

Our English Letter

Weather and Crops—Farm Labor—A Long-Lived Wheat Stack—Extinct Scotch Cattle—Price of Wool

London, June 9, 1906.

The season has taken a distinct turn for the better and the weather has mended its ways. Bright sunshine succeeded a soaking rain and the result was that vegetation profited all round. A correspondent sends me his views on the present position. Winter wheat, he says, is looking well while barley and oats have greatly improved. The hay crop will be a short one, the grass now being very thin; in fact, many of the upland meadows will never be any good for hay—only fit for feeding purposes. Sheep shearing is now in full swing and as a rule they are cutting good fleeces and coming out of the wool well this season.

FARM LABOR

The complaint at the recent Nottingham Hiring Fairs as to the scarcity of farm hands is a common one, the unwillingness of those available to do any part of the milking is unfortunately by no means rare. It is an old question, but the difficulty grows year by year. It is no more than one can expect. There are few if any vocations which afford the young women of our villages the same opportunities of living well and for social improvement as the conditions of service does; for in the towns, girls of good character and ability are always in request and "places" are so many that no girl of capacity is under the necessity of taking an indifferent one. So long as that is so, the best young women and the most capable will gravitate naturally to the towns, where not only are the wages higher, but the work is more congenial and the general standard of living higher. Perhaps in the long run the girl who remains in the village may do the better, but the temptation to take advantage of the easier conditions of life in town is irresistible to most. As time goes on and the rural population continues to dwindle, the difficulty of finding capable servants for farm houses is not likely to diminish.

A LONG-LIVED WHEAT STACK

According to an account which recently appeared in a daily paper there is a wheat stack in South Lincolnshire which will be famous if nothing unfortunate happens to it. This particular stack has stood in the yard of a Mr. Philip Selby for a matter of twenty-seven years and the grain is said to be in excellent condition. Numerous stories are told as to the reason of the stack standing so long, one being to the effect that the owner determined not to sell the wheat for less than a certain sum—which has never been offered. I have no information as to what the price is, but should think that there is very little chance of it being realized now, unless a national agricultural museum of curiosities is established, when there would be an opportunity of business, always providing this remarkable corn stack really exists.

AN EXTINGUISHED BREED OF CATTLE

We are all familiar with the Polled Aberdeen-Angus, but possibly there are few that know that there was once a noted breed of Aberdeenshire horned cattle, which has been thrust out of the bovine world by the inroads of the Shorthorn and the Dobby. The black horned breed have long passed out of existence, although in their day they gave to Aberdeenshire a

leading place among the cattle breeding counties of the Kingdom, and that part of Scotland has continued to maintain its pre-eminence as a stock rearing and feeding district. Before the union of England with Scotland, the introduction of Scottish cattle south of the border was prohibited by the English Parliament, but after 1707, when commercial disputes between the two countries had been settled, north county farmers turned their attention to the rearing of cattle. The era of tilling the soil more extensively led to the demand for work oxen by the farmers in Aberdeenshire, and thus there began the introduction of the Fife and Falkland breed.

This fine breed of cattle held the field for some decades, at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. But with the appearance of Shorthorn bulls from the banks of the Tees, crossing set in, and one of the results of that was the production of the famous Kintore Ox, which was a marvel in its day, and was taken throughout the country and exhibited as a curiosity. This animal, bred by Lord Kintore, was sold when seven years old for £100, and its gross live weight was 1 ton 8 cwt. As driving cattle the black horned breed of Aberdeenshire excelled, but when the days of the drover were over another type of animal had to be found, better suited to the changed conditions of the cattle trade, and this was responsible for the disappearance of the picturesque black horned beasts.

In the transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, Mr. Farclay not only traces the rise, the history and progress of the breed to its final disappearance, but supplies a most readable account of the cattle themselves and of the men who were associated with them. In 1822, when the Highland and Agricultural Society held its first show, the live stock included representatives of the horned breed, although they were shown along with the polled cattle un-

der the generic title of "The Aberdeenshire Breed." In 1831, when the society held its first show at Inverness, there was no competition for the prizes offered, but at Aberdeen, three years later, there was one bull and eight cows forward. So far as is known the last pure representative of the breed died some eighteen years ago. She had the arching white horns and the waving tuft of black hair on the forehead, indicative of a pure descendant of the breed. When she died she was 25 years old and had produced no fewer than 23 calves. At 25 years of age she had twins. Every one of her bull calves were horned, but of the heifer calves one only was horned. At a dispersion sale in 1893 there was included a daughter of this cow by a Polled Bull. The daughter was then 18 years old and had the characteristic tuft on the forehead, but was minus the horns.

THE PRICE OF WOOL

For some time the price of wool has been advancing and even now there remains the greatest doubt as to what will be the ultimate level of values. Nothing like the present situation has been experienced since the early seventies, when for several months prices went up to \$15 per box of 28 lbs. for choice lustre fleeces. That high water mark is in striking contrast to the prices now current, which are now \$8 to \$9, or only about half what they were 30 years ago. But the conditions of the woollen industry have been revolutionized in the interval. Prices declined to such an extent that good, sound wool could be bought almost as cheaply as cotton. Then the continued droughts in Australia caused the death of millions of sheep, greatly curtailing supplies from this source. The limitation did not affect prices so speedily or so directly as was anticipated and the probable explanation lies in the fact that during the years of declining prices very big reserves of stock had been accumulated by the trade. To the agriculturist the position is full of possibilities; it means that wool is now worth about double per lb. to what it was and to sheep breeders in all parts of the world this comes as a welcome boon.

BREVITIES

The agricultural show season is



White leghorn hens—winners of the Utility Poultry Laying Competition, England. Record, 24 eggs in 112 days—October 18, 1905, to February 4, 1906.