

*Observations and Facts concerning the Breed of Horses in
Scotland, in Ancient Times.*

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THE Caledonians, Picts, and Saxons, had each a word in their languages, as a name for this noble animal; and I am informed that the Gaelic abounds in a variety of names for the different kinds of horses, mares, and geldings. It seems probable, that, among these ancient nations, horses were chiefly used by their warlike leaders; for a *Ryder* signifies the same as a knight †.

When we come to have written records in Scotland, the language used by the clergy was Latin; horses therefore occur under many barbarous appellations, as *Cuballa*, *Averia*, *Pullami*, *Palfredi*, *Dextrarii*,

* See Fordun.

† *Eques*, *Chevalier*, *Ryder*.

trarii, and *Gradarii*, denoting their various uses, either in husbandry, war, hunting, or travelling.

The most ancient evidence * that I have yet discovered relative to breeding horses in Scotland, is a grant by Gilbert de Umfraville, before the year 1200, to the monks of Kelso, of the tenth of the foals bred in his forest and studds. From which we learn, that such great Barons as he were very attentive to this article; that horses were bred by being let loose in the forest, where the foals followed their dams, being marked with their owner's name, till they were three years old; and were then taken up to be broke. These great men had also studds, called *Harrus* in the ancient writings, over which grooms and servants were appointed. The favourite horses were put into inclosures, called in Scotland, Parks, near the Baron's castle.

This taste for breeding horses became general soon after the 1200; because the exportation of them to England became a profitable branch of commerce, and was carried on by men of the highest rank. We have several instances of this in Rymer's *Foedera* †. In 1359, Thomas Murray Dominus de Bothwell, Panetarius Scotiae, and Alan, second son of William fifth Lord Erskine, obtained a passport to come into England with horses for sale; and the grooms and servants of the Earl of Marr, obtained the like, for coming into England in the year 1361, with a full bred war horse, and two smaller sized horses.

This trade, however, of exporting horses, was soon perceived to be disadvantageous to the state, and restraint was laid upon it by a statute of David Bruce ‡, in 1369, imposing a duty of one sixth part

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* Chart. of Kelso.

† Rymer's *Foedera*, tom. vi.

‡ Statuta Davidis II. cap. 49.

of the value on every horse carried out of the kingdom; perhaps the reason of this might be, a mortality which had happened among the horses and cattle some time before*.

This prohibition was not strictly executed; for licences were obtained from the Sovereign, dispensing with the statute.

James I. a politic prince, finding that the trade in horses was an advantage to the country, if properly regulated, departed from the statute of David, and allowed horses to be exported, providing they were three years old †, when they were ready for use; and we suppose, to induce the owners to pick out the best for their own work, as at that age the nature and temper of the horse would be more certainly discovered.

These regulations indicate, that the Scottish breed of horses was held in great request, and other nations as well as England fought after them; for a total prohibition was enacted by the legislature in 1567 ‡.

Æneas Sylvius, the Pope's Nuncio, who was in Scotland in the reigns of James I. and II. § describes our horses to be mostly small sized pacers; a few of them reserved for stallions; the rest gelded; that they were never dressed by brush or comb, nor broke to, nor used with a bridle. We are informed by some English statutes ||, that the stallions were 14 hands and the mares 15 hands high, and allowed to be imported into England for a breed.

The

* Fordun.

† Parl. 1567, cap. 22.

‡ Edwardi VI.

§ Parl. 1414, cap. 31. Sken's edition.

¶ Æn. Sylv. Opera, editio fol. p. 4.

The breed of horses remained unimproved till James II. brought stallions and mares from Hungary, as our historian Bece tells us, to mend the breed: Probably James II. procured these more easily by his connection with Segismund Duke of Austria, married to his sister. We believe such horses would mend the breed of saddle horses, but not raise the size. The size of horses was more studied in the next reign. The two younger sons of James II. viz. the Duke of Albany, and John Earl of Marr, as Pitfcottie informs*, were great admirers of what he calls Great horses; that is, as I conjecture, horses for war, and for tournaments. These princes took great delight in these horses and mares, whereof the offspring might flourish.

The taste still prevailed during the reign of James IV. who was much given to tilts and tournaments, and feats of horsemanship. He sent his grooms to Spain, and brought home twelve horses and mares; likewise to Poland, in 1509 †. Lewis XII. of France sent a present to the King of Scotland, of the best French horses; in return for which, James sent four of the most choice amblers, which, in his letter he says, were proper for running and hunting; and promises to send more and better ones, when he could get them.

James IV. promoted more the race of swift horses, than of great horses; for he was accustomed to make frequent speedy circuits through his dominions: One instance is told us by Lesley ‡, made from Stirling, by Perth and Aberdeen, to Elgin, a distance of 150 measured English miles, in one day; which, even supposing relays of horses, shows the fleet horses he used in this excursion.

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* Pitfcottie, edition 1778, p. 115.

† Epistolæ Regum Scotorum, Epist. 58.

‡ Lesley, p. 331.

James V. went a step farther, for he applied himself to improving the breed of all kinds of useful horses. He procured a law for raising the size of the native breed of horses in Scotland, all manner of persons being enjoined * to plenish their studds with studd mares and great stallions.

This law extends the breeding horses to all ranks, which formerly had been confined to the nobility and gentry. After this period, a stronger and more weighty breed was introduced: For, James V. writes † a letter to Christian III. King of Denmark, and to Gustavus King of Sweden, for horses, and sent his groom, Charles Murray, to purchase them. This was in 1539, about four years after the above law was made; at the same time, he signified that he wanted the most approved horsemen or riders.

In the reign of this prince, races and horse courting were very much in fashion among all ranks, which are most humorously described by Sir David Lindsay ‡.

Henry VIII. of England §, in 1540, sent a present by Sir Ralph Sadler, his ambaffador to our king, Spanish Jennets, Barbary horses, besides some English geldings; they are described to have been small, but well proportioned. These foreign horses contributed to mend the shape of our horses, chiefly for the faddle, hunting, and racing.

It would seem, that, from 1540, during the reign of Mary Queen
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* Parl. 1535, cap. 21. Black Acts.

† Epistolae Regum, 54. and 55.

‡ Sir David Lindsay's works, edit. Edinburg. 1776, p. 65. Complaint.

§ Sadler's Letters, edition 1720, p. 51.

of Scots, the breed had been greatly improved; for the French, who remained long in the country at that time, perceiving the good qualities of our horses, when they quitted Scotland, not only carried many of them away with them, but commissioned many more, which were accordingly sent off for Bourdeaux, in 1565 and 1566; so that Regent Murray, in the first parliament held by him, in 1567 *, discharged the exportation of any kind of horses whatever, to any part beyond seas, under forfeiture of ship and cargo, whether by strangers or natives.

This total prohibition of the export of horses, multiplied them to such a degree, that in James VI's reign †, a restraint was laid upon keeping too many of them. The breed at that time was small, and there were many jockies and horse dealers, who carried on a great trade. In the subsequent reign ‡, it is surprising what numbers of horses were forced out for the public service, during the civil commotions, from every quarter of the kingdom.

HAVING given an account of what thus occurred concerning the breeding of horses, I shall proceed to mention the other purposes they were used for, and begin with husbandry.

So far as I can discover, they were never yoked in the plough; for we find the division of land refers always to ploughing by oxen; and in the ancient statute of Alexander II. *anno* 1214 §, containing instructions concerning agriculture, and regulating the farmers stocking, there is not the least mention of horses being used for ploughing.

* Parl. 1567, cap. 22.

† Parl. 1567, cap. 122.

‡ Repealed Acts.

§ Statuta Alexandri, cap. 1.

ing.—Further, in the numberless grants of pasturages, horses bear a very small proportion; the greatest number in any grant I have seen did not exceed six. The uses the farmers made of them, was carrying in their corns to the barn yard, to the mill, and to the market. This is also confirmed by the awkward custom of yoking horses by the tail, and the driver of harrows walking backward, with his face directly turned to the horse which he led.

Another obvious use for horses was travelling; but this was very considerable, considering the vast number of attendants used on these occasions, by our kings, great men, clergy, pilgrims, and merchants. Rymer's Foedra affords us proof of this, by the passports given for travellers. A few instances will suffice.

1342, David Bruce travelled with His Queen with	40 Attendants on horseback, 60 Ditto.
1340 Certain ambassadors from Scot- land had	200 Ditto.
1370 Alexander Lesley	70 Ditto.
1368 The Earl of Marr Countess of Douglas	30 Ditto. 20 Ditto.
Three Merchants	10 Ditto.

Numbers of horses were employed in the public service for dispatching couriers; in this service many horses were killed, as appears by the old Chamberlain accounts*, 1329, till 1482, when there was a law made erecting a public post †, for forwarding orders from the King and Council; the expences to be defrayed out of the treasury.

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* Chamberlain's Accounts, 1330.

† Parliament 1482.

The last, and indeed the chief use and employment of horses, which I shall mention, was for war, and inroads, and assistance to the allies of Scotland abroad. In this article, one would have thought that the whole horses of Scotland had been employed. To form some notion of this, we must notice, that, by an ancient statute of William the Lyon*, in 1214, every subject in Scotland who possessed property in lands or moveable goods, landed men, and burghesses, was to keep at least one horse; for, by that statute every landed man, having L. 15 value in land, or 40 merks in moveables, was ordered to appear at the rendezvous, furnished with a horse. The inhabitants of burghs, by the by-laws of their corporation, obliged every burghess to have a horse, value 20 shillings, *anno* 1284 †, in their stable ready for public service: No wonder then, such numbers of horses were in our armies. The whole army was sometimes mounted on horseback ‡. Randolph, Earl of Murray and Douglas, made an incursion, 1327, into England, in Robert Bruce's reign, with 20,000 horse. There were 3000 fighting men on horseback at Halydoonhill. Froissard, who was present in that incursion in the time of Robert Bruce, describes the whole army to be mounted on horseback; the knights and squires on couriers, and the peasants on small horses: And there is a very accurate disquisition into the numbers of horse at Halydoonhill, in the Appendix to Sir David Dalrymple's Annals of Scotland.

The statute of William the Lyon must have collected vast numbers of horses together; for, as the whole lands of Scotland were then valued, the proprietors of land alone would, in the above proportion, have amounted to the full number mentioned by Froissard.

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* Statuta Willelmi, cap. 23.

† Statuta Gilotae, cap. 18.

‡ Froissard, tom. i. p. 16.

The Scots were fond of the rendezvous, in hopes of plunder; besides maintenance in going to, and coming from the army, during which they were entitled to free quarters. Our subsequent statutes and acts of parliament restrain the number of horses; and, in the reign of James V. the numbers were then much reduced.

It is somewhat difficult to account for the maintenance of such numbers of horses, as were always traversing the country; but the wonder ceases, when we discover that it was a practice among the great to quarter their horses upon the farmers, the religious houses, and the parochial clergy*; and, when passing through the country with their retinues, forced their quarters, on pretence of being entitled to purveyance, by being in the King's service; this grievance arose to such a height, that it was restrained by many laws.

The practice of shoeing horses was not universal; few of the work horses, as appears from leges Malcolmi, and an act 1487, being shod, though about that time it became more common to shoe riding horses; for we have a regulation that makes the smith who pricked the horse liable to furnish another till the cure was performed, or, if the horse died, to pay his value †. This law was procured by the Duke of Albany, and his brother the Earl of Marr, 1481.

In the reign of James IV. when tilts and tournaments were much in fashion, foreign grooms were brought from Denmark ‡; and James V. rewarded his master of horse with an extensive grant of lands.

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* Statuta Davidis II. cap. 43.

† Parl. 1481, cap. 79. Skeen's edit.

‡ Charta Jacobi V. &c.

It is needless to mention the accoutrements of war horses, which are minutely described in Anderfon's Diplomata Scotiae; but I shall only notice, that the price* given by Regent Randolph Earl of Murray, in 1329, was 100 *solidi*, equal to L. 15 Sterling of our money, for his palfrey. And two saddle-covers L. 20, which is L. 60 Sterling. Two pack-saddles, with girths and brechems, 4s. 6d. or, of our money, 13s. 6d.

It is almost impossible to ascertain with any certainty the prices of horses, because we are nowise certain of the kind of horses that are valued.

1283, The burgeses horse was	-	-	L. 1	0	0
1329, A courier's horse	-	-	0	5	0
1424, A colt, and horses above the age of three years	0	13	4		

N.B.

An Account

* Chamberlain's Accounts.