

PREFACE.

THE increasing attention devoted to the Kerry and Dexter Breeds of Cattle induced the Royal Dublin Society, early in the year 1887, to establish a Herd-book for these breeds.

Previous attempts in this direction had been made. In 1879 the County Kerry Agricultural Society passed a resolution approving of the publication of a Herd-book under their own auspices; but difficulties arose which prevented the project from being carried out.

The "Farmers' Gazette" undertook the publication of a Register, and in January, 1887, published the first issue of their "Register of Pure Kerry Cattle and Dexters." This Register extended to three volumes, including 46 Kerry Bulls and 100 Kerry Cows. It did not include any Dexter Bulls, and only 10 Dexter Cows. The Royal Dublin Society acquired from the publishers of the "Farmers' Gazette" their rights in connexion with this Register; and the Cattle, with the numbers originally assigned to them, are now included in the Society's Herd-book.

Kerry Cattle were shown for the first time at Cattle Shows of the Royal Dublin Society at the Spring Show held in 1844. A distinct class for Dexters was first introduced in 1876. It is generally believed that Kerry Cattle are the descendants of a well-defined native breed of great antiquity; but it is difficult to trace the history of the breed further back than the middle of the last century.

Wilde has described a number of ancient crania of cattle found in various parts of Ireland; * but the modern Kerry Cow cannot be identified with any of these ancient remains.

There are at present in the Dublin Science and Art Museum 53 crania of different varieties of oxen, from the bogs, lake deposits, and crannoges of Ireland; but there is not one which presents a close resemblance to the skull of a modern Kerry. It may be observed that none of these remains came from the County Kerry: they are chiefly from Meath.

The following references will be of interest to the owners of Kerry and Dexter Cattle:—

Arthur Young, referring to Lord Doneraile's experiences of cattle on his estate in the County Cork, says:—

“He tried many breeds of cattle, and finds that the long-horned English Cow is the best for fattening. The Holderness for giving much thin, poor milk, but are too heavy for winter feeding. The Kerry Cow is much the best for milking in quantity of good milk.” †

Writing, in 1807, about the mountainous regions of west Kerry, Isaac Wild says:—

“This country was formerly remarkable for a very small and beautiful breed of black cattle; but the people have been seized with the spirit of improvement, and the true Kerry Cow, as it is called, is now rarely to be found, excepting amongst the mountains in the vicinity of Bantry Bay. The size of this animal does not exceed that of an ordinary yearling calf. From the prevalent inclination of the people to discard the native stock of their hills, it is presumed that they derive more profit from the enlarged breed; but there are some of a contrary opinion, who still maintain their attachment to the ancient race; and who contend that from their hardy character and the abundance and richness of their milk, they are peculiarly adapted to the situation and circumstances of the country.” ‡

* *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. vii., pp. 70 and 209.

† *A Tour in Ireland, with general observations on the present state of that Kingdom, made in the years 1776, 1777, and 1778.* By Arthur Young, F.R.S. London: 1780. Page 253.

‡ *The Scenery of Killarney and the surrounding country.* By Isaac Wild. London: 1807. Page 164.

The same author mentions as a well-known fact that Kerry butter, which was then regarded as amongst the best produced in Ireland, was re-made in London, deprived of its salt, and sold as the produce of Epping.

In the early part of the present century the Royal Dublin Society undertook a general survey of Ireland, for the purpose of developing the industrial resources of the country. The County Kerry was not separately surveyed; but the adjoining County of Cork was surveyed for the Society by the Rev. Horatio Townsend.* The author refers frequently in the course of his survey to the partiality of the farmers for the small breed of cattle for dairy purposes. These cattle seem to have been closely related to the Kerries of the present day. Referring to the cattle of the Barony of Carbery, in the south-west of the county, he says:—

“The cattle of this district, except those possessed by gentlemen, are of a small size, seldom weighing more than three hundred and a-half weight, and frequently not more than two. The breed is now a mixed one, of various colours; formerly they were all black. In the more remote and mountainous parts of the district this colour still predominates; but few, I believe, of the pure native breed at present remain. They are, in general, very good milkers—eight pottles, or sixteen quarts a-day, being no uncommon produce from a cow of three hundredweight. The usual price for a new milch cow of this description is from eight to ten guineas. Small beasts of all kinds are preferred by the farmers, as being better suited to the circumstances of the country, more capable of enduring hardship, and more easily subsisted.” †

A few years later Edward Wakefield writes:—

“The Kerry Stock are a distinct breed, but they are not to be procured of the true blood, because the long-horned are now so much dispersed throughout the country that the breeds have become intermixed. The Duke of Bedford desired me to purchase some of this kind for him; but though I rode many miles, and made every possible inquiry, I was not able to find any which I thought free from admixture.” ‡

* *Statistical Survey of the County of Cork, with observations on the means of improvement.* Drawn up for the consideration and by the direction of the Dublin Society. Dublin: 1810.

† *Ibid.*, page 311.

‡ *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political.* By Edward Wakefield. London: 1812. Vol. i., p. 335.

The views expressed by David Low about Kerries, nearly half a century ago, are of special interest at the present time. He says:—

“ These cattle are hardy and capable of subsisting on scanty fare. Although stunted in size when brought from the bogs and sterile pastures on which they are reared, they make a wonderful advance in size, even though several years old, when supplied with suitable food. The fat of their beef is well mixed with the muscular parts, or, in technical language, marbled; and they fatten well in the inside, a character which renders them valuable to the butcher, and distinguishes them, in a remarkable degree, from the long-horned breeds of the lower country.

“ But the peculiar value of the Kerry breed is the adaptation of the females to the purposes of the domestic dairy. In milking properties the Kerry cow, taking size into account, is equal, or superior, to any in the British Islands. It is the large quantity of milk yielded by an animal so small which renders the Kerry cow so generally valued by the cottagers and smaller tenants of Ireland. She is frequently termed the poor man's cow, and she merits this appellation by her capacity of subsisting on such fare as he has the means to supply.

“ This fine little breed has been greatly neglected; scarce any means have been used to produce a progressive development of form, by supplying proper nourishment to the breeding parents and the young, and no general care has been bestowed on preserving the purity of the stock. In almost every part of Ireland the breed has been crossed with the long-horns; and a great proportion of the cows of the country, known under the name of Kerries, are the result of crosses of this kind, and so have deviated in a greater or less degree from the native type, and almost always for the worse.

“ A few honourable exceptions, however, exist to this general neglect of the mountain dairy breed of Ireland. One attempt had succeeded to such a degree as to form a new breed, which partially exists with the characters communicated to it. It has been termed the Dexter Breed. It was formed by the late Mr. Dexter, agent to Maude Lord Hawarden. This gentleman is said to have produced his curious breed by selection from the best of the mountain cattle of the district. He communicated to it a remarkable roundness of form and shortness of legs. The steps, however, by which this improvement was effected, have not been sufficiently recorded; and some doubt may exist whether the original was the pure Kerry, or some other breed proper to the central parts of Ireland now unknown, or whether some foreign blood, as the Dutch, was not mixed with the native race. One character of the Dexter breed is frequently observed in certain cattle of Ireland, namely, short legs, and a small space from the knee and hock to the hoofs. This has probably given rise to a saying sometimes heard of, ‘ Tipperary beef down to the heels.’ However the Dexter breed has been formed, it still retains its

name, and the roundness and depth of carcase which distinguished it. When any individual of a Kerry drove appears remarkably round and short-legged, it is common for the country people to call it a Dexter. . . . The Kerry cows afford admirable first crosses with Short-horns, Herefords, and other larger breeds. Of these crosses, that with the Short-horns is the most general, and appears to be the best. The crosses are found well adapted to fattening as well as to the dairy; and the profit from this system is so immediate, that it is to be believed that it will be more largely resorted to than a progressive improvement of the parent stock.

“Nevertheless, the cultivation of the pure dairy breed of the Kerry mountains ought not to be neglected by individuals or public associations. The breed is yet the best that is reared over a large extent of country, from its adaptation to the existing state of agriculture, and to the humid mountains and bogs in which it is naturalized. Were it to be reared with care in a good district, the form would be gradually more developed, and the Kerry breed might then bear the same relation to the mountain breeds of Ireland that the Castle Martin does to those of Wales, or the West Highland to those of the North of Scotland.” *

It is hoped that the publication of the Kerry and Dexter Herd-book by the Royal Dublin Society will have the effect of further developing the good qualities for which these cattle are now celebrated. It can scarcely fail to preserve the distinctive characters of the breeds; and it will afford the guarantee of pedigree which has been so anxiously desired.

RICHARD J. MOSS.

ROYAL DUBLIN SOCIETY,
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* *The Breeds of the Domestic Animals of the British Islands.* By David Low. London: 1842. Vol. i.
