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JOE PALMER



## Samuel Doyle Riddle

ON JUNE 30, 1861, Matt Winn was born in Louisville, Ky. On the following day Samuel Doyle Riddle was born in Glen Riddle, Pa. Being an extremely stubborn man, Mr. Riddle outlived his contemporary by something more than a year. His death a few days ago removed one of the few remaining links which bound racing of today to the racing of the previous century, and in fact if there is any older man now living who played an important part in the long pageant of racing his name escapes me at the moment.

This tourist knew Mr. Riddle for some fifteen years, and had various arguments ranging from mild to bitter with him, as anyone who knew him that long was sure to have. But he has always been honored in this corner for one somewhat peculiar reason: he never forgot that Man o' War was a horse.

If this seems an obvious thing to remember, then you were not well acquainted with Man o' War. He was as near to a living flame as horses ever get, and horses get closer to this than anything else. It was not merely that he smashed his opposition, sometimes by a hundred

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lengths, or that he set world records, or that he cared not a tinker's curse for weight or distance or track or horses.

It was that even when he was standing motionless in his stall, with his ears pricked forward and his eyes focused on something slightly above the horizon which mere people never see, energy still poured from him. He could get in no position which suggested actual repose, and his very stillness was that of the coiled spring, of the crouched tiger.

All horses, and particularly all stallions, like to run, exultant in their strength and power. Most of them run within themselves, as children run at play. But Man o' War, loose in his paddock at Faraway, dug in as if the prince of all the fallen angels were at his throat-latch, and great chunks of sod sailed up behind the lash of his power. Watching, you felt that there had never been, nor could ever be again, a horse like this.

Well, this fiery thing of blood and bone (a bow to Mr. Masefield here) was Mr. Riddle's own. It could very easily have gone to his head. I tell you this as one who has seen people make fools of themselves over far lesser horses. Mr. Riddle was much prouder of Man o' War than you are of your children, and probably with more reason, and possession of him was a stately music. But he didn't spend his time feeding sugar to the horse, or drooling over him. He remembered that even if Man o' War was the most magnificent horse ever, he was still a horse, and that his interests lay in hard oats and clean hay and good grooming and a comfortable stall, and that is what he got.

Any number of people had bright ideas about Man o' War, nearly always to their personal enrichment. The movies wanted him. There was a very remunerative scheme to tour him around the country for exhibition. At all such propositions Mr. Riddle snorted. The verb here has been very carefully chosen, and when Mr. Riddle snorted at a proposition, then that proposition lay dead and partly decomposed.

With the hundreds of thousands of people who wanted to see Man o' War he was always very fair. Faraway lay open, from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, and anyone who wished could drive up and park and go into the stable and see Man o' War. It must

have been expensive, because it involved keeping one groom always on duty to show the horse, and another to step on the cigarettes which visitors threw down in the stable, but there was never any variance to the pattern.

Mr. Riddle was not always a model of old southern Pennsylvania courtesy. The day that Whirlaway beat War Relic by the length of one flaring nostril in the Saranac Handicap was an instance. Mr. Riddle had looked at the motion pictures (Saratoga had a different camera then) and was convinced War Relic had won. He said so in clear ringing tones, and the entrance to the Saratoga clubhouse, which I should estimate at about ten feet wide, fit him just about the way the Panama Canal fits the U.S.S. Missouri. He had a cane in one hand and a racing paper in the other, and there were only a few inches of clearance on each side.

But he could be a very good companion and a gracious host, and a fine teller of tales, particularly of the days when racing had not bartered color and intrigue and verve for mere dull honesty. I suppose his death releases one of these which, since it happened when Mr. Riddle was a young man, must antedate 1900.

It was at a hunt race meeting, which included a jumping race with eight starters, all ridden by amateur riders. Naturally they fixed it, and because they did not trust one another inordinately, each rider was required to put up a \$300 bond that he would let the elected horse win.

Some of this seeped out to the bookmakers in residence, so the prices went crazy and one rider, who was on a horse which should have been a legitimate second choice at perhaps 3 to 1, noted that he was being held instead at 10 to 1. So, through a confederate, he bet \$400 on himself and stole off to a long lead.

Nobody bothered about him, because it was assumed that in due course his horse would "bolt" or that he would roll off at the next low fence. By the time anyone realized that the double steal sign was on, it was too late for anyone to go out and throw him down, though it was tried. So he forfeited his \$300 bond and won \$4000.

“There was a little hotel near the course where the riders and some of the trainers stayed,” Mr. Riddle remembered. “I was over there after the race. The winner was barricaded in his room, and the others were outside the door, howling in the hall.” He did not say whether, when he departed, six or seven riders were left howling in the hall, and it did not seem good manners to ask.

“I always remember that fellow,” he chuckled. “He was one man whose word was as good—just exactly as good—as his bond.”