

The Cattle Trade and Agrarian Change on the Eve of the Railway Age

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I

FARMING practices varied considerably from area to area in the century after 1750; the pace differed at which new techniques and crop rotations were adopted and adapted to local conditions. The type of farming which developed in a particular locality and the way in which farmers responded to available agricultural improvements must have depended to some extent on proximity to the growing urban markets, which encouraged the production of certain products. The degree of specialization was determined by the transport facilities available, the time taken to reach the market, and the marketing life of the product. In a pre-steam era major towns made an impact on farming in their immediate vicinity by encouraging the production of perishable commodities, especially vegetables, soft fruit, and milk, and the finishing sections of the meat trades. Supplies of commodities with a longer marketing life, such as cereals, cheese, and livestock moved on the hoof, were brought from more distant supply areas. In this way the urban markets were linked with distant farming areas. London's markets had long enjoyed, for instance, Cheshire and Derbyshire cheese, Yorkshire and Irish hams, while Scotland and the northern counties sent cattle south to be finished and sold as fatstock at Smithfield. That is, the effects of location and proximity to the market on agricultural production were probably much greater than they are today, but were continually being altered by changes in methods of transport and food preparation for marketing.

The crucial factor in this question of proximity to the market was time, the time taken to cover a certain distance by different methods of transport, and the effects of this on the product being carried. Clearly the problems of transporting live animals, dead meat, milk, or butter were each quite different, involving different time-scales. A change or improvement either in transport or in the marketing life of a product could affect the period available to reach the consumer, and thereby alter the relationship of the farmer to his market: similarly with changes in the market itself—its type and location for instance—as the result of urban growth. In turn, improvements in farming techniques which the farmer could introduce probably influenced his response to that market. Transport, markets, and agricultural improvements interacted on each other. This appears to have been particularly a feature of the decades following the Napoleonic Wars when significant developments took place in all three. Some analysis is attempted here of cattle-farming and the cattle trades in the north-eastern counties and Yorkshire during this period in order to throw some light on the nature of this interaction.

II

The growth of new urban markets had two major effects on the cattle trades: it challenged the established pattern of the internal and coastwise movement of livestock focused on the London market,¹ and it altered the balance between cereal and pastoral farming in favour of the latter near the towns. Adam Smith had already noticed the latter. He suggested that the relative values of bread and butcher's meat were different at different stages of agrarian development. He took as an example the trade in Scots cattle with England:

It is not more than a century ago, that in many parts of the Highlands of Scotland, butcher's meat was as cheap or cheaper than even bread made of oat-meal. The Union opened the market of England to the Highland cattle. Their ordinary price, at present, is about three times greater than at the beginning of the century, and the rents of many Highland estates have been tripled and quadrupled in the same time. . .

This equality, however, between the rent and profit of grass and those of corn; of the land of which the immediate produce is food for cattle, and of that of which the immediate produce is food for man, must be understood to take place only through the greater part of the improved lands of a great country. In some particular local situations it is quite otherwise, and the rent and profit of grass are much superior to what can be made by corn.

Thus, in the neighbourhood of a great town, the demand for milk, and for forage to horses, frequently contribute, together with the high price of butcher's meat, to raise the value of grass above what may be called its natural proportion to that of corn. . .

But where there is no local advantage of this kind, the rent and profit of corn, or whatever else is the common vegetable food of the people, must naturally regulate, upon the land which is fit for producing it, the rent and profit of pasture.²

He linked the adjustments made between arable and pastoral farming to the growth of an urban market, and noticed particularly what might be called the regional balance of the cattle trade, whereby areas remote from a large urban market specialized in stock-rearing, as in parts of Scotland, Wales, and England, and sometimes in butter and cheese-making. Other districts, nearer an urban market, were more interested in fattening and finishing animals for the retail meat market as well as in dairying.

It must have been in the decades following the defeat of Napoleon that the really major adjustments of the kind Smith was commenting upon took place in

¹ G. E. Fussell and C. Goodman, 'Eighteenth-century Traffic in Livestock', *Econ. Hist.*, supplement to *Econ. Jnl.*, III, no. 2, 1936, pp. 214-36; C. Skeel, 'The Cattle Trade between Wales and England from the 15th to the 19th centuries', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, IX, 1926, pp. 138 ff.

² A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I, World's Classics edition, 1904, pp. 169-71.

arable and pastoral farming. Our knowledge of how farmers approached the problems that faced them after 1815 is still rather impressionistic. The prize essays published by the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* in the 1840's and subsequent decades are invaluable for observers' assessments of the agricultural changes that had taken place county by county over the previous thirty or forty years. We are still left to guess too much, however, of how farmers took their decisions to make changes in their farming systems, why, and in response to what stimuli. Ernle regarded this period as a farmer's depression from the end of the Napoleonic Wars to the 1830's, a period of falling prices with costs remaining at a higher level.¹ Adams dated what he calls "any decided advance" in farming until after 1837.² Did this period of readjustment last too long? This picture has since been somewhat modified by a greater emphasis on some rise in the price levels for cereals from 1827 to 1832, and again from 1836 to 1842.³ Moreover, meat prices may have fallen less dramatically than cereal prices after 1815, and remained at a higher level than was experienced before the wars.⁴

The post-1815 period depression of agricultural prices, in comparison with the artificially high prices during the war years, could be termed a period of experimentation. Greater attention was generally paid to cereal growing in mixed farming systems to overcome the problems caused by the lower levels of cereal prices, and to take advantage of the growth in demand for meat products. The breeding, for instance, of improved shorthorn cattle adapted to a mixed farming system, yielding both milk and good quality meat, was probably encouraged by such a situation, and was eventually to revolutionize the livestock trades. But the emphasis placed by both contemporary observers and historians on the new courses and crops with their temporary leys and roots has probably overshadowed what had been happening since the end of the eighteenth century to grasslands and meadows and to the cattle raised on them. The many parliamentary enquiries into the state of agriculture during the depression took little evidence on stock-rearing until well into the 1830's, whereas in some areas changes in the balance between pasture and arable had begun long before this.

This is a complicated story. By the end of the eighteenth century there was already an increasing English dependence on imports of Irish beef, pork, dairy products, and Scots-bred animals. The survey made by Deane and Cole led them to the conclusion that the home supply of beef "failed to keep pace with the growth of population" in the second half of the eighteenth century and still more after 1800.⁵ During the French Wars in particular they suggest "a big increase in the output of grain was achieved only by bringing more land under the plough at the expense of the nation's meat supply."⁶ John has disputed this, although he has tended to read

¹ Lord Ernle, *English Farming, Past and Present*, 6th edn, 1961, esp. pp. 316-31.

² L. P. Adams, *Agricultural Depression and Farm Relief in England, 1813-1852*, 1932, p. 113.

³ A. D. Gayer, W. W. Rostow, and A. J. Schwartz, *The Growth and Fluctuation of the British Economy, 1790-1850*, I, 1953, p. 234.

⁴ J. D. Chambers and G. E. Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution, 1750-1880*, 1966, pp. 108-28.

⁵ P. Deane and W. A. Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688-1959*, 2nd edn, 1967, p. 74. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Deane and Cole's comments on beef supplies as though they were referring to all livestock.¹ From the last half of the eighteenth century there must have been increasing pressure on supplies of stock, both sheep and cattle.

III

It is from Marshall's study of Yorkshire² and the comments of later agricultural essayists that one begins to understand the complexities of introducing farm improvements. There remained, of course, marked differences in farming practices from one area to another within a region, depending on soil and climatic conditions, on water supplies, transport facilities, and proximity to markets. The attempts to introduce the new farming systems caused both optimism and pessimism in agriculture for more than half a century. Marshall, for instance, succinctly explained the nature of the revolution in farming practice in the Vale of Pickering as being principally a matter of changing old arable lands to grass, and old pasture lands to arable. In some areas the struggle to produce wheat in a rotation with roots on badly drained soil was given up in favour of grassland for feeding cattle, especially in the Yorkshire Dales: in others the old grasslands were ploughed for wheat more successfully, and again there were other areas where the traditional rearing of leanstock for long journeys to markets as far away as London was replaced by fatstock rearing and dairy herds for markets within the region.

Marshall, with his keen observation of the demands being made on the farmer, foresaw some of the difficulties and disappointments the switch to a more mixed system of farming could cause. In his analysis of the Vale of Pickering, which he knew particularly well, he pointed out that the "comparative values" of land—and this is his emphasis—had been inverted since enclosure.³ The old common land now enclosed and laid down to grass was many times—Marshall suggested five times—the value of the old meadowland which had hitherto been regarded as the most valuable property. It was in the management of this new grassland in areas where grazing predominated that Marshall understood the problems or variety of options open to the farmer, which might or might not be disastrous. In a mixed farming system where the herbage formed part of a regular rotation, he suggested that it should simply be regarded as an arable crop. In contrast to this, in the areas of new grassland there was a greater upheaval in the relative values of land, and a continuing problem of maintaining its enhanced value. As a result, at the end of the eighteenth century no regular course of arable crops and fallow had yet evolved to break up periodically the new grasslands and thereby improve them. Marshall regarded this problem as one which would be overcome only over a period of time with careful observation and management. He pointed out that in contrast to the areas like the Vale of Pickering,

¹ A. H. John, 'Farming in Wartime: 1793-1815', in E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay (eds.), *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution*, 1967, pp. 37-9.

² W. Marshall, *The Rural Economy of Yorkshire*, 1st edn, 1788; 2nd rev. edn, 1796.

³ *Ibid.*, 1796 edn, I, pp. 273-4.

In the Midland counties, where this alternancy of grass and corn has, in some instances, been in practice time immemorial, a regular course of husbandry has taken place. But, here, where this system of management is in its infancy, and where the diversity of soils is almost endless, no regular round of management can, with propriety, be at present pursued.¹

Milburn, half a century later, still found that a variety of courses of crops were necessary in parts of Yorkshire, giving the impression of a lack of system, and in some cases an adherence to more old-fashioned ideas.²

It may be that the era of high prices, which followed not long after Marshall was making his survey, helped to disguise the technical difficulties which were to be revealed later when the mood of optimism created by rising prices had gone. For instance, the essays on farming in Yorkshire and other counties presented to the Royal Agricultural Society some decades later discussed the recurring problems discovered in the new farming systems, such as clover-sickness, from too frequent a clover crop in the crop cycle,³ the need to devise improvements adapted to local conditions which were not necessarily applicable elsewhere,⁴ and the experiments required before the limitations on different soils of systems of drainage and subsoil ploughing were understood.⁵

It was in this period of experimentation and improvements that there occurred a considerable growth in urban demand for foodstuffs. This helped to alter the balance of traditional farming systems towards a greater interest in stock-rearing, fattening and dairying to supply these more local markets, as well as grazing stock *en route* to the London market. Marshall again had seen some of the changes this was already beginning to cause in Yorkshire, and the Vale of Pickering in particular, by the end of the eighteenth century:

Twenty or thirty years ago, there was not, for the smaller markets of *this* District, a single cattle killed (except upon some extraordinary occasion) during the winter, spring or summer months. In autumn, particularly in the month of November, considerable numbers were butchered, to be salted and hung for winter provision; "hung-beef" being formerly a standing dish, not only in this, but in other Districts. But the number which were then killed, in autumn, was small, compared with the greater numbers that are, at present, butchered in the District; every market of which is, now, plentifully supplied with beef, the year round; and this notwithstanding considerable quantities are still hung in autumn. The market of Malton might well vie with the London markets. . .

Twenty or thirty years ago, great quantities of young stock, bred in the com-

¹ Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 277-8.

² M. M. Milburn, 'On the Farming of the North Riding of Yorkshire', *J.R.A.S.E.*, IX, no. 2, 1848, p. 499.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ J. Grey, 'A View of the Past and Present State of Agriculture in Northumberland', *J.R.A.S.E.*, III, no. 2, 1841, p. 161.

⁵ P. Pusey, 'On the Progress of Agricultural Knowledge during the last four years', *J.R.A.S.E.*, III, no. 2, 1842, p. 179.

mon pastures and, in the rough grounds of the marshes, and other central parts of the Vale, were annually sent out of it. The number of lean oxen, too, which were sent out of the country, was very considerable. Now, the Vale, perhaps, barely rears its own stock. A few young cattle may go out of it every year; but a number of Scotch and some Irish beasts, and generally more or fewer young cattle from the Teeswater quarter, are annually brought into it.¹

Marshall was especially struck by the growth of the market for fat cattle in parts of Yorkshire and the impact this had on farming in the region. The commentators for the Board of Agriculture on Northumberland made a similar point in their survey of the mid-1790's. In a footnote to their observations on markets in that county, and especially the supply of meat to Newcastle, Shields, and Sunderland, they stated:

It may be proper to remark, that 30 or 40 years since, the butchers of those places were obliged to purchase a great deal of fat stock, in the neighbourhood of Darlington, and other parts of the county of Durham; the produce of the north not being equal to their demands; but the scales are now turned, the northern farmers being able, not only to supply the increased population of those places, but to send great numbers of both fat cattle and sheep, every year, to Leeds, Wakefield, Manchester, &c.²

The growth in this region's trade in fat cattle resulted in a shortage of locally reared stock, and farmers had to supplement their herds with animals brought in from other areas. This had already led Marshall in the last decades of the eighteenth century to ponder on the possibility of a national shortage of store cattle.³ It appears that the cattle farmers of Yorkshire and other northern counties looked particularly to Scotland as one of their most important sources of store cattle. In turn, the growth of fatstock markets in Yorkshire, in addition to the established trade with London, provided Scottish farmers with a growing market for their stock. This, together with their shortage of winter feed in the Scottish Highlands, encouraged the export of cattle in large numbers out of Scotland into England to be prepared at a later stage for the more southerly fatstock markets. Droving stock on the hoof linked the two regions. In this way a national market in cattle began to develop at all stages from breeder to butcher, involving more complex marketing arrangements now that regional markets for store and fat cattle had interposed between the traditional north-to-south trade for the London market. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, for instance, York and Darlington had become two of the largest markets for store cattle, supplying a wide region and handling stock from Scotland and elsewhere as well as local supplies for the northern industrial centres.

¹ Marshall, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 199-200.

² J. Bailey and G. Culley, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northumberland*, Newcastle, 1797, p. 154n. This footnote does not appear in the earlier 1794 edition of this report.

³ Marshall, *op. cit.*, II, p. 200.

They were complemented by fatstock markets nearer the urban centres, such as the Leeds and Wakefield markets.¹

The development of new fatstock markets must have helped to push ahead changes in farming systems, giving greater prominence in some areas to the integration of livestock in the arable rotations. At the same time the pace of change in transport facilities may well have affected the timing or progress of such agrarian improvements. In particular, the limitations of droving as the main form of transport of livestock until the middle decades of the nineteenth century enforced regional specialization in cattle-breeding, rearing, and feeding according to a region's proximity to the final fatstock sales in the marketing chain.

IV

An account kept in 1838 of traffic passing each day through the toll-bar at Entercommon, found in the records of the Stockton and Darlington Railway Company,² gives some indication of the movement of livestock on one route through Yorkshire just at the period when steam navigation was beginning to alter this marketing pattern. By 1838 improved transport facilities by rail and sea were beginning to make inroads into the long-distance droving of stock. Up to then the inland transport of livestock, and therefore of meat, was almost entirely dependent on the one form of transport—the network of roads and drove tracks, and the movement along them of animals on the hoof.

Entercommon is some ten miles or so south of Darlington, not far from where the Tees forms the boundary between Durham and Yorkshire. Almost due north of Northallerton, it was on one of the main north-south routes from Scotland through east Yorkshire.³ This route through Durham and Yorkshire roughly followed the line of the Great North Road, continuing south through Doncaster, Gainsborough, and Newark, serving both the Midlands and the London markets via the grazing districts of Norfolk. Haldane has described the various routes west and east of the Pennines which had been used for centuries by drovers and their large herds of Scots-bred cattle,⁴ and Bonser has given us a particularly detailed study of the drove roads in northern England, especially the Hambleton route.⁵ Irish stock imported through Liverpool joined the Scots herds coming down the west of the Pennines, and then cut eastwards through Westmorland to the grazing areas of Yorkshire.⁶ In 1831, for instance, over 90,000 cows were imported into Liverpool from Ireland, nearly 135,000 sheep, and 156,000 pigs.⁷ The cattle counted through

¹ See the comments, for instance, of a Yorkshire farmer, T. C. Booth, to the Select Committee on Cattle Plague and Importation of Live Stock, 362, 1877, *Minutes of Evidence*, paras. 2244–52.

² British Railway Archives, York: Stockton and Darlington Records, SAD 4/72.

³ Entercommon today is marked on some recent ordnance survey maps but does not warrant even a road sign. The inn which serviced travellers, near the junction of the Teesside road with the Northallerton route, is now a private house. The only signs of the cattle trade in the area are the inn names Black Bull and Durham Ox.

⁴ A. R. B. Haldane, *The Drove Roads of Scotland*, 1952, esp. ch. 10.

⁵ K. J. Bonser, *The Drovers. Who they were and how they went: an Epic of the English Countryside*, 1970, ch. 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁷ Board of Trade, *Tables of the Revenue, Population, Commerce, etc. of the U.K. and its Dependencies*, III, 1834, p. 324.

the toll-bar at Entercommon may have included some Irish stock but we have no way of telling. This may, on the other hand, have been an account of mainly local traffic in livestock for consumption nearby. This census does not reveal the destination of these animals, and we can only speculate that some may have been leanstock from other areas bought up for restocking Yorkshire farms, and some may have been fatstock for local markets. The number of animals moved together is not always very large, suggesting a local trade; on other days far greater numbers were moved, suggesting they were *en route* to an important market or fair, probably south of Entercommon, as part of the greater north-south movement of cattle.

At Entercommon the drove road from Darlington and the north joined a road to Yarm, which is to the north-east of Entercommon.¹ Yarm was on another drove road further to the east from Durham, and forming the Hambleton drove road further south.² At Entercommon these two roads from Darlington and Yarm converged to form the main route south to Northallerton and Thirsk, two important market centres. At Northallerton, some nine or ten miles south of Entercommon, a fortnightly sale of cattle was held, and there is some evidence in this census of traffic that the movement of animals in larger numbers occurred every two weeks, perhaps for this market. These are the monthly totals of livestock passing through the toll-bar:

MONTHLY TOTAL OF LIVESTOCK PASSING THROUGH
ENTERCOMMON BAR IN 1828

<i>Month</i>	<i>Oxen</i>	<i>Sheep</i>	<i>Pigs</i>
January	199	37	58*
February	187	193	64
March	1,526	126	218
April	1,356	102	370
May	1,560	315	309
June	1,462	162	422
July	894	190	46
August	546	366	8
September	1,649	1,322	2
October	2,204	564	0
November	2,569	450	2
December	367	562	2
Total:	14,519	4,389	1,501

* Includes some sheep for this month only.

This census indicates the seasonal movement of livestock. The main movement of oxen occurred, as we would expect, in the spring and early summer months for the spring fairs and markets, and in the autumn up to November. There was a very

¹ See the frontispiece map in *Cary's New Itinerary: or an accurate delineation of the Great Roads*, 9th edn, 1821.

² Bonser, *op. cit.*, map on p. 151.

sharp rise in the movement of stock in the month of March. The traffic in sheep displays a different pattern to some extent; the main movement was again in the spring months up to May and in the autumn, but with some 30 per cent of the whole year's traffic in sheep occurring in the month of September.

The flow of traffic can be gauged from the daily entries in the census. It appears that there was a fairly large-scale movement of stock on particular days, presumably in order to reach certain places in time for a market or fair.¹ The pigs, for instance, were passing through the toll-bar from March to June approximately once a week in groups of 60 to 170 pigs in a day. Similarly with cattle: these were moved regularly, usually on Mondays, weekly or fortnightly, in large numbers varying according to the season, from some 30 to 80 a day to between 300 and 450 on one day in April, May, and again in June. On Monday 4 June, for instance, 717 head of cattle were paid for at $\frac{1}{2}$ d each.

The sheep, too, were moved in large numbers on a few days in the week. Of the 193 which were recorded for the whole month of February, 187 travelled on the 27th of that month. Similarly in other months. In the peak month of September over 1,300 sheep moved through the toll-bar in flocks of over 200 three days running, and 480 on another day. The animals or their drovers were no keepers of the sabbath, and large numbers of livestock moved through the toll-bar seven days a week in order to reach markets on time.

The traffic in cattle through this toll-bar reached two main peaks in the year, March to June, and September to November. This suggests that these animals were moving to Yorkshire fairs and markets for purchase by graziers and farmers to supplement their own herds. Those purchased in spring would be fattened on the early summer pastures, and sold off in the autumn as fatstock. March seems to be an early month for such a large movement of stock, and was often referred to as the "hunger-gap" when fodder was scarce. The winter of 1837-8 was a severe one in other parts of the country with a late spring and a cold wet summer,² and consequently farmers may have moved a large number of stock early on to the market in search of other sources of feed or for slaughtering. At the same time, with the wider introduction of crop rotations including fodder crops, larger stocks of animals could be fattened through the winter months on turnips and other roots, sometimes supplemented with cattle-cake. This allowed some farmers who were nearer the retail markets to fatten stock bought at the late summer or autumn fairs through the winter, and to sell them off to the butcher in the winter and spring months. This may have helped to spread the supply of fatstock to urban markets over a longer period of the year. On the other hand, this did not entirely cut out the seasonal nature of the trade and the movement of animals, especially of leanstock. As yet the only feasible method of transport was primarily by road: the breeding

¹ A similar feature can be seen in the few figures available for the traffic in livestock at the Shenfield toll-gate in Essex *en route* for the London market in the same year; see J. Copeland, *Roads and their Traffic, 1750-1850*, Newton Abbot, 1968, pp. 51-2.

² E. L. Jones, *Seasons and Prices*, 1964, p. 167. The details of weather conditions in this study are mainly for England south of the Trent: see Jones's comments on p. 136.

cycle, and the necessity of moving livestock in the warmer months when the roads were passable and grazing was available *en route*, ensured the continuance of this marked seasonal pattern of trade.

V

So far we have no detailed accounts of how quickly farmers in Yorkshire and other northern counties saw the advantages of rearing and fattening to supply the fatstock markets within their own region. The changing market situation, pressure on local supplies of stock, and increasing imports from Scotland and Ireland probably encouraged experiments in cattle-breeding as well as in fattening. The development of the improved shorthorn was the most important addition to the country's cattle stock, owing much to the pioneer work of the Collings brothers, farming near Darlington at the turn of the century.¹ It was in the post-1815 decades that other breeders improved the shorthorn still further, and farmers became more and more interested in its properties as an animal yielding good milk and meat. It is not too exaggerated a claim that the shorthorn revolutionized cattle-farming, bringing the possibilities of profitable fattening for the meat trades to more farmers who were not necessarily specializing in beef cattle. Eventually the introduction of the shorthorn must have undermined or offered an alternative to the regional pattern of leanstock producers sending their animals long distances to fatstock producers for final preparation for the market. How quickly this took place, and in which areas, we do not have a very clear idea. The trade in cattle from the Highlands and the Tees area had traditionally been in animals driven as lean cattle for fattening nearer the areas of consumption, especially London. This was a speculative trade dependent on the availability of grazing and the supply of grass, hay, and turnips in England.² Much of the information on sources of fodder and grazing rights, as well as the drove routes south, were handed down from father to son. Walter M'Combie, famous in later life for his Aberdeen Angus cattle, began to speculate in grazing on the drove routes while a young lad still learning the trade from his father and his labourers.³

The innovations in cattle-feeding which developed especially in the eastern counties, such as stall-feeding in the winter months, were probably linked to the greater emphasis in this area on the fattening of stock for the London market, supplemented more and more by the growth of fatstock markets in the northern counties. By the time the rail network was completed cattle were imported from Ireland and elsewhere, brought by rail to the eastern counties for fattening, and then sent by rail again to the markets of Manchester, Sheffield, and other towns.⁴ Pusey

¹ E. H. Carrier, *The Pastoral Heritage of Britain*, 1936, pp. 98-9; R. Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry, 1700-1900*, 1959, pp. 236-9.

² W. Thompson, 'Cattle droving between Scotland and England', *Jnl. of Brit. Arch. Assocn.* xxxvii, no. 2, 1932, p. 177.

³ W. M'Combie, *Cattle and Cattle-Breeders*, Edinburgh and London, p. 3.

⁴ See G. Ewart Evans, *Where Beards Wag All*, 1970, ch. 13, for an account of this trade, and the part played by the Norwich drovers.

commented on the differences in feeding methods between the eastern counties and elsewhere:

Every autumn horned cattle move across England, from Devonshire, Herefordshire, parts of Yorkshire, and Scotland, to the eastern coast, where they are fattened. I do not know why this practice should be confined to that side of the country; but though it may be known elsewhere to individual farmers, all the counties in which stall-feeding seems to be established lie to the east.¹

It may be that the integration of livestock in the crop cycle was carried further in this area; the ploughing of waste and large tracts of old grasslands, and the need to support the increasing stocks of sheep and cattle, may have provided a context favourable to feeding experiments. The growing fatstock markets in the northern counties, as well as the established cattle trade from the north via the east-coast routes to London, increased the pressure on the supplies of fodder, and probably drew attention to more profitable methods of feeding. It may be that the cattle breeds used in this trade were particularly responsive to extra feeding, offering very high profit prospects. Again we need to know far more about the economy of farmers engaged in rearing and fattening cattle before we can do more than suggest this was the case.

There certainly seems to have been an awareness of a widening differential between leanstock and fatstock prices in the mid-1830's, if not earlier. In the third report of the Select Committee on Agricultural Distress, made two years before this Entercommon census, it was mentioned more than once that there was now greater profit on fatstock than on leanstock, that the price of the latter was low, but that of the former very high, especially beef prices.² This rise in price may have been partly, at least, only short-term, the result of the higher costs of feeding as a consequence of the failure of the turnip crop in the southern counties.³ While the wholesale meat prices that we have may reflect fatstock prices and the fluctuations in the costs of feeding, the movement of leanstock prices at this period is almost unknown to us. It may be reasonably assumed, however, that the greater demand for fatstock increased pressure on leanstock supplies; nevertheless, the relative profit of the leanstock and fatstock farmers and dealers may have differed. Cattle-rearers were conscious of being remote from their final market, and very much in the hands of dealers. The dealers and drovers were the link or marketing chain between the Scottish farmer and his more southerly markets, and the slow movement of cattle over long distances left the farmer dependent on the dealers for information on market trends and prices. The 1814 report on Scottish farming put this more graphically: "Hence the breeder cannot avail himself of that range of experience, which commences with copulation and terminates in the shambles."⁴ And in the

¹ Pusey, *loc. cit.*, p. 205.

² S.C. on Agricultural Distress, 3rd Report (465), 1836, *Minutes of Evidence*, QQ. 12239 f.

³ *Ibid.*, QQ. 11926, 13676.

⁴ Sir J. Sinclair, *General Report of the Agricultural State and Political Circumstances of Scotland*, Edinburgh, III, 1814, p. 12.

1836 Select Committee one farmer from Roxburghshire spoke of the increased profit from grazing sheep and black cattle coming to farmers like himself, aided by the setting up of markets of their own with the assistance of the Agricultural Association. He mentioned in particular their own markets at Morpeth, and the selling of stock to dealers there for the English markets in the northern districts.¹

VI

In contrast to the situation in the northern and eastern English counties the Scottish cattle farmer was still influenced to a large extent by the shortage of winter-feed and the long journey to his main market for fatstock outside Scotland. In the report on Scottish farming made under the directions of Sir John Sinclair in 1814 William Aiton and others discussed livestock farming in terms of the capability of the land to produce a supply of winter food.² Their conclusion was that improvements in breeding were not as advanced as in the English counties, and could not be until better quality and a larger supply of fodder were produced. They stated that for the Scottish farmer

His cattle and sheep must be in a great measure the creatures of his own mountains and of his own climate. . . He has seldom any considerable extent of land that would fatten any breed; and if he had, there is no market for it within his reach.³

This situation enforced a pattern of stock-rearing whereby a large percentage of the cattle reared was exported for further rearing and finishing for the markets in the south. Stock was moved south from the more mountainous regions before the winter set in. As a result the pattern of farming, of employment, and the life of the whole community reflected this situation until the supplies of fodder were improved by the wider introduction of a turnip crop. Poor supplies of fodder hampered experiments in breeding, and limited the farmers' choice of stock to the hardier types which matured and fattened quickly. The Kyloes, Galloways, black Fifeshire breeds, and the Aberdeen Angus were developed as beef cattle for the English market, fitting into the particular features of Scottish farming systems, local conditions of poor supplies of winter feed, and few local fatstock markets of any size.

The new fodder crops were to alter all this, and during the first half of the nineteenth century revolutionized Scottish stock-farming. This inevitably brought changes in the structure of the local economy with a greater emphasis on enclosure. The stockbreeder could now be more selective in the breeds he chose, and could experiment with cross-breeding, as hardiness for winters on poor feed was no longer such a major consideration in some areas, while in others sheep were introduced in preference to cattle as hardier animals. The initial capital outlay a cattle farmer had to make was considerable.⁴ At the same time, the possibility of earlier preparation of cattle for the journey south to the major meat markets gave the farm-

¹ S.C. on Agricultural Distress, 1836, *op. cit.*, *Minutes of Evidence*, QQ. 14564-7.

² Sinclair, *op. cit.*, III, ch. 14. ³ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 5-6.

⁴ Pusey made a similar point in relation to English farms, suggesting that clay-farms in comparison with grazing or mixed farms had fallen into "inferior hands" as little capital was required; Pusey, *loc. cit.*, p. 171 n.

er a more rapid turnover of his stock, possibly altering the cost structure and cash flow of his farming system. There were other alterations in the traditional situation of the Scottish stock farmer, which suggests this is one of the best documented instances of the interrelationship of the various factors which were making their impact on agriculture at this period. In particular the growth of a market for meat and dairy products in Scotland itself, as well as in the northern English counties, encouraged improvements in farming, especially the introduction of the short-horn. At the same time the new transport facilities were changing the relationship of Scotland with London and other more southerly markets.

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century the English graziers and fat-stock markets could take all the beasts Scotland exported, and more. The Falkirk Trysts, closer to the southward drove roads than the earlier ones at Crieff, had become the most important Scottish cattle dealers' fair by the end of the previous century. A modern estimate of the output of Scottish farms at that date confirms the feasibility of Sir John Sinclair's figure of some 100,000 store cattle exported to England in 1800,¹ 60,000 of which were probably sold at the Falkirk Trysts. This trade via Falkirk probably reached its peak in the 1830's or sometime before mid-century, by which time transport changes were beginning to make an impact on the structure of the cattle trade between Scotland and England.

Before rail transport, droving was the only feasible form of transport except for some sea voyages. In 1839 the *Stamford Mercury* was commenting that some 1,500 Scottish drovers visited Barnet Fair each year, driving the small Highland cattle purchased by dealers at the Falkirk Trysts.² A glance at the map at the back of Haldane's study showing the Scottish drove roads bringing cattle to England from the northernmost tip of the country reveals something of the extraordinary scale of this operation, its hazards, and its fascination as Britain's "cowboy era." This was a highly speculative trade, dependent on a certain amount of skill, experience, and even luck, especially in judging the value, stamina, and fattening potential of animals at the time of purchase as lean cattle. M'Combie thought that it was particularly difficult to succeed in the store-cattle trade; a correct judgement of the value of stock and their fattening properties could make all the difference between a small fortune and bankruptcy.³ His lifetime spanned the period when the most important agricultural improvements in cropping, winter-feed, the development of the shorthorn, and changes in transport made their revolutionary impact on the cattle trade.

The transport by steamship of Aberdeen cattle to London had begun in 1828, and by 1838 between 5,000 and 8,000 animals were being shipped southwards each year. This trade was soon to compete quite successfully with droving,⁴ cutting out

¹ J. A. Symon, 'The Falkirk Trysts; a gauge to Highland stock output', *Scottish Agriculture*, Winter 1953-4, pp. 119-21.

² I am indebted to John Perkins, a graduate student of mine now lecturer in economic history at the University of New South Wales, for this information: *Stamford Mercury*, 4 Oct. 1839.

³ M'Combie, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 ff.

⁴ J. H. Smith, 'The Cattle trade of Aberdeenshire in the nineteenth century', *Agric. Hist. Rev.* III, 1955, pp. 114-18.

some of the intermediary stages in the marketing process, and so leading to a decline in the number of cattle dealt in at the Falkirk Trysts. In particular, steam transport brought the Scottish cattle breeder nearer in marketing time to the London market. He could now turn his attention to fatstock-rearing, bringing his animals nearer their peak for retail sale in London with a much quicker sea-journey between the producer and the main market. Aberdeen and London were pulled together so that the London market could begin to dominate this trade once more. M'Combie commented on this:

Steam navigation and the use of bone-dust being both introduced about the same time, shortly produced a complete revolution in the cattle trade; feeding soon became general, from the larger breadth and heavier crops of turnips grown; droving gradually diminished, till now it has all but ceased, almost all the herds in Aberdeenshire being fattened, besides many brought in from north and south.¹

And so with the appearance of Irish-bred cattle and shorthorns, M'Combie gave up his job as a lean-cattle jobber dealing in north-country cattle, "seeing it was done for" as he put it.² The growth of an urban meat market in Scotland itself underpinned this development of Scottish fatstock rearing for the London markets.

Eventually cattle-droving as a trade became confined to shorter journeys from farm to local market, and to and from the railway station. The decline in long-distance droving from Aberdeenshire was an example of what was happening elsewhere as a result of rail and steamship transport of livestock. Proximity to a large urban market dictated less and less the location of livestock-farming, especially fattening, particularly when freezing techniques, by extending the marketing life of meat, made the transport of dead meat feasible over longer distances. In this way the coming of steam transport by sea and rail helped to destroy the balance between stock-breeding and fattening areas which had developed at a time when cattle-droving was the only method of transporting livestock to the retail meat markets.

VII

It would seem, therefore, that a number of factors were interacting in the first decades of the nineteenth century whereby farmers and traders responded to new market opportunities and to the pressure on livestock supplies. The most important new development was the growth of large urban markets. The national market for cattle, both store and fat animals, had become much more complex now that the London market was augmented by other large centres of demand. In this situation we might expect to find less regional differences in the price paid for livestock and for meat. The level of prices in the London market may have become the national price with less variation in other regional centres. As yet we can only speculate about such matters, but this may have been the trend in fatstock prices. Leanstock may have had a different price pattern, with greater regional variation depending on the stage reached in the marketing process, the distance still to be

¹ M'Combie, *op. cit.*, p. 101. ² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

covered to supply the carcass salesman and butcher, the local price of cattle-feed, the local supplies of livestock available, and other factors. The Scots cattle breeder, by taking advantage of the shortage of supplies in the English counties, certainly improved the level of his local prices by exporting livestock to England. The profit opportunities of farmers in areas remote from a large urban market were improved by the increase in demand for livestock generally. The increase in demand for meat encouraged farmers near these new markets to become both breeder and fatterer, buying in stock from elsewhere for fattening to supplement their own stocks. This development strengthened the long-distance trade in cattle, drawing supplies from breeders far from the large retail markets. In this long-distance movement of cattle on the hoof the number of intermediaries remained large. The lack of new transport facilities on any scale until the middle decades of the nineteenth century kept the cattle trade to its traditional pattern or organization, with the livestock farmers operating largely on the market intelligence obtained from the traders. At a later period transport improvements added another dimension to the situation, causing further changes. As Aberdeen as a supply area and the London market were drawn together by steam transport this may have altered the supply situation for farmers in the northern English counties. They may have become more and more dependent on their own supplies, encouraging the introduction of new breeds including the improved shorthorn, supplemented by larger imports from Ireland.

Agricultural history can be too easily seen perhaps as a progression of changing farming techniques without indicating the possible connections between them, and also the impact on them of a changing market situation and of new transport facilities. All that has been suggested here is the type of links which probably existed in one sector of farming—cattle-rearing and fattening. The effect was to create a national market in livestock with regional specialization in the various stages of preparation for the butcher. As yet our knowledge of the way in which farmers took their decisions, and reacted to new factors affecting their livelihood, is small and too dependent on the comments of contemporary observers rather than information from the farmers themselves. The memoirs of men engaged in farming and the cattle trade, like M'Combie's, are all too rare. Further regional studies of marketing may throw some light on the way farmers balanced the advantages of new opportunities, once they were realized, against the difficulties of switching to a new system of husbandry. In the cattle trade the long distances between the cattle breeder and the problems of marketing a live commodity may well have resulted in a greater division of roles between the farmer and the cattle traders, placing the cattle dealer in a more powerful position to study the market, price accordingly, and switch to new markets. This seems to have been the situation throughout the period in which, as Ernle noticed,¹ some of the most important advances in livestock rearing were made.

¹ R. E. Prothero (Lord Ernle), 'English agriculture in the reign of Queen Victoria', *J.R.A.S.E.*, LXII, 1901, pp. 11-12.