

GOSSIP

THOUGHTS ON HORSE-BREEDING.

The following is one of the latest papers written by the late Captain M. H. Hayes, F. R. C. V. S., and published in the Live-stock Journal (British):—

I have adopted the above title in preference to the more specific one of "Horse-breeding," because I feel that my ideas on this very important subject are not sufficiently matured to enable me to do more than to write tentatively, and particularly with the object of obtaining more information from readers who may be good enough to criticise, correct, supplement, and condemn.

The war in South Africa, and to a lesser extent the one in China, showed us the great need of a fund of good horseflesh to draw upon. For military purposes the number is ample, but the quality is singularly poor, as our English Remount Department has found to its cost. When we turn to that land of horses, Australia, we find the same want. Mr. W. E. Abbott, of Wingen, New South Wales, writing in the Pastoralists' Review, tells us that out of about a million horses in Australia, English remount officers have been able to get only 5,000 or 6,000 of all sorts; that these have cost three or four times more than they ought to have done, and that the great majority of them were mongrels. And now Germany wants to buy horses in that colony. The same difficulty has been met with in the Argentine Republic and North America. Our great rival in China, Russia, is more fortunate than we are, for she has no difficulty in obtaining every year about 9,000 horses for their regular cavalry, and probably as many more for their artillery, transport and Cossacks. I shall allude more fully to Russian horses later on.

Horses, like other animals, are the product of their surroundings. Their evolution is a process which, to obtain comparative completeness, has to work through many generations, and even then we find occasional reversion to former types. If the process be forced, the action of atavism will be so frequent and varied that precision for ordinary requirements will be out of the question for the time being. As generation succeeds generation, the effects of a casual disturbance will become proportionately diminished. Thus we find that it is impossible to foretell what the produce of a thoroughbred and a cart animal will be. Even the son or daughter of two thoroughbreds may throw back to some vulgar ancestor which lived 150 years ago, as we may see by its "lumpy" shoulders, broad chest, or large fetlocks; but the steady influence of a century and a half makes this danger of trifling importance. Even the more recently established breed of American trotters shows a large degree of permanency in its type. Among high-class Arabs, which date back more than 1,000 years, fixity of type is far better marked than even among thoroughbreds. I have made the foregoing remarks in order to accentuate the fact that to obtain uniformity of results we must stick to one particular breed, and consequently we should then limit our efforts in improving our stock by selection in that breed, and by attention to hygiene (conditions of health). Although the common practice of crossing is destructive of uniformity, it may be commercially successful. For instance, if the produce of a half or three-quarter bred mare and a thoroughbred does not turn into a hunter, it may serve for a remount or ordinary trapper. This haphazard style of breeding may be remunerative in Great Britain and Ireland, where home requirements are extremely varied, but it is fatal in a country like Australia, where the market is to a great extent restricted to one particular class of horse.

Several years ago the "stock horse" was a fine type of saddle animal, which many years of careful selection, chiefly for the Indian market, had evolved in Australasia. As I have bought, ridden and broken a great number of them which were brought over to Calcutta by my old horse-shipping friends, Stevens, Macdon, Hunter, Cavanagh, Kerouse, Gascard and others, I can speak of them from personal knowledge. Although some of them were somewhat plain about the head and a trifle goose-rumped, they had size, strength, cleverness, good paces, light forehands, flat and sloping shoulders, strong hocks, broad gaskins, great mobility of the joints of the fetlock and foot, strong feet, and their back tendons ran nearly as possible parallel to their cannon bones. They were beautiful horses for our cavalry and horse artillery, and their more compact brothers and sisters were equally efficient for field batteries. The dealers gave from £10 to £20 apiece for them.

(Continued on next page.)

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