

## Shakespeare on Horseback

*(Read by Charles Edward Flower before the Stratford-Upon-Avon Shakespeare Club on March 3, 1887)*



*Charles Edward Flower (1830–1892) was an English brewer. He was the eldest son of Edward Fordham Flower, an English brewer and author who campaigned for a Shakespeare memorial theatre and against cruelty to animals. As a major employer in the area, he was influential in local affairs, serving four times as mayor of Stratford. Perhaps his greatest legacy is his involvement in the celebrations to mark the tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth in 1864, and the impetus they gave to create a permanent memorial in the town. Fund raising began to erect a theatre, which opened in 1879 as the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. In 1873 he retired and moved to London where, being a great lover of horses, he spent the rest of his life campaigning to reduce the suffering caused by inappropriate harness, in particular tight bearing reins (also criticised in the 1877 novel *Black Beauty* and gag bits. The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was commissioned in 1874/5 (opened 1879). The theatre was very badly damaged by fire in 1926, 47 years after its opening.*

The two following papers are offered as slight contributions to a section of Shakespearean Literature which is constantly increasing, and in which the personal characteristics of the Poet are sought in his Poems and Plays.

They deal with certain strongly-marked likes and dislikes which crop up with curious and suggestive frequency all through his works, and have no more ambitious purpose than that of showing their bearings, and where they may be found. Thus, as in the tragedy of "Hamlet," Polonius says: — "Thus do we, of wisdom and of reach. With windlances, and with assays of bias, By indirections find deductions out."

The Society before which the Papers were read and discussed began its career early in the present century, and has from time to time played a leading part in the various festivals, feasts, and commemorative gatherings which have affectionately honoured the memory of Shakespeare in his native town.

In the Autumn of 1882 I undertook to read a paper to the Stratford-on-Avon Shakespeare Club, and in fulfilment of my somewhat rash promise, I jotted down some notes on a subject, one of several which had occurred to me while engaged in

the labour of love which I have undertaken, " The Memorial Theatre Edition of Shakespeare's Plays."

The subject I selected was Shakespeare's knowledge of horses and everything appertaining to them, and I put my Notes into the form of a good-natured skit upon a certain class of enthusiastic Shakespearean commentators, who take up a hobby, and ride it so hard that they can see nothing but the goal they are making for, and who are apt entirely to ignore any obstacles or difficulties which present themselves in the way.

The Notes I then read appeared in the columns of the "Herald," and I was asked by several friends to reprint them in a more extended form. For this object I have from time to time made further memoranda, but I find that they only serve to enable me to add a few more illustrations to those which I had offered before, and while introducing some of them, I have not attempted to make this paper anything different from what it was at first, and it must, therefore, not be imagined that I for one moment intend it as a serious contribution to the study of the great Master's works.

Many essays have been written to prove all sorts of things about Shakespeare's early life, and especially to urge that he must have studied for, or even served an apprenticeship to, various different professions and trades. And it is remarkable as showing how exact he was, and how truthful in his descriptions, that those who, by their special knowledge and experience, are most able to detect errors, have claimed the very fact of his correctness in the small details with which they were intimately familiar to prove that he also had that special knowledge of the subjects which bore out their views. Thus an eminent lawyer writes an essay to prove that Shakespeare must have studied law with a view to practising in the profession, for no person who had not so studied could possibly have been so conversant with its technicalities and phrases.

Others have tried to prove that he must have studied medicine, and that he even practised as a physician. The traveller writes to show that he must have sojourned, or at least have travelled, in Italy, in Scotland, and elsewhere, as no one could possibly have learned from books the descriptions of scenery and the innumerable light touches and passing allusions which showed his familiarity with those places, and the manners and customs of their inhabitants.

Shakespeare has been ' proved ' to have been a schoolmaster, a butcher, a farmer, a gardener, a soldier — so many different trades, in fact, that they disprove each other; and serve to teach us that his wonderful accuracy in detailed description was derived not from that close study which in so many various subjects would have demanded a dozen lifetimes, but rather from a wonderful power of seeing at a glance, and of storing all he saw in a well-ordered brain, ready instantly to be produced at the bidding of a fertile imagination, to embellish and illustrate whatever subject his active mind was engaged upon at the moment.

As Cowden Clarke says, "To a mind like Shakespeare's the acquisition of knowledge of all mirths was like inhaling the air lie breathed, a .sheer vital necessity; he could ill more help the one than the other, and both he turned to best account."

There is another class of commentators who put forth the bold theory that Shakespeare had nothing to do with his plays; but they have not only to avoid or leap over difficulties, but to swallow hard facts, and to invent other facts to stand in their place. They have to assume, among other things, that Shakespeare was a poor uneducated village lad when he went to London, and that he might there have acquired just sufficient learning to have enabled him to become the editor of others' writings, and that the riches he acquired were the product of some heavy bribes paid to induce him to become sponsor for the plays, which created so much delight as they were brought out, and that he was paid to conceal the real author or authors, and to take to himself the contemporary and lasting fame and admiration which these wonderful anonymous writers were too modest to accept.

But the truth is, they have to assume that ignorance of which there is not the slightest particle of evidence. Shakespeare was certainly as far removed as it is possible to conceive from the uncouth ignorant peasant which those who advocate the Baconian and similar theories are obliged to represent him to have been. On the contrary, he doubtless inherited from his father an impulsive, generous, and energetic spirit, while from his mother (a gentle-woman, be it remembered, by birth and breeding) he derived the instincts and feelings of a true gentleman, with a taste for art and literature, which tempered the bold and manly spirit inherited from his father.

Owing to his wonderfully retentive memory he would not have the slightest difficulty in mastering his lessons at the Grammar School, where, if he learned nothing else, he at least acquired a thorough knowledge of Latin and the Classics. He, of course, read every book he could lay his hands on — probably not many, but all of them worth the reading, and what he read he remembered. When he went up to London he must have had many opportunities of which he naturally would avail himself of obtaining a fair knowledge of French and Italian ; and his quick power of observation enabled him to gain a familiarity with the habits, thoughts, and feelings of the city and court as thorough as that which he had previously acquired of the country and rural life.

If his abundant knowledge of technicalities is to be a guide to his early training he could as easily be proved to have been a sailor, or a game-keeper, as any one of the various trades and professions allotted to him, and it is to illustrate my argument that I, taking a subject of which I know something (having had a good deal to do with horses), might now say ' Shakespeare was not a lawyer, or a doctor, or a schoolmaster; no, the internal evidence of his plays and poems proves that the greater part of his life must have been spent as a horse dealer or veterinary surgeon, otherwise he could not possibly have acquired the knowledge of horses which is exhibited through all his works.' At any rate, I can say that there is as strong internal evidence for this last suggestion as for any of the others.

I will now extract some of the more important of the very many passages which show how much Shakespeare knew about horses, how correct his judgment was on their various points and qualities; in fact, how much more he knew about a horse than any ordinary person who was not a veterinary surgeon or a jockey.

First, then, we will turn to his poem, Venus and Adonis, where we find a description of what a horse should be —

Venus and "Look, when a painter would surpass the life,  
Adonis. in lining out a well-proportion'd steed,  
His art with nature's workmanship at strife,  
As if the dead the living should exceed:  
So did this horse excel a common one  
In shape, in courage, colour, pace, and bone.

Round-hoof'd, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,  
Broad breast, full eye, small head, and nostril wide,  
High crest, short ears, straight legs, and passing strong,  
Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide:  
Look, what a horse should have he did not lack,  
Save a proud rider on so proud a back."

What description can be better than this? What point has he omitted or what described incorrectly, or who but a consummate judge could have so summed up the points in which a horse should excel, and name them all in such few terse words, giving such a picture in a dozen lines as might be expected from able writers on comparative anatomy in as many chapters?

How spirited, too, are the pictures drawn of the action of the "strong-neck'd steed," as "Imperiously he leaps, he neighs, he bounds, Venus  
And now his woven girths he breaks asunder, Adonis.  
The bearing earth with his hard hoof he wounds,  
Whose hollow womb resounds like heaven's thunder;  
The iron bit he crunches 'tween his teeth,  
Controlling what he was controlled with.  
His ears up-prick'd, his braided hanging mane  
Upon his compassed crest now stands on end:  
His nostrils drink the air, and forth again,  
As from a furnace, vapours doth he send."

Then we get his paces —  
"Sometimes he trots, as if he told the steps,  
With gentle majesty and modest pride,  
Anon he rears upright, curvets and leaps,  
As who would say lo! thus my strength is tried."

And further on —  
"Sometime he scuds far off and there he stares,  
Anon he starts at stirring of a feather;  
To bid the wind a base he now prepares,  
And whe'r he run or fly they know not whether:  
For through his mane and tail the high wind sings,  
Fanning - the hairs who wave like feathered wings."

But it is not in this poem alone that a horse's action is described, as through all the plays its action and paces are constantly referred to, as in the chorus at the beginning of Henry V:

"Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them" Henry V.

"Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth." Chorus.

Or, in Troilus and Cressida, where he describes the "Strong-ribbed bark through liquid mountains cut, Troilus Bounding between the two moist elements Like Perseus' horse."

Shakespeare must have had many opportunities of riding and learning all about horses in his boyhood and youth. Doubtless, his father kept more than one, and Will was sure to get a frequent mount, besides being often sent to the neighbouring towns and villages on his father's hackney to pay or receive accounts, or carry messages connected with his business.

Horseback was the only way of getting from one town to another, and heavy goods also were carried on pack horses, for there were few roads on which even a cart could travel. Those who had not horses of their own could hire them, and probably the sign that Benedick quoted, "Here is good horse to hire", was not an infrequent one in the streets of Stratford. If there was such a sign in Henley Street it had, in the course of two hundred years, given place to another which might have been seen about the beginning of this century over the window of a certain old house in that thoroughfare, which announced, "William Shakespeare was born in this house. N.B. — A horse and taxed cart to let."

So in two hundred years the roads had been made passable for light carts, and the Government had found in the carts a subject for taxation, and the owner of a particular light cart had found another source of income by exhibiting his house to the travelling public, who had by that time discovered — what before had been only known to literary and poetic students — that Nature's greatest genius had been brought up in that old farm-house in Henley Street.

How pleasant it is to picture the youthful poet riding along the narrow lanes between the high and tangled hedges, or on the open tracks across the frequent downs, sometimes alone, but not lonely, for while his clear, observant eye marked every bird and flower and insect that he passed, his quick imagination peopled the country with the moving armies of York and Lancaster, or the sylvan followers of the Banished Duke; while Titania and her fairy train peeped out upon him from every flower and sheltering leaf. At other times, in company with one or more congenial companions, he jogged along chatting and singing as he went, and joining in a hearty laugh at some quaint conceit or merry jest.

He must have enjoyed those days when, with his merry companions, he rode up to the Cotswold Hills to join the coursing matches, where he must needs have followed on horseback Master Page's "fallow greyhound," whose owner would not confess that it "Was outrun on Cotsall," (Merry Wives) or he would have seen little of the hare on those open downs which are even now only partially enclosed, and where

the purple heather still lingers, and the thin plantations have a hard struggle for existence against the bleak winter blasts.

That he delighted in coursing as a lad we may be sure, but we know that his kindly and sympathetic heart was touched with pity for "Poor Wat far off upon a hill " and that he cared less for coursing in after life, deeming it tame sport compared with the chase of more noble animals.

Racing for stakes as carried on in our days seems to have played a very small part in the rural life of those times, and Shakespeare makes but few references to that sport. Imogen, indeed, says: "I have heard of riding wagers Cymbelie  
Where horses have been nimbler than the sands  
That run i' the clock's behalf."

But racing which afterwards grew to be such an important element in English social life was little thought of until betting became a science.

The speed of the horse is, of course, referred to, as is natural when it was frequently the subject of life and death interest as it was in those days so long before railways and telegraphs. What anxiety as to whether the horse could hold out on his journey, when riding to bear the news of victory or defeat in such a time as when in Henry IV, "Contention, like a horse,  
Full of high feeding, madly hath broke loose,  
And bears down all before him."

Those were stirring times, when, after the " battle of Shrewsbury, the Earl of Northumberland's friend " out rode " Travers, being better mounted, and brought the joyful but false news of the King's defeat.

Travers, on his slower steed, was again overtaken by a messenger of very different tidings, for in 2 Henry IV. "After him came spurring hard  
A gentleman, almost forespent with speed;  
That stopped by me to breath his bloodied horse.  
He asked the way to Chester, and of him  
I did demand what news from Shrewsbury;  
He told me that rebellion had bad luck,  
And that young Harry Percy's spur was cold.  
With that he gave his able horse the head,  
And, bending forward, struck his armed heels  
Against the panting sides of his poor jade  
Up to the rowel head: and starting so  
He seemed in running to devour the way,  
Staying no longer question."

But the Poet used the horse's speed as an illustration of more peaceful scenes. It will suffice to take one example from the Sonnets.

Sonnet 50. " How heavy do I journey on the way,  
When what I seek — my weary travel's end —  
Doth teach that ease and that repose to say,

Thus far the miles are measured from thy friend.  
The beast that bears me, tired with my woe,  
Plods dully on, to bear that weight in me,  
As if by some instinct the wretch did know  
His rider loved not speed, being made from thee:  
The bloody spur cannot provoke him on  
That sometimes anger thrusts into his hide,  
Which heavily he answers with a groan,  
More sharp to me than spurring to his side:  
For that same groan doth put this in my mind,  
My grief lies onward, and my joy behind."

#### Sonnet 51

"Thus can my love excuse the slow offence.  
Of my dull bearer, when from thee I speed;  
From where thou art why should I haste me thence  
Till I return, of posting is no need:  
Oh, what excuse will my poor beast then find  
When swift extremity can seem but slow?  
Then should I spur, though mounted on the wind,  
In winged speed no motion shall I know:  
Then can no horse with my desire keep pace:  
Therefore desire, of perfect'st love being made  
Shall neigh — no dull flesh— in his fiery race;  
But love, for love, shall thus excuse my jade;  
Since from the going he went wilful s'ow,  
Toward thee I'll run, and give him leave to go."

Perhaps I may add, as illustrating this subject in a different vein, Benedick's not very polite retort to Beatrice.

"I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer."

Shakespeare not only looked on a horse with the eye of a judge, but he entertained for him a feeling of affection which is exhibited through all the plays and poems. He constantly makes his characters refer in affectionate terms to their horses. I will particularly instance the Dauphin in Henry V.

"I will not change my horse with any that treads but on four pasterns.

Ca, ha!

He bounds from the earth, as if his entrails were hairs.

Le cheval volant, the Pegasus, qui a les narines defeu.

When I bestride him I soar, I am a hawk; he trots the air; the earth sings when he touches it: the basest horn of his hoof is more musical than the pipe of Hermes."

Orl, "He is of the colour of the nutmeg."

Date, " And of the heat of ginger; it is a beast for Perseus : he is pure air and fire, and the dull elements of earth and water never appear in him, but only in patient stillness while his rider mounts him. He is, indeed, a horse, and all other jades you may call beasts."

Con, "Indeed, my lord, it is a most absolute and excellent horse."

Ban, "It is the prince of palfreys: his neigh is like the bidding of a monarch, and his countenance enforces homage."

Orl, "No more, cousin."

Dan, "Nay, the man hath no wit that cannot from the rising of the lark to the lodging of the lamb vary deserved praise on my palfrey. It is a theme as fluent as the sea: turn the sands into eloquent tongues, and my horse is argument for them all. 'Tis a subject for a sovereign to reason on, and for a sovereign's sovereign to ride on; and for the world (familiar to us and unknown) to lay apart their particular functions and wonder at him. I once writ a sonnet in his praise, and began thus ' Wonder of Nature,' &c, &c."

(Henry V)

This, of course, is the ridiculous exaggeration of praise, and, as the Constable retorted, 'twere more honour some were away —

Henry V, "Even as your horse bears your praises ; who would trot as well were some of your brags dismounted."

But this is only one of numerous instances in which the horse is referred to with expressions of the greatest admiration and regard, such as *Midsummer Night's Dream*, true regard for an object is shown by the care taken for its comfort, he makes his characters give directions that their horses should be well cared for, as when Lafeu says *All's Well* "Let my horses be well looked to, without any tricks."

He was up to ostler's tricks.

Or when the carrier in *Henry IV* looks after the stuffing of the saddle and his companion complains of the quality of the food.

Henry IV, "I pry thee, Tom, beat Cuts' saddle, put a few flocks in the point: the poor jade is wrung in the withers out of all cess."

"Peas and beans are as dank here as a dog, and that is the next way to give poor jades the bots: this house is turned upside down since Robin, ostler, died."

Prince Hal considers it a characteristic of the gallant Hotspur that he should think of his horse before he can answer his wife's anxious inquiry. The Prince says, " I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the North; he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife 'Fie upon this quiet life! I want work.'

'Oh my sweet Harry,' says she, 'how many hast thou killed to-day? '

'Give my roan horse a drench,' says he: and answers ' some fourteen ' an hour after."

Hotspur, indeed, thought much of his horse.

"Come, let me take my horse,  
Who is to bear me like a thunderbolt  
Against the bosom of the Prince of Wales :  
Harry to Hairy shall, hot horse to horse,  
Meet and ne'er part 'till one drop down a course."

Shakespeare had observed and probably practised the management and breaking-in of horses. Thus he describes how horses should be broken. (Henry VIII)

"Those that tame wild horses  
Pace them not in their hands to make them gentle,  
But stop their mouths with stubborn bits, and spur them  
Till they obey the manage."

And again he says in Venus and Adonis  
"The colt that's backed and burdened being young Venus and  
Loseth his pride, and never waxeth strong." Adonis.

I wish that breeders of horses would remember those lines: we should not have the country so overrun with unsound horses, whose various defects are generally brought on by over-work when only two or three years old.

He sums up the description of a gallant man by comparing him to  
"An angel dropped down from the skies  
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,  
And witch the world with noble horsemanship."

And again Mark Antony likens a tried and valiant soldier to his horse that

"I teach to fight, Julius Caesar  
To wind, to stop, to run directly on,  
His corporal motion governed by my spirit."

And in Hamlet the King, saying that the French "Can well on horseback," goes on to describe one of them, Lamond, a gentleman of Normandy,

"He grew unto his seat, Hamlet  
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse,  
As he had been incorpsed and demi-natured  
With the brave beast."

He knew well there must be for perfect training an intimate sympathy between the horse and his rider, so that the one can instantly feel the intention of the other, even before it can be expressed by word or sign. He says,

"Well could he ride, and often men would say,  
'That horse his mettle from his rider takes  
Proud of subjection, noble by the sway,  
'What rounds, what bounds, what course, what stops he makes'  
And controversy hence a question takes,  
Whether the horse by him became his deed,

Or he his manage by the well-doing steed."

In Measure for Measure he describes severe laws as "The needful bits and curbs to headstrong steeds."

And in the same play Claudio refers to the public body as "A horse whereon the governor doth ride, "Who newly in the seat, that it may know He can command, lets it straight feel the spur."

Many more passages might be quoted to show the high, esteem in which Shakespeare held good horsemanship. He sometimes, however, refers to bad riders, as when Celia likens Orlando to, "A puny filter that spurs his horse but on one side."

Shakespeare certainly knew more about the horse than many of his commentators, for in Lear, when the Fool says, "He's mad that trusts in a horse's health," an eminent editor, in a note, remarks, " we should read heels, as health has no meaning," and this so-called recommendation has actually been adopted by several of the learned closet critics; whereas health has the best of meanings to one who knows anything about horses. The fool, of course, used health in the sense that we say soundness, and all those that have had much to do with horses will bear feeling testimony to the truth and wisdom of his remark. In the same play there is an amusing instance of correctness of observation in little things — "Horses are tied by the head; dogs and bears by the neck: monkeys by the loins, and men by the legs."

Kent being in the stocks — and this leads us to the complete knowledge which Shakespeare evinces~of all the various parts of the horse's harness and trappings, In Henry IV, the carrier looks after the stuffing of the saddle trappings of silver and gold are referred to. Bridles and headstalls, spurs and rowels, bits and reins, of course, are often mentioned, but not bearing reins, which he doubtless would have condemned in strong language had he witnessed the modern use of those instruments of torture.

Although he mentions various coloured horses, Shakespeare seems to have had a decided liking for roan, as, for instance, King Richard's roan Barbary, of which the faithful groom said —

"Oh, how it yearned my heart, when I beheld Richard II.  
In London streets, that coronation day,  
When Bolingbroke rode on roan Barbary!  
That horse that thou so often hath bestride;  
That horse that I so carefully have dressed."

King, "Rode he on Barbary? Tell me, gentle friend,  
How went he under him?"

Groom, "So proud as if he had disdained the ground.

King, "So proud that Bolingbroke was on his back?  
That jade hath eat bread from my royal hand;

This hand hath made him proud with clapping him.  
"Would he not stumble? Would he not fall down,  
(Since pride must have a fall) and break the neck  
Of that proud man that did usurp his back?  
Forgiveness, horse! why do I rail on thee,  
Since thou, created to be awed by man,  
Was born to bear? I was not made a horse,  
And yet I bear a burden like an ass,  
Spur-gall'd and tired by jauncing Bolingbroke."

Again, when Hotspur's servant tells him that Butler has brought one horse only from the sheriff, Hotspur inquires, "What horse? A roan? A crop-eared, is it not?" (Henry IV)

And adds, "That roan shall be my throne."

And afterwards Prince Hal speaks of "Hotspur's roan horse."

The Dauphin's favourite horse was "of the colour of the nutmeg," which we now call chestnut. And we hear in King Lear of a "Bay trotting horse."

Lafeu's horse also was a bay — "I'd give bay Curtal and his furniture."

White horses are referred to several times, but I believe that black horses are only mentioned once, when Titus Andronicus tells Tamora to,  
"Provide two proper palfries, black as jet,  
To hale thy vengeful wagon swift away."

Shakespeare knew that the value of a horse was reduced by a white blaze or cloud upon his face —

"He has a cloud on his face;  
He were the worse for that were he a horse."

Of course, we frequently find reference to the value of a horse as a gift, worthy of a prince to bestow or to receive, as in Coriolanus, where the Roman general Cominius, when adding the name of Coriolanus to that of Caius Marcius, and after offering a tenth of all the horses taken in the field, bestows  
"My noble steed known to the camp  
With all his trim belonging."

The Lord Lucius presents Timon with  
"Four milk white horses, trapped in silver."

But that was only in the certainty of a greater gift being returned, for, as the Senator said, "If I would sell my horse and buy twenty more  
Better than he, why give my horse to Timon?  
Ask nothing, give it him, it foals me straight  
A stable o' horses."

The King in Hamlet wages, "Six Barbary horses,"

And in Troilus and Cressida, Diomedes bids his servant, "Take thou Troilus' horse Present the fair steed to my lady Cresaid."

Sir Andrew Aguecheek offers his horse to make up the quarrel with his supposed ferocious opponent, "I'll give him my horse grey Capilet."

And Sir Toby takes care to get the advantage to himself.

"Marry, I'll ride your horse as well as I ride you; I have his horse"-- he says to Fabian — "to take up the quarrel."

My opening quotation was an admirable description of what a horse should be. Shakespeare was equally felicitous in describing what he should not be. He concentrated every kind of unsoundness into a horse when Biondello says that Petruchio is coming —

"His horse hipped with an old mothy saddle and stirrups of no Taming of kindred: besides, possessed with the glanders, and like to mose in the ' Shrew the chine : troubled with the lampass, infected with the fashions, full of wind-galls, sped with spavins, rayed with the yellows, past cure of the fives, stark spoiled with the staggers, begnawn with bots: swayed in the back, and shoulder shotten: ne'er legged before, and with a half cheeked bit, and a headstall of sheep's leather, which being restrained to keep him from stumbling hath been often burst, and now repaired with knots: one girth six times pieced, and a woman's crupper of velure, which hath two letters for her name fairly set down with studs, and here and there pieced with pack thread."

Can you suggest any addition to that? Cannot you see the poor wretch in his trappings, which Petruchio must have rescued from the knacker's yard to carry him to his bride. In another scene in the same play he uses as a climax, "As many diseases as two and fifty horses."

And yet there are clever commentators who think that when he speaks of a horse's health he must mean something else. I fancy that Shakespeare must have had some troubles in horse dealing just before he wrote *The Taming of the Shrew* — it has so many allusions to mishaps connected with them. He often refers to horse stealing, a crime more common then, when the country was thinly populated, and when there were no rural police or pursuing telegraphs. When Lord Bardolph (not Falstaff's friend), wishing to discredit the messenger of bad news, he at once says — "Who, he? He was some hilding fellow that had stolen the horse he rode on."

And the better known Bardolph in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was the victim of the treachery of three Germans, who, after staying a week with mine host of the Garter, hired his horses — Bardolph in charge riding behind one — when as soon as they came beyond Eton, " They threw me off into a slough of mire, and set spurs, and away like three German devils, three Doctor Faustuses."

These Germans, it seems, had cheated all the landlords of Beading, Maidenhead, and Colebrook of their horses and money. They probably sold them in Smithfield, where Bardolph had before that time bought a horse for Falstaff.

The fat knight was very dependent upon his horses for locomotion. They were about the last things he could part with; and for this reason the Merry Wives, in order to be revenged on him, determined to, "Lead him on with a fine baited delay, till he hath pawn'd his horses to mine host of the Garter."

They succeeded in their plan, as we learn from the last scene of the play.

Among the descriptions of horses we may quote the passages in Henry V, where the boasting French exclaim, "Hark how our steeds for present service neigh,  
Mount them and make incision in their hides,  
That their hot blood may spin in English eyes,  
And dout them with superfluous courage."

And afterwards, describing the supposed state of the English army, Grandpre says, "Their horsemen sit like fixed candlesticks,  
With torch-staves in their hands; and their poor jades  
Lob down their heads, dropping the hides and hips:  
The gum down roping from their pale dead eyes,  
And in their pale dull mouths the gimmal bit  
Lies foul with chew'd irass, still and motionless;  
And their executors, the knavish crows,  
Fly o'er them all, impatient for their hour."

In Henry IV, Vernon, while counselling prudence to Hotspur, and urging him to put off the fight until the morrow, says,  
Bonn "Your uncle Worcester's horse came but to-day,  
And now their pride and mettle is asleep;  
Their courage with hard labour tame and dull,  
That not a horse is half the half himself."

Hotspur replies —  
"So are the horses of the enemy  
In general journey— bated and brought low;  
The better part of ours are full of rest."

Had Vernon's advice been taken in this and other matters it had been the better for Hotspur.

Shakespeare has referred to the courage of the horse, especially on the battle field, but he does not forget his timidity at any unexpected object:  
"Anon he starts at stirring of a feather." (Venus and Adonis)

And it appears that he knew that the fear of a wild beast would make him fly in terror.  
"Sheep run not half so timorous from the wolf  
Or horse or oxen from the leopard." (Henry VI)

African travellers recount among the most ordinary incidents the danger of losing their horses and oxen from their breaking away in fright at the sound of a wild beast's roar.

Horses played a part in the superstitions of the times, such as are recorded in Richard III.

"Three times to-day my footcloth horse did stumble,  
And startled when he looked upon the tower."

And they are often brought in to homely proverbs, as in the same play,

"But yet I run before my horse to market.  
Clarence still lives."

Or, in Henry VI, "Unless the adage must be verified,  
That beggars mounted run their horse to death."

A proverb, I presume, which preceded that of ' put a beggar on horseback, and he'll ride to the devil."

I am drawing to a close now, not, however, from want of more matter; but before I conclude I must refer to the use Shakespeare makes of the horse in drawing similes. I will only cite two or three out of many I might take which show how ready he was to use that noble animal as an illustration, as where Buckingham speaks of the ungoverned state of the country: (Richard III) :Where every horse bears his commanding rein,  
And may direct his course as please himself."

Or, as Norfolk says — (Henry VIII) "To climb steep hills  
Requires slow pace at first; anger is like  
A full hot horse, who, being allowed his way,  
Self mettle tires him."

And again in the same play, where Lord Sands, describing the tricks the English have learned in France, says, "They have all new legs and lame ones;  
one would take it  
That never saw their pace before, the spavin  
Or spring-halt reigned among them."

And we must not omit from the Merchant of Venice, "Where is the horse that doth untread again  
His tedious measures with the unbated fire  
That he did pace them first."

Or, a fine example from Julius Caesar,  
Julius Caesar, "There are no tricks in plain and simple faith,  
But hollow men, like horses hot in hand,  
Make gallant show and promise of their mettle,  
But when they should endure the bloody spurs  
They fall their crests, and, like deceitful jades,  
Sink in the trial."

I think that I have now given enough illustrations to prove my case. I might go on till you would exclaim with Portia, "He doth nothing but talk of his horse."

But I have really only taken some of the most striking out of hundreds, and I think that I have shown that if Shakespeare's knowledge of law or medicine was so great as to prove he must have been a lawyer or a doctor, the knowledge he had of horses, their good and bad points and characteristics, was quite sufficient to have qualified him for a certificate from the College of Veterinary Surgeons. But the fact is, it would be as difficult for "Thy horse to con an oration," (Troilus) as for us to find any subject with which the great master mind was not familiar, and with the familiarity of one completely initiated rather than of an amateur. And as it was impossible that the whole of his younger life could have been devoted to all of the professions and trades to which it has been claimed that he has served an apprenticeship, may we not rather conclude that his works are the outcome of a mind ever observant and enquiring— never forgetting or despising even "unconsidered trifles" — and capable of retaining, digesting, arranging, and reproducing every incident presented to his senses.

I would, in conclusion, hope that this paper, though by no means exhaustive of its subject, may serve to show how much there is in Shakespeare's writings to assist and lead one on in other studies. You have had one instance in the admirable paper read by Mr. Humphreys on the Flora of Shakespeare. Doubtless he would bear witness that the study of botany and the collection of specimens were made pleasanter and even easier by the poetic associations connected with their names and habits.

I can say the same, and so will any of you who may be inclined to work out what Shakespeare has written upon any subject, no matter what, in which you may take a special interest.

Now I conclude with the hope that you will not vote me, "As tedious as a tired horse."  
(Henry IV)