

**THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF  
JUDGING  
STOCK: ITS FAULTS  
AND THEIR REMEDY**

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The Present System of Judging Stock: Its Faults and Their Remedy by Alexander Bruce

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**ALEXANDER BRUCE**

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THE  
PRESENT SYSTEM  
OF  
JUDGING STOCK:

ITS FAULTS AND THEIR REMEDY.

WITH

FULL DESCRIPTION OF THE DIFFERENT POINTS OF SHORTHORN  
CATTLE.

BY

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Chief Inspector of Stock for New South Wales.

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IN presenting the following remarks upon the important subject of Judging Stock at Exhibitions, I feel the utmost deference for the practical knowledge of our stockowners, and would not venture to disagree, as I am aware I will do with many of them, were it not that the subject has been a matter of long and special study to me, to a degree far exceeding that which they can have bestowed upon it.

Having before us the fact that, under the present system of judging, errors are of very frequent occurrence, that there is little or no prospect of a settlement of the wide divergence of opinion which now prevails among acknowledged Judges as to the value of the different points and qualities of stock, and that little or no real teaching is being given on these points at our Exhibitions; and believing, as I do, that until all descriptions of stock are judged by points, these evils will never be remedied,—I make no apology for this attempt to ventilate the question, affecting as it does in no indirect way the progress of the great Pastoral interest of the Australian Colonies.

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## THE JUDGING OF LIVE STOCK.

## I.—FAULTS OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM.

1. *It leads to erroneous Awards.*—This it does from three causes.

- (1.) Through a want of ability on the part of the judges.
- (2.) Through the hurried manner in which they judge.
- (3.) Through prejudice on their part for, or against, particular breeds, or strains of blood, and through over or under valuing particular points in the stock.

The *first* cause is, up to a certain extent, at the larger shows at least, of comparatively rare occurrence, but oftener than is generally allowed; for, when the entries are numerous, and the exhibits nearly on a par—some excelling in one point but defective in another—it not unfrequently happens that judges are led, by the present "rule of thumb" system, to commit palpable mistakes. For example, cattle are being shown in a class, some of which are high in "quality" but inferior in "form;" others, again, are good in some points of "form" but defective in others, while some are good in both "quality" and "form," but defective in "vigour" and "size." The judge is, of course, anxious to act fairly to the exhibitors, and sets about summing up and balancing in his mind the good and bad qualities or points of the several exhibits, in order to arrive at a correct decision; and any one can see that this process of mental calculation stands a very poor chance of leading to a correct decision under the perplexing circumstances in which the judges are placed. In fact, the decisions of all but the very best judges are, in such cases, little better than good guesses. If, again, this be true as regards the judges individually, it can easily be seen how very much worse the case is as regards the judges collectively; and how much more difficult it is for them—if they do not set down the marks for the value of the different points in black and white—to arrive at correct and unanimous decisions, where the exhibits are of nearly equal but of diverse merit. There are generally three judges acting in a class, and it is no uncommon thing, at first, at least, to find them all holding different opinions as to the merits of the several exhibits, and each dwelling on the excellences of the



and the reasons for their decisions thus given, this class of exhibitors, who are now discontented, would be satisfied that the judges had acted fairly, and would make no complaint. The present system of judging is therefore unsatisfactory, as it does nothing towards allaying this needless discontent.

3. *It fails to direct breeders, who are looking for stock to improve their herds in particular points, where animals high in these points can be found.*—Were the judges to state in what particular points the prize and commended animals excel the others, an authoritative record of these points would be created, to which breeders would turn when in quest of stock possessed of certain points of particular excellence, and thus save themselves a great deal of trouble and expense in visiting the different herds to look for animals high in the qualities they desire to exgraft on, or increase in their stock; while they would at the same time be put on their guard against any defects these prize animals might have, through their shortcomings, as well as their excellences, being noticed by the judges. If this record were once established, breeders would be enabled to see how even the far back progenitors of stock, which they were inclined to purchase, stood in regard to every point of any importance. The present system of judging gives no such information, and therefore fails in this most important respect.

4. *It fails to afford those who are anxious to acquire it, a knowledge of the excellences and defects of Stock, and therefore does little or nothing to advance this most important branch of Agriculture.*—If the judges of stock at the principal shows were to give the reasons for the decisions at which they arrive—as they ought to do—these reasons would be published with the lists of prizes in the daily papers the day after the stock were judged, and visitors, going round the stalls with the papers in their hands, would be able to see why one animal was placed before the other, and thus learn more in the course of *one day's* attendance at a show than they now do in *ten years* under the present system of judging. In this respect also, the existing system is a failure, and ought to be altered; for one of the principal objects of shows is the dissemination of information; and every endeavour should be made to render them thoroughly educational.

The fact is that our shows now scarcely confer one tithe of the benefit they ought to do, and public opinion is frequently misdirected, while not an exhibition passes but a great deal of dissatisfaction is caused to exhibitors and the public, both through the want of information from the judges and erroneous awards. As regards the educational element, again—the great object for which shows were established—these exhibitions are every whit as wanting as they were twenty years ago; and it surely cannot be the case, that every institution in the kingdom is to improve and progress, and agricultural exhibitions stand still. It is, no doubt, questionable whether the remedy

here proposed be the right one; but its proposal, if entertained and discussed at all, must do good in calling attention to the matter; and, if it does so, the object of the writer will be served.

## II.—THE REMEDY—THE POINT SYSTEM.

1.—*Mode of its initiation.*—The remedy for all this would be to judge the stock by points; and that mode of judging might be initiated by adopting some such course as the following:—

The opinion of breeders throughout the colonies should be taken, as to the points which should be adopted for the different sorts of stock and the relative values of these points. With this view the Councils and Committees of the leading Agricultural Societies in these colonies should prepare and print tentative award papers for the several breeds of stock in something like the form that will be afterwards given in this paper, and should send them round to the different Local Agricultural Associations for consideration and report by their members. In this way the opinion of every judge worth having would be obtained; and when they were, the Reports of the different Local Associations could be gone through by the Councils and Committees of the principal Societies, and the points and their values fixed in accordance with these opinions. After that, again, a joint Committee might be appointed by the principal Societies, to consider the scales of points and their relative values thus fixed upon, and agree on a general scale for the colonies. Both correctness and uniformity would thus be secured, and there could be no cavilling at the points fixed upon, or the values given them, as they would be the result of the collective wisdom of all the best judges in all the colonies.

The course here recommended would take a little time and trouble, and would no doubt create considerable discussion as to what the points ought to be, and what values should be placed upon them; but this would all do good, for there is no subject on which breeders and owners require more to obtain correct information than on this, nor one the discussion of which would tend more to the general improvement of stock and the development of their most valuable points. If the principal Societies would agree to this mode of judging, and some such course as that here suggested for initiating it were followed, the system might be carried into effect in the course of twelve months, and the labour could not possibly be better bestowed.

2. *The advantages of the point system are, among others, the following:—*

- (1.) With ordinarily competent judges, *it insures correct and, of course, uniform awards.*
- (2.) It affords the most ample information with respect to the exhibits and their points—the award papers forming exhaustive

and, at the same time, very concise reports as to their good and bad qualities.

- (3.) It is in a high degree educational, as the reasons are given for all the decisions, thereby affording those who attend the shows for the purpose of acquiring a correct knowledge of stock, the best possible opportunity of doing so.

To show that this system possesses the *first advantage* claimed for it—correct and uniform awards—and to illustrate the mode of carrying it out, we will suppose that a scale of points has been fixed upon in the manner suggested, for all the colonies, that award papers have been prepared like those given in Appendix A hereto, and that the judges have commenced their duties in a class of ten exhibits. The first thing they would do (as they could not be expected to take the points of all the animals in the class), would be to send back, say the six possessed of the least merit, to their stalls, including, of course, all those which were very defective in any one material quality or point, or in vigour or size, and draw up together in a line the four head left in the ring, which, for convenience sake, we will suppose are numbers 1 to 4, inclusive of their class. Then, instead of attempting to give one animal after the other the whole marks which they consider it should receive for the several points, the judges should take each of the different points, one after the other, see how the several animals in the class stand in regard to it, and allot the cattle their proper number of marks for the point. To make this more plain, we will suppose that the judges begin by examining the four animals in regard to the first group of points, "general style and carriage," "colour," and "bone," and that they find No. 3 the best in that group. They then settle among themselves how far that exhibit is from perfection, as regards the group of points, referred to, and allot it the proper number of marks in accordance with the authorized scale of points. They would then in the same manner agree as to the animal next best in this group, say exhibit No. 2, and allot it its proper number of points, bearing in mind the number given to exhibit No. 3; and so on till all the four exhibits received their marks for the *first* group of points. The same course would then be followed with regard to the *second* group, "hair and touch," "handle," and "evenness of flesh and fat;" and so on with all the groups in succession, until they were completed, when the numbers would be summed up, and the animals with the highest number of marks would, of course, be placed first.

In pointing the exhibits, the judges could arrange among themselves either that one of their number should take the lead throughout in calling the number of marks to be allotted to the different animals for the various groups, or they might lead in turn; or the system followed at Philadelphia could be adopted—each judge could act independently, put down his marks without referring to his fellow judges, and give in his award paper to the Exhibition Committee, who would