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Picture

Cairns at work in 1835

Cairns Are Working Terriers

We Should Always Keep in View What Was and Is the Proper Job of This Breed

By C. BREWSTER MACPHERSON

MY

knowledge of the Highland terrier as a worker goes back some fifty years, although

for many years before that he was used by the hillmen in their pursuit of the fox and otter. Professional foxhunters were to be found all over the Highlands, who kept packs of these hardy dogs and who moved about their district in the fox-hunting season, getting free bed and board at the Moorland farms. A nondescript hound or two often went with the pack whose job it was to beat the woods, driving the outlying fox up to

ACCORDING to Mrs. Henry F. Price, Robinscroft, Riverside, Connecticut, who has secured and kindly contributed this article to the GAZETTE, a working certificate in England is granted by any Master of Foxhounds, who does it previous to arrangements with the owner. The English Kennel Club does not act in this relation. Mrs. Price also states that Mr. Macpherson has been appointed by the Cairn Terrier Club to grant certificates in the Highland districts where no M.F.H. is available. The author is a firm believer in the real working terrier.

the guns, posted above, or to ground in cairn or moss hole, where the terriers either bolted him to be shot or killed him inside. The type of terrier varied considerably, but they were all alike in their indomitable courage, hardiness and endurance.

IN my own district I knew them all, and many a day and night have I spent with them at their job, and often had occasion to admire

the pluck and hardihood of these great-hearted little fighters.

Many had ears erect. As many, or more, had them half set, like a deer-hound, which I thought lent an alert and "all there" aspect to their battle-scarred visages. Their jackets were nearly all very hard and short, very deep and dense, with an undercoat, and they were generally larger and more on the leg than those seen on the bench today.

An active, able dog, that could travel through rank heather and get quickly about

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rocks, being essential in their trade.

A silky topknot-or its constant accompaniment, a soft coat-was in great disfavor, the former always leading to the remark: "there is some cross in him," although many of such were as game as their fellows.

It may be of interest if I described a typical day's hunting of my youth. The date, let us say, was soon after daylight, about April 30.

I WOULD be anxiously awaiting at the trysting place the arrival of the Brocaire- fox-hunter – and his pack, who soon appeared with two neighboring farmers and a sporting young sheep-farmer, all with guns and followed by a couple of strong hounds and four couples terriers, on couples, except old Fraochan, which always

Picture
Donan, gray brindle, 16 lbs., which the author declares was the best type of the old terrier that he had ever seen

ran loose.

A great dog this, which I have never got out of my mind's vision! A strong terrier about 15 pounds weight, yet active and narrow enough in front; ears half set, and powerful jaw. His jacket a sort of badger color and as hard as cocoanut matting with a gray, grizzled muzzle.

The surest finder in the pack and hero of 100 fights; a Fraochan was dear to the heart of "Seumas Bann" –Fair James- a tall, handsome fellow, active as a deer, despite his 50 years, a great ally of mine and fox-hunter of all that district.

In action, Fraochan formed Seumas' reserve, and when, at some deep and difficult den, Morag, Teenack, Doran, and many

another came out with bloody nose or torn cheek, to confess defeat by some old

dog fox, which, getting into a place of vantage, had held off all attack, Seumas would say "Leag, Fraochan"-let go, Fraochan- and Fraochan, unloosed from the walking-stick beside which he had lain curled up, as if fighting was the last thing he was out for, would walk slowly to the hole, shake himself like a ferret, and as slowly disappear with hackles up on his shaggy back.

A FEW growls faintly heard in the distance, and suddenly the cairn is alive with the din of battle, while Seumas, his head as far in as he could get it, encourages his favorite to deeds of blood. Fraochan, the old warrior was a crafty fighter, and always feinted for his hold, like a boxer for his knockout. And, though I knew him seldom to get badly punished, he would change his grip like lightning from the side of the head to the

Picture
For more than 24 hours, Donan was in a cairn with his first fox. The latter had got on a ledge above the terrier. Note the fox in the foreground.

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throat, after which, save for a muffled sound of worrying, silence would reign within.

Moss hole there the terriers were soon at it. Quickly the guns get back into positions commanding the exits and before long the vixen is forced out and duly shot.

After that the cubs are killed inside, old Morag bringing out one for us to see-as she always did-but never more than one.

A great palaver then followed, and it was decided to watch out the night for the fox dog. Luckily it was dry and not extra cold, and oatcakes, cheese and whiskey having been partaken of, we got into sheltered holes and watched.

He did not come at nightfall. But at dawn one of the keepers got a view of his head over a ridge, with a grouse in his mouth, and made an end of him.

Such is the account of a successful hunt when all went well and weather was good. There is another side to the picture when tragedy takes a hand, for it is a hazardous game these little terriers play. Often, too often, when one has descended into the dark ways where "danger roofs the narrow walks of death," it is "seen again no more of man," having, in a cairn, got jammed between two rocks or, in a moss hole, fallen into some deep water hole with steep sides and perished there from drowning.

I once had a terrier; left in a cairn, crawl home on the ninth day a living skeleton. Fortunately, it survived. The head stalker at Achnacarry assured me he lost seven terriers in one season.

The terrier, too, must needs endure great hardship from weather. The Glenmazeran foxhunter, Fraser, having heard of a "den," very deep in the Monaliath, once went

out with a few of his terriers. It was a bitter April day and the wet moss "den," very deep and intricate, was very well known to me. The terriers, having done their job, came out, heated by the fight and soaked to the skin in peaty water, to meet the snow and sleet driven on a cruel northeaster.

Fraser, fearing trouble, started for home, taking one little favorite cubbing bitch "in my shirt next my bosom." He had difficulty in getting the others home-"so perished were they with wet and cold"-and, sad to say they all died except the little bitch.

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IT will be readily understood, therefore, that no terrier not possessed of exceptional strength, courage and hardiness, has a chance of standing the hardships which attend their dangerous calling, and that dog of these days differed widely from the great majority of those seen on the bench today.

If any of my readers is in doubt as to what is and what is not a cairn terrier proper, let him wander along the benches at some important show, and ask himself these questions:

"Is any one of this crowd fit to do a 20-mile day over the roughest of country? Fit to face the blinding snows and driving drift and survive the bitter cold of the watch by night? Which of these can I think of as going down into the dark places below and killing there a strong and savage foe? Could fox hunters of old have done their job with such as these?"

Picture

Vic, a small red bitch of 11 lbs. weight. She is an excellent specimen of the type of bitch that the author prefers.

If the answer is, as I fear it must be, "No," he will then ask:

"What are all these weak-jawed, silky-haired little atoms-cairns?"

And perchance a gentle voice may answer: "These are the sweetest little pets in the world."

And doubtless they are. But, oh! "*Quantum mutates ab ille Hectore.*"

What I have written is indeed no unfair description of the standardized cairn terriers. There have been a few on the bench, and champions, too, which, in appearance at least, did no discredit to their fighting race. Alas, but how few! They could be counted on the

fingers of one hand.

Our inquiring friend, as he moves on, may chance to see one or two strong, hardy customers with murder in their wicked eyes. They have strong, punishing jaws, and are guiltless of Bedlington top knot. Therefore, they are of the "Scottie" type. They are 15 pounds, or mayhap 16 pounds in weight; therefore they are far too large. There is no place for such at shows. Above their despised heads no badge of honor shines. Yet let it not be supposed there is no use for small terriers—all foxhunters used to keep one or two especially for cubs—and they were highly valued.

When the row begins below, the cubs often slip away into small places where the bigger terriers cannot get at them. Then the small

Picture

Sheila, this splendid Islander, is dark gray in color and has a gray muzzle. It is about 15 pounds in weight.

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terrier, 11 or 12 pounds in weight, has its real value. I always keep several. They are just the small ones of the litters, bred the same, as dauntless in heart and as hard in constitution as their larger brothers, and in no way to be regarded as toys.

I have written before frankly of a subject on which I feel strongly. Yet even since the writing I have had cause to hope for a brighter day, and that, like most things bright and fair, comes from the ladies themselves; for by recent posts, I have received letters from several, asking me to test their favorites for working certificates to fox. Moreover, as I write, I have before me a letter from a lady who, after describing adventures of her pack at fox and badger, tells of a sporting otter hunt, where her terriers actually accounted for the quarry which weighed 16 ½ pounds, no mean feat.

THIS is all to the good, and of good omen. "What a woman wills today, God wills

tomorrow"-and may it not be that the terrier of the cairn shall yet, again, come to his won by ways far other than I could have dreamt of it?

To those who would hasten the coming of that day, I would say "keep in view what the terrier's proper job was and is." Breed only from proved workers. Enter them young to small vermin, for this breed, above most require careful entering. Some, indeed, I have known which never "took blood" until after their second year. So if they are, as old Tom Wootton used to say, "bred to murder," don't be in a hurry to draft them, for I have known such to turn out among the best in the end. My own practice is to enter the youngsters, first in the artificial earth to rats and stoats, and when the sterner ordeal of battle comes they have no fear of trusting themselves to the dark deeps below.

There can be no better advice than that of Dandie Dinmont of old

who, descriptive of his famous terriers, said:

"For it a' depends hoo they are entered ye ken . . . I had them a' regularly entered, -first wi rottens-then wi stots and weasels and then wi the tods and brocks and noo they can fear naething that ever cam wi a hairy skin on't."

No description of the working terrier of the Highlands would be complete without some mention of what is, perhaps, the oldest branch of the clan-the Island breed.

IN old days, one might see these occasionally among the working packs of the Mainland, where it was named by the hillmen "the old Skye terrier." It was of a very distinctive type, for the most part small - 11-to 14-lb. dog - generally dark brindle, or dark gray, the later possessing a grizzled gray muzzle, the ears were erect, the face foxy, the jacket very hard and short with soft close undervest. The sort of coat which if ruffled up with the hand, at once returned to its natural lie, and

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from which water ran as from a duck's back.

Very game and hardy were they, and much used for bolting the otter from his holt on the rocky shore. Their owners liked them small, their job being not to kill, but to cause the quarry to vacate the premises by incessant harassing tactics. An old dog otter, who has not been hunted outside, will often bolt very readily. I have seen such come out almost as soon as the terrier got out of sight.

This strain of terrier has always claimed my admiration, and I unsuccessfully tried to get them recognized. They are so different from the Mainland type that no doubt it is difficult to get them their due on the bench today. If one appears it is at once turned down as "short of coat," and "wanting in Cairn character."

In truth, they differ so widely that separate classes would have to be provided for them. In appearance, they resemble a neat, small Scottish terrier, and

beyond doubt are the parent stock from which the present day "Scottie" has been evolved.

The parrot cry too often heard around the Cairn terrier benches of "Scottie type, horrible visu, away with him," seems indeed to carry with it its own condemnation, when one remembers that such probably shows but a reversion to a type most ancient of all of the terrier family.

I have had the luck to possess several – two of which – I append – photographs. I hope to find a dog, but it will prove difficult task to trace out the old strains now. Those of McDonald of Tormore, of the McDonald brothers, of the McKinnons of Kilbride, of "Waternish," have I fear, passed away forever. They were all of the same type as I have described. The pity of it!

It seems certain that, in an evil hour, the Dandie Dinmont cross was introduced in certain strains, hence, doubtless, the topknot so dear to the heart of

the showman. By request, I give a few photographs of workers, all good at their trade. ◇

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