in front of him, for all felt that the pace was fast enough, nor did they lay out of their ground (hang back) since they could not feel that Anthony was making the pace too fast. He deliberately rode a "waiting race in front"—one of the hardest things to do in racing.

You will have read the published account of the race, and I am not going to repeat it. I only say that, at the last turn, with only four or five fences to jump, all the runners had been tailed off except Reynoldstown, who was a couple of lengths behind him, and it was then that their duel was fought. Reynoldstown's rider forced him up to challenge Anthony, and to the astonishment of everybody, Davey Jones prevailed. In the course of this effort, Reynoldstown made a very bad mistake at the fence near the turning, shooting his rider, Walwyn, on to his neck as he landed. Though Walwyn made a wonderful recovery, getting back into the saddle, this gave Anthony a lead of five lengths, with Davey Jones still going "on the bit," with ease to himself. You will have read the rest.

It was only just before the last fence, when both

REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

man and horse were on the happiest terms with each other and balanced, that the catastrophe came and the reins broke—when Anthony had won his race as was subsequently admitted by the winning rider himself.

As to what really happened to the reins. It seems that all present-day steeplechase jockeys, when they come to the fences, and especially such big obstacles as those at Aintree, have to let the reins run through their fingers right out to the buckle, in order that the horse may be given sufficient rein and liberty to recover when landing, or in the case of any mistake, and in order that they themselves may be able to lie right back on the horse's quarters.

As at every other obstacle, Anthony let the reins out to their fullest extent at the last fence but one. But the buckle was rotten, and parted. The reins, being greasy with the perspiration of the horse, flew off on either side, leaving him quite powerless. He tried to keep the horse straight with his whip, and by hitting him with his hand, but it was no good. I have since been told by expert jockeys that he was but doing what is invariably done.

As to the breakage itself, it was not the leather which broke, but it was the steel tongue of the buckle which parted, a very bad business !

It was hard luck, but Anthony took it wonder-

STEEPLECHASING WITHOUT TEARS.

fully well, and said to me, "Never mind—I'll win next year!"

Discussing with him after the race why Davey Jones had run so wonderfully well, I said that the horse must be an extraordinary stayer. "No," said he, he did not think that he was. "You must be talking nonsense," I answered. "No," he replied, "I believe that his success was due to the fact that the Aintree fences are so big that each means an exhausting effort to the competing horses. Davey Jones is such a jumper, he takes his fences in such effortless fashion, with such ease, he correctly and intelligently times his stride to the varying requirements of each of the greatly differing fences, that he gets over the formidable obstacles with a minimum of effort, and gains a length every time on any other horse." He 'floats over them,' to use Lady Daresbury's expression in her letter to me.

I have written at wicked length, and will have bored you.

It was a sad ending, but I am very proud of the horse, and of Anthony.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) Mildmay.

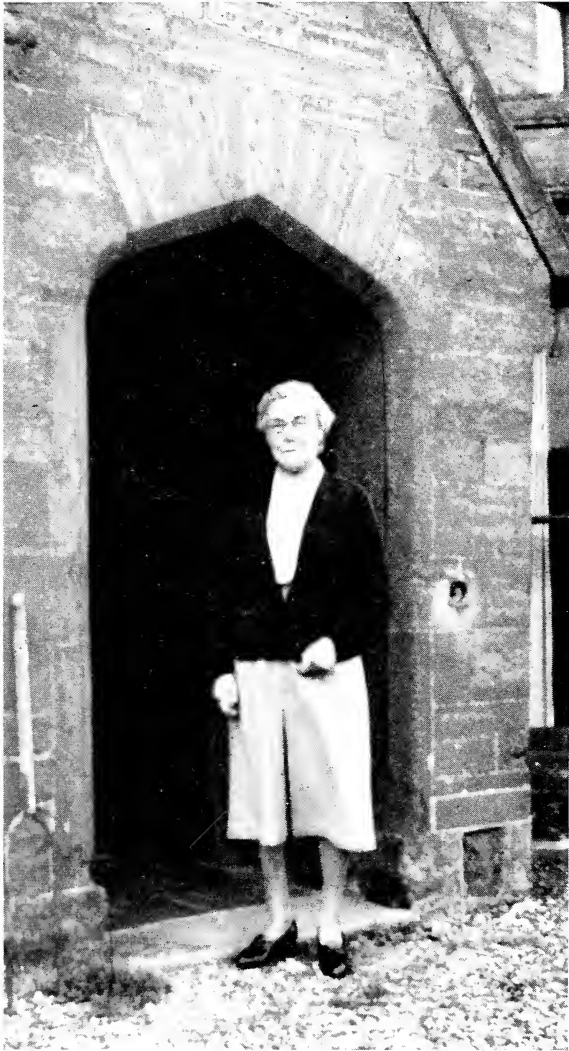
I rode a few times at Rugby and Towcester. I did win one point-to-point. John won a good many. He had the right temperament.

REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

One day Major Macdonald Buchanan asked me if I would go down to Lavington stud to see a thoroughbred horse there, that he had taken out of training and tell me whether I felt the horse would be likely to win a premium at the show in London as a hunter sire. When I got back I told him that I felt certain he would win a premium, and probably a super premium, so he asked me if I would have him at Brampton and get him in form for the show, which I agreed to do. He won, as I felt sure he would—also a super premium and King's Cup. Then he asked me if I would let the horse stand at Brampton for the season. Now came the tragedy. I can't really remember, but I think he had a severe attack of colic. Anyhow, it ended fatally. I was really very upset, and I think he realised this. He came over and spent an hour with me—not to complain, as he never did, but just simply to cheer me up. I can never forget this kind action, one of many that I received from him.

When the second world war broke out Major Macdonald Buchanan, who was then Joint Master of the Pytchley, came over to see me and he asked me if I would take charge of his farming operations while he was at the war. Of course, I said I would do anything I could for him. He had always been so very kind to me. I advised him to appoint a Bailiff and young Mr. Messinger got the job. He is still in charge.

To go back to my father's affairs. He had always



Miss CARTER

STEEPLECHASING WITHOUT TEARS.

kept a good hunter sire, but the time came when he was without one, so he and I went to the December Sales at Newmarket and, after spending three days there, and not finding what we wanted, we had decided to come home. I was watching a string of horses walking round preparatory to going into the sale ring, and I was very struck with a brown horse and so, really just out of curiosity, I looked it up in the catalogue. When I saw how he was bred I felt sure he would make a big price, but, to my astonishment, they could not get anyone to start him. Eventually, I think, he was started at about 200, so I found my father and persuaded him to bid for him. I think we got him for about 360. He was about the only thoroughbred horse that I heard Tattersall give a guarantee of soundness with. He was a very good looking horse by Galopin out of Spinaway (winner of the Oaks). No better bred horse existed. He made a wonderful Hunter Sire.

I must relate a very amusing incident in my life. We used to break a few horses into harness, and we had one of those tall skeleton brakes that one sits high up on. The late Lord Spencer happened to call one day and saw me get up, and he said he would like to come with me. I was a very poor coachman and Lord Spencer criticised the way I was driving. I was rather nervous with him sitting perched up by my side and we nearly had a spill. He ended up by teaching me how to drive.

REMINISCENCES OF BERT DRAGE

He was very, very kind to us in our early days on the farm.

I remember he made me laugh one day. The Mr. Messinger who managed our farm for us lived in a house on the Merry Tom Farm, and he complained to me that his living room was too small so Lord Spencer said he would like to see it. The room was certainly small, but he had a table in it. Lord Spencer said: 'Surely, Messinger, your table is too big.' How we all laughed—including Mr. Messinger.

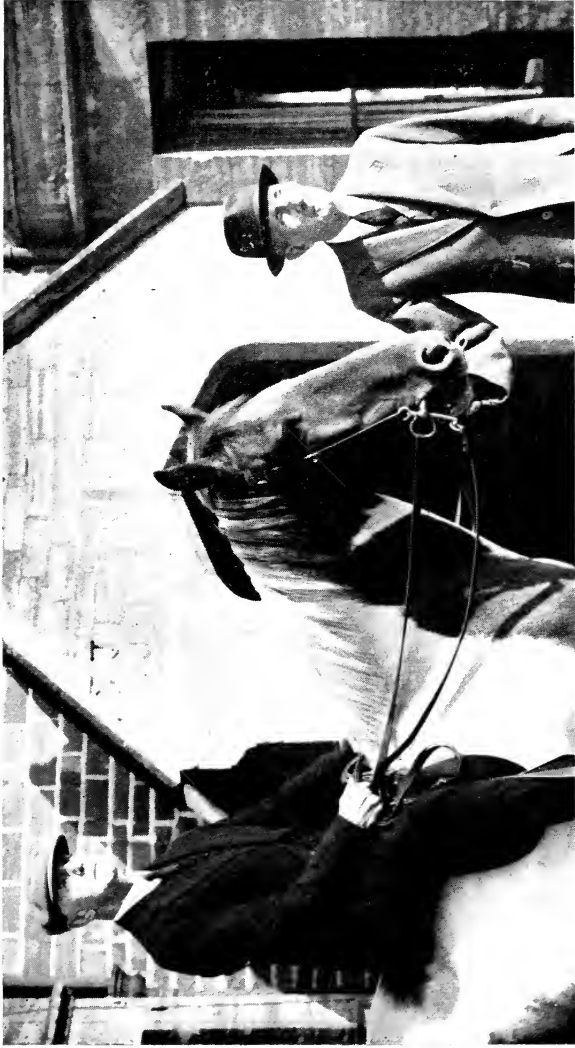
Stallions.

Chanteur	Cock-a-Hoop
Drummonds Pride	Alan Breck
Adam Bede	The Weaver
Pytchley	Markab
Hanover Square	Solomons Seal

FINALE.

I am now well again, playing golf and riding but do not jump, for at 88 I leave it to the younger generation.

I am very, very fortunate in having such a nice person, Miss Carter, to keep house for me and look after me. Candidly, I don't think I should be alive to-day if it had not been for her care and prompt attention on several occasions. She has been with me about nineteen years. I



BERT DRAGE and SAM ADAMS "Riding but does not jump"

STEEPLECHASING WITHOUT TEARS

should be just lost without her. She is a fully trained nurse, and has been twice called to Buckingham Palace to be decorated for her war services.

I must thank Mr. Robert Colville of "The Field" for assisting me in arranging the material.

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COUNTY PARADE

88, HIS FIRST BOOK JUST BEEN PUBLISHED

A COPY of a remarkable new book appeared on my desk this week. And remarkable is the right word, for it has been written comparatively recently by a Northamptonshire man who is now "getting on for 89," to quote his own words.

He had never written anything for publication before, not even an article—let alone a complete and fully illustrated volume that runs to 77 pages!

"Reminiscences of Bert Drage" (David Green, Kettering, 10s. 6d.) is the book. And the Bert Drage of the title is Mr. Herbert Drage, of Chapel Brampton.

This is how the autobiography starts off: "I have had a grand life—more hunting than any man living, I should think.

"I am writing this in bed (January, 1953). I had a fall about a month ago and fractured my thigh . . . I have broken so many bones, but never my thigh before. I have broken by legs six times, collar-bone twice, ribs, both arms and pelvis, and cracked my shoulder-blade. The broken pelvis was the worst.

"I suppose I ought to give up jumping fences now, as I have lost my grip and probably I never ought to have come off."

Yes, startled reader, it was a fall from a horse that broke Mr. Drage's thigh! Although in his middle 80's, he was still out hunting with the Pytchley!

Turn to the end of the book and you will read what I think is an equally surprising FINALE: "I am now well again, playing golf and riding, but do not jump, for at 88 I leave it to the younger generation."

HAS ED

I think this is one of the most telling sentences I have ever read. Here is the essence of an obviously great personality. At 88, he leaves jumping to the "younger generation"—those, I presume, in their fifties and sixties!

His enthusiasm

Most of the book is like that. Calm understatement, a wealth of local colour, and tremendous enthusiasm for field sports and everything to do with them.

That enthusiasm is understandable. Mr. Drage, a bachelor, has been a horse-dealer, bloodstock, hunting, racing, and steeple-chasing man throughout his adult life.

He records it all. Successes and failures; the moments of excitement, humour, and tragedy that every individual experiences.

I rang Mr. Drage at his home this week and asked him why he decided to write the book.

"Well, I was in hospital and did it to pass the time," he said. "It took me about six weeks.

"Then I left the matter with my nephew, Major Gerald Glover, of Pytchley. He did everything else. I only wrote the book."

"I only wrote the book" . . . there we go in that matter-of-fact manner again.

Two sayings spring to mind: "You're never too old . . ." and . . . "There's one good book in everybody."

Both certainly apply in the case of Bert Drage.

