

Horse-breaking in Australia.

Editor "The Farmer's Advocate":

Australia has become a notable horse-breeding nation, and a considerable factor in the supply of army remounts to India. Australian horses are valued all over the world, and rightly so; the stock is founded for the most part on the best of English blood, and the climate and native grasses are peculiarly effective in producing the bone and size demanded by foreign buyers. In addition to the surplus stock which she exports, Australia requires an immense number of strong, well-bred horses to carry on the work of her great pastoral properties. The breaking-in of tens of thousands of these range-bred colts every year is, therefore, a far-spread and important industry. The complaint is often made by foreign buyers, as it was made by the army authorities during the South African war, that the breaking of Australian horses is rough and inadequate, and that it is frequently necessary to re-break colts which were supposed to have been handled in their own country.

A consideration of the horse-breaking methods practiced in the less-settled Bush districts (which supply the bulk of the exported horses) will throw some light upon the subject.

And, first of all, it is as well that the reader disabuse his mind of the prevalent idea that Australia is a land of wild, buck-jumping horses, and of magnificent, daring riders. The real position is very different. The old buck-jumping strain in the horses is rapidly dying out, and the bushman, with a few notable exceptions, is no more than an average good horseman—in many cases he is a very indifferent one, considering his life-long apprenticeship to the saddle. Out among the furthest Queensland cattle stations may still be found fierce bucking horses, and superb riders to master them, but over the vast sheep country of South Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia the horses are mainly quiet, and the men quite satisfied to find them so, having more regard for their necks than have the daring cattlemen of the Cooper and the Diamantina. Under these circumstances there is no excuse for a horse-breeding country like Australia turning out half-broken or ill-handled horses, and thus curtailing her own advancement in a business so lucrative as the export of army remounts.

A short sketch of some of the horse-breakers of the Bush may be interesting; for, to the methods of the less skilful among them may be traced the foundations of the now well-established belief that Australian horses are not so satisfactorily made and mannered as they should be.

First of all there is the professional horse-breaker; the man who travels from station to station through the back country, dealing with large contracts, handling and riding mobs of from twenty to fifty colts at a fixed price per head. These men are generally first-class riders, and very often first-class horsemen—a distinction with a difference. They do their work conscientiously and well, as a rule, in so far as it is demanded of them; but as the station manager too often wishes the job completed as quickly as possible, and the colts either sold or put to work on the station at the earliest possible date, the horse-breaker is frequently compelled to spend less time on his charges than he would wish, and to hand over the colts in a state which he knows to be somewhat short of a finished education. Or, if he lacks conscience, he may scamp his work, and, in a headlong hurry to earn his money and get away to another job, may leave behind him a number of raw, half-mouthed, half-handled three-year-olds destined to give trouble later on.

In any case the time spent on the breaking of a Western colt is about one-fourth or one-fifth of the time devoted to the education of a hack, hunter or harness horse in this country; and, naturally, the better the station men ride the less finished and careful is the work of the breaker, for he knows that once a colt has been backed a couple of times there is always a man to take him. Nervous boundary riders ensure well-broken hacks.

On a station where the men ride well, the breaking is thus likely to be superficial. The procedure is something like this: one afternoon the breaker ropes his colt; gentles him first with a wand and then with his hands; picks up his fore feet, and sometimes, but not always, his hind feet; teaches him to lead and to tie up to a post; puts the tackling on him and a mousing-bit in his mouth, and leaves him standing thus all night; in the morning gives him a drink, handles him again and drives him for an hour or so in long reins; saddles and rides him at noon; and then turns him out for a rest and feed. Next morning he catches him again; gives him another drive in reins, leads him, ties him up, and handles him all over; then rides him two or three miles in the afternoon. The next day one of the station men is ready to mount him if he is rea-

sonably quiet, and thereafter the colt goes directly into station work, sometimes being ridden ten, fifteen or twenty miles as occasion requires. He is then considered to be broken in. What wonder that he often gets girth-galled, sore-backed, callous-mouthed, broken-paced and broken-spirited; becoming a mere mechanical slave, yet retaining a certain dogged courage and endurance! If he is nervous or vicious and the station men show no desire to ride him he stays longer in the breaker's hands, and thus has a better chance of getting more handling and mousing. The breaker rides him out with the men at station work, and this often means a long day's mustering; the colt, sore and overweighted, is too often flogged along to keep up with the other horses, and may do a journey of thirty or forty miles in the day; "keeping him quiet," they call it. At last some boundary rider less timid than his mates summons up courage to mount him, and rides him thereafter at his daily work, usually without the slightest consideration for his soft muscles and un-set bones, expecting him to do at once the full work of a hardened, old stock horse.

It says much for the cast-iron legs, the sound constitution, and the fine temper of the Australian horses that but few of them break down under this drastic treatment, and still fewer become sulky or savage. They lose spirit certainly, but they do their work gallantly in spite of all, and the endurance of these green, half-broken colts is a subject of wonder to every

the breaking of the ten to twenty three-year-olds which an average-sized sheep station produces. During the rest of the year he does the ordinary work of a station hand. The advantage of this kind of horse-breaker is that he is always on the spot, he can take time over his work, he can keep a wild or vicious colt in his own hands till he is absolutely quiet, and in the off-season he can make himself useful by riding any old out-laws or bucking stock horses which are of no use to the other members of the station staff. On the other hand, since he has his tale of station work to do, he is often tempted to ride his young horses too fast and too far, with the worst possible effect upon their subsequent usefulness or selling value. Thus he is not an unmixed blessing.

This man lives generally at an out-station, where he has yards specially constructed for his work, and his methods are much the same as those of the travelling professional, except that he has more time at his disposal, and is more dependent upon the orders and wishes of the station owner or manager. It is a position much sought after by the travelling professional horse-breaker who finds that advancing years are making his nomadic existence too strenuous, and by the young boundary rider who can ride well and wishes to marry and have a home of his own.

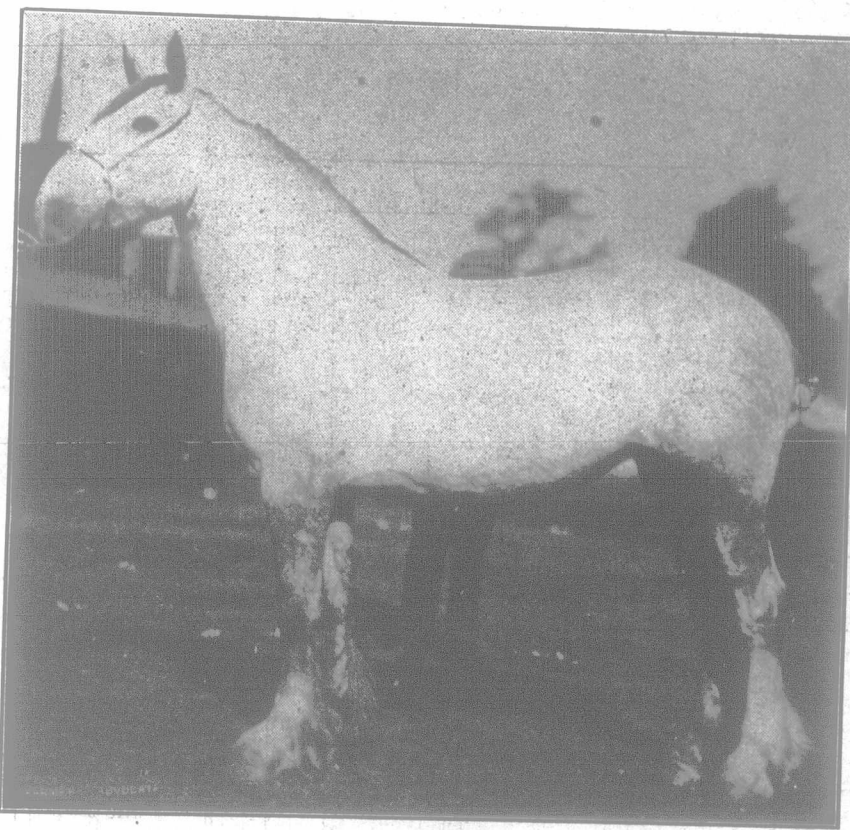
It is almost inevitable that the high-spirited young Englishman—the younger son who goes out to Australia for "colonial experience"—should turn his attention to breaking horses. The excitement, the danger, call to him with insistent voice; and scarcely has he served eighteen months of his pastoral apprenticeship before one finds him pleading to be allowed to try his hand at

breaking a colt. And, to his credit be it said, he is generally, for an amateur, wonderfully successful. He has probably been used to ponies and horses from his earliest boyhood, and he has much of the natural equipment necessary to the horse-breaker. He has some initial advantages over his professional rivals. He has, or should have, superior intelligence, a finer-fibred courage, and more self-control. He has the further advantage of knowing something of the methods of horse-breaking recognized in the old world, and he can value at their true worth the virtues of patience and absence of hurry. The thoughtless taunt of lack of courage that may often drive the hot-headed Australian to back a horse long before it is time to do so, falls on deaf ears where the more self-assured Englishman is concerned. He has sense to know that his reputation as a breaker depends not so much on his ability to ride a half-mouthed, dangerous

brute as upon his skill in handling it and giving it manners.

On nearly every large sheep station you may find one of these amateur horse-breakers. Sometimes he shows real skill and knowledge of his subject, and is promoted to breaking in the full mob of station colts; but more often he handles horses only for himself and friends, and occasionally some station colt that has escaped the breaker's attention, or some specially valuable Thoroughbred destined for the race track.

The Englishman is, generally speaking, a less-powerful and less naturally endowed, but a much bolder and keener horseman than the Australian Colonial. Indeed "jackaroo's pluck" has become a familiar expression in the Bush. His horses are for the most part well-mouthed and mannered, they preserve their spirit and courage, and show the result of more care and patience and intelligence than those broken by the Australian professional. But the English jackaroo has his failures, too; often he gets hold of a bad horse, which his lack of experience causes him to spoil, and which—in spite of his bulldog pluck—throws him again and again, until he has to admit himself beaten and give it up to one of the rough-riders to be mastered. The worst horse-breaking in the Bush is done upon the small farms and selections. The farmer, or selector, has often a very good breed of horses, but has also, all too frequently, a bold and reckless son or sons who think it advisable to save expense and have some fun at the same time by doing their own horse-breaking. Most of these youngsters do not know the first



Grey Fuchsia.

Champion Shire mare at Toronto and winner of her class at London, for John Gardhouse & Son, Highfield, Ont.

horseman. The climate and the wonderful hardening properties of the Bush grass are probably responsible for this courage and stamina.

In due course the colt is turned out for three or four weeks' spell, but this rest comes too late to benefit him to any great extent. His mouth is very probably ruined, and so are his paces; manners, in the sense understood in this country, he has none; and if there is any buck-jumping strain in his blood it is now that it will make itself apparent.

So much for the professional horse breaker. It would be unfair to say that all of them are alike. Some take time and trouble over their work and refuse to hand over their colts until they are properly broken in accordance with the breaker's accepted ideas; but in most cases quick profit is their object, and they will put through the horses just as rapidly as their employer will let them. Most of them have good hands and good tempers and could, if they liked, mouth and manner a horse as well as the best of our breakers in this country, but they do not keep them long enough in hand, and the mischief is done by the incompetent, unskilful rider who too often follows them, and whose sole idea of horsemanship is contained in a pair of long-necked spurs to which he trusts implicitly to pull him through the longest day.

Another breaker on the Western stations is the semi-professional. He is one of the ordinary boundary riders, who, being a specially good horseman, or having had some previous experience of handling colts, is entrusted each year with