

life. "He had nothing to console him and nothing to sustain him except his pride; and even that deserted him before a heart which he knew at least could give him sympathy. He gave a sort of stifled groan. 'All my life I have been trying for this; and for what have I sacrificed it?' he murmured. It was in vain to offer solace. 'You don't know what the Derby is,' he moaned out. 'Yes, I do; it is the Blue Riband of the Turf.' 'It is the Blue Riband of the Turf,' he slowly repeated to himself, and sitting down to the table, he buried himself in a folio of statistics."

As we learn from the "Electra" of Sophocles and from other sources, the Greeks had their horse-races and chariot-races. "They had," writes "Nimrod" in the "Turf," "their course for full-aged horses and their course for colts, and their prize for which mares only started, corresponding with our 'Oaks' stakes at Epsom. Of the training and management of the Olympic racehorse we are unfortunately left in ignorance, all that can be inferred being the fact that the equestrian candidates were required to enter their names and send their horses to Elis thirty days before the celebration of the games commenced, and that the charioteers and riders, whether owners or proxies, went through a prescribed course of exercise during the intervening month."

But though horse-races and chariot-races were known to the ancients, yet it would seem that the sport of which Epsom Downs now forms the centre was unknown in British and Anglo-Saxon times. Doubtless our Norman forefathers under the Plantagenets not only hunted and hawked, but amused themselves on 'the turf'; still records are almost wholly wanting. Besides that, the qualities most valued in the horses of the Middle Ages were strength and endurance rather than speed.

It was at first for foot-races that Banstead Downs* were celebrated, and here and there we find references to matches decided in this manner. At a time when every family of "the quality" kept his "running footman" or "running footmen" it was a very obvious amusement for their indolent masters to set them to run races; and we learn from Pepys' "Diary" that this was often done in the neighbourhood of Epsom.

English horse-racing, if we may believe Mr. Hone's "Year Book," would seem to have sprung, like Minerva, in a perfect form, and to have come out of the head of our royal Solon. At all events he writes:—"Horse-racing was established in the reign of James I., with nearly all the rules for training, physicking, carrying weights, and running for

prizes, as at present. A silver bell was the annual prize; hence comes the proverb, 'to bear the bell.'" In his "Every-day Book," he seems to state that Chester was the scene of the inauguration of such sports, Mr. William Lester, a worthy mercer of that city, having caused three silver bells to be made, and to be run for by horses on St. George's Day, in 1609 or the following year. The bells, both in Chester and elsewhere, were gradually superseded by bowls or cups, or by money.

The passage in the "Every-day Book" with reference to this custom runs as follows:—"In 1609 or 1610, Mr. William Lester, mercer, being mayor of Chester, did cause three silver bells to be made, of good value, which bells he appointed to be run for with horses 'upon St. George's Day, upon the Roode Dee, from the new tower to the netes, there torning to run up to the Water Gate; that horse which came first to have the beste bell, the seconde to have the seconde bell for that year, putting in money and for to, and shuerties to deliver in the bells that day twelvemonth.' The other bell was run for the same day, upon the like conditions . . . the bell and bowl of these races have been converted to the ordinary prizes at similar meetings. They are now (1827) held in the first entire week in May, which comes as near the original time (old St. George's Day) as possible."

Horse-racing is thought to have been introduced on Banstead Downs by James I. when residing at Nonsuch; and tradition states that the King held these Downs and Enfield Chase in equal estimation as resorts for his favourite pursuit.

That the pastime of racing in the neighbourhood of Epsom existed in the days of Charles I. is proved by a quotation from Clarendon's "History of the Rebellion":—"Soon after the meeting which was held at Guildhall, 18th May, 1648, to address the two Houses of Parliament, a meeting of the Royalists was held on Banstead Downs under pretence of a horse-race, and 600 horses were collected and sent to Reigate." This pretended sport, it would seem, was the only way in which large bodies of men known to be disaffected to Government could meet in arms without exciting the suspicions of the powers that were.

Horse-racing at that time was of the rough and ready sort. Heywood, in the "English Traveller" (1653), tells us that Epsom

"Is a place of great resort,
And commonly upon the market days
Here all the country gentlemen appoint
A friendly meeting . . .
. some for pleasure,
To match their horses."

* See ante, p. 215.