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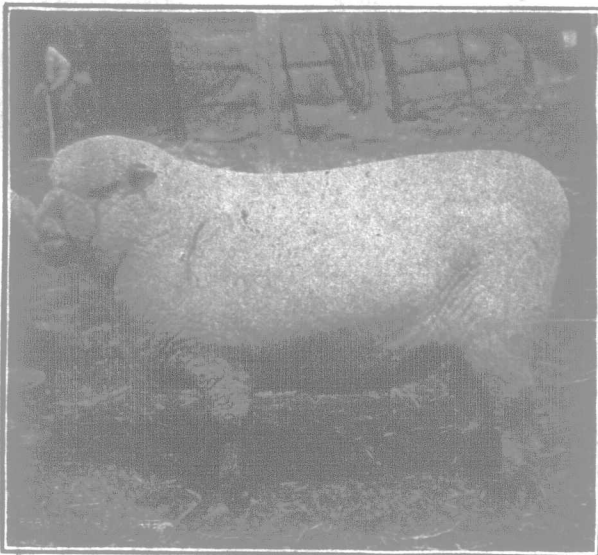
How the Old Countryman Feeds his Xmas Beeves.

By W. J. Kennedy.

In response to your request for an article on "How the Old Countryman Feeds His Christmas Beeves," the writer does so, not with the hope of giving your many intelligent readers new information, but for the purpose of emphasizing some features of the cattle-feeding business which are familiar to many, but practiced by the few. In different countries we find somewhat different methods practiced in the attempt to produce the same kind of a finished product, namely, a desirable carcass of beef. That such should be the case is not at all surprising, since the production of beef is simply a means of converting vegetable matter into a more concentrated and acceptable form of food for the human being. This being true, we would naturally expect the farmers of any country to utilize those feedstuffs which are most largely grown within their own land. Furthermore, a rather close study of the methods adopted and results obtained by the farmers of the different European countries and those of the American continent leads the writer to make the assertion that the farmers of no one country have any legitimate right to think that their knowledge, or, at least, the methods practiced by them, in the production of beef, are very much superior to those of several other countries. That Ontario has farmers who are the equal of the best Scottish feeders, not even Aberdeenshire excepted, the writer is fully convinced. But it is not the work of a few that tells the tale, it is the general average of a district or country that gains for that district or country a reputation, good, bad, or indifferent. It was not the work of one man, nor of a hundred, that made Aberdeenshire beef famous in the London markets, but the high average quality of all the feeders of the district. For many years there was a strong demand, at fancy prices, for high-class beef cattle on the London markets to meet the Christmas trade. Nothing but high-class animals, those bred right, and finished to the proper degree of ripeness, would meet the demand of so critical a trade. This being true, there was some money and much honor in store for those feeders who could breed and feed the class of cattle demanded. While, to some extent, farmers in the various parts of Great Britain aimed to produce a few "Christmas beeves," those of Scotland, and more especially Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, Murrayshire and Rosshire, made the production of Christmas beef a special feature of their work. For many years these North of Scotland feeders sent beef, by the train load, to the London markets for the Christmas trade. Some years it was a very profitable business, while at other times it could not be considered as such. Two decades ago the business was a good one, but it is wonderful what changes have taken place during the last fifteen years in all lines of work. The production of "Christmas beeves" is no exception. During the last ten years the business has been far from satisfactory from the feeder's standpoint. The markets have been glutted with good beeves, thus lower prices have prevailed. It has been a case of burning the candle at both ends. While the supply has been increasing, the demand has been falling off. The increased supply has been due to at least two distinct factors. Those who were engaged in the business gradually fed larger numbers, and then new men were entering the ranks. This caused a noticeable increase in the numbers marketed. But there was another factor which has had a more disastrous influence on the business. The British people, unlike their American cousins, buy and sell their cattle largely at markets or fairs, where the business is done by auction. Almost every town or city has its fair day or days each week, where farmers offer for sale by auction or purchase such cattle as they wish to sell or buy. This work is done by the auctioneer, thus there is very keen competition between the different towns and auctioneers for the trade of the farmers. For the purpose of stimulating an interest in a certain market, the auctioneer in charge, who oftentimes has the aid of the business men, holds a fair in the month of September, at which cash prizes are offered for the best bullock or heifer of a certain age, or perhaps several classes may be arranged, according to ages, groups and championships. These fairs have been very general, of recent years, all over the country. As a result, many farmers who were accustomed to sell their cattle in the early fall, or, perhaps, carry them on into the winter, have aimed to finish them at this time, in order to compete for the prizes. These fairs have been attended by dealers, who purchased these good cattle, and sent them to London for the Christmas market. This factor alone has been sufficient to flood the market with high-class animals. While the supply has been increasing, the demand has been falling off. Instead of continuing to consume the juicy roasts of prime beef, the Englishman has developed an appetite for turkey. The demand for turkey has been on the increase

for more than a decade. While the British farmer is loth to have his sappy bullock displaced by the turkey, it is still more aggravating for him to learn that it is American turkey, the greater bulk of the same coming from Canada. The bad condition of the Christmas markets during recent years has caused a great many feeders to sell their cattle either early in the fall or seek a mid-winter market, when the prices are usually much more satisfactory. The auctioneers in charge of many markets, especially in Cumberland, have disbanded their December fairs on account of their bad influence on the Christmas market. These changes will, no doubt, react in favor of the man who continues to feed Christmas beeves. In former years, it was the custom to feed cattle so as to market them at three or three and a half years of age. This method seems to have disappeared almost entirely. Practically all of the cattle are now marketed at from two to two and a half years of age. Feeders claim that gains can be secured at a much lower cost on younger cattle, and, furthermore, they meet with more favor when offered for sale. The demand, in all markets, strongly favors the handy-weight steer which is well finished. Those men who breed their own cattle aim to sell them at two years, and in many instances before that age. Many farmers do not grow their own cattle, thus must purchase their feeding stock. For this purpose a great many Irish cattle are used. These Irish stores are usually poorly fed in their native land, thus require more time than Scotch or English bred animals. With such cattle, it is impossible to get a satisfactory finish before they are thirty months of age.

Where home-grown cattle are used, they are generally well fed from birth until ready for market. As calves, they are either allowed to suckle their mothers, or are hand-fed. The latter practice seems to be the most prevalent. The calves are generally dropped between the months of



Shropshire Ram.

January and April, the earlier the better for the following winter. When weaned from their mothers, or at the end of the milk period, it is quite a common practice to feed some cake, in addition to the grass. During the fall and winter months, the ration consists of turnips, good oat straw or hay, and a small allowance of cake, the aim being to keep them in good flesh and making good growth all the time. During the following summer, grass and clover is the staple ration. In some instances, cake is fed, but it is not by any means the general practice. Should the grass be short, or the cattle forced for an early winter market, cake is then fed in conjunction with grass. It is also quite a common practice in such an instance to put cattle in pens by the middle of September or the first of October, and feed heavily until ready for market. In making such a change, care is exercised during the first two weeks in getting the cattle on their grain ration. For this purpose, rather large quantities of straw and turnips are used. The grain ration usually consists of a mixture of cotton and linseed cake, fed in equal parts. Sometimes corn, barley or oats are also fed. Rice is also being used to some extent, in conjunction with other feedstuffs. Turnips are largely used, and often fed in large quantities. Some men feed as much as one hundred and fifty pounds per day. The ordinary ration is from seventy to one hundred pounds per steer per day. The quantities of cake fed is a surprise to the American. These people often feed from eight to twelve pounds of mixed cake per steer per day. In America, linseed or cotton cake is generally valued on account of its high protein content. The British feeder buys it and pays for it in accordance with the amount of fat or oil which it contains.

Where store cattle are purchased at one and a half years old in the fall of the year, they are usually fed on turnips, oat straw and some cake, about three pounds per head per day during the first winter; during the summer season they are

pastured and fed some cake, usually the uncorticated cotton cake. The uncorticated is preferred to the corticated, on account of its tendency to prevent laxativeness of the bowels of animals on grass. Such cattle are finished in the same manner as previously described for home-grown stock.

In many sections the cattle are fed three, four, and in some instances five times per day. The cooking of feedstuffs is also quite a common practice. Such practices are not nearly so common as they used to be. Many good feeders believe that as good results can be obtained when cattle are not fed so often and the feed is not cooked. With plenty of cheap labor, such methods of feeding and preparing rations may be profitable, but where labor is scarce, thus high in price, it surely is not economical. In no other country has the writer seen so much care used in the selection of feeding stock. Our people could learn much from these people in that respect. Cattle carefully bought are much more likely to give good returns. These men feed in smaller lots, thus study the individual animal more closely. The lessons learned in this manner are of great value to any man.

Another point in which they are ahead of our people is in the finishing of their cattle. It is the exception to find half-fat cattle being marketed by a British feeder. They feed to a good finish, thus sell near the top of the market. Too much attention cannot be given to this phase of the business.

Shropshire Sheep.

"It is difficult to imagine," says an English writer, "that the massive carcasses of the Shropshires, with a leg at each corner, were derived from a diminutive breed, described in 1792 as the Morfe Common sheep." These sheep were then considered to be a native race, black, brown or spotted-faced, and carrying horns. This appears to have been the parent form, and the work of improvement consisted in crossing with the Leicester, Cotswold and Southdown, together with careful selection and better care and food. These various crosses produced in the first instance a somewhat uncertain type, but as early as 1853 we find them commended in the following language in the report of the Royal Agricultural Society: "The new class of Shropshire Downs was very successful, and it is to be hoped that the society will recognize them as a distinct breed." They were at that time described as "without horns, with faces and legs of a grey or spotted color, the neck thick, with excellent scrag; the head well shaped, rather small than large, with ears well set on; breast broad and deep; back straight; with good carcass, and the legs clean, with strong bone. They are hardy, thrive well on moderate keep, and are readily prepared for market."

Shropshires were first recognized in the prize-lists of the Royal Agricultural Society in 1859. As a rule, the Shropshire breed heads the list in point of numbers at the shows of that Society. The Shropshire Sheep Society has been longer in existence than any other in England. There is a regular flockbook kept, and every sire can be traced. The American Shropshire Registry Association was organized in 1884, and the first volume, of which Mr. Mortimer Levering, La Fayette, Indiana, is the Secretary and Editor, was published in 1889. Over 150,000 animals have been recorded, the largest number in any record of the mutton breeds in America, and by owners in most of the United States and in every province in Canada. While the central home of the breed is Shropshire, they are bred numerously in one-half the counties in England, and are found in large numbers in various countries in Europe and the Continent of South America.

In size, Shropshires are considerably larger than Southdowns, but not so large as the other Downs. They mature quite as early probably as any other breed except the Southdown, and are valuable for crossing upon long-woolled grades or common sheep, as the records of the prize-lists of the fat-stock shows amply attest. The quality of the meat is excellent, being about equal to that of the Southdown, while the quantity is considerably more, and they dress well in proportion to live weight. They are hardy, healthy, and prolific. Their wool is finer than that of the Oxford Down, and less fine than the Southdown, and should be even and close. The average fleece of ewes from a good, well-kept flock should weigh nine to ten pounds unwashed, and of rams twelve to fifteen pounds.

In general appearance and character the best Shropshires are symmetrical; stylish in carriage, short-legged and elastic in their movements. The head is short and broad; wide between ears and eyes; ears short, or of medium size; head well covered with wool, fitting like a continuous cap or helmet; color of face and legs dark brown; neck medium length, thick and strong, especially in the ram; body well proportioned; bone medium, not too fine or too coarse; hind quarters well finished; twist deep and full; standing with legs well set apart and well woolled; breast wide,