

THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF LIVE-STOCK EXHIBITIONS.

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THE possibilities of live stock exhibitions from an educational standpoint can hardly be estimated, and they can be discussed here only in a general way. The careers of a few individuals stand out prominently in the annals of Agriculture, and, in their cases, we can arrive at a measurable appreciation of the educational value to them of such exhibitions, but no man can tell how much the rank and file of breeders and stock raisers may have been inspired by such influences, nor can any statistician estimate the value to a country of the work of men who devote a large share of their time, energy, and money to the breeding and showing of live stock. That live stock exhibitions have an exceedingly strong hold on the attention of the public is unquestioned, and if proof were required we have but to glance over the attendance roll of some of the older established ones and at the large sums of money that are yearly offered in premiums and prizes, and the enhanced estimate of their value to the public is further emphasised by the increasing interest taken in them by people of all classes and at great distance, as instanced by the world-wide renown of the shows of the Royal Agriculture Society in England, the Royal Dublin Society in Ireland, and the American Royal and International Shows in America. The very large attendance of townspeople shows that persons of all ranks recognise the necessity and desirability of being informed concerning one of the greatest industries of the world. For convenience of description, I propose to look at these exhibitions from two standpoints, viz. : (1) value to the exhibitor ; (2) value to the spectator.

(1) VALUE TO THE EXHIBITOR.

The public does not generally realise the fact that exhibitors usually add to their knowledge of animal form and management at each show to which they bring their animals. A carefully classified and well conducted live stock show will provide instruction not only for the spectator—almost equally important are the lessons taught the exhibitor himself. Most people think that a man who brings an animal into a show ring is beyond the necessity of acquiring knowledge of the selection and management of his animals, but while the best authorities on these subjects are undoubtedly almost always among exhibitors, the ranks of showmen frequently include some

inexperience and mediocrity. An exhibitor who goes to a show with the idea that he has nothing further to learn had better stay away. The educational value of a show to an exhibitor may be in fitting his animal for show, in competition in the ring, in interchange of views and opinions with other exhibitors and breeders and in an enlarged useful and sympathetic acquaintance, and he may also learn much from buyers, and have an opportunity of studying the requirements of the market or markets which he seeks to supply that would otherwise be denied to him.

Fitting for Shows.—When a man contemplates entering the show ring, whether in a local show or one of greater pretensions, he will be wise to send his stock in good condition. At some shows this requires that an animal be fattened almost to the danger point. It is necessary that meat-bearing animals should give good indications of their fitness for the block, and it is always more pleasing to look at a horse that has been well fed and cared than at one that is thin; besides, fat “covers a multitude of sins,” even in a horse. That the requirements of a show season are extremely severe on the animals submitted to it, solely owing to the stuffing process that must be undergone, no one will deny. Many very capable breeders in all parts of the world are reluctant to show upon this account, and prefer to place their reliance upon newspaper advertising to enable them to dispose profitably of their stock. However, while admitting that some animals have been ruined for breeding purposes by this excessive feeding, many have come through unscathed by reason of inherent worth and good management, and it is this latter that the observant and careful exhibitor is afforded an opportunity of studying at a show, and in the treatment that leads up to exhibition. In bringing his cattle to this prime condition (prime from the butcher’s standpoint), the exhibitor has a constant opportunity for the study of development of animal form and condition. He must calculate carefully in order to bring the herd “to edge” just at the right time, otherwise they will be “faulted,” as in poor condition or over done. He must use discretion and good judgment to force them steadily, or they will become rough, uneven, patchy; and as perfect condition is very closely dependent on the quality of the animals, it follows that long before the fitting begins the breeder must have selected the individuals in his herd that would best respond to the treatment with least danger of serious injury. As the fitting advances it will be observed whether the original judgment was correct or not, whether the animal filled out here or became a trifle rough there. Much is thus learned regarding the development of the animal during growth and fattening, and the breeder learns to select animals that will develop to the best advantage, which is, next to selection in mating, the highest achievement of his art.

Competition in the Show Ring.—When the show ring is reached, the exhibitor, if a beginner, first comes into contact with two very important factors in this educational scheme. One is the competitor.

and the other is the judge. He thus has an opportunity to compare the results of his own ideas with those of others. The best opportunity a man has to learn the weak points of animals and of his own judgment is at such a time, especially if he is defeated, and he can return home with these ideas and those of his competitors and the judge to help him. The strangers he meets, the interchange of views and the friendships and friendly rivalry established, broaden his ideas and are sources of pleasure and profit to look back upon and talk over in after life.

The Study of Markets.—At the larger shows, the exhibitor comes in contact with the men who control the market, and an interchange of ideas is therefore possible, resulting in closer connection between these two forces of production. The requirements of the market must be known and understood by the breeder before he can hope for success in his work, and here he can gain his knowledge. The highly finished harness and saddle horse in the arena gives the breeder of horses higher ideals; the exhibition of dressed carcasses at a fat stock show is always a drawing card and one that deeply concerns the exhibitor. It shows him the ideal carcass of the butcher's mind, and with it before him he can study to reconcile his own ideal of a fat animal on foot, a task possibly for him yet unthought of. This is a feature lacking for obvious reasons in many shows, but its usefulness is beyond question.

(3) VALUE TO THE SPECTATOR.

The success of a show depends mainly on a creditable exhibit of animals, and a popular, judicious and skilled arrangement of classes has much to say to this. Its success as a financial undertaking depends on the public, and no matter how good its exhibits, no exhibition can last long without a good revenue from admissions unless it has the power of the Government or of some very strong and liberal corporation or society behind it. People attend shows primarily to see things, and these are usually the animals exhibited; but some shows, and those not the least successful, have another, a lighter or society side to them where people go to see and be seen. But of the vast throngs which attend exhibitions, not all are there to amuse themselves; thousands of people make use of the opportunity to study the animals in the ring. Persons in the live stock business must have instruction in methods and ideals, and they must keep in touch with the productions of the leading breeders. In addition to those who have already a more or less complete knowledge of animals, are the young men on whom the example of an outstanding winner may be forcefully impressed. The spectator finds profit, educationally, at an exhibition of live stock, principally in three ways: (1) From the ideals presented and the inspiration given; (2) in direct instruction; and (3) in the lessons conveyed on the necessity of pure breeding.

Ideals and Inspiration.—At many exhibitions is to be seen the very cream of animal production. Even at a local show a farmer may learn much from the study of the best products of his neighbours; at the larger shows he sees stock of still better breeding and in higher condition, while at a show of national scope he will find positive inspiration. The pick of the smaller shows, the animals that have been selected by a rigid judgment as worthy to compete with the best in the land, are there pitted against each other for the final contest, and many breeders who confine their exhibits to the largest shows here submit their work to the same inspection. The student, farmer, and breeder may here see the most perfect of form and quality—animals brought to the keenest edge of condition on which no expense has been spared to bring out all that is in them. The real inspiration received here does not die out with the last flutter of the winning ribbon.

Direct Instruction.—Each live stock exhibition gives many opportunities for direct instruction, especially when it is conducted on a small scale. A feature of many small shows has come to be a talk by the judge on the relative merits of some of the more prominent animals, and it is very common at the large stock shows to see a judge discussing a prize winner with a little party of spectators. These discussions are often of the greatest benefit, for it does not always happen that the spectator at the ring side is in a position to determine accurately the relative merits of the animals in the ring, as there are nearly always a number of points that show on close inspection. A discussion by a competent and fair-minded judge almost always clears away objections and results in good feeling, a very desirable sentiment at a ring side. When occasion permits, a time set apart for formal discussion of the requirements of different breeds or of the market proves to be one of the most valuable features of a show. Such instruction will crystallise and fix the ideas already gained by observation, and will bring out many indistinct and moot points, discussion of which leads to fruitful results.

A leading educational feature that cannot be overlooked in a discussion of live stock expositions is the meeting of students in contest in stock judging. The wonderful growth of instruction in animal husbandry in colleges has had a natural outlet in such trials of strength. In such contests a student will find out more about himself and about his fund of knowledge than he could otherwise expect to do in months; he concentrates his opinions, reviews them, strengthens and fortifies those that are correct, discards those that are misleading and wrong; he learns self-possession, develops the faculty of observation and keenness of vision at a wonderfully rapid rate, and, besides, learns to express himself correctly. I may here point out that this rapid development of the educational element in animal husbandry is as much a feature of the industry at the opening of the twentieth century as the rapid evolution of breeds was characteristic of the opening of the nineteenth century. It is certainly

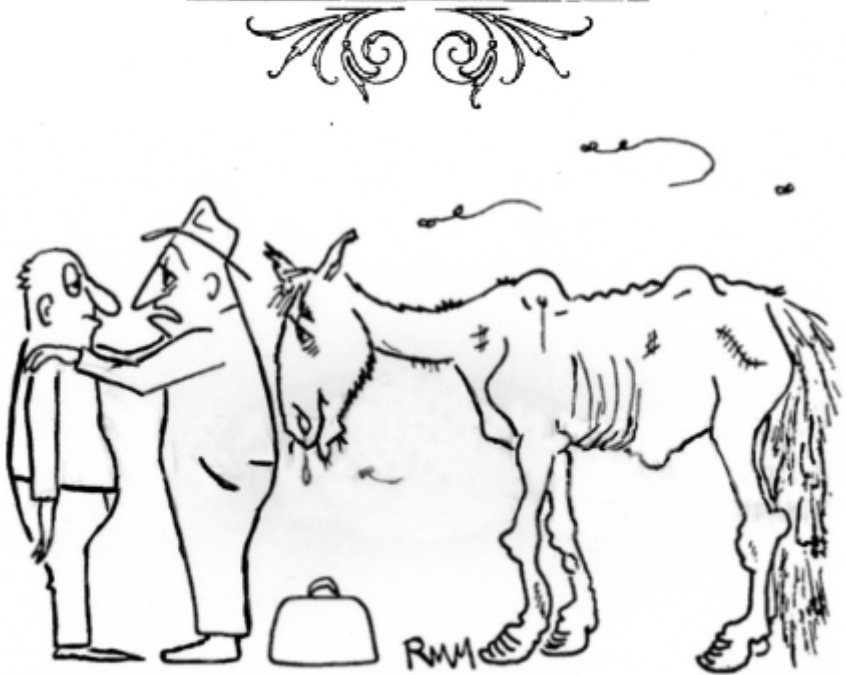
true that live stock exhibitions were very common in the past, and, doubtless, our grandfathers discussed all phases of the shows with warmth and vigour ; but this idea that there is here a real field for education is of recent development, and the systematic training of young men for a foundation in the principles of stock judging has had practical and successful application within the past fourteen years only, America being the pioneer in this branch.

The Lesson of Pure Breeding.—A man may go to a show and receive inspiration and instruction, yet go home none the better for his visit if he does not carry with him the great lesson of all such exhibitions, namely, that the champions were the results of a systematic plan of breeding, not accidental productions. The value of pure breeding is first impressed on the spectator's mind. The live stock on exhibition are not the progeny of chance-bred males ; all breeding animals should be registered or be immediately eligible for registration. This is the logical outcome of years of experience. An animal cannot be trusted to produce progeny similar in form to itself unless it is from a long line of ancestors that have been bred to an accepted standard. In producing animals for the market the male should always be pure bred. The motive for the use of a half-bred sire is usually economy in the purchase price, and there is a tradition that a half-bred is more easily kept than a pure bred, but this is not borne out by careful observation. The lesson of the show points out on every hand the overwhelming importance of pure bred sires.

In a first prize exhibitor's herd may be seen the results of years of work along definite lines. The successful breeders do not switch from one breed to another, nor work inconsistently. Almost all breeders whose work has been of original and lasting value have devoted the better part of their lives to their chosen work. If the South African farmer has a fault that can compare with his neglect to provide proper winter food and shelter for his animals, it is his shiftness and apparent carelessness in breeding. Any sort of a male is usually considered good enough. This is true of every kind of live stock from horses to chickens, and if anyone is in doubt let him look at our horses, cattle, sheep, goats and hogs, while some of the flocks of poultry that one sees are beyond description. Live stock exhibitions serve to intensify the utility of proper selection in breeding. The spectator sees there animals whose breeding for generations has been planned by one man, who has an ideal in his mind and is becoming more capable as the years go by. He notices that the herd of one man contains animals very much alike, and inquiry shows that they have been bred carefully along well defined lines, and within pretty well defined family lines, but he will also see that what in-breeding has been practised was used judiciously. On the other hand, there may be a herd that does not show the same uniformity as this one, for, although it is pure bred and contains some prize winners, it is "spotty" in breeding and lacks the uniformity of a herd bred consistently and systematically.

When the spectator thinks of his own stock at home, cross bred, mixed bred and scrubs, any kind of a male running with the droves, herds and flocks, this great lesson of the value of pure breeding is more emphatically enforced and the mind is again inspired to better work. No one forgets his first visit to a really great show. The hugeness of everything, the size of the cattle, the bigness of the hogs, the spread of back, loins and quarters of a mutton sheep, the magnificent fleece of the wool sheep, the style, action and perfect manners of the horses and the way they are turned out—these things give rise to the first impressions he receives. If one is at all a judge of stock, it does not take long to begin to look for quality and constitution, and then for breed type. When a man begins to realise that all this magnificence is the result of pure breeding, he is learning one of the greatest lessons of the show. The hope of the writer is that frequent opportunities will be given to the people of South Africa to study this lesson.

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"I hope you didn't pay too much for him, Sam. I want you to brace yourself for bad news. To begin with, he isn't a two-year-old."