

THE FOREIGN CATTLE MARKET IN GREAT BRITAIN

(Editorial correspondence.)

Great Britain, and particularly England, is one of the greatest meat-eating countries in the world. In part, this is due to habit, induced by the pursuits of the masses of the people, which involve a great deal of active physical labor, and to their living in the north temperate zone. For centuries Great Britain has been a stock-rearing country, and it was therefore natural that the meat-eating habit should become fixed. With the growth of industrial England, and the enormous populations of the cities and towns, and the comparatively small area devoted to agriculture and stock-rearing, Britain had to look abroad for food, hence the tremendous importation of animals and their products from Canada, the United States, the Argentine Republic, New Zealand and Australia. Frozen mutton and beef she receives from the two last-named, chilled meat and live cattle from the United States, and, thus far, chiefly live cattle and bacon from Canada. Frozen carcasses are imported in vast quantities, and is the lowest-selling fresh meat; consequently it supplies a class of customers that might otherwise not be able to buy meat at all. Carefully swathed in cotton or canvas sacks, it looks attractive before being taken out of the refrigerators, but once thawed, it rapidly deteriorates in appearance. The chilled meat, which comes so largely from Chicago, ranks considerably higher than the frozen product, but does not command the price nor the patronage of the flesh of finished cattle imported on the hoof and then "home-killed" at the ports of entry where live cattle are admitted, subject to slaughter within ten days, under the notorious embargo regulation. The highest-priced meat is what is called "home-fed," or "prime Scots," or some such taking appellation; but in the shops the customer probably pays his shilling for many a toothsome "ome-grown" steak, nourished and finished in the bank barns of old Ontario or the feed-lots of Illinois.

The following nine ports are open to receive cattle under the present system: Liverpool, London, Glasgow, Bristol, Manchester, Newcastle, Hull, Cardiff and Southampton, ranking in magnitude of trade something after the order named. Dealers at Liverpool, by the way, are not favorable to spreading the trade over so many markets, arguing that the distribution can be more economically and speedily done from the larger centers well supplied with railway facilities, and claim that, while the shipper may occasionally strike a good market in the smaller ports, they are more liable to be glutted, and when that happens the seller will get squeezed. Of course, it means additional running about for the big salesmen who operate at more than one market, but it may be that the local dealers prefer more distributing points, and the consumer will likely regard it as a sort of free-trade safeguard against combination. Some idea of the magnitude of the trade now transacted in live animals at Liverpool will be gathered from the following official tables. The animals are landed, not in Liverpool itself, but at Birkenhead, across the river Mersey, which is accessible for a penny in about five minutes' ride on the ferry:

CATTLE LANDED AT BIRKENHEAD.

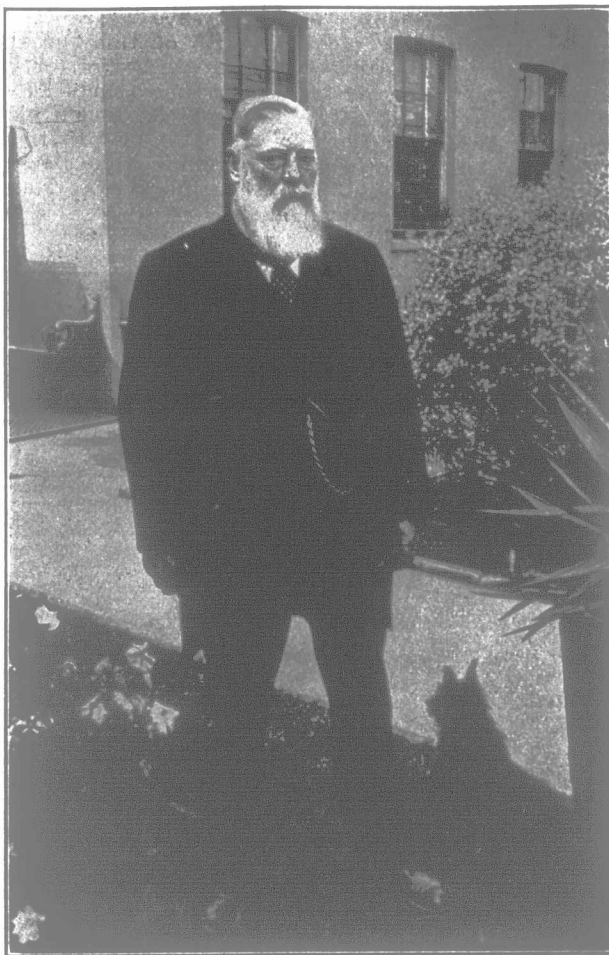
	1904.	1905.	6 months 1906.
From U. S. A.....	211,096	218,948	122,520
From Canada	68,096	57,777	16,343
Totals	279,192	276,725	138,863

SHEEP LANDED.

	1904.	1905.	6 months 1906.
From U. S. A.....	243,125	143,330	54,801
From Canada	23,079	11,524	2,808
From Ireland	9,602	4,751	Nil
Totals	275,806	160,105	57,609

The importation of chilled meat from the United States per month into Liverpool alone will probably average about 70,000 quarters, of 190 pounds each, while South America sends vast quantities of frozen carcasses.

The main lairage, where the selling is done at Birkenhead, is called Woodside, there being an overflow lairage at Wallasey, with a capacity for about 2,000 head of cattle. There is also accommodation for large numbers of sheep, the receipts of which had been falling off at the time of our visit. Above twenty firms operate in the Liverpool cattle market, and the selling is done by the pound, dressed meat, so that the salesman must look after the carcass, offal, hides, and



Mr. Geo. Thilcox.

Superintendent Deptford Foreign Cattle Market, under whose charge 17,000,000 head of stock have passed.

keep an account of all. This is quite different from the system prevailing at the Deptford foreign cattle market, London, where the beeves are sold at so much per head and the transaction is over. When the cattle land at Birkenhead, they are locked in compartments until passed by the three Veterinary Inspectors of the Board of Agriculture, and the carcasses have to pass the town meat-inspector, and, besides this, the Humane Society officers look sharply after the condition of the lairages. The United States have had an officer looking after the condition of their beeves on arrival, but we understand they have now ceased the system of tagging their cattle. There appears to be no Canadian officer specially detailed to look after the interests of Canadian cattle, but we were pleased to meet both here and at Deptford two Canadians, who have been for some years doing a large business as salesmen—Mr. W. S. Williamson, who, on the day of our visit to the London market, sold a fine bunch of cattle for Mr. C. M. Simmons which did no discredit to the Lobo feeder or to Western Ontario; and Mr. John Sullivan, who appear to be quite able to hold their

own with the best of their confreres on these great marts. About 4,600 head had been landed for the week's trade at Birkenhead, and there was only about a farthing's difference between the Canadian and States cattle, just then in favor of the latter. In very warm weather the carcasses of the very highly-finished States cattle do not keep as well as the less-ripe Canadians, but in ordinary weather the Yankee steer has quite the best of it, as may be seen by the most casual observer. The very best cattle do best at Deptford, but the fairish sorts are claimed to have the best of it at Birkenhead. We went all through the lairages from top to bottom, and saw no evidence of diseased cattle, cattle out of good health in any way, and none that had been ill-used on shipboard or in landing. The losses in transport are reported now to be practically nil. The cattle are usually killed in about five days after landing at Birkenhead, and, having the option of several markets, appear to go for what they are worth. It is in the transportation charges, commissions, etc., that the Canadian shipper or feeder finds his returns mercilessly pared down. If the Canadian Government wishes to serve the Canadian farmer, they could probably do it more effectually by getting after this end of the business than fiddling at the embargo. At Deptford, also, prices appeared to be a matter of supply and demand. The north-country feeders, who are still working for embargo removal, would probably find themselves greatly mistaken if they imagine they could get Canadian store cattle at as cheap rates as in the palmy days of old.

Deptford foreign cattle market appears to be a model institution, more systematic and orderly in its appointments than Birkenhead, and the selling pens were scrupulously clean, as an engraving from photos specially taken for use in "The Farmer's Advocate," will show. From the time the cattle march off the steamships onto the three jetties, 940 feet long, and into the lairages, they are fed, watered and cared for with every possible care. The system is admirable. The day before our visit 1,211 cattle were landed in three-quarters of an hour, without a hitch, and on another day over 1,000 cattle were landed in 35 minutes. Two boats can be discharged at once. On the Monday of our visit there was a large market, some 2,600 head being on offer, including States, Ontario and Western range cattle. An occasional lot of the best Canadian stall-fed cattle may be equal to the U. S. corn-fed lots, but, as a rule, the Canadians are woefully out of it by comparison. The former are thoroughly finished and ripe, alike as peas in a pod, usually exceedingly uniform representatives of the different beef-breed types, Shorthorns predominating. What the Canadian cattle trade is suffering from is apparently not so much the embargo as want of more well-bred cattle properly finished. The range cattle are reported to be improving, but they were by far the worst we saw on the markets, both at Birkenhead and Deptford, being old-looking, wild, in many cases lanky and unfinished, the hides depreciated by the brand marks, and, after killing, the yellowish tinge of the flesh was not in their favor. Many of them are so wild that they can-



S. S. Fremont Landing Canadian Cattle at Deptford, London, Eng, July 27, 1906.