

The Shire Horse of England.

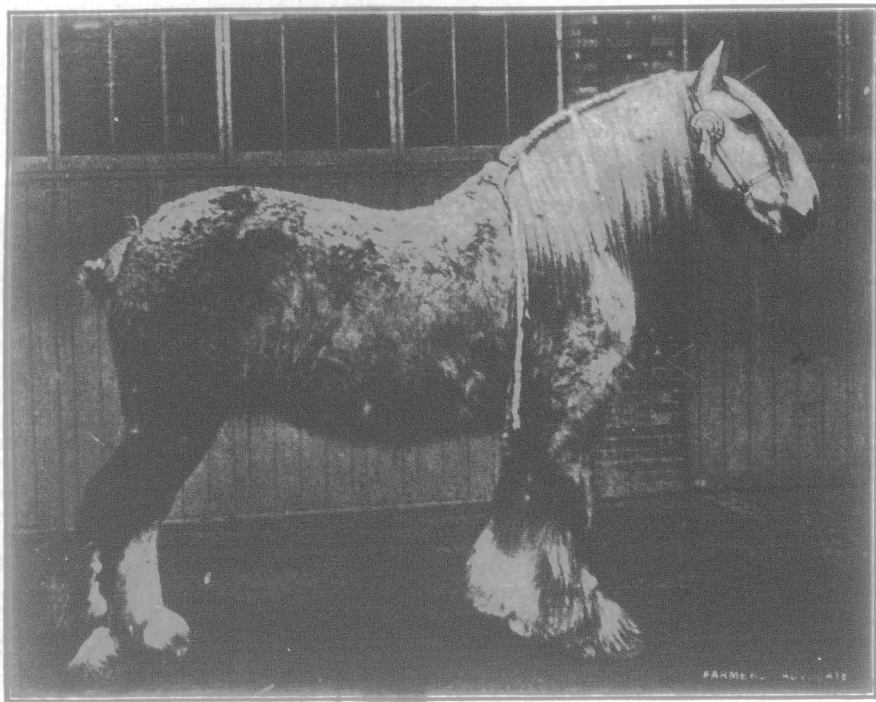
There is every indication that in the course of time the merits of the Shire horse will be better known outside of England than they have been in the past, and when the foreigner and colonial buyer become cognisant of what a Shire horse is,

it. The English dray market requires a horse that can do his five and six miles an hour, and the ready manner in which draught geldings of the Shire breed find customers at the leading auction sales in England, is abundant evidence that these requirements are fulfilled. He is the

the limbs, and the incoach of quality will necessarily reduce that as the years go on. On very heavy soils it may not be of particular advantage, but where the hair is of the right quality it is really no drawback.

That the work of the Shire Horse Society is thorough I would commend to the consideration of your readers the following facts. It enjoys the support of tenant farmers practically in a greater degree than any other Society; in fact, the backbone of Shire horsebreeding is the number of smaller breeders, who keep two or three work mares. These work mares, formerly unregistered, have been changed for registered animals, and it is a common enough occurrence for men to sell a foal to pay the rent. In the second place, the Society is very liberal with its funds for the encouragement of the breed, and particularly the breeder of animals which win show yard honors. Its show is a wonderful sight, and two years ago some 800 entries were classified; but the exigencies of modern hygiene and local authority's regulations demand that this number should be cut down, and now the Society, owing to the accommodation of the Agricultural Hall being limited, cannot accept more than about 600 entries. The most valuable feature of this show is undoubtedly its system of "vetting," that is to say, veterinary inspection. I think, if we except the London Hackney Show, there is no other organisation which sends its live stock through this ordeal. The Clydesdale, for instance, is not "vetted" at the Glasgow stallion shows. The advantage to the Shire horse has been immense, although anomalies have arisen, and will inevitably arise, when "doctors differ." By this system of "vetting," to which stock of all ages are subjected, animals suffering from hereditary diseases are not allowed to compete, so that the Society does not officially recognise unsound animals. The same system pertains in the allocation of its Gold Medals at the summer shows throughout the country. I wish to make a strong point of this, because it is sometimes held up against the Shire horse abroad that a greater percentage of unsound animals are bred from the Shire than say from the Clydesdale. That is a point on which we have evidence on one side and none on the other, as the Clydesdale man, wisely or unwisely, does not submit his horses to veterinary examination.

There are one or two other points which may be of interest to Canadian readers, to which I should like to refer. These refer to a system of hiring and breeding. In England there are not so many horsebreeding societies as in, say, Scotland, and the reason for this is well defined. In England there are more large studs owned by gentlemen of independent means, frequently members of the nobility, and where these studs exist it would almost seem a superfluity of energy to hire horses specially for that district, particularly as tenant farmers have generally a separate and lower fee at their disposal. The sy-



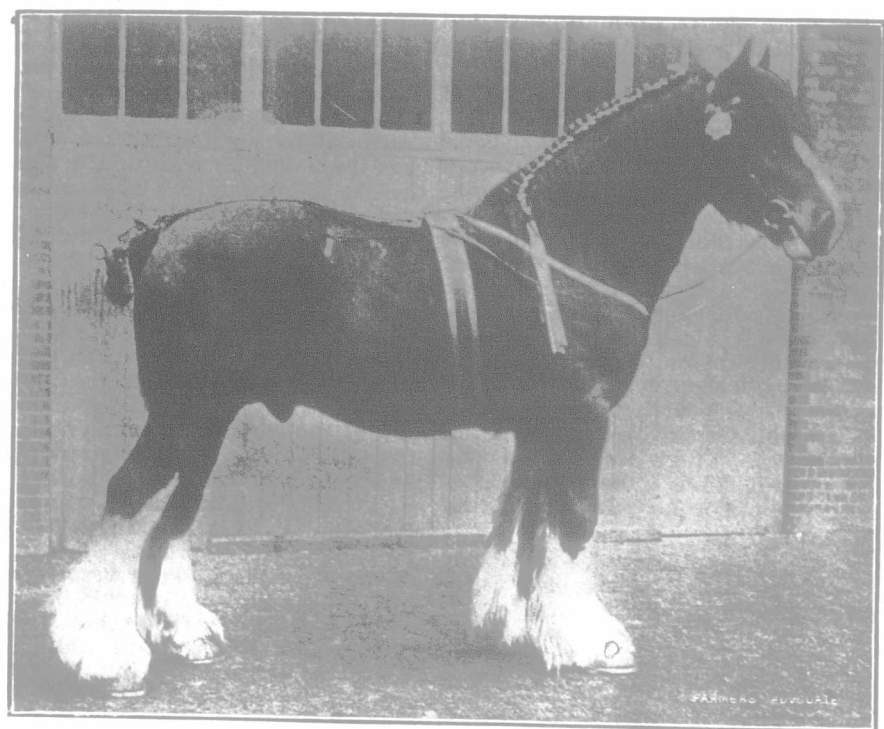
MONK'S POLLY, A WINNING SHIRE MARE.

I feel certain that they will generously recognise that they have been all too slow to appreciate his good points. It is perhaps hardly necessary for me to dip largely into history. The history of the breed has been a long record of success. In modern times it is associated with the Shire Horse Society, which has not yet been established thirty years. It must, in the first place, be understood that the appellation "Shire" horse is a modern designation. One school of writers has sought to trace a connection between the modern draught Leviathan and the old English war horse, which carried the flower of the chivalry of England in the merry days of the Middle Ages. If that is so, it is morally certain that the Shire horse has improved greatly in weight in the succeeding years. We know that several kings of England lent a helping hand in the making of the breed, and a few noble spirits, meeting about thirty years ago, took a greater hand in the improvement of the breed, probably, than they then anticipated, when they formed the English Cart Horse Society, subsequently altered to the Shire Horse Society. The history of the horse it is quite immaterial to trace, because it is somewhat obscure, but there is one thing upon which breeders of all classes are united, and that is, the influence which the Shire Horse Society has exercised upon the fortunes of the breed.

I can imagine a colonial reader asking for a few facts descriptive of the modern Shire. I am afraid that in the past, if they have not had the good fortune to witness for themselves a first-rate collection of English Shire horses, they must have formed a very indifferent idea of the breed, if they judge by the horses which have been exported. There was a time, some fifty years ago, when the great desideratum with the English breeder was a massive body and the alluring evidence of the weigh-bridge. The opinions of breeders have undergone a considerable change as the times advanced, and whereas, at one time it was the custom to begin judging a horse from the top, for many years now the other and the proper system has been followed of judging from the ground upwards. Let me try to describe what a modern Shire horse is like. Picture in imagination the weightiest draught horse in the world: a big claim I hear some say, but it is placed beyond the region of dispute, alike by measurement and the evidence of the weigh-bridge. It may be taken as an accepted fact that the Shire horse is at once the most massive of the draught breeds, and the best weight shifter on a smooth surface. This is one point that Shire horse breeders will insist upon. They hold that it is of great advantage to have weight in the collar, and one who has witnessed the Herculean strain of a Shire draught horse with a heavy load, and whose surface, will agree that the weight is a great attention. There was a time, when no attention was paid to action than to weight, and the modern Shire horse is the result of this.

most carty looking horse that we possess; he fills the eye in point of symmetry; is built on very short legs, with a fine profusion of hair, enormous muscular development of thigh, fore-arm and loin, and stands on good feet and springy joints. That is what the modern Shire horse is like, and if proof of my description were required, I can only refer the reader to a show like the London Shire Show.

There is one point which arises in this picture, to which I would like to make reference before proceeding further. The Shire horse, besides being the weightiest of the breeds, has also the greatest profusion of hair. Now, I am aware that in hot countries, or countries subjected to extremes of temperature, and likewise in the States and Canada, there is a rooted prejudice against much hair on the legs—what we call "feather." It is the contention, rightly or wrongly, of English breeders that excessive bone and muscle is an accompaniment of hair of the right quality and in profusion; and there seems to be some claim for their contention in that the Shire horse is by far the heaviest and the biggest boned of the draught breeds. Take the Percheron and the Suffolk as an example of horses without "feather." They do not measure in bone below the knee by a couple of inches



NORLEY ADVANCE, A THREE-YEAR-OLD SHIRE HORSE OWNED BY CHAS. BELL.

within the Shire, and when this extra weight is welded to activity, as it undoubtedly is in the modern Shire, the advantage to the dray master is at once apparent. The tendency is, however, to depart from excessive hairiness of

stem of forming horsebreeding societies, however, is extending, and there is now a very large trade done in hiring horses for the season at premiums varying with the character of the horse. As much as £1,000 is paid for one season, and some