

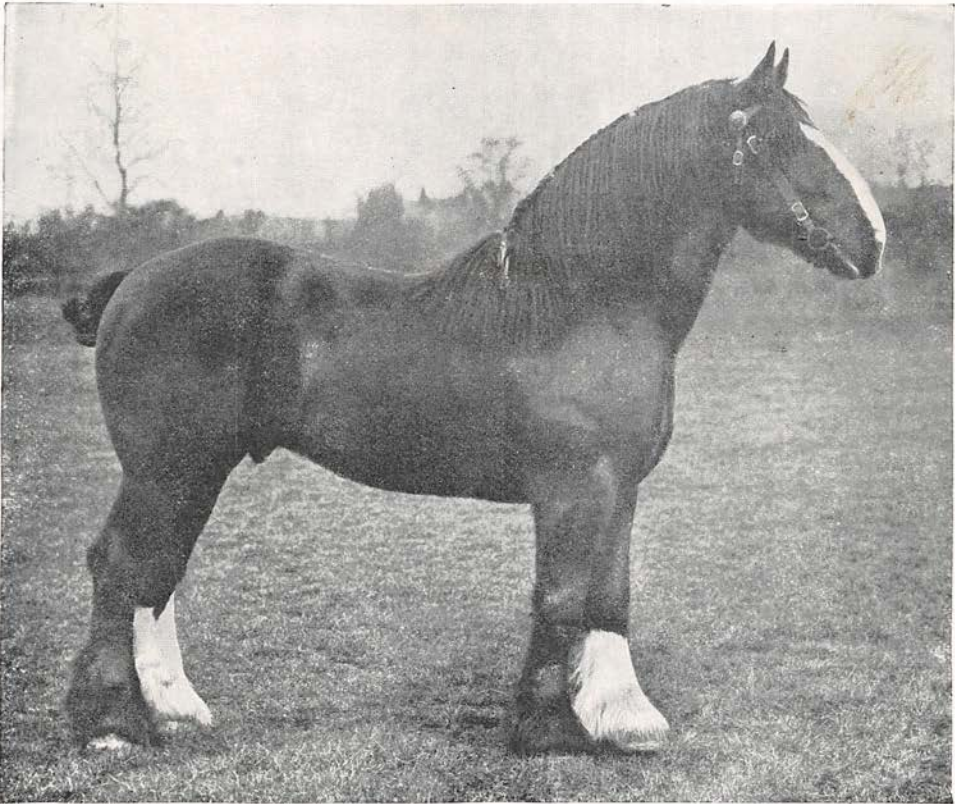
SOME SPLENDID SHIRE-HORSES.

BY GAMBIER BOLTON, F.Z.S.

Illustrated from Photographs by the Author.

THERE can be but very little doubt that the modern Shire-horse—that hairy-legged, big-boned, but active equine giant so common in the streets of our cities and on our country farms—is descended from the old breed of English cart-horses. These, in their turn, were probably descended from a breed of heavy

day. So long as armour was in fashion a large, massive animal was required to support the enormous weight of the steel-clad knight, and to withstand the ponderous attacks of a similar opponent. The half-bred horse was then unknown, and the Spanish and other imported horses were insufficient in size, so that recourse was had to the large black



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H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES'S "WHIRLWIND."

[Gambier Bolton, F.Z.S.]

horses imported into these Islands from the mainland of Europe as far back as the days of the Norman Conquest. This point is emphasised by Mr. W. C. Spooner, who says: "We have reason to believe that the horses employed in the army of William the Conqueror were little better, as respects breeding, than the cart-horses of the present

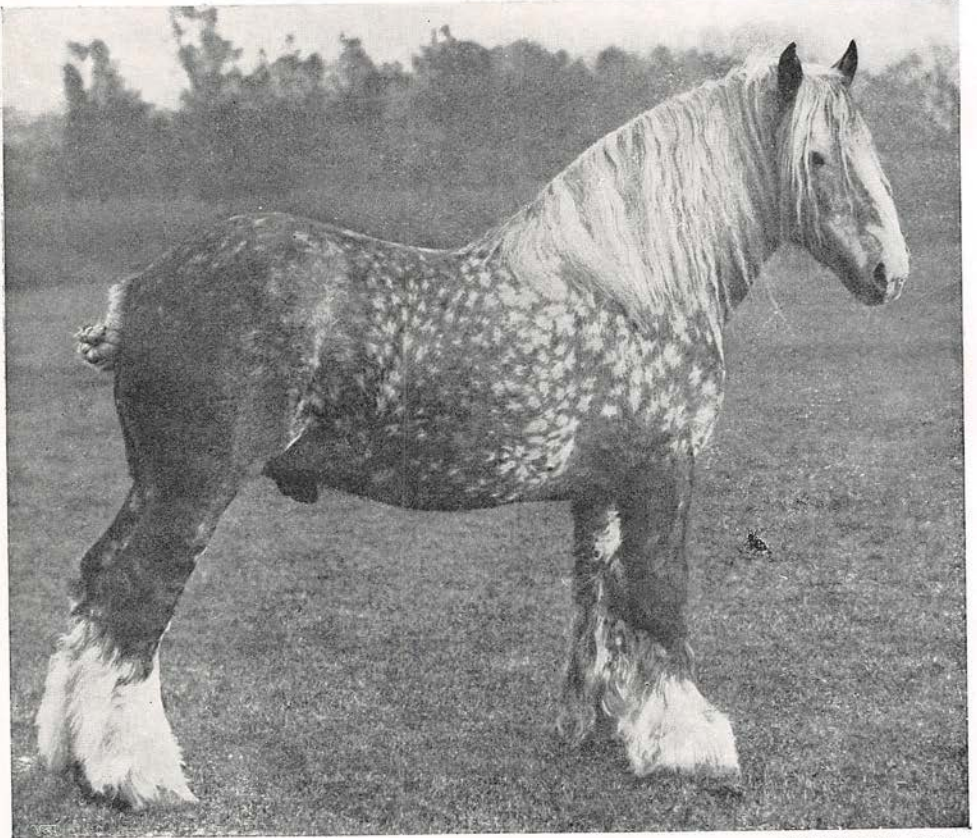
horse, which had been known throughout the fertile plains of Europe from time immemorial, and from which no doubt the greater portion of our cart-horses are descended; for we find that during the reign of the Edwards repeated importations of these animals took place. And in the time of the Duke of Newcastle, who wrote

a work on horses in 1667, there was in this country an established breed of cart-horses. The most prevailing colour amongst these animals is black—so much so that we recognise a distinct breed under the appellation of the ‘old black horse.’”

But nowadays we constantly meet with bays and browns, while chestnuts, roans, and greys are fairly common, and even skewbalds and piebalds are by no means rare. This variety and colour is the outcome of many crossings.

—Ely, strangely enough, being the city in which Hereward the Wake and the last of the English so long defied the Norman Conqueror. But Mr. Gilbert Murray, on the other hand, claims that the most perfect specimens of the Shire-horse to be found in the United Kingdom were bred within thirty miles of the town of Derby, and that much of the ancient and unalloyed blood still remains there.

Possibly both statements are more or less correct as to the past history of this ancient



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MR. McMULLEN'S "IRON CHANCELLOR."

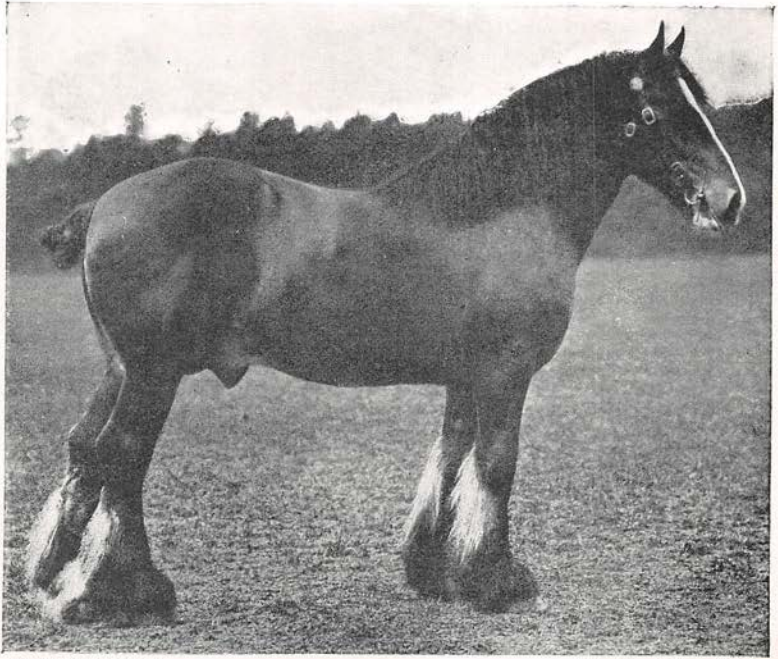
[Gambier Bolton, P.Z.S.]

Shire-horses derive their name from the counties in which they are most commonly found—*viz.*, Cambridge, Lincoln, Derby, Norfolk, Huntingdon, Bedford, Leicester, Cheshire, Rutland, Nottingham, and some parts of Northampton, Warwick and Shropshire. They have chiefly sprung, however, from the rich fen districts in the Midland and Eastern counties, and it was said at one time that “more good horses were bred within a radius of twenty miles of the city of Ely than in all the rest of the Kingdom”

breed; but to-day we find them rapidly spreading all over Great, and even Greater, Britain, for many wealthy landowners, like Lords Ellesmere, Spencer, and Powis, the Duke of Westminster, Mr. Walter Gilbey, Mr. Alexander Henderson, and others, not to mention H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, have become so deeply interested in the breeding of these giants, that they keep not tens or twenties, but hundreds between them; and there are few more picturesque sights than that of the great brood mares

and their shapely, active foals, feeding in British pasture lands, whilst a visit to any of our agricultural exhibitions is well repaid by the sight of the monster stallions, decorated with bright-coloured rosettes on their head-stalls, and ribbons on their manes and tightly tied-up tails, the long, silky hair from knee to fetlock carefully brushed out with dry sawdust, and their coats shining, in the very pink of condition.

Yet, despite the wonderful utility of these animals, it is not so very many years ago since they were quite neglected and the breed almost lost to us; for at one time they were thought to be too slow and heavy for town work, and



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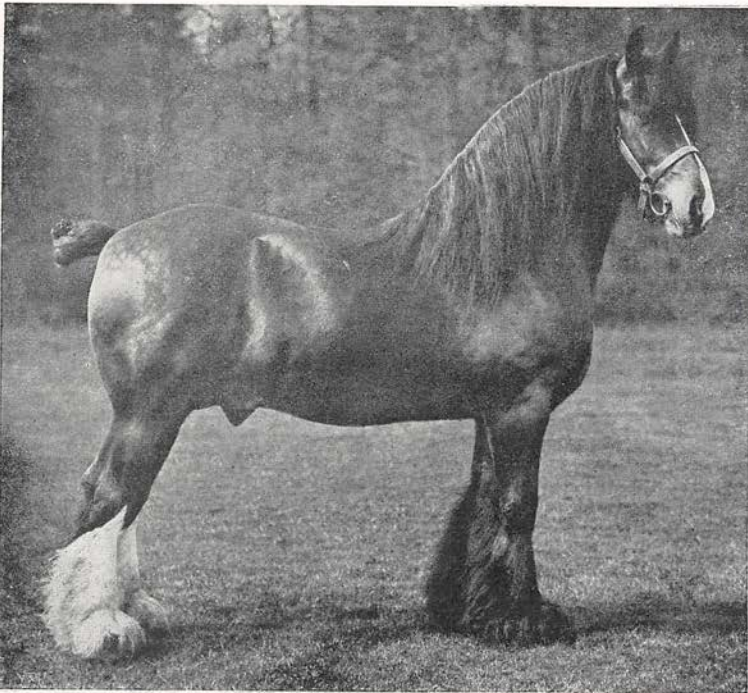
MR. A. HENDERSON'S CHAMPION BAY COLT, "BUSCOT HAROLD."

[Gambier Bolton, F.Z.S.

their clean-legged rivals, the Clydesdales and the old "Cleveland bays," were looked upon as the *beauz ideals* of what cart-horses should

be like. Fortunately public taste has changed once more; the clean-legged horses were found to be unable to stand the wear and tear of the paved streets, and it has been proved that the heavy Shire-horse, bred as he is now, with quicker and lighter action, is more suitable for general purposes, that he stands the stone-paved streets far better, and commands a much higher price in the market, as recent sales go to prove.

And not only have the people of Great Britain recognised this at last, but our fellow-countrymen in Greater Britain—those in Australia,



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MR. A. HENDERSON'S CHAMPION, "MARKEATON ROYAL HAROLD."

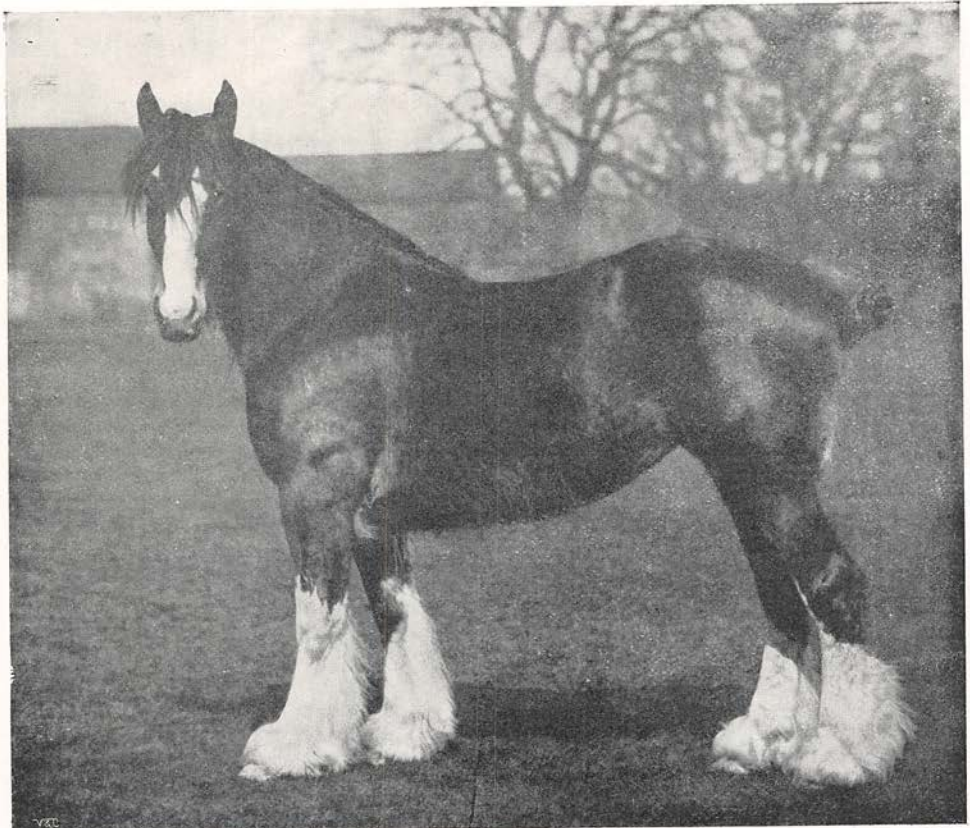
[Gambier Bolton, F.Z.S.

Canada, and even South Africa—have become large buyers of our surplus stock; and in Melbourne, Montreal, Toronto, Cape Town, and other cities they may be seen stepping out gaily in front of loads which three or four of the ordinary light horses of those countries could scarcely move.

The writer well remembers a recent visit to the stables of one of the great horse-loving rajahs of India. Round three sides of a huge stone enclosure ran sheds in which stood scores of beautiful Arabs, many Australian "Walers," and active native ponies; but the horse specially reserved to the last, as a *bonne bouche* for the English sahib, was an enormous black Shire-stallion, who was led forth, kicking and plunging like a colt, whilst ten to fifteen little natives hung on for dear life to the leading-chains, the perspiration rolling down their arms and faces, the whites of their eyes shining, in the most ludicrous fashion, through the clouds of red dust, as they clung to the skittish twenty-year-old monster; and it

remains a problem, unsolved to this day, how those dusky little Hindoos could ever groom him properly without the help of a step ladder.

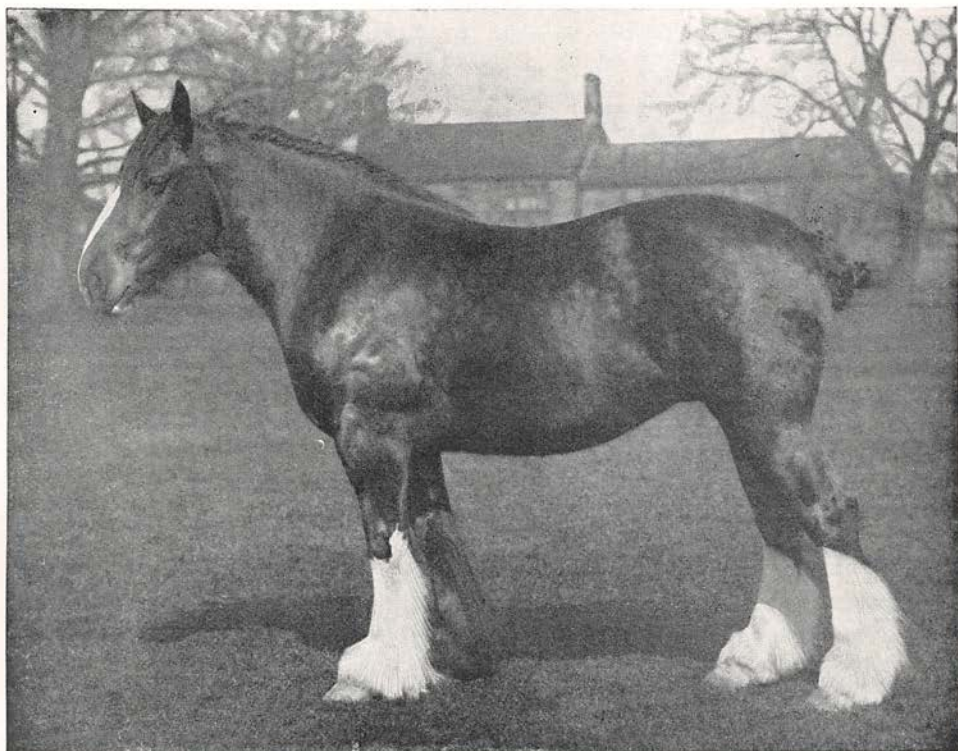
A remarkable feature in the stud-book of the Shire-Horse Society is the length of the pedigrees of the best-known stallions, which, for the sake of brevity, may be printed as: "British Wonder" (foaled in 1875) g. g. g. g. g. g. g. g. s Milton and Colley's brown stallion"—each g., excepting the last, representing the word "great," thus giving a total of nine generations to this horse's pedigree, even in 1875, and now two or perhaps three more would be added to the descendants of "British Wonder," whose pedigree traces back direct to the end of the last century. And it is most interesting to notice the names that have been selected for these huge British horses, names so typical of the land of their birth as to be worth quoting, for we meet with "England's Glory," "Honest Tom," "Thumper," "Samson," "What's Wanted," "Heart of Oak," "Honest Lass,"



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MR. GRANDAGE'S "DUCHESS OF YORK."

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MR. GRANDAGE'S CHAMPION MARE, "QUEEN OF THE SHIRES."

"Cast Steel," "Bar None," "Spanker," "England's Boast," "Yorkshire Lad," "So Seldom Seen," and many others equally happy in their exact description of these giants, and redolent of the pastures and fen countries in which they were bred. "A real good 'un" should stand about seventeen hands, should be long, low, and wide in form, and, above all, should be a good mover at cart-horse pace—*viz.*, walking, and if trotting should pick up his feet and show the action of a Norfolk cob.

The Prince of Wales's "Whirlwind" (14,935) is a good specimen of the "old black horse" breed, and can trace his pedigree, through "Honest Tom," back for many generations, and is interesting for comparison with the more modern type of Shire-horse which our photographs show.

One of the most picturesque of modern-day stallions is Mr. McMullen's dark grey "Iron Chancellor" (14,677), champion at Anglesea, and winner of the Cup at the Bath and West of England Show. He stands seventeen hands at the shoulder, has good legs, enormous bone, and fine quality hair, whilst he is an excellent mover, and a typical dray-horse. Looking at his beautiful

dapplings and white mane, one is reminded of the horses so beloved by Rosa Bonheur, and immortalised by her in her picture of "The Horse Fair."

Although, of course, the mares cannot be expected to come near the stallions in beauty of appearance, massiveness, and general picturesqueness, yet they must not be passed over without notice, and in "Queen of the Shires" (20,686), Mr. Grandage, of Leeds, owns the champion mare of the show in London in 1897. She is a deep brown, and with her darker dapplings appears to the uninitiated eye to be a black. She was three years old at the time of her great victory, and although, in the photograph, she looks staid and rather sleepy, she is remarkably "showy" in the ring; and as she trotted round and round the huge Agricultural Hall, at Islington, on the day of her triumph, loud volleys of applause from the thousands of onlookers proclaimed how splendidly she moved, and how popular "the Queen" and her owner are amongst all lovers of the Shire-horse. In the "Duchess of York" (19,855) Mr. Grandage owns another splendid animal, although not equal to his champion; but as he bred her himself, he is

naturally proud of her victories ; and being one of the judges at our largest shows, when he sums her up as "a really good one," we may rest assured that his verdict is correct.

On the day when "the Queen" won her championship for mares, Mr. Alexander Henderson's magnificent bay four-year-old stallion, "Markeaton Royal Harold" (15,225), was awarded the corresponding cup for the opposite sex ; and although even then rumours of a most wonderful son of his were heard, no one was prepared for the sensational series of wins that have since taken place ; and when the champion returned to his home at Buscot Park, near Farringdon, an offer, it is said, of no less than £5,000 was refused for him by his owner.

At the great show at Islington in 1898, Mr. Alexander Henderson, M.P., exhibited four celebrated animals : his champion, "Markeaton Royal Harold," who, now five years old, again won first and the £20 cup for the best stallion in his classes ; his superb bay mare, "Aurea" (13,951), who, at seven years old, won first and the £10 cup for the best mare in her classes, and then the £50 Challenge Cup, and finally the £25 Championship Cup for the best mare in the show (beating "the Queen") ; his bay filly, "Locking Loiret" (22,071), who took first and the £10 cup for the best in her classes ; and the sensational bay colt, "Buscot Harold" (16,576), who, at

two years old, won first and the £20 cup for the best in his classes, and was then led into the ring to compete against his father for the championship of the show.

Few of the thousands who were present will ever forget that memorable sight ; and as the judges sent first one, and then the other, walking and trotting round the huge ring, the spectators broke into thunders of applause, in which the Prince of Wales joined most heartily. Mr. Henderson's face was a study in itself, for although both were his property, the colt was bred by him, whilst his sire was bred by Mr. John Smith, of Ashbourne, and, perhaps somewhat naturally, he favoured the youngster ; and as the judges hesitated, and made fresh examinations of both, and then compared notes with each other, one could see the anxiety of the fortunate owner plainly written on his face. But when the red, white, and blue rosette was handed to the groom who held "Buscot Harold," and the great building swelled with roars of applause, his suspense was at an end ; and, after first receiving the hearty congratulations of the Prince, and then both the championship cups and the two challenge cups, he left the ring the proud holder of a most wonderful "record," which it is more than probable will never again be repeated by any one person in the annals of Shire-horse history.



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"BEFORE THE JUDGES,"

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