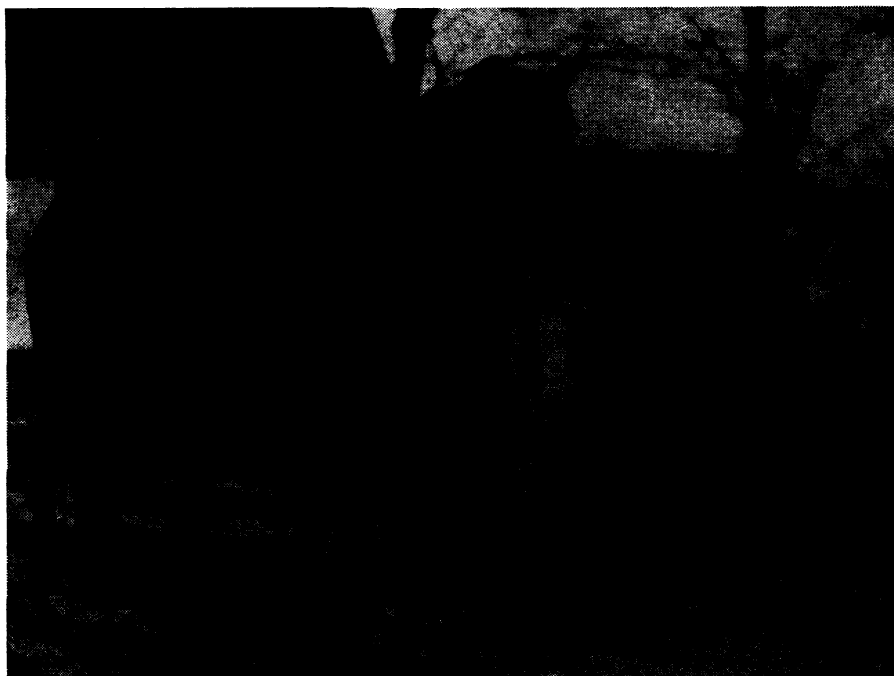


America a Melting Pot for Animal Stocks—Continued



ZEBRA-HORSE AND ZEBRA-ASS HYBRIDS, in the National Zoological Park, Washington, D. C.

Mules as a rule do not breed, yet in the recent past two undoubted cases of mule mares giving birth to healthy foals have come to light.

"Old Beck" is only an ancient Texas "cotton mule" mare who has been on this planet long enough to vote, but she has done her bit toward breaking the age-old reproach of sterility leveled at her hybrid race. For she has not only borne offspring—two lusty colts—but now has a grand-child. For a mule to have a foal is an almost miraculous rarity, but for one of these to propagate is practically unheard of.

Yet this is the record of "old Beck," as reported by A. H. Groth of Texas A. and M. College. Her first offspring was a daughter, sired by a jack, and foaled in 1920. This feat brought her to the attention of the college authorities, and she was soon given a home on the campus. Subsequent matings with other jacks failed to produce another colt, but a noted stallion of the college stud sired a foal that has grown up to look quite like a horse—and a fine horse at that.

"Old Beck's" mule daughter has remained without issue, in spite of several attempts to breed her, but the horse-like colt, a stallion, has sired one healthy colt, now over a year old.

Mr. Groth says of him. "He has developed into a nicely balanced horse of saddle type. . . . He per-

forms well under saddle and is possessed of remarkable intelligence. The only mule characteristic which he shows is his dislike for crossing a ditch or stream."

Erasmus Haworth of Lawrence, Kans., records another case of a mule mare producing a foal sired by a jack. The same mule is now believed to be with foal a second time.

Every once in a while some one takes a notion to hybridize the zebra with the horse or the donkey. It isn't especially hard to do, for all three animals are fairly closely related—as closely, say, as cattle and zebu are, and more closely than cattle and bison. The offspring are called by various names, such as "zebrass" and "zebrule". As a rule they are of no practical use, for they usually inherit the wild intractability of their striped ancestors; but at any rate they are interesting animals and make nice specimens for zoos. At present the U. S. Zoological Park in Washington has two of these zebra hybrids, one a cross between zebra and horse and the other between zebra and ass.

The question of the hybrid origin of some of our breeds of dogs is frequently agitated. The dogs that look more or less like wolves, especially German police dogs, Alsatian shepherds and Eskimo "huskies", are often declared to be "part wolf", and their occasional outbreaks of temper

ascribed to this supposed lupine ancestry. Nothing is known with any certainty about all this, except that presumably the Stone Age ancestors of all tame dogs were originally all wild dogs captured as puppies and reared in captivity, tumbling around with the Stone Age kids on the floor of the Stone Age cave or tent. But there would be nothing incredible about crossing wolf into dog stock or vice versa, for zoologically dogs and wolves are much more nearly related than cattle, bison, zebu and yak. These various bovines are all distinct species, while all varieties of dogs are rated as belonging to the same species, which includes also the most widespread species of wolf, the big lobo or timber wolf. One interspecific hybrid at least has been made, crossing shepherd with the prairie wolf or coyote. The pups were "cute" enough when they were small, but at six months of age the ignoble coyote traits displayed themselves in such habits as persistent chicken stealing. The mating had not been what the Almanach de Gotha would rate as "of equals", and the curse rested on the offspring.

Science News-Letter, March 30, 1929

Flies Aid Medical Studies

Genetics

Flies which have long been held in bad esteem as spreaders of disease are about to do their bit in helping the human race. They are being used now for studies of the effect of X-rays on future generations. In flies, the harmful effects of these rays appear in the third and fourth generation, Dr. Mary B. Stark of New York City reported recently. She has exposed flies to X-rays for varying lengths of time. While the individuals exposed continue to grow and breed, their descendants die off. Dr. Stark believes this is because the reproductive cells of the grandparent or great-grandparent flies were injured by the rays. This injury is inherited and finally causes death. In this same way cancer may be produced in the third and fourth generations of flies. Dr. Stark believes that the experiments on flies will throw some light on this problem in human beings. Her theory is not accepted by all scientists, however. Because the human race breeds slowly, it will be some time before the inherited effects of X-rays can be noticed in man.

Science News-Letter, March 30, 1929