

Some Notes on Maine Cattle

Through the efforts of Messrs. Thorndike, Sears and Prescott, proprietors of the Waldo Patent, choice blooded stock was early introduced into that section of the State. These gentlemen were wealthy land proprietors, and had a farm of one thousand acres in the town of Jackson, which they carried on as a mere pastime.

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The operations upon this "great farm" were something magnificent for the time and place, and deserve more than a passing notice. The buildings were large and expensive, food for animals was cooked by steam, some twenty-five to thirty men were employed upon the farm and in the garden,—but the whole establishment was never a paying concern, and was carried on solely for the pleasure and amusement of its proprietors. My friend, Prof. Samuel Johnson, formerly of the State College, and a native of Jackson, has kindly furnished the following account of this famous farming enterprise, which, although lengthy, will be read with interest:

"Israel Thorndike, Sen., became wealthy by his commercial transactions, and in connection with Prescott and Sears, purchased of the heirs of Gen. Knox what is known as the Waldo Patent. The title to the farm in Jackson was, however, always entirely in the Thorndike family, being purchased by I. Thorndike, Sen., and I. Thorndike, Jr. from time to time, of the first settlers, who generally obtained their titles from Gen. Knox. The farm at first contained five or six hundred acres, but additions were made to it, till in 1830 it extended two miles from the centre of the town southwardly, on both sides of the road, and contained about 1,600 acres. It was first commenced, I think, by Israel Thorndike, Sen., and the house and old barn built by him in 1815 or 1816. The house is two stories in front and three stories back, with a long L containing a large kitchen and wood-house, and in the extreme eastern end a room which John Davis, Esq., a graduate of Harvard, used for a store. This was the first store in Jackson. The house contained 15 or 16 rooms, and cost \$15,000. The bricks for the chimneys were made in the eastern part of Maine and shipped to Boston. They were then purchased by Thorndike and re-shipped to Belfast, then carted 15 miles over a very rough, hilly road to Jackson. At the death of Israel Thorndike, Sen., I. Thorndike, Jr., a graduate of Harvard, became sole owner. The Thorndikes were on the farm but a few months in the year, using it only for a summer residence.

"My memory of this farm extends back to 1824. At that time Timothy Thorndike,

Esq., of Brooks, had charge of it. There being no lack of means, the farm continued to flourish till 1835, when Israel Thorndike, Jr., became so deeply entangled in land speculations that he failed. Since that time the farm has been changing owners, and retrograding. It was evidently the intention of the Thorndikes, regardless of expense, to make this in every respect a model farm. The methods adopted were many of them English, and there were many failures. In the garden there was a well educated English gentleman, Mr. Rhienier, an old bachelor, who with his exquisite neatness and profusion of flowers was the centre of attraction for all visitors. The orchard contained about 15 acres of the choicest fruit. In the flock of sheep, numbering at one time fifteen or sixteen hundred, were to be found imported rams from Saxony, costing two or three hundred dollars each. When these sheep were troubled with foot rot, a Polish gentleman was employed to care for and doctor them. Believing that turnips might be as profitable a crop here as in England, a skilled Englishman was hired one summer who raised a very large crop. In the hog-house were about fifty swine, of different breeds, from the extremely fine-boned, delicate Chinese, up to the ponderous Berkshire and Chester. Here, too, were the best appliances known for cooking and steaming food for the swine. In the stable was the imported horse, 'The Pheasant'; and although he was fine looking and thorough bred, his progeny was a disappointment to the community. Here were imported Jacks, and quite a number of Mules

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raised by the farmers around there and sold to Thorndike when four months old. In the large poultry yard were a great variety of fowls, including domesticated wild geese, peacocks, and guinea hens. To make the whole establishment seem more foreign,—more like England,—it so happened that Mr. Timothy Thorndike was fond of fox hunting, and had a few well trained hounds. These, in the fall of the year, after the leaves fell, he would put with Mr. Pilley's of Brooks, and then the woods for miles around would for a few weeks echo and re-echo with their lengthened yelp.

"This expensive establishment served to gratify the taste of its owner, and was indirectly a benefit to the farmers around it. They could with little expense improve their breeds of cattle, and could witness the expensive experiments going on at the farm unharmed. But it is much to be regretted that with all this profusion of means so little was accomplished; that there was so little weighing and measuring; no record of facts kept. Perhaps such another opportunity for exact experiment may not occur again in this State during this century. For twenty years money was lavished upon this farm, and the result seemed to be of little permanent value. Go into the piggery and ask Mr. Gilman how much pork a bushel of potatoes or a bushel of corn would make, or the relative value of the several breeds of swine, or how much more nutritious cooked food is than uncooked, for swine, and he would know little about it. And so it was all through the various departments. They could only give opinions, guesses—not figures, facts. Thus this great outlay continued, almost through one generation—was mainly lost because there was not connected with the estate one enquirer after truth who could make a record of what he learned.

"Timothy Thorndike, Esq., was a man of excellent judgment and good sense. Many years after he left the farm he said, while conversing with him about stock, that large breeds of cattle required so large an amount of nutritious food to keep them up that he doubted if they were any more profitable than smaller breeds, or so well adapted to the general wants of this State.

"Israel Thorndike, Jr., would come from Boston annually, with his family, his rich coach and his beautiful span of dappled bays, and receive in the halls of his noble

mansion many distinguished guests. Daniel Webster spent a short time there one summer, and angled in the farm brook. But now, how changed! The beautiful garden, the piggery and the poultry yard, all gone! The orchard but a remnant. The buildings in a most dilapidated state. The old lead aqueduct, that brought spring water a half a mile to the buildings, taken out and sold. The large lightning rods attached to the barn and house, and put up in accordance with Franklin's most approved plan, torn down and sold for old iron. It seems like some great banquet hall deserted."

The first bull introduced by them was got by the imported bull Denton. He was a red-grizzle in color, and according to the statement of Mr. Henry Butman, of Gardiner, "was confessedly the finest bull ever introduced into eastern Maine." The next was a bull known as "Sore-chops," a pure blood Shorthorn, imported by Theodore Lyman, of Boston, from the herd of the celebrated English breeder, Mr. Witherell, of Kirkly, Leicestershire. This was imported about the year 1832. He was mostly red, and his stock was celebrated for oxen rather than for cows—though the latter were not complained of. At that time, however, when butter and cheese sold slowly, and large, well matched oxen were in great demand for the woods, the milking qualities of cows were not

much regarded. The oxen were majestic and stately, and would sell for from one-fourth to one-third more in price than other oxen of the same girth, on account of their beauty. But somehow his stock was not at first duly appreciated by the farmers in that section, and after a few years' service he was sold, and stood in towns in Penobscot county. He was gone some two years, and meanwhile his stock had proved so good that he was afterwards bought back by Timothy Thorndike, Esq., agent of the proprietors, and died upon the farm. His stock became disseminated all over Waldo and Penobscot counties, and formed the basis of the best cattle in those districts. This bull had a scrofulous, never-healing sore on his under jaw, and always went by the name of "Sore-chops." Another bull placed upon this large farm, was a full blood Hereford, obtained from the Vaughan farm in Hallowell about 1835. The oxen from this bull were stout and lusty, and the cows large and fair. He was afterwards sold to Dea. Joseph Rich of Jackson. Mr. Samuel Johnson, writing concerning this stock in 1872, said: "The stock of this bull was very celebrated in all that region, almost as much so as that of 'Sore-chops;' and so strongly marked was it, that even now his white-faced descen-

dants may possibly be found in some of the herds in that vicinity. The grade Herefords made very fine looking, salable oxen, and were excellent for beef." In addition to these animals, the proprietors of the "Great Farm" made a direct importation of some Dutch or Holstein cattle, consisting of a bull and two or three cows: one of the cows dropping a bull calf either on her passage or soon after landing at Boston. These cows were noted as milkers, though the milk was not rich in quality: but the amount given was so great that the breed went by the name of "Fill-pail," in all that section. As the value of this breed was not then known, the bull was kept but a few years, when he was castrated. "But even in the few years he was kept," writes Mr. Johnson, "he made his mark—starting a race of black, and black and white cattle, that had quite an influence upon the herds in that vicinity for many years. This Holstein stag, named 'Goldin,' was long, bony and muscular, and on being put to work his strength was Sampson-like, almost miraculous. There was such a singular mixture of black and white in his color, that he was called blue. The grade Shorthorn that worked with him girted over seven feet, yet his office seemed rather to be that of an attendant to carry the long end of the yoke. For years it was 'Gen.' Witham's business

to feed and drive this yoke of cattle, and he was as proud as a prince of his position. At the barn haulings, the first call was always on Gen. Witham for the farm team, the old blue stag and his mate being put next to the building. Then we boys would gather round, entirely confident that when Gen. Witham swung his white oak goad, saying, 'haw Goldin here,' and the stag bending forward to the bow began to strain his powerful muscles, the building would tremble and move. Boyish fancy probably clothed Goldin with powers that did not belong to him, but I fully believe that he was the most powerful ox we ever had in that region. Though some of the cows from this strain of Dutch blood were very good, so good that it was a disputed point which was best, these or the Shorthorns, yet it was chiefly valuable for oxen. I can myself recollect two yokes very remarkable for strength. One of these logged at Lake Baskahegan in 1834, and were called by those who knew them, the strongest yoke of oxen on the Penobscot." In 1834 Israel Thorndike, Esq., also introduced a full blood Devon bull, which was procured from the celebrated Patterson herd of Baltimore, Md.