

Is Our Thoroughbred Destined to Extinction?

Will the Sysonby Type Soon be Impossible? How Mr. Sewell Proposes
to Produce the Ideal American Horse.

SYSONBY was a magnificent specimen, and it is no wonder that his death aroused the intense interest that it did. All the world loves a great horse, and when one dies whose deeds have made him everywhere famous, his death is chronicled as the passing away of a hero. But did you ever stop to think that this breed of which Sysonby was such a superlative representative is in danger of dying out?

Various black and bay heads were thoughtfully stretched out of as many box stalls as the dire suggestion was made. But the soft, deep eyes that were momentarily fixed upon us where we loitered in the sunny paddock outside reflected no feeling of alarm at the threatened doom, to which, indeed, some of the graceful heads appeared to be nodding a sagacious acquiescence. Perhaps that was because these were pure sons of the desert, to whom the fate of the American horse has been a foregone conclusion all along. The Arab is said to be bred quite as much for intelligence as for speed, and these Arabs of Robert V. V. Sewell in his stables at Oyster Bay certainly wore an air of preternatural wisdom as we talked about Sysonby in their hearing a few days ago. As for Mr. Sewell, his hobby is the horse. He has pursued this hobby in the wilds of Morocco, the deserts of Arabia, and other uncomfortable parts of the world, and although he is a painter by avocation, it is the horse which has finally captured him, until he in turn has become an authority on his captor through his writings and experiments on the subject.

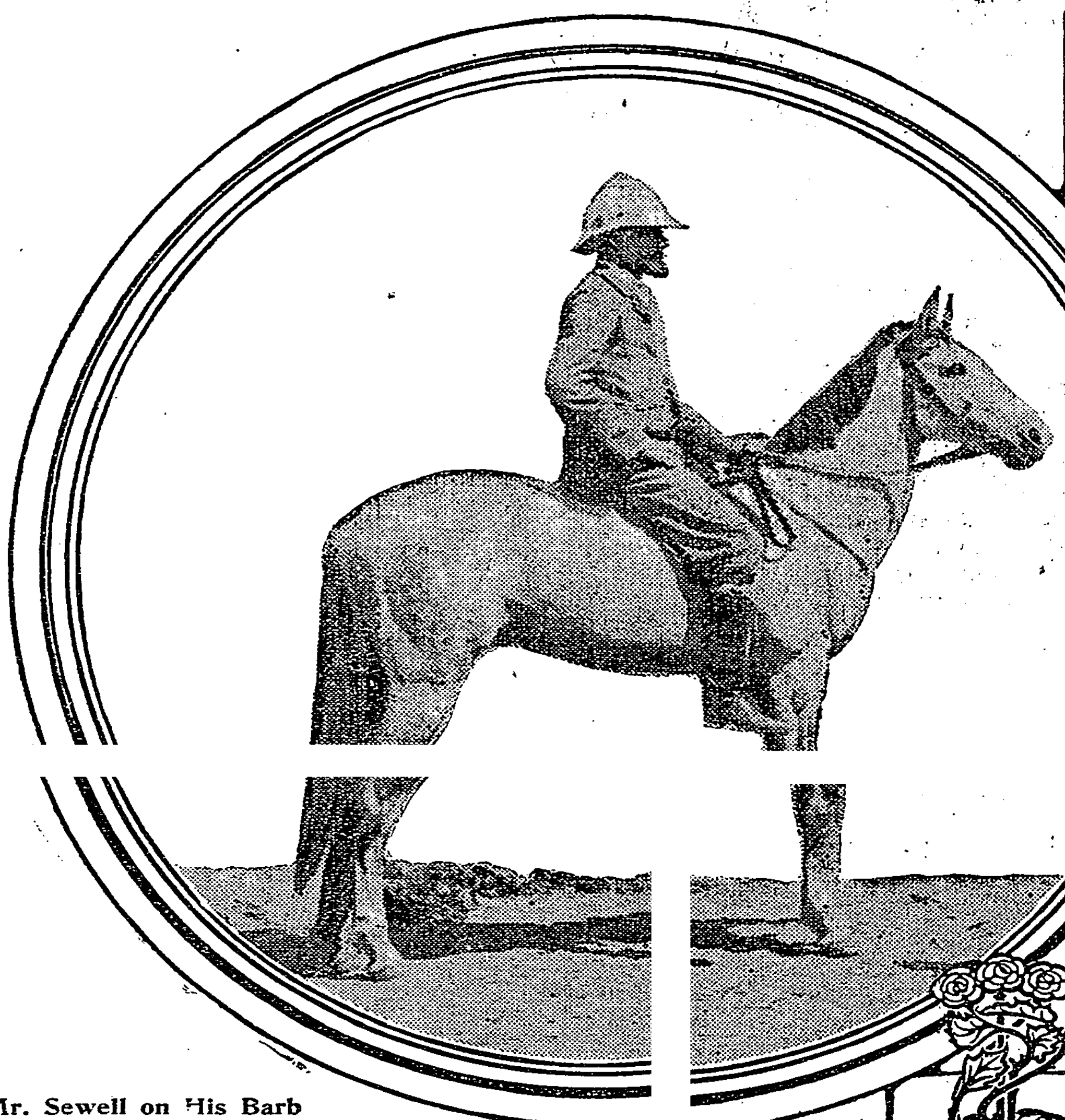
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"Let me explain," Mr. Sewell went on. "Since the foundation of the type known as the English thoroughbred, more accurately the Anglo-Arabian courser, to which Sysonby belonged, that horse has stood as the epitome of everything that is excellent. Speed of a phenomenal character, grace and beauty of conformation, sufficient stamina for the work set him to do, with originally a fair amount of intelligence and a sound nervous organization, made this horse easily the king of all created types. Had the conditions of his early environment remained unchanged he could still be relied upon as a basis on which to build further types that would inherit the qualities which have made the English thoroughbred famous.

"Those conditions, however, have not remained the same. Within the last fifty years the gradual change in the length of races, from long endurance tests to short sprints of one to two miles, the intense competition for the development of speed at any price and at the cost of all other qualities, together with the too-long-continued perpetuation of the race type without fresh infusion from its original source, have resulted in the evolution of a horse which, though capable of extraordinary speed for short distances, is lacking in the qualities of conformation, strength, endurance, and intelligence necessary to act as a basis for the development of other types. Such a horse may be expected to die suddenly, in the middle of his career, just as happened with Sysonby.

"A nervous organization depleted by generations of racing, and nothing but racing; a brain power weakened by selection for speed and not for intelligence, with stamina and endurance curtailed by development for short distances, place the thoroughbred of to-day in a position in which he can no longer be called the 'father of types,' and it is even highly doubtful if he will be able much longer, without increased deterioration, to perpetuate his own family.

"You are aware of the interesting experiments in breeding that Prof. Davenport is conducting at the Carnegie Laboratory at Cold Spring Harbor, two miles from here. Among other ventures Prof. Davenport is endeavoring to create a new, or more perfect, type of the domestic cow, correcting some of the dangerous tendencies to which the latter has been subjected through generations of too close breeding. Well, I am devoting myself to the same kind of experiments with the horse, hoping by careful selection to give a new and more lasting direction to the American thoroughbred of the future. I have just learned also that the American Government is about



Mr. Sewell on His Barb
"The Bird."

to embark upon a similar effort—the improvement of our native horse, with a view to the creation of a National coach horse.

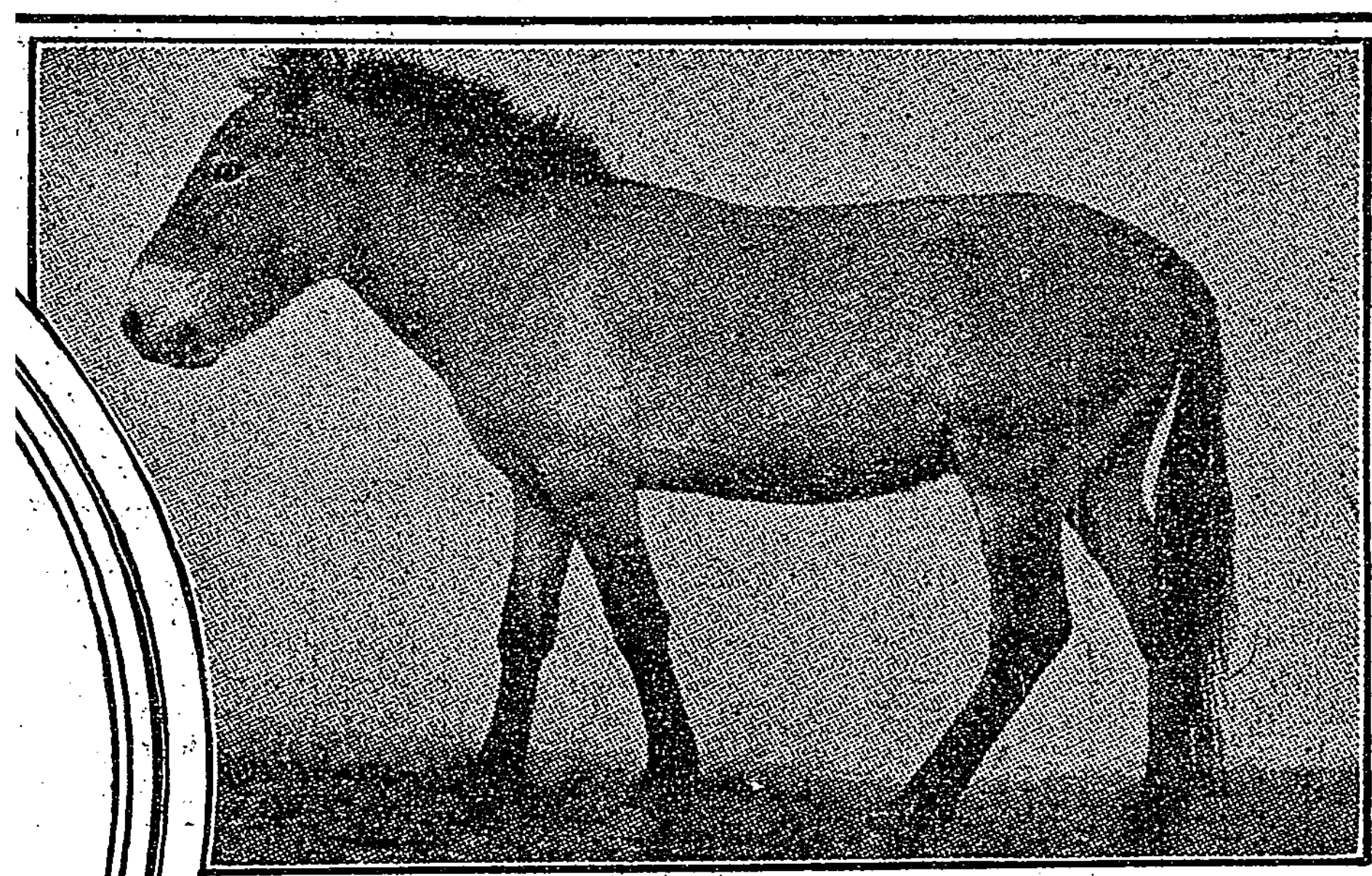
"That is news that will be of the deepest interest to every horse lover. It is significant, too, of the increasing tendency to the use of scientific methods in these matters of practical concern. I understand that for the purposes of the Government's experiment certain stallions, including a Percheron, an American saddle horse, an English thoroughbred, and some others have already been purchased. It is hoped that with the aid of these divergent types a new type can be produced.

"This task which the Government has set itself, the improvement of our native horse and its development into a new American type, is really a stupendous venture and should be undertaken with a thorough knowledge of the past and present racial tendencies of the horse.

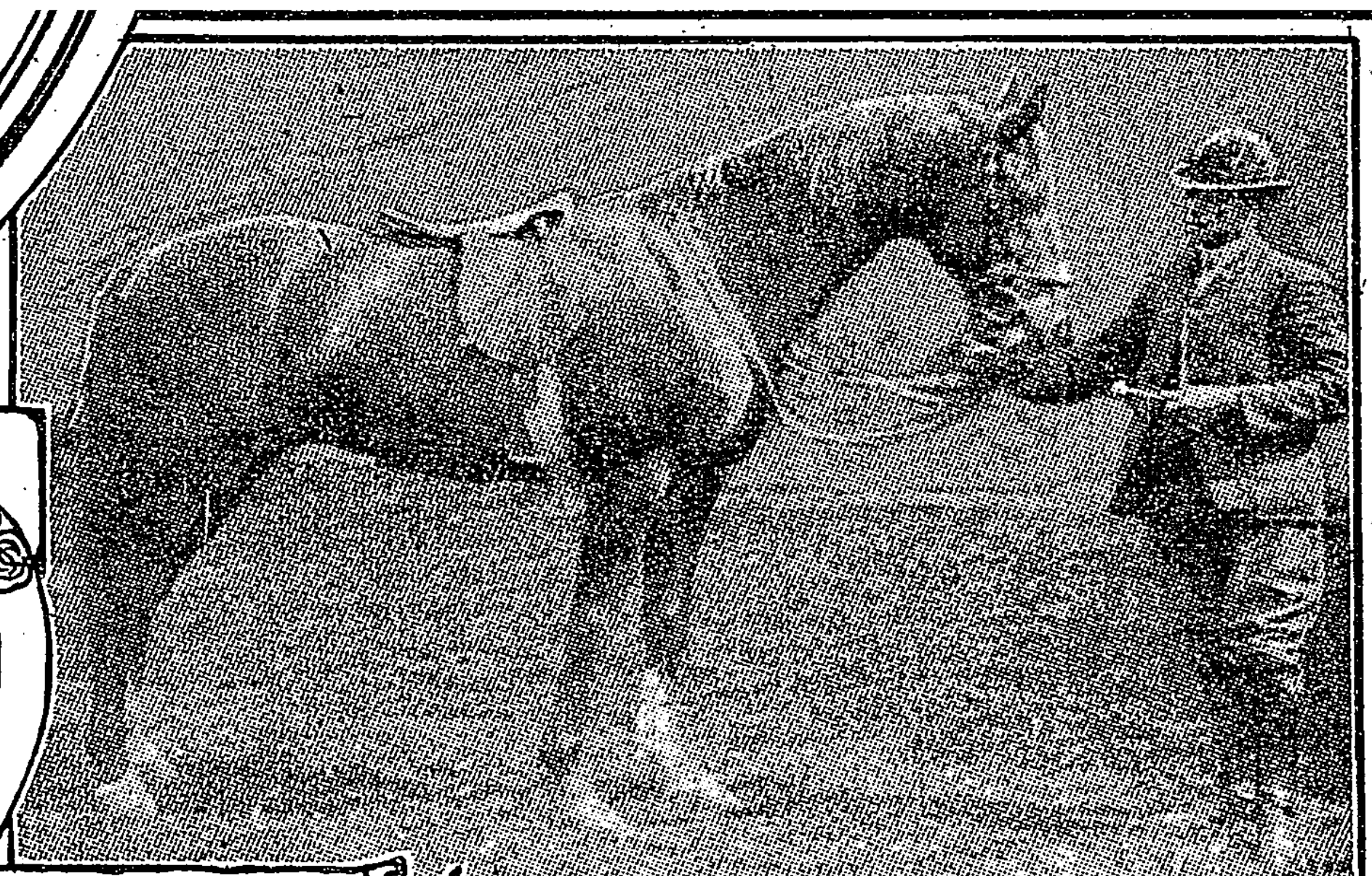
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"As a matter of fact, you know, there are only two races of the horse in existence, although there are many breeds, the result of artificial evolution or selection. The two races are known as the European and North Asian, on the one side, and the African, or Libyan, on the other. Until late times there were no horses in South Asia. Our modern horse results from the blending in different degrees of these two great bloods.

"Absolutely pure specimens of the European horse scarcely exist to-day in civilization, although the ponies of Iceland, certain parts of Norway, and the North English Islands, described recently in THE NEW YORK TIMES, are believed to be nearly pure representatives of the stock. In the lately discovered wild horse of Siberia a pure example of the North European-Asian race has been discovered which differs but slightly from the types before mentioned. This horse was originally coarse, large-headed, and shaggy, and its descendants still are. It was and is



RECENTLY DISCOVERED WILD HORSE OF SIBERIA, THE ORIGINAL EUROPEAN TYPE, FROM WHICH ALL MODERN HORSES, EXCEPT THE ARABIAN DESCEND



THE LARGEST PURE ARABIAN STALLION IN THIS COUNTRY. PROPERTY OF ROBERT V. SEWELL, OYSTER BAY.

characterized by round, large and porous bones; large ergots, or fetlock warts, large callosities, coarse legs, big joints, and coarse, long hairs on mane and tail. By selection for size it has been increased to the cart-horse type of to-day. It never has had and never can have speed, as it is structurally incapable of it. It is invaluable as a weight-puller, and in most of the improved modern breeds the original coarseness of the type has been greatly modified by an infusion of Libyan blood with a subsequent selection for size and weight. Such improved breeds are the Percheron, Clydesdale, and Shire.

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"During the whole of the period of chivalry in Europe the horse was selected for size until, at the end of that period, smaller and swifter horses were not greatly in demand. The 'Great Horse' of Europe is the result of these centuries of evolution and had its foundation in a very inferior type, which has been, however, capable of vast increase in size.

"The Libyan horse had its habitat from the east to the west coast of North Africa. It is represented on Egyptian monuments in a style of realism that identifies it with its modern descendant. It made its

Barb, even more than on his purer relative, the Arabian, that the foundation for the English thoroughbred was laid. The specialization of the latter, however, as a racer has rendered it impossible to introduce fresh strains of the Libyan into his blood. Such an effort would increase staying power, but probably in the first generation would decrease speed for short distances. Thus the thoroughbred, or more accurately the 'Anglo-Libyan,' with his mixed origin, is undesirable as a base for the formation of a new type. Breeding for speed without regard to temper or intelligence, and a tendency to nervous degeneration owing to constant strain of training and racing, have spoiled him for that purpose.

"The situation in regard to our future efforts, therefore, one may sum up in about this way: We have a horse who has already too much European or cold blood, (except in the carthorse type.) We wish to improve him in the direction of elegance, conformation, intelligence, speed, and general adaptability. To blend him with breeds already blended themselves would be a waste of time. The problem is simplified when we remember that the pure European horse scarcely exists; that if he did exist we would not care to possess him; that all modern horses, except the Arabian, are the result of a blending of European and Arabian blood, and that the Arabian horse is not a breed in any sense of the word, but the sole pure survivor of a great race.

"As for the Government's efforts to lay a foundation by mixing highly specialized breeds, such as the Percheron, thoroughbred, &c., and expecting to blend them all into an American horse, it would be quite as sensible, in the light of recent biological experiments, to make a 'mix up' of spaniel, terrier, and hound, in order to produce the 'great American dog.'

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"So far as my own experiments with this interesting problem have pointed to a solution, I believe that a new type of horse, worthy to secure the indorsement of the Government, can be produced in the following manner in twenty years:

"Let as large a number of mares as possible be obtained, mares which are the nearest approach to the desired type, but slightly smaller. Let them all but ten be bred to one pure Arabian stallion, as perfect a specimen as money can buy. The remaining ten should be bred to another Arabian stallion, not nearly related to the first, but equally fine. Two horse colts of the first generation should then be selected who are the best of the progeny of the ten mares. These should be bred to the progeny of the remaining mares. In the ensuing generations this course should be methodically repeated, constant judgment being exercised to eliminate those animals which do not conform to the desired type. In the course of five generations a type of horse would be produced that would astonish the world and confer a lasting honor upon the American people. The horse produced will, from the first generation, average one hand taller than either sire or dam.

"This system, less methodically applied, therefore less perfect, was used to produce the Russian Orloff. Its application has already resulted in extraordinary success in this country, though it has as yet been carried only to the second generation, and with an insufficient number of individuals to practice complete elimination and selection for type. Sufficient has been done, however, to show that the Arabian makes a quicker and surer impress upon cold blood than can be made by the animals of any evolved type.

"The Arabs claim that an infusion of mixed blood lessens the speed of their horses, and I predict that the Sysonby of the future will be based on pure Arabian blood, which will give to him all the good qualities that are lacking in the thoroughbred, as well as the latter's speed." C. S.

The best way to console a widow is to tell her how well she looks in black.

A man's conscience tells him what sinners his friends are.