

The Last of the Horse

From the Cincinnati Enquirer

By Lafcadio Hearn

HOW HE IS TURNED INTO SOAP-FAT,
FERTILIZER, AND PRUSSIAN BLUE.

A FLYING VISIT TO THE HORSE-FRYING
WORKS AT DELHI.

A visit to the place where they fry out the dead horses clears up something of the mystery as to why our men of science are not anxious to go seeing among the insides in search of the hidden secrets of the horse disease. That a bad smell surrounds every thing is surprising to no one, but the general surroundings of the place are not of an agreeable kind to one not particularly hungry for the fruits of knowledge. In St. Louis, when the police took up the matter of licensing houses of prostitution and placing the women under the hands of medical practitioners, it is said that the Chief was run down by applicants for the position of examiners, all of whom were prompted alone by love of science and a desire to improve their knowledge of mankind for the good of their race. No such eager students have come forward in this city to look into one of the most dangerous and fatal diseases that ever spread among man's most useful ally, the horse. Although in a period of little more than two weeks, two hundred horses, including among them some of the best, have been swept away, no one has come forward and offered to apply the test of science to the cause. True, the representative of the city's paid Health Board has made some data, but if the rule holds good in medicine as it does in other matters, that the opinion of a single individual is worth a trifle more than nothing at all, the opinions of that gentleman will go very little toward throwing light on the intricacies of the disease.

THE BONE-YARD.

This, as every body who has ever taken a ride down the River Road knows, is in the township of Delhi, six miles or so from the city boundary-line. Here the dead animals are brought each morning on a flat-boat towed down by a tug, and left moored along the shore at the foot of the hill, on which stand the buildings holding the machinery, etc. The horses, piled in rows on the boat, their stiff legs sticking up in the air, are here dragged off. A car comes down the hill on a track, a rope is slipped around the dead horse, the carcass is pulled on the car, and up the hill it is drawn by steam. It is drawn into an apartment covered two inches deep with a slime of dirt and blood, the air thick with rank smells and overpowering fumes from tanks full of boiling horse and hog; here it is dumped among a miscellaneous gathering of four-footed carcasses. Here are lambs, goats, bullocks, sheep, dogs, and swine. It is not an agreeable place to slip down in, disagreeable as slipping down any-where is apt to prove, and it is not a pleasant place to wander about in unaccompanied by a guide. To get wedged in between two black sows dead from some disease that had swollen them up to the size of small cows, with a row of tubs full of green entrails in front, and a gang of blood covered men dragging along with long strides the carcass of a horse behind, the position is one that calls for firmness and a strong stomach.

THE DEAD HORSE.

Is here left lying, and the skimmers make a slit up the leg and so take off the hide. It is not an animal difficult to flay. The webby filament which holds the skin to the flesh is elastic, and with a strong grip on the hide below, a skillful stripper will, with a sharp knife, have the hide off in a few minutes. The legs are then cut off at the knees, the shoes still on, and thrown aside. Then the belly is ripped open, and the insides scooped out. These and the horse flesh are boiled separately, several large boilers are ranged along the room. The flesh, after being separated into conveniently-sized chunks, is thrown into the boilers, and the covers fastened firmly down. Steam is then turned on, and the whole subjected to a long process of boiling, so intense in its heat as to cause the bone afterward to crumble like bread. After the whole has boiled long enough, the fat is run off from cocks placed at different grades in the boiler, and placed in tanks for cooling. This process is the same for all flesh brought here, and all is boiled together, horse and cow, sheep and dog. Some of this fat is run into barrels and afterward sold to makers of Stearine candles and lard-oil for machinery, but the largest part is turned into soap, from which the greater revenue of the establishment is derived.

WHAT IS LEFT.

In the boilers, after the fat and water have been let off, is turned into large vats into which the boilers tip, and this substance, a thick, plaster-like matter, is what forms the bulk of the fertilizing compound so valuable for the worn-out cotton lands of the South and the barren farms of the East. By the old method it required months for the drying of this mixture; but an improvement has been made in machinery by which it can be immediately dried; and, as has been before stated, a man who sends his horse here in the morning may have in the evening samples of him in the shape of a dry, snuff like substance. To illustrate the extent to which this work is carried, it is a striking fact that the right to use this machine for a term of years is to cost the company \$40,000. And further, to show how much money has been invested in this business of utilizing the waste animal matter of this city, no less than \$180,000 have been sunk in the different appliances necessary.

THE USE OF THIS HORSE.

However varied the uses to which the living horse is put in this city, his carcass is resolved into few. The hide is sold to tanners, who throw it into cheap leather, such as the "great-bargain" shoes are made of, and for different purposes. This hide is sold green at from three dollars downward. The legs are tried out for neat's foot oil, which brings from seventy cents and upward a gallon. The hoofs are stripped off and sold to makers of Prussian blue for fifteen dollars a ton. By an ingenious machine of Mr. Thompson's invention, the hoofs are stripped of the shoes in a jiffy. They are stuck in boiling water until softened, and then held between the jaws of something between a vice and a nutcracker, when off comes the shoes, nails and all, without difficulty. These shoes fetch, when not bought by blacksmiths for working over, two cents a pound. The tails are sometimes sold to different parties for different purposes. In Germany they are used in the manufacture of haircloth, dress materials and military accouterments and in England the

horse-hair is sold to builders, who mix it with plaster for walls. The trunk, entrails and bones are, after boiling, made into manure. Thus,

THE HORSE,

Most valuable of all animals in life, is far from being so in death. A hog carcass fetches more to the owner, one-third of its value when good, and a bullock is paid for at from fifty cents to ten dollars, but for a horse nothing is given, and the bone boilers consider that the expenses of carting him are not much more than covered. Like the body of Caesar, fit only to stuff in a hole with which to keep the wind away, the horse's glory ends with life. Viewed with the eyes of the fat-devouring men at Delhi, the horse hardly pays for the cutting up. The yellow fat which lies finger deep between the hide and ribs, and the hand full which clings about the kidneys makes a sorry show beside that from only an ordinary pig, and were it not for his hide these fat-fryers would pass untouched the carcass of a Dexter in favor of a measly sow. A fair article of soap is made here from all this fat, and the disconsolate owner who would have one last remembrance of his dead friend should get some of this soap, white and highly savored. Boilers, vats, presses and cutters have been added to the bone-mill, and before long the capacities of the place for turning out an immense quantity of the cleansing compound will be very great. A brown soap is turned out largely with which the soap-fat saving virtues of the servant girl is rewarded, and cleanliness and honesty are encouraged at the same time, for instead of following the custom of soap men in either cities, who give certain amount of hard cash for a certain amount of soap-fat, thereby offering inducements to domestics to throw good lard and butter into the grease-pot, and get drunk from the proceeds of its sale, the moral soap-boilers of Cincinnati give brown and yellow scrubbing soap in exchange.

STATISTICS.

The inquiring reader will naturally expect a mass of figures showing how many horses have been brought here in the last fifty years; how many pounds of fat have been fried out, and how many tons of hoofs have been turned into bluing. He will naturally also indulge in a shade of disappointment on learning that one of the brilliant young men of the ENQUIRER's staff has dared the perils of the Delhi St. factory for no other good than to repeat what every one knew of already; but such is the truth. The horse after death is a barren enough subject, without making it more repelling by a wondrous array of Arabics; the figures connected with dead horses can have no interest for any one not concerned in the profits, and for those who are, the figures are doubtless pleasing enough. So until some else has a trifle of two hundred thousand or so to invest in horse-frying machinery, let him not meddle with fried horse figures.

BONE-DUST SENT AWAY

Most of this bone-dust is sent to great distances. Some goes to Georgia. The most is sold in Baltimore, where the Company keep an agent. It is a curious commentary on the want of thrift in the rulers of those cities that they do not utilize the waste gathering about their own doors, but allow it to be washed away. There is no reason why every city in the country would not be the source of supply for all the farmers of the surrounding country, if the necessary machinery and management were but supplied. Thus Cincinnati, settled among the hills on the Ohio, is called

upon to supply the waste made by the people on the seaboard and in the interiors, for which these last have to pay well.

SAUSAGE-SKINS.

The casings used for sausages are made here in great quantities. They come in barrels from the butchers, fresh from the hogs, and are turned out into vats full of water, in which they are turned inside out and washed. After cleaning, they are scraped on a board with a dull knife, when they are put into salt. A bucketful of these will take from seven in the morning until nine in the evening to clean, and brings the cleaner one dollar and seventy-five cents. The men earn between ten and twelve dollars a week. After cleaning, the casings are packed in salt, shaken clear, packed again, and after the third packing, from which they come sweet and odorless, they are put in kegs and sold at the rate of forty cents per pound. They are sent to all parts of the country, and even to England.

THE EMPLOYES.

Considering the nastiness of the work, it would seem as though there would be difficulty in getting men to carry on the business. In this country, where, according to the dreams of the poor in the Old World, gold is to be picked up in the streets, and fine situations are to be had for the asking, one would suppose that a job, when a man's work was to rip up and sort the insides of diseased animals, would be apt to go begging for an applicant. Such, however, does not seem to be the case. There is not only no difficulty in keeping up the quota of necessary hands, but men are often refused work. Some men have worked here for many years, and so long as they behave themselves they are sure of their job. Drunkenness, especially, is something not tolerated, and a spree is almost certain to end with a walking-ticket. The Superintendent, being a handsome man himself, he has been especially solicitous about surrounding himself with men remarkable for their elegant bearing, and the astonished stranger is puzzled to account for the presence of such good-looking young men as the clerks and the boat-master amid such exceedingly incongruous surroundings.