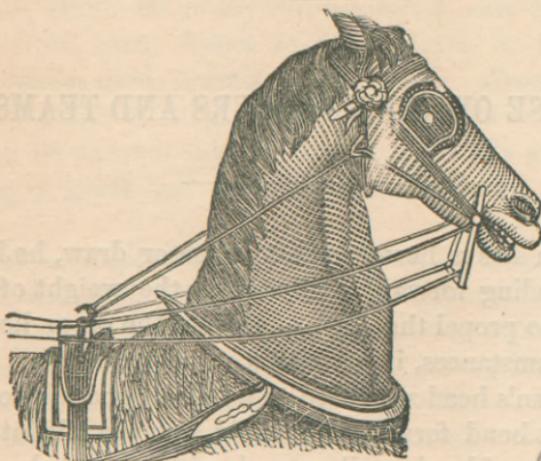


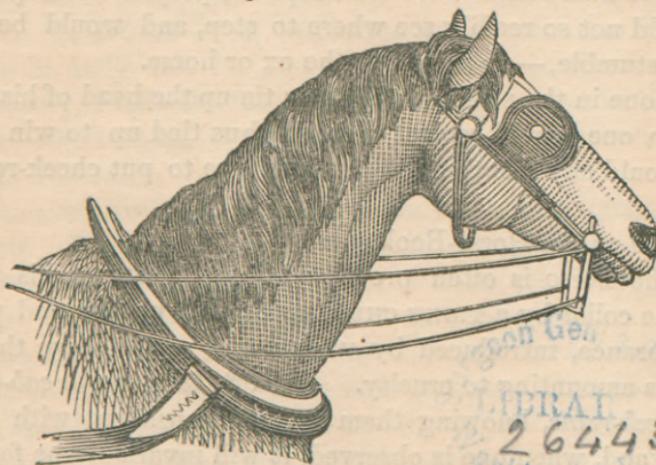
Angell (Geo. J.)

# THE CHECK-REIN.



BY GEO. T. ANGELL,

President of the Mass. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.



[To awaken attention to the improper use of check-reins, we wish to give a wide circulation to the following article, prepared from the best authorities. Packages of the pamphlet will be sent, *without cost*, to friends who will distribute them to stable-keepers, teamsters, drivers, and others who have to do with horses.]

FRANK B. FAY, Secretary,  
OFFICE OF THE SOCIETY, 46 Washington Street, Boston.

## TO HORSE OWNERS, DRIVERS AND TEAMSTERS.

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If a man has a heavy load to push or draw, he lowers his head by bending forward, and throws the weight of his body against, or to propel the load, — so does the ox or horse, under similar circumstances, if permitted.

If the man's head were tied to a belt around his body so that he could not bend forward, he would lose the advantage of his weight, and could only pull or push with his muscles, — so also with the ox or horse.

If the man's head were thus kept in a perpendicular position, he could not so readily see where to step, and would be more apt to stumble, — so also with the ox or horse.

No one in the saddle would thus tie up the head of his horse, and no one would expect a horse thus tied up to win a race. Nor would any one think it an advantage to put check-reins on oxen.

The London Horse-Book says: —

“The horse is often prevented from throwing his weight into the collar by a **TIGHT CHECK-REIN**, — a useless and painful incumbrance, introduced by vanity, and retained by thoughtlessness amounting to cruelty. *Few of the London cab-drivers use check-reins*, knowing them to be inconsistent with proper work; and, when one is observed, it will invariably be found to be on some poor animal, whose wearied and haggard appearance is attempted to be disguised by this implement of torture.

*The check-rein is, in nearly every case, painful to the animal, and useless to the driver. Because,* it fastens the head

in an *unnatural posture*; and, as the horse's shoulder and head fall together, cannot be of any real support in case of stumbling.

When, from some defect in the animal, or other cause, the check-rein *is* used, it must be slackened. *Because*, in addition to the easier position of the neck, a greater portion of weight can be thrown into the collar, especially going up hill, thus saving a great and unnecessary expenditure of muscular power.

There is an important difference between a *tight check-rein* and a *tightened rein*, although not generally understood. The first is injurious, and cannot help the horse, while the latter is often useful. *Because*, the latter is a *steady support* to the animal's head, from a distinct and intelligent source—the driver; whereas, the former is only the horse's head *fastened* to his own shoulders. *That the check-rein is inconsistent with the action of the horse's head, is clearly shown by the fact, that when a horse falls it is always broken.*"

From the letters of an American gentleman travelling in Europe in 1869 and 70, and which have been widely read in this country, I take the following, giving the places of date:—

BELFAST, Ireland. — "*I have not seen a check-rein on a draft horse in Ireland.*"

GLASGOW, Scotland. — "As I wrote you about Ireland, so in Glasgow. *I have not seen a check-rein on a draft horse, nor on a horse used in any omnibus, hack, or other public conveyance, and very few — and none tight — on other horses.*

I talked the other day with the keeper of one of the largest livery stables in the city. He had over a hundred horses in his stable, and he told me that he had never used a check-rein on one of them. I talked with an old scotch stage-driver, and he said, 'We dinna use them. You winna get half their power with them crimped up so.'

LONDON. — "*Few check-reins on cab and 'bus horses here.*"

NAPLES. — "*Check-reins are not used here on cab horses.*"

VENICE. — “*I do not remember to have seen, in this whole country, a check-rein on a horse attached to a public conveyance.*”

PARIS. — “*Check-reins are used rarely on draft horses here, and not much, and almost never, tight, on hack horses.*”

PROFESSOR PRITCHARD, of the Royal Veterinary College at London, says, Sept., 1869: —

“I would therefore say that, instead of preventing horses from falling, the check-rein is calculated to render falling more frequent. Other not uncommon results of its use are, distortion of the windpipe to such a degree as to impede the respiration ever afterwards, excoriation of the mouth and lips, paralysis of the muscles of the face, etc. It is a useless appendage, supported only by fashion. I feel that if this were more generally understood, numbers of excellent persons who now drive their favorites with check-reins would discontinue to do so.

DR. KITCHING, of York, another eminent English writer on the subject, says: —

*First.* If a horse pulling a load has his head held in by a check-rein, he cannot throw his weight into his collar, and is hindered from giving his body that position which is the most natural and effective. He has to pull by the strength of his muscles only; the weight of his body is lost, and so much pulling strength thrown away. What remains is exerted at a great expenditure of the horse's powers and health, to say nothing of his comfort. The consequence is, that his limbs and muscles become strained and distorted. His knees are bowed forward and his hocks backward. If a man pulls a load by a strap across his shoulders, he bends his head and chest forward, and relieves his legs; a horse does the same when he can, and ought always.

*Second.* It injures the horse not only in the way described, but the confinement of the head in a constrained position, whilst the heart and lungs are excited by work, hinders the breathing and the circulation of the blood in the head. These effects make the horse uncomfortable, and he becomes restless and

irritable; in fact, his head aches and pains him, and he gets many a violent jag and blow just because his driver cannot understand the cause of his restlessness. I have seen many horses standing at public-house doors and other places in this uneasy state, and by-and-by set off in their desire to get home and be unharnessed, when the driver has rushed out and punished the horse for his own error.

*Third.* The check-rein inflicts unceasing torture upon the animal in another way. By holding the head upwards it puts the muscles of the neck on a constant strain. They become painfully uneasy and tired. If the horse cannot bear it, he rests the weight of his head upon the rein, and his mouth is violently stretched. Thus he only exchanges one torment for another. I am not making fancy sketches: every word of my description is true. I have seen many splendid and valuable horses, worthy of a better fate, tossing their heads incessantly, and champing their mouths into a foam from the intolerable uneasiness of this cruel check-rein. To sum up in a word: the check-rein lessens the horse's strength, brings on disease, keeps him in pain, frets and injures his mouth, and spoils his temper.

Mr. FLEMING, Veterinary Surgeon of the Royal Engineers (London), says:—

“I think nothing can be more absurd than check-reins. They are against reason altogether. They place the animal in a false position. The horse stands with a check-rein exactly as a man would stand with a stick under his arms behind his back when told to write. It is extremely cruel also. I have no doubt, if the public could only realize the fact that it throws away a large portion of the horse's power altogether, and is very cruel besides, this rein would be discontinued. It is not only the head that suffers, but from his head to his tail, from his shoulder to his hoof, and over his whole body, he suffers more or less.”

Another eminent English authority, JOHN ADAM McBRIDE,

Professor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery in the Royal Agricultural College, says:—

“I most heartily concur in what has been written by Professor Pritchard and Dr. Kitching as to the bad effects of the foolish custom of using the check-rein.

Professor Pritchard has stated, that the check-rein is a very common cause of ‘roaring’ in the horse, which statement is endorsed by all veterinarians.

I will briefly consider the effects of the check-rein — (1) upon the circulation of the blood; (2) upon the veins; (3) upon the arteries.

1. *Its effects upon the circulation of the blood.*—It will appear very evident that this contrivance must seriously interfere with the return of blood *from* the brain, and thus lead to an accumulation of venous blood, producing eventually a state of coma, the severity of which will depend upon the duration and intensity of the compression; and, further, it must impede the flow of arterial blood *to* the brain. This deficiency of arterial blood is characterized by a want of nervous sensation, and a disarrangement of the nervous parts.

2. *Its effects upon the veins.*—The sudden, intermittent, and violent muscular action of the neck, together with pressure of the lower jaw, would induce more or less permanent distention of the veins, which in all probability would ultimately become varicose.

3. *Its effects upon the arteries.*—The pressure of the blood within the vessels, and the unnatural muscular contraction of the neck, would lead to laceration of their inner coats, resulting in enlargement of the vessels, and thus form aneurisms.

The consequences of the above conditions would lead to increased pressure upon the nerves of the neck, causing pain to the animal; and, further, it would predispose the unfortunate victim of fashion to such diseases as megrims, apoplexy, coma, inflammation, and softening of the brain.”

Hon. CHAS. L. FLINT, Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Agriculture, in an address delivered at Boston Music Hall, March, 1869, says:—

“There is another point on which I should like to make a single remark: I allude to the prevailing use of the check-rein upon our draft and team horses. \* \* \* If a man has a hard day’s work to do, if he wants to exert his muscles and sinews, he must have those muscles free and unconfined; nobody who has tried it can deny that, and yet how does it happen that a principle that every farmer, every mechanic, every laboring man of any character would admit in his own case, is so constantly disregarded in the case of the hard-working and often ill-used horse? And yet you see it every day.

I have many times seen a team overloaded with coal tugging up yonder Beacon Hill, straining every nerve, often plied with the lash and sometimes with the toe of a cowhide boot, while the power of the too-willing horses was crippled by a useless and senseless check-rein. Some of you may have read a little work called ‘Bubbles by an Old Man,’ by Sir Francis Head, a distinguished soldier who had galloped across the pampas of South America, and seen those vast droves of untamed horses in their native wildness and freedom, and so was a good judge of the natural conditions under which the horse exerts his strength to the greatest advantage. In that little work he contrasts the practices of different nations in regard to the check-rein, and points out clearly that when a horse has real work to do, whether slow work, as in our plows and carts, or quick, as in galloping, or in the headlong flight across the plain, nature tells him not to throw his head up and backward towards his tail, but forward and down so as to give the force of his weight into what he is called upon to do. He shows that nature never intended a large and heavy animal like a draft horse to perform his slow work only, or chiefly, by the strain of the muscle; but, on the other hand, by the power of weight as the rule, assisted

by the strength of the muscle, as the exception when extra resistance is to be overcome.

And what is the use of a check-rein on a draft or a team horse, anyhow? There may be a necessity for it in some young, unbroken, or ill-tempered animals; but these are the exceptions. On most of our heavy team horses it can rarely be justified. If it be said to prevent them from falling, it may be said in reply, that it has quite as often prevented an old horse from recovering from a stumble. It is to be hoped that horse owners will look at this matter in its true light."

The foregoing are only a few of many European and American authorities, which I have found to the same effect, and I have searched the books in vain for a single line to the contrary.

I can only conclude, as the result of my examinations, that the custom of tying up horses' heads with check-reins, like the custom of bleeding calves before they are killed, is a relic of barbarism, contrary alike to common sense and scientific opinion, and which has been permitted to exist so long because it has been nobody's business to call public attention to it.

GEO. T. ANGELL.

BOSTON, May, 1872.



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