

Our Scottish Letter.

FAIRS AND MARTS.

An inquiry into the origin of fairs and public markets in Europe takes us back to the days when the outward duties of an elaborate religious ritual occupied much of the time and attention of the people. Henry Morley, a well-known writer and student of ancient manners and customs, says "that the first fairs were formed by the gathering of pilgrims and worshippers about the sacred places, and especially within or about the walls of abbeys and cathedrals on the feast days of the saints." An incident recorded in Holy Writ indicates something of a similar character in the Jewish religion in olden times. There can be no doubt that the assembling of money changers and sellers of doves within the precincts of the Temple of Jerusalem was but the intrusion of what in itself was purely innocent and praiseworthy business into a sphere which belonged not to it. These trades first assembled outside of the Temple walls for the accommodation and convenience of worshippers at the great Jewish festivals, and what had thus begun as a purely legitimate mode of commerce so overcame the religious aspect of the festival that it was, so to speak, crowded out, and, to change the figure, the handmaid became the mistress.

Somewhat similar were the progress and growth of fairs in Europe. From all quarters the worshippers assembled around and within the sacred piles. Their bodily necessities had to be supplied, and traders appeared on the scene. By-and-bye the trade increased, and the heads of the religious houses, with the business instincts which so often distinguished them, began to exact toll for the privilege of selling, and to issue regulations for the better conduct of business. The supremacy of the religious houses in time passed away, but the fairs had become events of local importance. The great marketing days for wide districts, and the secular powers, town councils, and such like, framed regulations for the transacting of business, and in some cases exacted toll. Thus at St. Luke's Fair held at Ruthylen, a town situated farther up the Clyde than Glasgow, which has a charter as a royal burgh dating from the reign of David I., the following rates were levied at the close of last century:—For each horse or mare imported for sale, 1½ l.; for each cow or bull, 1½ d.; for each pack of linen cloth, 8 d.; for each load of fruit, 4 d.; for each sheep, ½ d.

The religious origin of many of the fairs is further apparent from their names. St. Luke's we have mentioned as held at Ruthylen. The great London Fair was that of St. Bartholomew, which ran its course for seven centuries, and its various stages are summed up by Henry Morley with three words—religion, trade, pleasure. The great meat market at Smithfield stands on the site of this ancient business hive. It finally degenerated into a fierce Saturnalia, and was abolished by special enactment in 1855. The first meat market was opened in its stead thirteen years later. The general law of fairs and markets in England is summed up in Blackstone thus:—"Fairs and markets with tolls belonging to them can only be set up by virtue of a royal grant, or by long and immemorial usage, and prescription which presupposes such a grant. The limitation of these events to the time most convenient for the trade of the locality is a part of the paternal system of government, which makes the government responsible for the comfort of the people."

At present fairs can only be held by virtue of the royal grant, or by virtue of Act of Parliament. No other title than these will suffice. The right to take toll is usually part of the privilege, and the tolls are exigible generally from the sellers and for stallage. A fair once set up by the royal grant is by the common law of England good against the king. He cannot resume the right which he has granted. Alfred the Great is generally credited with founding the first English fairs, other than those that were the natural growth of the religious usage of the people, but it is said by authorities that what he really did was to make the first attempt to regulate fairs by issuing enactments enjoining good behavior and prohibiting the indiscriminate multiplication of

such events. Coming to modern times, we find in 1871 that an Act was passed empowering the High Sheriff of each county, on cause shown, to abolish fairs that had become unnecessary and a nuisance. In 1872 the Irish Local Government Board Act gave power to the governing bodies of any town, being the owners of any fair or market held therein, with consent of two-thirds of the said governing board, and with the consent of the Central Board, to alter and fix the dates of holding fairs. These cursory jottings will have conveyed to the reader some general idea of the origin of fairs, their regulations and government in Great Britain. It will be clear from what has been said that fairs have not been instituted at the mere caprice of individuals of greater or less numbers. They cannot be forced, and they must, to be successful, be held at convenient centres and on convenient dates. Some central authority must have power to regulate their incidence, so that a fair held at one place may not interfere with the success of one held at another. It is easily conceivable how without this central controlling and regulating authority the best devised schemes might miscarry and no success attend them. Some of the fairs in Scotland at least, that are in a state of decadence, are held at places which do not seem to be very convenient, and the question naturally arises, How came they to be planted there? The answer, of course, is that they were so planted to suit the convenience of far other days than ours. To understand their location, we must look back to the days preceding railroads and enquire what were the great trunk roads in those early days. In every case it will be found that the location of the fair was not fixed arbitrarily, but to meet the convenience of the greater number. This led to the remark that fairs are the natural growth of a district and time in which locomotion is slow and tedious; where the railroad has annihilated distance and lengthened time, they are rapidly giving place to the more modern auction mart, and the picturesque dealer is being supplanted by the prosaic, but thoroughly up-to-date auctioneer. The most flourishing fairs are to be found in the West Highland and North Highland districts, where railway communication is unknown, and men still are compelled to adhere to the ways of their fathers. There the fair is still the great centre of business and pleasure—a sort of carnival, which is looked forward to by all the countryside as an annual friendly visitor. Servants are hired and merchandise of all kinds, but especially stock and agricultural produce, is bought and sold. The gossip dates her tales according as they precede or succeed the fair. It was so many weeks or days before, or so many after the fair that the event discussed took place. All this is very interesting and very quaint, but the railroad comes and first pronounces it slow; then the distance to the great town is not so great as it used to be; the auction mart is opened there and the auctioneer is smiling and pleasant. He takes over your cattle or horses for the nonce. You entrust them to his care. He charges you a commission on your goods, say a sixpence in the pound or two and a-half per cent. In return he undertakes to sell your cattle or horses to the best advantage, and guarantees payment. In the evening the railroad car whisks you home with the price of your farm produce, whatever it be, in your pocket. Possibly you would have got more for each beast at the fair in the old days, but the risk would have been all your own. The dealer who bought your stock might have been insolvent or 101 other things might have happened. In the modern auction mart the auctioneer undertakes all the risk. He advertises that on a certain day he will hold a weekly sale for live stock. He invites consignments, and receives entries up to within a day of the sale. Then he may publish a short catalogue giving brief particulars of the animals, and he may even go a step farther and hold a show of the stock, appointing qualified men to award the prizes. In this way everything is done to make the auction mart popular, and although it seems a risky business for the auctioneer, in the end in some cases, if report speak truly, he amasses a colossal fortune. Farmers and stock breeders, on this leaking out, become suspicious. Their pro-

fits have been fair, perhaps taken overhead and on an average better than with the old fair system and sale by private treaty, but they might have been better if the auctioneer had taken less. So they club together and sometimes start an opposition mart on the co-operative principle. They guarantee the sales, and, in fact, do everything on the same principle as the private auctioneer, but their salesman has only a salary—it may be a high one, and, whatever the cause, the fact remains that the co-operative auction mart has had comparatively little success. At least, I do not know a case in which it has supplanted or crippled the private enterprise. I suspect one reason is that in the private mart your financial status is known to the proprietor and to him alone, while in the co-operative mart what is nobody's business, in a sense, becomes everybody's business. The auction mart is thus a great fact in modern Scottish agriculture. Possibly not more than a quarter of a century has elapsed since the idea of holding such meeting at great centres like Perth, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Stirling, Keith, Aberdeen, Elgin, Thornhill, Lanark, Ayr, Paisley, Newtown, St. Boswell's, Kelso, etc., first took shape, and now they form the great places of exchange for live stock. The causes of their success are probably these:—They are thought to bring the breeder and the buyer into immediate contact; the middleman and his profits are abolished; a wealthy firm, strong in the amount and volume of the trade passing through its hands, and not a single individual, is your debtor; and the small farmer with short capital can have his surplus stock converted into cash by means of the mart on the shortest of notice.

The qualifications necessary to insure success as the proprietor of a mart appear to me to be:—Sharp business habits, a good general knowledge of live stock (although one notable instance in Scotland belies this), unimpeachable integrity begetting public confidence, a talent for organization, a wide circle of acquaintances, and a good command of capital. The man who possesses these qualifications, and selects a suitable location and a convenient weekly date for his sale, should have little difficulty in making an auction mart an unqualified success. SCOTLAND YET.

Chatty Letter from the States.

The abandonment of the American fat stock show this year, owing to the inability of the builders to get the new building ready, will cause a deal of dissatisfaction among prospecting exhibitors and those who had planned stock sales.

Cattle feeders are generally not trying to breed and raise their own cattle, as they can buy them better and cheaper than they can raise them.

Texas cattle have never sold any lower than this season, and they have never before been marketed in such overwhelming numbers. The number of cattle marketed at all points this year is larger than ever before, but the quality of the cattle has been deficient and the weight on average has been comparatively light. The condition of the cattle market is not, as a rule, satisfactory to owners. Prices for fancy beefs, \$5.00 to \$5.70, are high enough, but there are so few of that class that they really cut no figure. On native beef steers, 1,150 to 1,400 lbs., sell chiefly at \$3.75 to \$4.25. The western range beefs sell at \$3 to \$4.60, largely at \$3.50 to \$4; Texas grass steers, \$2 to \$3, largely at \$2.50 to \$2.75, and a few "skinny" steers as low as \$1.75.

Prices for beef cattle have been extremely uneven, while some fancy 992-lb. mixed steers and spayed heifers sold at \$5, coarse fat 1,599-lb. cattle sold at \$4.05, and rough 1,328-lb. steers sold as low as \$2.90. Choice 1,169-lb. steers sold at \$3.60; 1,130-lb. spayed heifers and steers mixed at \$4.87½; plain 1,410-lb. steers, \$4.10. Many thin old cows have sold as low as 50c. to 75c. per 100 lbs.

A great many brood sows are being marketed. The practice of marketing pregnant sows should be abolished. In one car load of 79 head recently marketed there were 28 "piggy" sows.

A load of 570 head of mountain cattle was owned by 102 different men. This made lively work for salesmen and "sorters" and bookkeepers.

Hogs have been selling at \$5 to \$5.75, against \$3.90 to \$4.75 a year ago.

Best sheep selling at \$5.80. Good lambs, \$5.50.