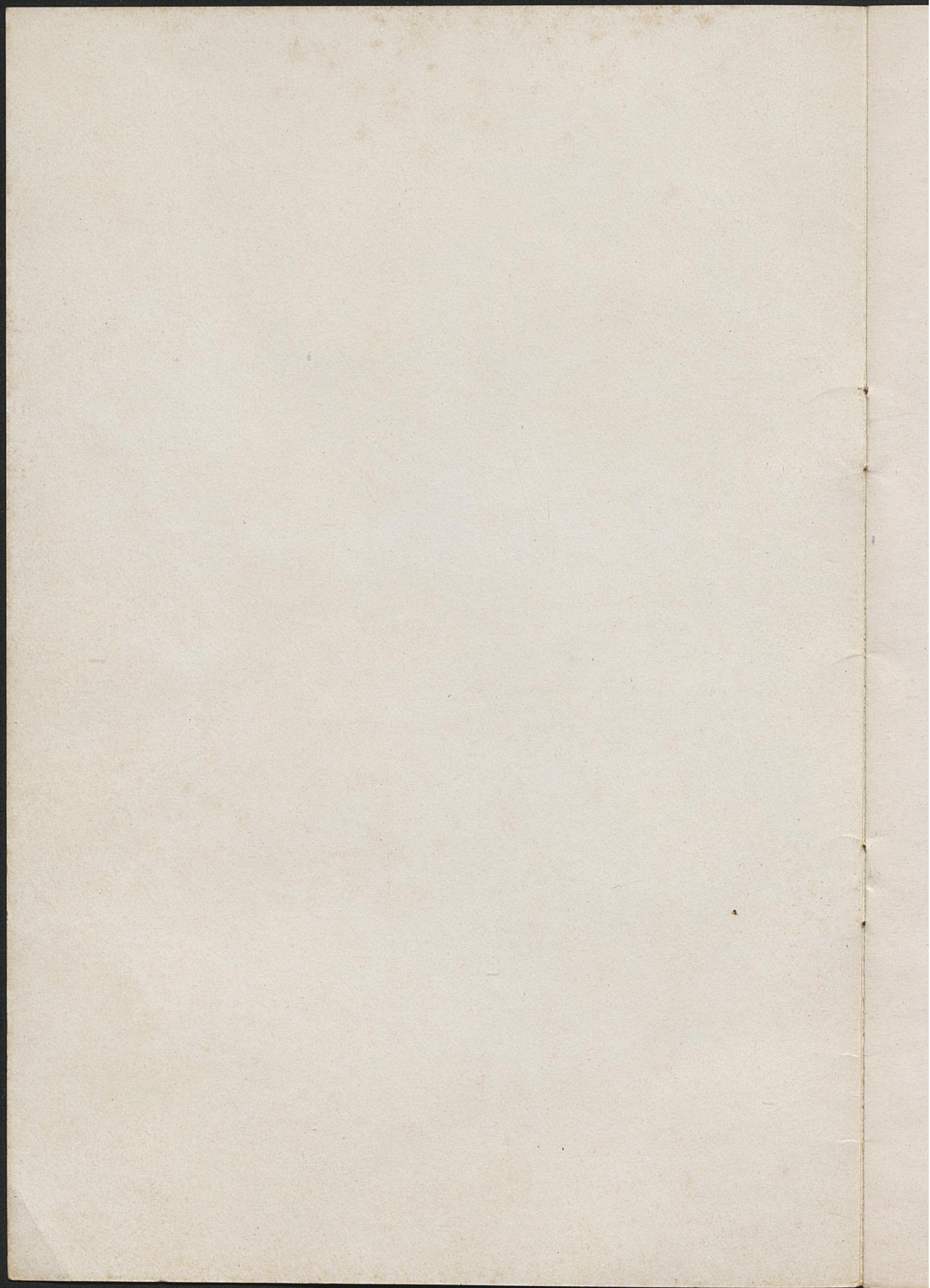




"Melrose" as a two year old—

Speaking of Horses

An Appreciation



An Appreciation of The Half-Bred Hunter

BY OLIVE BENNETT

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Elizabeth Grinnell's splendid articles on Thoroughbreds, their blood lines and prepotencies, have inspired me to break into print. Surely we all agree that the clean bred horse of carefully planned parentage stands a better chance of doing a good job than some poor animal whose dam is of unknown and conglomerate breeding, but whose Thoroughbred sire is supposed to give such elixir of life that the dam's short-comings can be overlooked.

But let's take up the cause of the well-considered Half-bred. I think we all remember clearly the tales our mothers taught us when we were very young, and often preferences and prejudices then formed die hard. My mother was a lovely, graceful creature and was reported to have the best seat and hands in the three packs with which she hunted: The Puckeridge, The Cambridgeshire, and The Bedfordshire, but this is ancient history. Anyway, I do well remember tales of her hunters and of how BLUE PETER and BESS stood

better outside coverts and were more bold in jumping through bullfinches than were the "blood horses" because of the latter's excitable natures and thin skins. BLUE PETER and BESS were known as "well bred" but not "blood horses" as Thoroughbreds were then called. I take it that the well bred ones, or Half-breds, were more than likely to have a cross of coach horse or perhaps hackney, but never any "cart horse" (Shire, Punch, etc.) for that would eliminate them from the well bred class unless it were at least two generations away.

Then, if my memory serves me right, my cousin, Robert Long of Stondon Manor, always had a "hunter sire" in his big stallion barn, and in answer to my question "Was that a race horse?" I was told "No, it was a hunter sire."

I think that LE FILS ROYALE, about whom Broadview from Toronto writes would come under this heading, for a perusal of his card



"The Lordly One," with author up

shows that clean blood has been constantly introduced for at least five generations although his official breeding names him a French coach horse.

I saw two French coach stallions, chestnuts with white markings, at the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto five or six years ago and was much impressed by them, their quality and way of moving, but lost track of them completely.

During the 1930's, when my daughter and I were hunting seven months or more out of the twelve, we brought down from Canada many hunter prospects, all Half-breds but of known parentage. In the meantime, we were forming our own ideas about a breeding program with the object heavy weight hunters with quality, and by 1935 we had pretty well determined that the cross we favored was Cleveland Bays and Thoroughbred, and that year on a trip into the backwoods of Ontario with my good friend Mary King of Galt, we eventually located two young mares by the Cleveland Bay horse TANTALUS and out of good sized registered standard-bred mares, these we eventually brought to Lake Forest. No pure bred Cleveland Bay mares had been imported for many years, and those who were around were either very old or not for sale. In 1936, while my husband and I were in England, we got in touch with Mr. Fairfax Blakeborough who was most helpful in giving us Cleveland Bay data, and it was through him that we heard that Mr. Mackay Smith also had a breeding program of the cross we favored. We had the great pleasure of going through the Buckingham Palace mews, and seeing their string of Cleveland Bays, all standing 16.3 and over and of great presence. They were used to draw the landaus and car-

riages of the Royal household, and we were even more convinced in our admiration for the breed.

But what of these Half-breds we were hunting? First in my heart and mind comes our beloved VICKY, chestnut, 16.1, 1140 pounds, a beautifully balanced horse and one of the smoothest I have ever hunted, so quick and keen and conscientious and always up in front with the Mill Creek Hounds, which under the mastership of Mr. S. Prentice Porter, had the reputation of being one of the fastest drag packs in the country, and I can well believe it. So light on his feet was he that he fairly sailed over the country taking everything in his stride and was always well up in front. How was he bred? His grand dam was a registered Clyde mare, but his two crosses of Thoroughbred, ALLAN-A-DALE and MASTER FOX, were plain to see and feel. He gave us eight seasons with the Mill Creek Hunt as well as several in Tryon and was never once off his feet and was the winner of many blues in hunter trials throughout the country.

Now comes GATINEAU, The Lordly One. He was bred by Miss Cameron of Six Portages, Quebec where I had the pleasure of meeting him as a 4-year-old. GATINEAU was out of a coach mare (French, German or Cleveland Bay, I do not know) and was by ANMER who when owned by his late Majesty, King George the V, was running first in the English Derby on that memorable day when a suffragette flung herself in front of the oncoming horses at Tattenham Corner, screaming "Votes for Women"! Horses, jockeys and suffragette all went down in one horrible mess but ANMER survived and was eventually sent out to Canada as a gift from the King to stand at



Vicky, first in my heart. Betty Mead Merck up.

stud for the benefit of the Light Horse Breeders Association of Canada. GATINEAU never forgets that his Pa was a potential Derby winner, hence his lordliness. His dam was mistaken for a deer by some hunters and shot the previous fall, so I did not see her. Those things happen in Canada too! He is a powerful and bold hunter, and it is a joy to be aboard him. He is big too, stands 16.2 and weighs 1300 pounds.

DARROCK comes to mind next, bay 16.1 and a good heavy weight. Mary and I went north about 100 miles from Guelph up to Jehovah Witness country to find him, for we knew that the Thoroughbred SPIRIT OF SENSE had been standing up there (whether the name had any significance, I didn't know).

After much driving around and following leads which often proved

utterly false, we saw a farmer driving a mighty good looking team hitched to a harrow. After passing the time of day with him, we commented on his horses. Yes, he 'lowed they were a right good team, GOLDIE and DARROCK, five and six respectively and were both out of his Clyde mare by SPIRIT OF SENSE. Come next Saturday, he was going to show them at Erin Fair as well as several pens of sheep that he had ready.

So Saturday Mary and I hied ourselves to Erin Fair and watched DARROCK and his mate come in. They were unhitched from the stock wagon and tied to a wheel until time for the general purpose class. Then the best brass mounted harness was put on and into the ring they went. Whether they won the class or not, I do not know, but they should have for after that

came the ladies' driving class and DARROCK did a superb job hitched to a shiny top-buggy, turning figure eights at a fast trot with nary a cramp of the wheel. At last came the event of the day, the steeplechase.

Indians from the reservation on their scary little animals and farmer boys on high-strung light weights were entries and, YES, DARROCK, but HE looked the course over to see where it lay, whereas the others were much too overcome by the fun of the fair to pay any attention and consequently got lost during the race somewhere between the hog pens and the man selling snake oil. Not so our DARROCK. He came in at a

good, steady, hunting pace and cleared the last jump with plenty to spare and the winner of the steeplechase!

I couldn't leave him behind, and we had a season's hunting with him here and at Tryon before Mr. Edgerton Throckmorton of Dundee fell for his charms. I hope his picture is reproduced for I think his character shows in his face. It was at Erin Fair that I learned of an infalible cure for splints. No, not snake oil either!

Now comes CROSS TREE, my only Thoroughbred at the time, so he really doesn't belong here, but he was so beautiful, such a perfect conformation heavy weight and so



Edward Bennett on Gatineau in Tryon, N.C.



*Melrose 16.2; foaled 1939. Cleveland Bay - Thoroughbred Cross
Bred by Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Bennett, Lake Forest, Ill.*

mild of eye and I might add the meanest damned horse I ever sat on, however I have only myself to blame for I succumbed to the flattery of a friend when he told me that CROSS TREE was only a mite playful on a cold morning, but a good horsewoman such as I would not be bothered by him! Not much he didn't bother me! and I learned about horses from him! I could write about CROSS TREE indefinitely, but I do not want my friend to know how much he really put one over me!

SYLVESTER, brown, 16.1, 1100 lbs. of steel springs and whang leather, my daughter's pride and joy, and I think the freest moving animal I have ever known. He always took off a full stride before I thought he should and lit running. I never hunted him but Betty did

and adored him. In fact when Honorary whip to the Mill Creek Hunt and with the Tryon Hounds, he was her favorite mount. His dam was a registered trotting bred mare and his sire the imported French Thoroughbred, ST. SYLVESTER. His parents were both gray but SYLLY came brown. Betty won the Mill Creek Hunter Trial Challenge Trophy aboard him in what I think must have been record time. It looked that way to me anyway.

MELROSE—last but by no means least for she is a result of our own well-considered breeding. I do like her looks and way of going, although she hasn't had a chance to hunt yet, or show. She is five now and out of one of our Cleveland Bay mares and by the Thoroughbred TETRACHALL. She stands 16.2

and weighs 1410 pounds with quality to spare. What else can one want in a heavy weight? We expect to breed her to a Thoroughbred horse for we feel sure that she has everything that we look for in the dam of a heavy weight Half-bred hunter. I hope I am right for she is ours and we are proud of her.

I always like to see several of a horse's offspring before sending a mare to his court and feel we

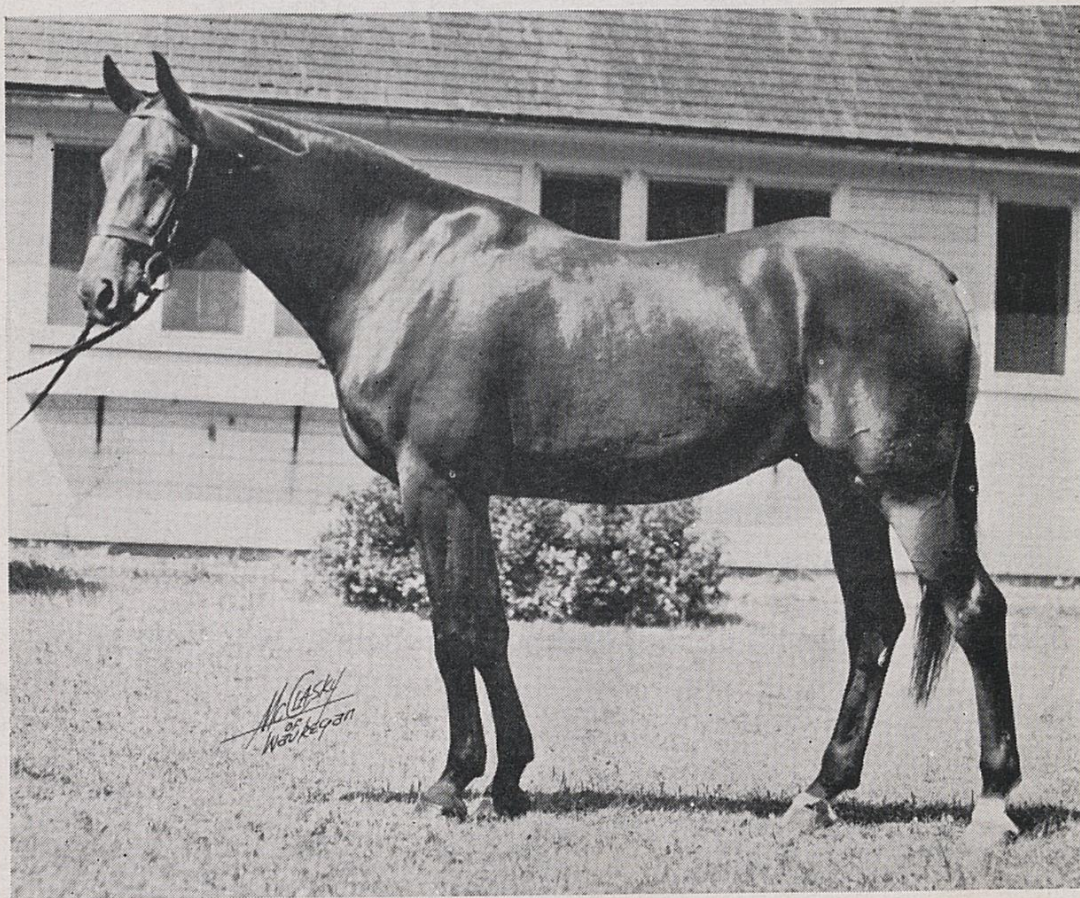
should bear in mind that when we bring a potential horse into the world we take on a responsibility, and he should start life with as fine a heritage as we can get for him, brains, bones and substance, the better to cope with the world and to quote from Will Ogilvie (correct me if I am wrong)

"May they find in those far off lands
Kindly hearts and horsemen's hands."

N. B. Since writing the foregoing we discovered that LE FILS ROYALE was one of the French coach horses we saw at the Royal in 1938 and we now have some of his foals out of Thoroughbred mares and at some later date I will write about them and publish their photographs.

December, 1946

O.M.B.



*Monty 16.2, foaled in 1942. Thoroughbred, Cleveland Bay Cross
Another of our own breeding. Taken when a four-year-old.*



Sylvester, 1150 pounds of steel springs and whang leather. B. M. M. up.

