

Ayrshire, previous to their being crossed and improved by other breeds, are described by very good authority, Mr. Wm. Aiton, of Strathaven, Scotland, as "being nearly all of a black colour, not weighing, when fat, over 300 lbs. of saleable meat—that they were driven round their bare leys in summer, with horses, sheep, and young cattle, and getting no other food in winter but a scanty supply of oat-straw, with what they could collect on the fields, they had the aspect of starvelings—their hair coarse, and standing up, their skin thick, and adhering to their bones: their bones large, bodies lank; few of them yielding more than two, or at most three Scotch pints of milk per day. This starveling breed of cows in Ayrshire, in the course of the last forty years (this was written in 1812) has been gradually, and as it were imperceptibly, changed into something very different in point of size, shape, quality, and general aspect. But though an eye-witness to the progress of that important change, and recently having made all possible inquiry, I am not able to account for it otherwise than by greater attention to crossing, rearing, and feeding. Some have alleged the dairy breed of Ayrshire have come from Holland, and others have ascribed to them an English origin. I have no doubt but a tinge of foreign blood may have come into their veins: but I am confident that the breed is chiefly indigenous, and that the principal improvement upon that breed was effected by better feeding and treatment. The Earl of Marchmont, about the year 1750, purchased from the Bishop of Durham, several cows and a bull, of Teeswater or some other English breed, of the *same brown colour*, into which the dairy stock of Ayrshire has since been changed. These were crossed with the stock of many farmers. They were of greater size than the native breeds of Scotland; and some of these having, from time to time, been carried into different parts of the county of Ayr, and being generally placed on richer pasture, and better fed than the ordinary farm

stock were at the time, they yielded a greater quantity of milk, and the farmers became eager to procure calves or crosses with them, in hope of getting similar returns from their progeny. I have not been fully satisfied as to the origin of this stranger breed; they were termed Dutch cows by some, and English cows by others. But from whatever quarter they may have come, it is from them that the brown colour, now so universal, in the Ayrshire dairy breed, has become so fashionable. Perhaps something of the other qualities of the breed may have also descended to the Ayrshire dairy cows by crossing with them. But I am not of opinion that the present stock of Ayrshire are either completely descended, or that their superior excellence has been entirely derived from these strangers. I am persuaded that they have been brought to their improved state, chiefly by better feeding and treatment. As the dairy has been the great boast of Cunningham, (the northern district of Ayrshire,) from time immemorial, the inhabitants could not fail to discover, that some of their cows yielded more milk than others. When one excelled in milking, they would look well for others of the *same shape*, and aspect, and *reject* those that were different. They would naturally rear the calves of the best milkers; in hopes of their inheriting the qualities of their dams. This, and better feeding would improve their stock, and the success would stimulate them to make still greater exertions to render their cattle better and more productive; such improvements once begun on sound principles, could not fail to lead to the most beneficial result. To procure more milk, they select the cows that they find to be most productive of milk, and gradually better her condition. By these means the stock is improved, and by experience and observation the farmers acquire more correct notions of the breed, and in what manner they can be rendered still more productive. It has been greatly more by these means, than by importing a foreign breed, that the dairy