

A DAY OUT WITH MAIDSTONE CHARM

by

Kathleen Pring

Some years ago I had a fine Hackney mare lent to me. Her name was Maidstone Charm and she had won prizes in the show ring. She was a dark chestnut with white socks, I mostly used her for riding although she danced and pranced a good deal when she cantered, but had a marvellous trot, which got you over the ground at a tremendous pace. She was very sweet-tempered and never bucked or shied.

After a time a friend lent me an American four-wheeled gig which was very smart, painted black and emerald green with large wheels and a seat for two with a behind for your shopping, etc. In those days there was very little traffic on the roads, so I could go spanking along through the villages and up the main streets of small towns, and getting quite a few admiring and interested glances of approval. If you timed her along a level stretch of road from one milestone to another she could do one mile in four minutes. I had rubber pads fitted in her shoes to give her more grip on the road, and she had a lovely set of patent leather show harness.

One summer day I thought it would be pleasant to take my father and uncle for a drive and a picnic to a lovely place called Temple Valley, which is near Cheesefoot Head, so we duly set off after breakfast. We went through the pretty village of Cheriton which had a village green and little bridges crossing streams to get to people's houses and then along a fine road climbing steadily upwards until you can see the Isle of Wight in the distance with the sun shining on the Solent. Just about here we met a coach with four horses going to a show. The coachman blew us a gay salute on his horn, and it was a grand sight. I once met a donkey four in hand on the same road. Eventually we arrived at Temple Valley which is like a great punch bowl or amphitheatre with extensive views all round from the top.

There is a group of trees at the highest part, and as it was a very hot day we unharnessed Charm and put her head collar on and tied her to a tree in the shade. We then went to the other side of the trees where we could see the view and have our lunch. I went to talk to Charm after a little while and she seemed all right but bothered with flies. I had brought a feed for her in the back of the gig and hoped to get her some water at a cottage not far away. After a time my uncle went for a stroll and came back to say the horse had gone and broken the head collar. Great consternation! We all looked around thinking we should find her grazing, but no horse anywhere. I went and enquired at the cottage if they had seen a horse loose. 'Oh, yes', they said, about half an hour ago and going fast. I then decided that she was probably going home the way we usually rode and not the way we had driven. So I asked the men to stay with the gig and I set off after her. I had to walk all the way back, several miles, picking up bits of head collar at intervals and occasionally hearing she had been seen. It was a very hot day and I thought the men had been very lucky lying on the grass at Temple Valley! She went home by the little grass lanes, through a wood and a park and I think can hardly have stopped at all. When I at last got back, there she was happily grazing the field. Someone had seen her looking over the gate and let her in. Well then, I had to get into my jodhs, saddle and bridle her, and ride her all the way back to Temple Valley.

The men said they had had a lovely restful day sleeping and eating all the food! We soon put the driving harness on Charm. the saddle and bridle in the back of the gig, and were off home by the way we had come in the morning, getting home for a late tea. Two of us had a lazy day and two oi us plenty of exercise!

After a time Charm went to Northamptonshire to an old lady who had a brougham and an old fashioned coachman. She used to attend the meets of the Pytchley Hunt and Cnarm was often admired. When the coachman retired Charm came to me in Hampshire, and had a fine filly foal by a thoroughbred sire, which I called Fantasy, and broke in myself for riding. She turned out very well and was sold to a gent leman who liked to drive her down to a small place he had in the New Forest where he kept a riding horse.

Both Charm and Fantasy had very sweet natures and good manners and were always fit and well, and I have very many happy memories of them both.