

AGRICULTURAL FAIR.

We are pleased to hear of the exertions making by the Dartmouth Agricultural Society to advance the improvement of the sheep, over which its influence extends. There can be no question that, while generously supported, such Societies contribute to the rapid improvement of every district in which they are established; and we doubt not that the period is not far distant when the beautiful Townships of Dartmouth and Preston, will exhibit a pleasing feature of improved cultivation. Notices have already been circulated of a Ploughing Match, which is to be held at the highly cultivated Farm of Mr. John Farquharson, at Preston, on Tuesday the 4th day of October next, which it is expected will produce a spirited competition; and on the 19th November a show of Cattle will take place in the Town of Dartmouth, when the wethers of those most approved of by the judges, will receive the respective prizes, under the rules established at a previous meeting. In addition to the gratification every one interested in the welfare of the country must feel in witnessing the well directed exertions of the Society, we have much pleasure in stating that it is the wish of several gentlemen to avail themselves of the opportunity, afforded by the approaching exhibition, to establish a regular Cattle Fair in the Town of Dartmouth, where, at stated periods in the Spring and Fall, not only animals but every other description of Agricultural produce, may be exhibited for sale. Those exhibitions are common in other countries, the buyer and sellers by meeting at the period agreed on, save to each other much time, travel and expense. For the purpose of commencing this useful system we are desirous to state that a convenient Field and Barn near the lower Bridge of the Canal have been provided by Mr. William Foster, for the exhibition of the animals raised by members of the Society, and that he is prepared to make arrangements with those having Cattle for sale, to have them properly attended to, fed, and exhibited, on such terms as may be considered reasonable. The attention of Farmers residing on the Eastern section of the County is particularly recommended to the above communication, and it is also intimated that those intending to avail themselves of this mode of disposing of their property, should make their arrangements during the ensuing month of October, and have the Cattle on the ground a day or two previous to the 19th November next. Several Ayrshire Cattle, of the pure and cross breeds, we learn, are already entered for sale at the Fair.—Communicated

THE NEW LEICESTER SHEEP.

The Leicester sheep were never favourites with the butcher, because they had little loose inside fat. It has been well said that tallow is a kind of boon which, if not forthcoming, produces a disappointment that the butcher cannot brook. It ought, nevertheless, to have been recollected that the smallness of the head, and the thinness of the pelt, would in some measure counterbalance the loss of tallow: that there is that about the Leicester sheep which would fully make amends to the butcher for the diminution of offal, namely, the property of weighing considerably more than the appearance of the animal would indicate; and that this very diminution of the offal, whatever the butcher may think of it, is advantageous to the grazier, for it shows a disposition to form fat outwardly, and is uniformly accompanied by a tendency to quickness of improvement.

It must also be conceded that the New Leicester sheep has a smaller quantity of bone in proportion to its weight than is to be found in any other breed, a circumstance highly advantageous to the consumer, although, in more ways than one, it may not be so profitable to the butcher.

There is another good quality in the New Leicesters of essential importance, namely, their early maturity. They are sooner prepared for the butcher than any other description of sheep, and the pasture left ready for other purposes. This was undeniably the case when they were first introduced. It was a point which, for many years afterwards, their most prejudiced enemies could not deny. Mr. Price, in his Treatise on Sheep, gives a satisfactory illustration of this. "In the spring of 1806 I called upon the Earl of Thanet, in Kent, in order to view his breed of sheep. His Lordship is for giving every breed a candid trial. He then had the New Leicesters, the South Down, and the Romney Marsh breeds together. He informed me that the New Leicester breed suited his purpose far better than any of the others, for they were ripe for the slaughter-house in April; whereas the South Down and the

Kents would not be so until the latter end of the summer. The advantage which he received was that of making two returns on his pastures."

Great improvement has been effected in the system of sheep husbandry since that time, and other breeds of sheep have materially advanced. Between some of them and the Leicesters it would occasionally be a neck and neck race, or the old favourites might now and then be left behind; but, as a general rule, and all circumstances being equal, the New Leicester sheep will get the start of their competitors, and they will not be left behind, although dearer and more stimulating food than used to be allowed is given to their rivals.

The New Leicesters, however, are not without their faults. They are not, even at the present day, so prolific as most other breeds. This was too much overlooked in the time of Bakewell and his immediate followers. Their object was to produce a lamb that could be forced on so as to be ready, at the earliest possible period, for the purposes of breeding or of slaughter, and therefore the production of twins was not only unsought after, but was regarded as an evil. It was considered that, during the period of gestation, few ewes would be able to bring to their full fetal growth two such lambs as the Leicestershire breeders desired to have. The fact, also, which, if they had seriously thought of the matter, must have appeared to be unavoidable, too soon began to be evident, viz. that when the energies of the system were systematically directed to one point—the accumulation of flesh and fat as early and to as great an extent as possible—there must be a deficiency in some other point; and the Leicester tops were not such sure lamb getters, and the ewes were not so well disposed for impregnation, and the secretion of milk was not so abundant as in other breeds. When, however, the contest for the highest character as a top-breeder, and the highest price for the letting of the tops, was somewhat passed over, and the Leicesters were submitted to the usual routine of sheep husbandry, they became better breeders and better nurses.

It was likewise, and not without reason, objected to them that their lambs were tender and weakly, and unable to bear the occasional inclemency of the weather at the lambing season. This also was a necessary consequence of that delicacy of form, and delicacy of constitution too, which were so sedulously cultivated in the Leicester sheep. The circumstance of their indisposition to accumulate fat internally was however much in their favour here. Had they "died as well," or, in plainer language, contained as much fat within as their external appearance bespoke, there would have been no room for the growth of the little one, and its puny form could not have endured the slightest hardship.

The last objection to the New Leicester sheep was the neglect and deficiency of the fleece; but this has already been hinted at. It was a great objection in the early history of the improved breed. The weight and quality of the fleece were not merely, as they should be, somewhat secondary considerations, but they were comparatively disregarded. There is little cause, however, for complaint at the present period. The wool has considerably increased in length, and has improved both in fineness and strength of fibre: it averages from 6 to 7 lbs. the fleece, and the fibre varies from five to more than twelve inches in length. It is mostly used in the manufacture of serges and carpets.

The principle value of the New Leicester breed consists in the improvement which it has effected in almost every variety of sheep that it has crossed. A rapid glance at the districts that have passed in review will afford satisfactory proof of this, as it regards the short-woolled breed. The Leicesters had nothing to do with the original formation of any of them, for each grew out of the situation in which it was placed; but they have formed useful and improved varieties with most of them, and in various instances a cross with them has superseded the native breed.

They have nothing to do with the formation of South Downs, and the early crosses with them were not successful. The activity and the hardihood of the Sussex sheep were to a certain degree impaired, and the wool was lengthened, weakened, and could no longer be used in the manufacture of cloth; but when a complete revolution had taken place in the character and uses of the British short wools—when a finer and a better wool than the South Downs ever produced was brought into the market, and rapidly superseded that of British growth—when, in point of fact, the South Down wool was driven from its old markets, and had to seek new and perfectly different ones, many farmers, reluctantly and hesitatingly at first, began to cross the South Down ewe with the Leicester