

Nature and Live Stock

The First Consideration in the Improvement of Live Stock is the fitness of Natural Conditions

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In this paper I have attempted to prove something which seems quite plain to me, both in theory and from evidence of experience, namely, that natural conditions are the best for live stock, that the natural conditions presented by this province are suitable for live stock, and that we may, by selection, produce types of live stock which are more suitable to those natural conditions and more profitable to us than any live stock we can import.

Home-bred vs. Imported Stock

There is a question which is always before the live stock breeders of this province, and that is whether as good stock can be raised here as in Europe? For answer there is an almost unanimous negative from the breeders and importers and its tacit acceptance by the community in general. The awards at exhibitions in Canada and the United States proclaim the fact that stock can be imported to win, except in the case of breeds which have their origin on this side of the Atlantic. An inquiry as to why this is the case will bring forth the answer that live stock men in the older countries have an inherited knowledge, a knack in raising live stock which we on this side do not possess, because we are too restless a people to stay long enough in one place or steadily enough in the business to acquire the knowledge and habits conducive to the highest attainments. We will also be told that the succulent foods which those countries produce so abundantly are more suitable for some kinds of live stock than the foods which are most readily available here.

Raising the Best Stock

It is hard, at first thought, to deny the truth of those statements, but that they are not a satisfying answer to the question of why we cannot raise the best stock is evident when we consider that there is every variety of soil and climate on this North American continent, and that these old country stockmen themselves have come to it in large numbers to practise their profession. It is evident, too, that a people so ready to conceive and to carry out the principles of business most likely to win in their own country, so able to absorb into themselves the mixed races of all classes of the European continent and to improve them to become good citizens of Canadian and American civilization, so successful, too, in originating and establishing some few breeds of live stock, are clever enough and persevering enough to excel in the production of all suitable classes of live stock, if they have sufficiently understood the true principles of breeding.

However, we may leave the people of the rest of this continent to solve the question for themselves while we try to find out for ourselves whether or not the live stock of this province can be made to establish a superlative merit in our agriculture, can be made more fitting to our needs than any stock we can get from anywhere else.

Native Breeds

In most countries where there is a long established agricultural population a purposeful improvement in live stock is earnestly engaged in and there are developed native breeds valuable because of their suitability to their soil and climate and the uses for which the animals are intended either during their lives or after they are slaughtered. The origination of those improved breeds has been no haphazard event, but has been a process of improving the native stock thru selection and by cross breeding conducted by a people who rightly understood their own soil and climate, and who, knowing what they wanted aimed to produce that want. The good judgment of the lead-

ers in improvement has been proved by the popular adoption of each breed in localities offering similar conditions, and in the case of breeds used only for crossing purposes by the continuance of their usefulness.

Each successful breed is thus a product of its own soil and climate and of the understanding and ideals of its originators, and of the sound principles of the farmers generally. Its breed character has thus a local or native significance and point by point a local valuation or appraisal. So it follows that no breed or type of a breed is universally perfect, but only approaches perfection in limited areas, because of its suitability to conditions there, and it is a fact that a breed—of more correctly a type of a breed—of superlative merit in its own district cannot be profitably established in another district presenting contrary conditions.

In old agricultural communities those natural differences in outside conditions are recognized, and the necessity of the adaptability of their live stock to those conditions is a truism in the genius of those people in live stock matters.

Imported Stock and Methods

When people in a new country import animals of breeds likely to meet their requirements they will be well advised to be wise to the fact that breed character will be point by point rightly

thing has been imported to it. There has been no native farming population, no native methods to be the foundation of improvement, and no native domesticated live stock to guide us to recognize fundamental native characteristics. Men and women have come here with their methods, utensils, implements and live stock to conduct the business of farming on a strange soil and in a strange climate, and the development of our agriculture to its present status has been accomplished thru the right interpretation of the favors and vicissitudes which have been encountered in the various combinations of soil and climate which it has been our aim to make use of. Our greatest progress has been in methods of cultivation, in the choice of crops, and in the feeding of live stock for market, while the development, in point of quality or in other words towards suitability, of the breeders' part of the live stock industry has not been so fortuitous, because our methods of handling breeding stock have been governed by the seeming necessities which arise from unsuitable surroundings. Of course that is a general assumption and not directed towards individuals. The open prairie has been the goal of the man alive to his own interests, and the proceeds from profit yielding wheat, growing have often been used to place the stock and equipment of the live stock breeder upon the wheat farm. Now, however, that the best wheat

true principles of breeding, governed as they are and must always be by the nature of the different kinds of animals and by the necessity to them of natural conditions has not been sufficiently considered. The art of the feeder has thus outgrown in our minds the art of the breeder until we have almost forgotten that it was not we who have made the animals.

We will agree that in the beginning God made all things, and that the beginning of animal life was many millions of years ago, and that from the beginning animal life has been continually fitting itself to established conditions. We will also agree that there is a common element in all animal life which we call resistance, virtue, moral courage, and that natural conditions are never so conducive to ease as to allow any form of animal life complete rest or safety without the exercise of a normal resistance, and that it follows that the perfect environment for any animal is one in which its normal resistance is sufficient to insure for it the comforts of existence. We all know also that live stock will, thru their physical adaptability fit themselves to various conditions of soil, foods, and climate, thus making a variety of types in the same species, so fitted to the natural conditions of their location that they are enabled to thrive by the exercise of a normal resistance. It will thus be quite evident that no foreign breeds will be so suitable to this province as the breeds we can produce ourselves by selection while subjecting the animals to its natural conditions and observing which types fare best. Constructive breeding here, as elsewhere, begins with the acceptance of that fundamental fact.

Variety and Fitness of Type

In this large province, representing, as it does, physical conditions differing in different localities, there will be developed various methods of agriculture. This will call for a variety of breeds and of breed types. It is so in other countries. The rugged, rain-swept mountains of Scotland support the Highland breed of sheep; the round, grassy Cheviot Hills, the Cheviot breed of sheep; the Downs in the south of England, where the natural range is supplemented by farm crops, support the Down breeds of sheep; and the Down breeds differ in character from one another in accordance with the relative amount of range and farm feeding to which they are subjected, and the people who we are ready to concede are better stock men than ourselves so truly recognize that fitness of type to natural conditions is the first essential in live stock improvement that each breed is confined to localities presenting conditions suitable to it, and even in the mating of the Leicester upon the Highland and Cheviot sheep, for the purpose of improving their mutton conformation, the cross-breeds do not supplant the native stock, but are removed to the neighboring Lowland farms. So fitness of type for natural conditions is considered apart from fitness of type for the butcher's block, and with all their livestock there are the same fundamental reasons for the existence of each type of animal in its own localities.

Sheep

To continue to use sheep as an example, suppose that in the rougher farm lands of this province where there is some pasture range for the summer and some natural shelter about each cultivated field, that sheep are adopted as the most profitable stock to carry, with the result that flocks of ewes of not merely a few head but of hundreds will be found wintering upon the fields, eating the grass in the uncultivated places,

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Shorthorn Cow, "Whitie Du Belle," and her yearling and twin heifer calves. Owned by H. H. Altman, Castor, Alta.

subject to a new judgment, and this new appraisal will be based upon the suitability of this breed character to the new country as shown during the process of the breed becoming permanently established, native to the soil and climate, and answering to the new demands on its usefulness, just as it was in the country of its origin during periods of its greatest improvement. A change in breed type to suit the altered conditions and a gradual establishing of native breeds will accompany a proper appreciation of the new environment by the farming community.

This appreciation of the new environment, to which our prairie provinces, differing from other countries and the rest of the Dominion, subject the imported breeds of live stock, will be hastened in accordance with our proper understanding of the principles governing the welfare of our stock until the acceptance of foreign type or fashion as the test of excellence gives place to an earnest endeavor to revise and improve our ideas as the experience of our own people enable us to set up our own standards for the valuation of breed character, judging it rather in accordance with its fitness for the agriculture of the three Prairie Provinces than in accordance with its fitness for the land of the origin of the breed.

What Is Our Agriculture?

First of all, what is our agriculture? One feature of the business of agriculture in this province is that the whole

lands have been taken up and men naturally fitted for and inclined to the stockman's business are still coming and seeking to locate, they, being free from the temptations of becoming possessed of the best wheat lands at a nominal value, find the rougher lands and best for stock acceptable and open to their tenure, with the result that the true principles of the care of breeding stock are being more generally put into practice.

Management of Stock

One other influence has been brought to bear upon the business of the breeder of live stock and that is the accepted teaching of the science of live stock management. This teaching has been directed chiefly towards considerations governing the art of the feeder. This attitude in the past in the teaching of agriculture has been universal, and in old established agricultural communities its omissions have been supplied by the inherited practical knowledge of the people. Is it too much to say that with us those omissions have not been supplied and that in the past we have been, perhaps, unduly influenced by the seeming first importance of considerations of balanced rations, warm stabling and rest and quiet for our animals in order to make more economical the consumption of food, and of the supposed advantages of equitable temperatures and never-varying atmospheric conditions. This kind of science has been very much in evidence while the