

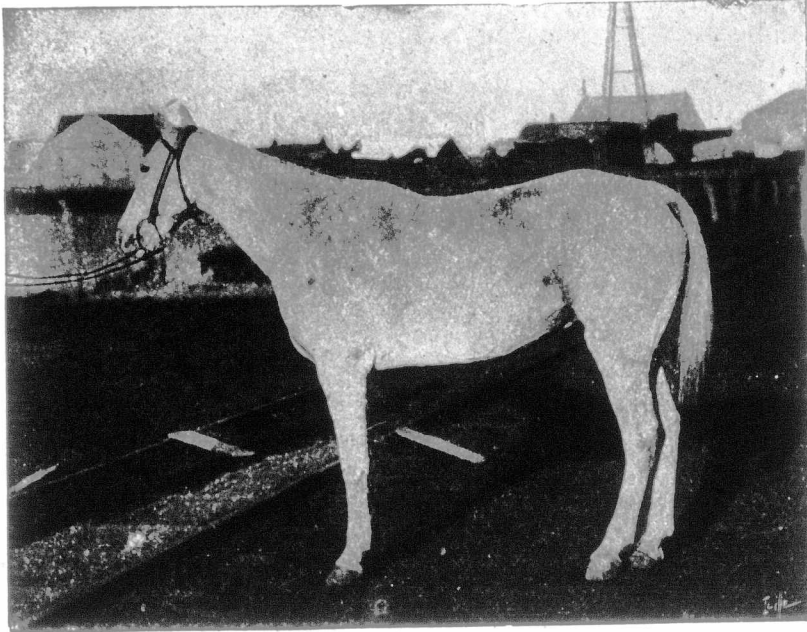


FIG. 1.—CAPE PONY (13.3), SHOWING ARAB BLOOD. Photo by M. H. Hayes.

South African Horses.

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During a horse-breaking tour which I made through South Africa in 1891-92, I had excellent opportunities of studying the horses of Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, the Transvaal and Natal, for I broke-in many scores of them, and was asked to judge horses at several agricultural shows which were held during my stay in that country. During the past year (1901), I had the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with these animals on two occasions when I went out to the Cape in veterinary charge of remounts.

My first introduction to Cape horses was in the early sixties, when I was a subaltern in an Indian Field Battery. Throughout the fifties, the Cape Stud Department, which was under the control of that good horseman, Colonel Apperly, furnished a large number of very useful remounts to the Indian Army; but soon after the Mutiny, the supply dwindled down to vanishing point. To judge by the remainder which I saw and by a couple I owned, they were remarkably hardy and wiry animals, although somewhat undersized (about 15.1) and rather plain about the head and croup. They were certainly well adapted for campaigning in India, on account of their having been bred and reared in a dry and warm climate. This type of Cape horse is now practically extinct. As Australia is a much better horse-breeding country than South Africa, the continually increasing importation of remounts from the former country appears to have closed the Indian market to those from the latter, and consequently Cape farmers did not find horse-breeding sufficiently lucrative for the employment of their time and money. We should here bear in mind that in South Africa there are few districts suitable for the breeding of valuable horses, and that horse-breeders in that part of the world are beset during the spring and summer by the danger of "horse-sickness." This disease and the scarcity of water are the two great banes of horse-breeding there; and the inordinate dryness of the country reduces the supply of fodder and the amount of arable land. Also, the indigenous locusts have an unpleasant way of eating up every green thing during their frequent visits.

Nearly all the grass in South Africa is natural; "temporary" and "permanent" pastures being comparatively unknown. Consequently, on the grazing grounds there is a very large admixture of weeds and deleterious herbs. Therefore, the Cape horse, which has existed for many generations under this condition of pasture, has acquired the ability to distinguish good grass from noxious herbage. If he is turned out on the veldt with several new arrivals from foreign lands, there will be no difficulty in recognizing the native equine product from the others, by the peculiar way he grazes; because, instead of eating the plants as they come, he plucks his favorite grasses in small tufts, here and there, at comparatively wide intervals of space. This faculty of selecting proper food on the veldt is undoubtedly the chief cause which has made him the best campaigner during this war.

The Dutch East India Company appears to have founded the race of Cape horses, towards the end of the 17th century, by the importation of Barbs and Gulf Arabs. Mr. Duncan Hutcheon, who is the Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, tells us in his interesting pamphlet, "Military Horses, and How to Breed Them," that in 1792, eight stud horses were imported from England. They are believed to have been of the early English roadster breed. In the same year five stud horses

arrived from Boston, and the following year a number of horses and mares were brought from the New England States, and are described as of Spanish or Eastern blood. In addition to these, in March, 1807, during the Peninsular War, two French vessels were captured at the Cape, containing some Spanish horses en route to Buenos Ayres for breeding purposes. It is said that from these were obtained the blue- and red-roads which were considered by the Colonists as so valuable for their great power of endurance.

It was in 1813, however, that the dawn of a new era in horse-breeding commenced at the Cape. In that year, Lord Charles Somerset was appointed Governor of the Colony, and soon after his arrival he directed his attention to the improvement of the Cape horse by means of the English Thoroughbred, and during his term of office he imported a considerable number of first-class Thoroughbreds, both stallions and mares. During the three following decades, first-class Thoroughbreds continued to be imported by the leading horse-breeders of the Western Province, and the male progeny of these were distributed all over the Colony as stud horses. It was after these importations had impressed their character and qualities on the native-bred stock—from 1840 to 1860—that the Cape horse reached the highest stage of perfection which it has ever attained. It was during the latter part of this period that large consignments of horses were shipped to India, which earned for the Cape horse such a high reputation with the Indian authorities.

The decay of horse-breeding at the Cape,



CAPT. M. H. HAYES.

which began about forty years ago, was considerably hastened by the importation of weedy and worthless English Thoroughbreds, few of which, I venture to think, cost more than £50. At the same time, some of the Cape breeders, like Mr. Hilton Barber and Mr. Alec. Robertson, of Stormfontein, employed really good Thoroughbred sires, and bred animals that were able, on the turf, to hold their own against imported English race-horses. Like other dry countries (Arabia and India, for instance), South Africa possesses the great advantage, from a horse-breeding point of view, that its equine produce hardly ever suffers from that form of laryngeal paralysis which is commonly termed roaring, even when their sires and dams are musical. Hence the fact of a sire being wrong in his wind is of little detriment to his stud career in that country. The noisy Belladrum and the still more obstreperous Candelmas, who was own brother to St. Blaise, are cases in point.

Mr. Mellish, whom I have the pleasure of knowing, has imported several high-class Cleveland Bays and Hackneys for crossing with South African mares, and may probably be successful in producing fashionable trappers by their means; but such an admixture of blood would be useless for saddle purposes, if we may judge by the result of similar experiments which have been tried in India. Experience, both in South Africa and India, shows us that a cross by English Thoroughbred stallions of a proper type with the respective country-bred mares gives the best result for all saddle purposes. Arab stallions probably come next in the

order of merit, but at a long interval, especially as their produce is lighter of bone than that of their English rivals. I make this statement with respect to India after having had ample opportunities of investigating this subject between the years 1864 and 1891.

At present, the vast majority of South African horses might be fairly classed as ponies, from an English polo-pony point of view. Their blood is so mixed that it is impossible to divide them into distinctive classes, according to the districts in which they are bred. Of course, I here refer to the ordinary South African horse or pony—whichever name we may like to give him—and not to Thoroughbreds specially intended for racing, or to the produce of recent foreign crosses. The South African, as a rule, is hardy, docile, sound, capable of standing a great deal of hard work, and is somewhat lacking in speed. Although his want of size and substance put him altogether out of the hunter class or the misfit hunter class, from which the English cavalry trooper is obtained, he makes a very useful hack, and an admirable mounted-infantry remount. His deficiency of blood and the semi-starvation diet which he had to put up with for several generations, unfit him as a rule for high-class polo.

The best horse-breeding districts I have seen in South Africa are those of Colesberg, in the Eastern Province, and of the Mui River, in Natal.

The most characteristic South African type of pony is a gray which shows a strong dash of Arab blood (Fig. 1). We can see specimens of this animal all over South Africa. It is strange that the Arab cross comes out more strongly in grays than in horses of any other color, for, contrary to the popular idea, gray is not the prevailing color among Arabs, as we may see by referring to the Yearbook of Indian Racing, which contains descriptions of a large number of Arab ponies and horses that have run in races for their respective classes. Bay, on the contrary, is the most common color among the sons of the desert. Fig. 2 is a good specimen of a Cape pony which has a fair amount of Thoroughbred English blood. Almost all Cape ponies have tick marks more or less widely distributed over their bodies, by which peculiarity they can generally be recognized.

The Basuto pony is a useful, though ill-defined animal, whose name has been widely made known by his connection with the present war. An entirely unsupported story is current, that his origin is due to a cross between Shetland pony stallions and Orange Colony mares. Mr. L. Barrett, Assistant Commissioner, Basutoland, who has lived in that country since 1882, and who is consequently an admirable authority on this subject, entirely discredits this legend. He writes in The Field (19th October, 1901) as follows about the "Basuto Pony":

"When the territory recently known as the Orange Free State began to be occupied by Dutch farmers, about the year 1845, the Basutos were largely employed by them as farm servants, and were paid for their service with stock—mares, cattle, and sheep. This practice has continued, except when interrupted by wars, up to the present time. Besides this, droves of mares have been brought into Basutoland year by year, both from the Orange Free State and Cape Colony, by speculators, who exchanged them for oxen. The Basutos are a sporting race, and many well-bred stallions have found their way into the country; bought originally by the chiefs for racing purposes, and afterwards relegated to the stud. Representatives of Tormenter (by Wild Dayrell), of Sir Amyas Leigh (by Adventurer), of Libertine (by The Rake), of Berkeley (by Teddington), of Belladrum (by Stockwell—Catherine Hayes).

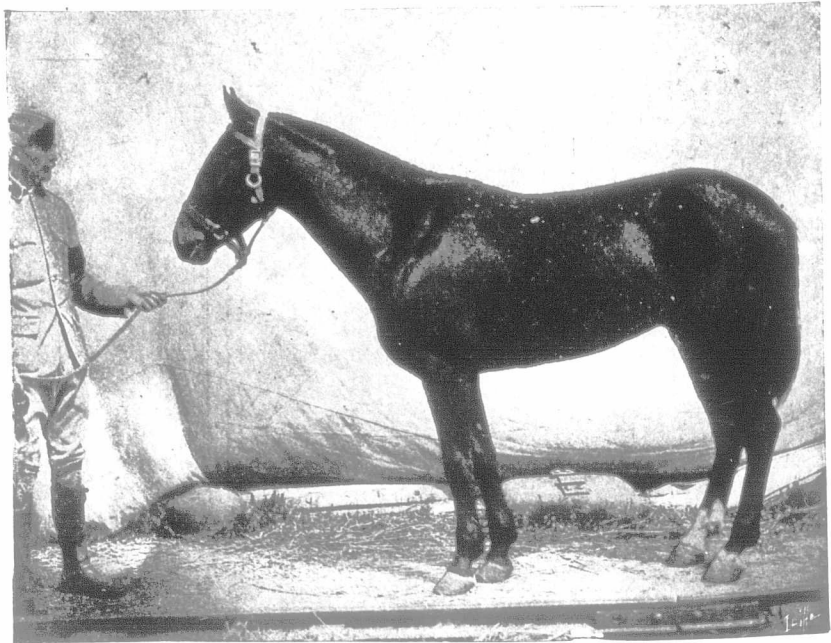


FIG. 2.—WELL-BRED CAPE PONY (13.2). Photo by M. H. Hayes.