



From the Pictorial Times.

ON THE DOMESTICATED ANIMALS OF THE BRITISH ISLANDS.

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From early times, Great Britain has been distinguished for the numbers and excellence of the animals reared for the uses of the inhabitants. The cultivation of the horse began in the earlier periods of our history, for the purposes of war and the tournament, and has subsequently been carried to great perfection, for the race-course, the chase, the saddle, and for draught. The cultivation of sheep was early the subject of public attention, and, as being connected with the woollen manufactures of the country, was favoured by numerous laws; and within a period comparatively recent, extraordinary attention has been devoted to the means of cultivating animals for human food. It is during this latter era, which began about the middle of last century, that the greatest additions have been made to the value of the live-stock of the country, and that the practice of breeding has been reduced to a system, and founded upon principles. Of the species of the domesticated animals naturalised in the British Islands, numerous varieties present themselves, to which we apply the term breeds. The characters of species may have been imprinted by original organisation, or may have been the result of laws of organic development and change, of whose nature and operation we are ignorant. The characters which distinguish varieties are those which may reasonably be ascribed to known agencies, as climate, and the supplies of food. The differences of character, indeed, produced by agencies of this kind, may be very great; and, in the case of many animals, the naturalist may be left in doubt, whether the differences observed are the result of original organisation, or of more recent changes. But however species may have originated, or varieties have been produced, all animals submitted to domestication are subject to modifications of size, form, and other characters, dependent on the conditions under which they are reared; and by breeding, we can communicate the distinctive properties of parents to the progeny. In the rural economy of this country, a high degree of importance is to be ascribed to a knowledge of the distinctive characters of races or breeds. Much of the profit of the owners depends upon adapting the breed of any animal to the circumstances

in which it is to be placed. By rearing, for example, a breed of large and delicate oxen, in a country unsuited, from its natural or artificial productions, to maintain it, we incur the hazard of loss in various ways; while, on the other hand, by rearing an inferior breed in situations where one of greater value could be maintained, we deprive ourselves of the profit which the natural or acquired advantages of our situation present. An error of another kind is the subject of constant observation, the result likewise of imperfect knowledge of the distinctive characters of breeds. For the procuring of a breed adapted to the situation in which it is to be reared, two general methods may be pursued; either a new breed may be substituted for that which exists, or the old one may have its characters modified or changed by crossing with other races. There are many cases in which scarcely an error can be committed in our practice in these respects, provided we resort to a really superior race; but there are many other cases in which a change of this kind may be injurious, or attended with doubtful benefit. Animals become gradually adapted to the conditions in which they are placed, and many breeds have accordingly become admirably suited to the physical state of the country in which they have been naturalised. Thus, the West Highland breed of cattle has become suited to a humid climate and a country of mountains; the beautiful breed of North Devon, to a country of lower altitude and milder climate. In these, and many cases more, an intermixture of stranger blood might destroy the characters which time had imprinted on the stock, and produce a progeny inferior in useful properties to either of the parent races. Not only have individual breeders erred in the application of this kind of crossing to practice in particular cases, but several entire breeds have been lost which ought to have been preserved. There are many breeds, indeed, so defective in themselves, that time and capital would have been lost in endeavouring to cultivate them; but not a few, as will be seen in the sequel, might have been improved to the degree required, by mere selection of parents, and attention to the known principles of breeding. Not only do animals become adapted in constitution, temperament, and habits, to the situations in which they have been naturalised, but characters communicated by art become permanent by continued reproduction. Thus, in the case of the dairy breed of Ayrshire, by breeding from

females that possess the property of yielding a large quantity of milk, a peculiar breed has been at length formed, exceedingly well suited to the purposes of the dairy, and at the same time hardy and fitted to subsist on ordinary food. Now, such a breed might be injured, and not improved, by crossing even with a race superior to itself in many properties—Thus, a cross with the Durham or Hereford breeds would produce animals of larger size and superior fattening properties to the native race; but even in these properties, the progeny would be inferior to either the Herefords or the Durhams, and inferior, as a hardy race of dairy cattle, to the Ayrshire breed itself. Hence, the crossing of a breed of cattle with a race apparently superior, will not always be attended with ultimate good; and caution and knowledge of the end to be arrived at are required, even in the cases where the good seems most easily attained. Another error of a different kind, but proceeding likewise from imperfect knowledge of the relative value of breeds, prevails to a great extent. Breeds, in themselves bad, are obstinately retained in districts fitted to support superior races. In every part of the kingdom, we see breeds which are unworthy of being preserved, while the easiest means are at the command of the farmer of supplying their place by others suited to the locality.—Thus, over the greater part of Wales, there are races of wild diminutive sheep, which, in economical value, can bear no comparison with those which could be supplied from other places. In Kerry, and other mountainous districts stretching along the western coast of Ireland, in place of such sheep as the country could maintain, are to be seen assemblages of animals of the size of dogs, and as wild as antelopes, neither having wool fitted to the manufactures of the country, nor being capable of fattening to any size. Even in the heart of Yorkshire, as we shall see in the sequel, a breed of sheep is preserved, covering a considerable tract of country, which, from its coarseness of form, and inaptitude to fatten, ranks in the lowest class of cultivated sheep in England; and in every part of the kingdom, we may see examples of the vast public and private loss which results from unacquaintance with the relative value and economical uses of the different breeds of our domesticated animals. To remove the causes of mistaken practice, in a branch of industry so important to the interests of producers and consumers, may be regarded as mat-