

ON THE BREEDING OF HUNTERS AND HACKS.

Perhaps the best introduction to this paper would be a reference to the prize-sheet of the approaching Exeter Meeting of the Bath and West of England Society, where two handsome premiums appear for "thorough bred stallions best calculated to get hunters and hacks." In a national point of view the good policy of calling more attention to this subject cannot for a moment be questioned, while the duty of doing so comes quite as legitimately within the scope of an agricultural association. All the rest of the world is even more inclined than ever to turn to us for their best cattle or sheep. There is, in fact, no breed of animal that commands so ready a market as a good riding-horse; and yet, strange to say, there is no other branch of business so fortuitously supplied. Saving in Yorkshire Lincolnshire, and parts of "the Shires," the breeding of horses is mere chance work; and the very gentlemen of the district, when they are in want of a promising hunter or clever hack, have but too often to import him from elsewhere. The mere rumour, indeed, of a smartish four-year-old will bring Mr. Oldacre or Mr. Weston some two or three hundred miles specially to look at him; and dealers and their agents now attend our great summer shows as regularly as they do the autumn fairs, just for a glance over the hunting classes, already so attractive a feature in the proceedings.

And yet farmers will tell you that, as a rule, breeding "nags" does not pay; as, under the circumstances, it would be rather a curious thing if it did. As a rule, breeding such stock does not answer, because they are bred without any rule at all. In these days, if a tenant wishes to rear a good beast, he takes especial care to secure the services of a good bull, as with the same ambition he will bid up for a Cotswold shearer or a Southdown ram. If, moreover, he really means to succeed, he will be almost as scrupulous in selecting a dam, and thus provided, he gives the principle he is testing a fair trial. But take the case of rearing a riding-horse, and how does the self-same man proceed? In nine times out of ten "just anyhow." He puts anything he may happen to have with anything that may happen to come in the way. As often as not, he scarcely looks at the horse he uses, but takes the word of some roving blacksmith, or broken down cooper who travels the country with an animal "best calculated to perpetuate the breed" of weeds and screws. Then the foal, when he does come, is cultivated much after the same fashion, or, that is, left pretty much to shift for himself. You will see him fighting for his own in the farmyard amongst a lot of store-bullocks, as likely as not with a hip down, or a hole in his side from a playful Hereford, and doing as well as he can on that grand specific, a due allowance of bean-straw. The result of this wonderful system

is surely logical enough. At a year old a young nag is a half-starved, sulky-headed, bellied, narrow-framed thing, with most probably a blemish or an eyesore of some sort: complete his personal appearance, and with general expression and carriage as lively as that of Rosinante, or Doctor Syntax's Dapple. Naturally, the breeder of such a prodigy is more than anxious to sell him, but quite as naturally can find nobody willing to buy him, until, without heart, mouth, or action—under-bred, unfed, and half-broke—the butcher gets him thrown in with his next half-score of beasts, or the village apothecary, on the spur on some happy moment, is brought to believe that the colt *suit* him. And thus it happens that breeding nags does not pay—with rather less outlay of attention devoted to such a business than one would bestow on a sitting of Cochon d'Inde eggs, or a litter of terrier puppies.

It may be argued fairly enough, that a farmer does not and cannot make the same whole business of breeding hunters and hacks as does of producing cattle and sheep. Still, something that is worth doing at all is worth doing well, and this might be put yet more emphatically in a pecuniary point of view. There scarcely an occupier of any position but who always a goodish animal or two that he rounds his farm, drives in his dog-cart, or, to it out, rides with the hounds. Let these some of them in continual succession, be men that from use, age, or accident, get beyond work, and what then becomes of them? Their owner cannot sell them, and he will not keep them; so that almost as a matter of course and necessity he proceeds to breed from them. Let us not stay here to inquire whether they are just the sort for such a purpose; but let us take the initiative, follow out the line of the social and show our friend that he should do, in contradistinction to that he too commonly does. The great improver, then, of his species is the thorough-bred horse; and as a matter of course you expect the produce of a half or even three-parts bred mare to be worth rearing, you put her to a sire who is as pure-bred as she herself. There may be occasional exceptions but these are not to be trusted or taken as precedents. A country mare crossed by a colt stallion may now and then throw a good hunter but we shall generally find that such colts are as nearly thorough-bred as possible, after all, it is safer to keep to the genuine article. I cannot here but congratulate the Council of the society on the wording of their resolutions for this class, as not admitting the creation of a half-bred horse to get good hunters or even clever, fashionable hacks. When, naturally, we see a fine powerful three-parts horse, with plenty of substance and style in him, a good head, fine shoulders, clean legs, and so forth, we feel willing enough to have a few more like him. But in this case we have a very forcible illustration of a fallacy of a