

## A Sheep-Dog Competition.

BY JAMES WALTER SMITH.

*Illustrations from Photographs by M. Henry Lemoine, Paris.*



On the 19th of June last, the town of Lizy-sur-Ourcq, about thirty-five miles north-east of Paris, in France, was gay with bunting and the music of a band. The townspeople were out in force, the railway station and its precincts were sights to be seen, filled with a

Paris, founded by M. Emmanuel Boulet, of Elbeuf, for the amelioration of the shepherd dog's condition, and for the encouragement of the shepherds. The object of the association would have been sufficient explanation of the attendant and expectant crowd, but the competition promised to be interesting and unusual enough in itself to warrant going miles to see.

The events of the day proceeded rapidly. First came an exhibition, near the station, of the dogs of Brie and Beauce, two beautiful breeds, to be described in another place. A half-hour later lots were drawn, and the contesting shepherds were presented with numbers showing the order in which their dogs were to take part, numbers which they wore upon their arms, as we may see as we pass over the illustrations in this article.

Then came a general adjournment to lunch.

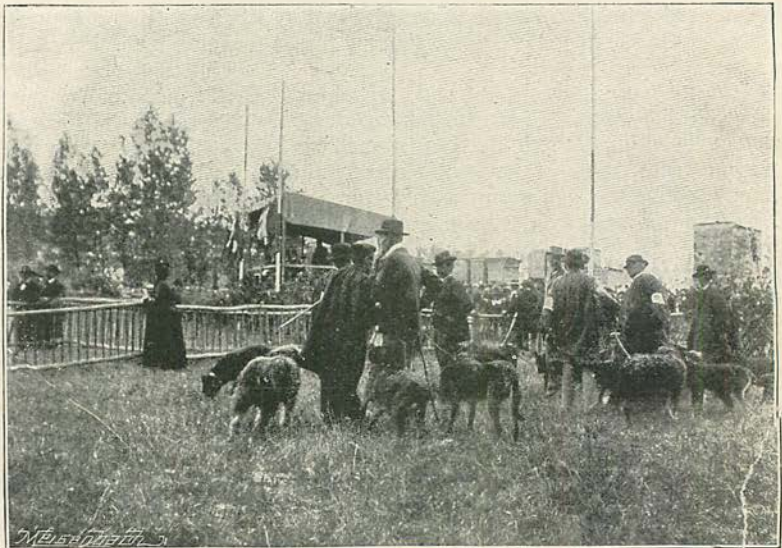
We may take time while these dignitaries and officials are feasting with the Mayor to give some details regarding the competition. There are three classes. The first is for the shepherd dogs, the work of the dog consisting in conducting a flock of twenty-five sheep from one pen to another over a course about 984ft. long and 19ft. wide. This

moving throng, whose ears were besieged by the intermittent baaing of sheep and the barking of countless dogs. Shepherds in blouses were in evidence with handsome and restless dogs in leash, moving with anxious steps around. Suddenly the whistle of the locomotive was heard, and the train rolled into the station, depositing on the platform a goodly crowd of well-dressed, intelligent men and women, dog experts, journalists, and some high Governmental dignitaries. The arrival of the train was the signal for jubilation. The day had begun.

These people had come all the way from Paris to witness a competition between shepherd dogs, and to award some prizes to the dogs that did the best. The competition—third of a successful series—had been arranged by the French Sheep-Dog Club of



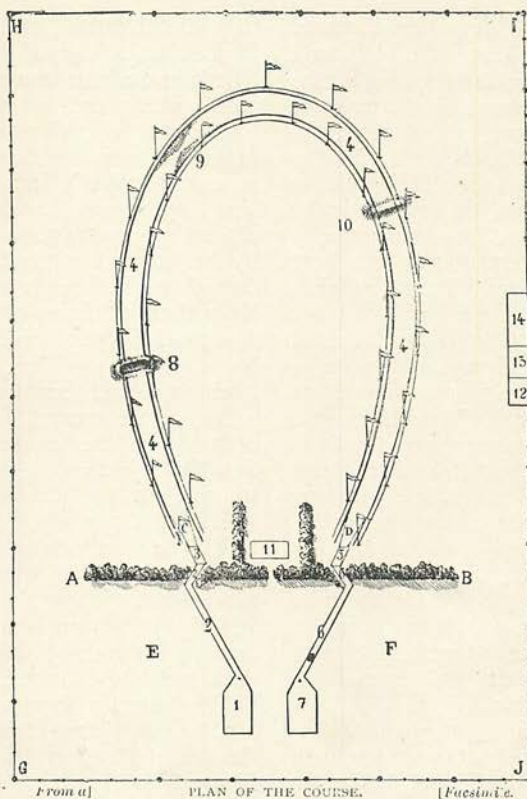
MEDAL AWARDED BY THE FRENCH SHEEP-DOG CLUB.



SHEPHERDS AWAITING THEIR CALL TO ENTER THE COMPETITION.

course has already been marked out by means of plough furrows, and presents three obstacles: a bank of earth and a dry ditch, and a V-shaped passage between two hedges. The dogs, moreover, are required by the rules not to allow the sheep to stray from the course, nor to bite them on the ear, the neck, the fore-feet, the stomach, nor deeply on the thigh. They are not even allowed to bark. Dogs with diseases and vicious dogs are to be rigidly excluded. It will therefore be seen that the work of the canines has been ably cut out for them, and that the first prize winner will be a dog of which any shepherd might be proud.

The accompanying plan gives a more detailed idea of the course, and will repay examination. But our running commentary must be brief. The pen marked (1) contains the sheep for the competition; (2) is an inclosure, about 130ft. long, leading to another pen (3), from which the sheep are let out upon the track. Passing round the horse-



shoe-shaped track, and avoiding for a moment the obstacles, we come to the arrival pen (5), and after passing through another inclosure, 130ft. long (6), reach finally the large pen (7), where all the sheep which pass over the course are received and massed together. The obstacles—that is, the dry ditch, the V-shaped passage, and the mound of earth—are shown by (8), (9), and (10) respectively. Little more need be explained in the diagram except that (12), (13), and (14) represent the grand stand for judges and public, and that (E) and (F) are the places set apart for

the shepherds and their dogs before and after they have taken part in the competition.

Let us now walk among the shepherds, as we see them pictured in the illustration on the first page, and admire the beautiful dogs of Beauce and Brie. For they are worthy of admiration. We, who like the good Scotch collie and his handsome eyes, will probably find the Brie dog, with his long grey and woolly hair, most to our liking; and will prefer



BRIE SHEPHERD DOG.



BEAUCE SHEPHERD DOG.

his intelligent face to that of the Beauce. But the latter, with his long, lithe body, and fox-like step, is the more striking dog of the two. Both breeds are shown in the previous illustrations, and as we stand near the chattering shepherds while they wait for the competition to begin, we soon find out that each would pin faith to his own particular breed of dog, until his last franc was gone.

This animated conversation is cut short by the arrival of the dignitaries and officials on the course, headed by a band and the town fire brigade, and followed by a crowd of men, women, and small boys. They enjoy a good time and a procession in France just as much as they do in England and America. The procession winds its way upon the field, the judges and invited guests take their places in the grand stand, the others line up along the course, and, with little delay, the competitions begin.

Twenty-four shepherds are engaged in the competitions, and to each of these the rules allow two dogs. Some of them, however, prefer to take their chances for the prize with one dog, and in such an event gain additional honour for their dog's skill. There is, of course, great excitement when the first number is called out, and a stalwart shepherd comes forward with his faithful helper in leash. His work, though, does not begin until the sheep are in the departure pen, ready to be let loose upon the track.

But few seconds elapse before the twenty-five sheep are ready. Loosened from their cramped quarters, they make a bolt along the passage and follow their leader into the departure pen. Here the dog stands ready to guide them round the horse-shoe. In less time than it takes to write it, the bar has fallen, the sheep are on the course, hesitating now and then as if puzzled over their whereabouts, but always pushed forward by the intelligent animal behind. They try to scatter and to leap over the ploughed furrows out of bounds, but in nearly every case

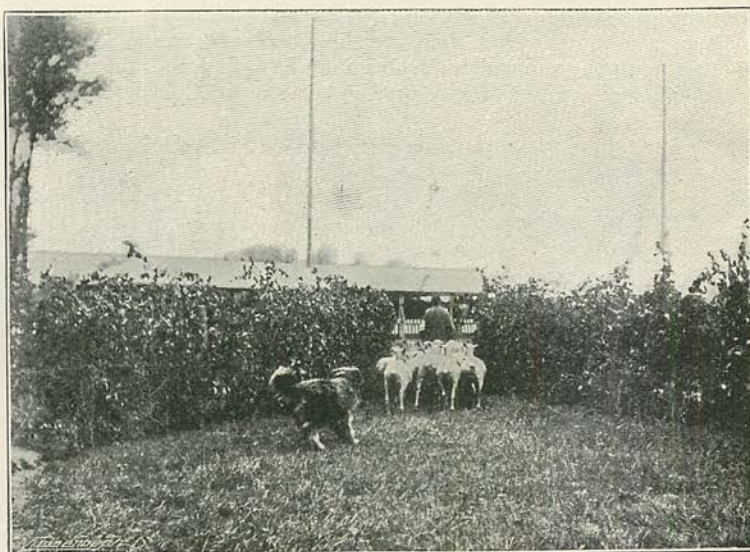
they are thwarted, and in semi-despair the flock makes its dogged way around the curve.

It is at the start that the dog's qualities are most quickly and interestingly brought out, for, as many of us know, it is no easy matter to collect two score and more scared and separated animals into a compact bunch. You may be sure, too, that the deficiencies of the dogs in this respect are carefully noted by the judges, for it is these deficiencies that cause loss of time on the course, and proclaim the inefficiency of the dogs. The best dog gets his sheep quickly together, and wins half the victory. The rest is but a matter of intelligence and constant watchfulness.

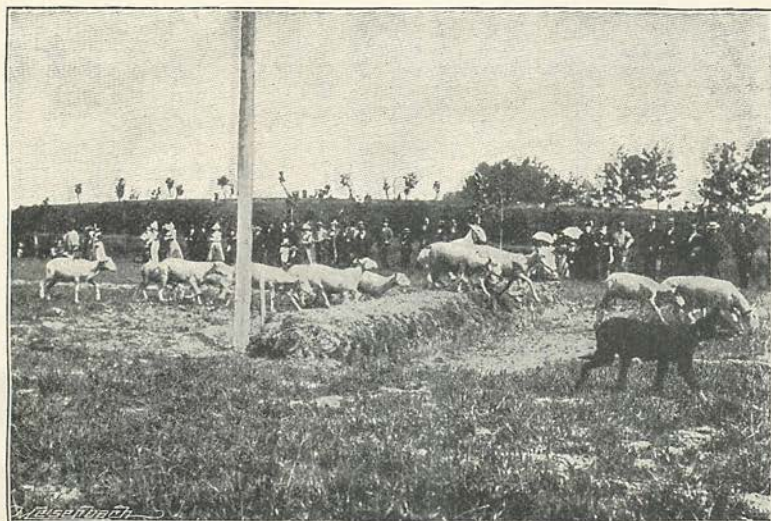
No, we are wrong. We have forgotten the obstacles on the course, placed there intentionally to bother the sheep, and in this way to bring out the skill and sagacity of the dog.

The first of these is the dry ditch, over which the sheep have to pass; and as they approach it, we can see the hesitancy in their movements. They do not want to cross, and the judges are watching to see that the dog, in his anxiety to spur the sheep on, does not bite or mutilate them in the forbidden manner specified in the rules. At last, however, one Cæsar of the flock casts the die and crosses this miniature Rubicon, followed by his two dozen mates, with a rapidity and helter-skelterdom as amusing to the crowd as it is satisfactory to the accompanying shepherd and his canine guide.

The sheep are now together again, and are rapidly approaching the V-shaped inclosure. In the illustration below we may note the



V-SHAPED PASSAGE THROUGH WHICH THE COMPETING DOGS DRIVE THE SHEEP.



THE SHEEP PASSING OVER THE MOUND OF EARTH.

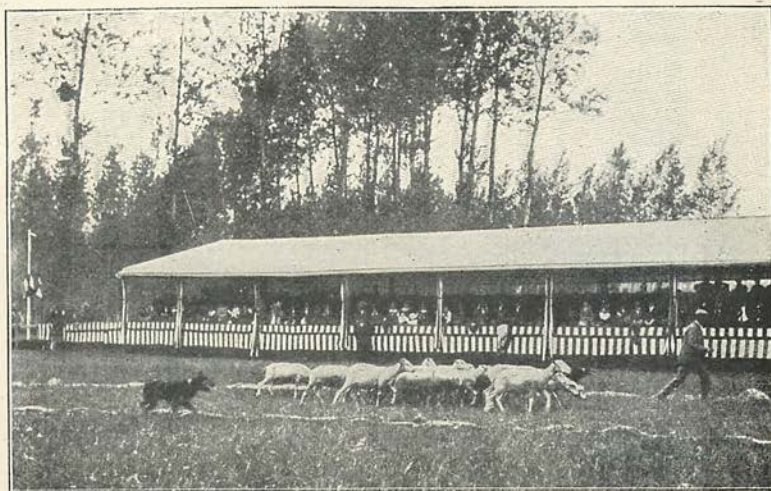
sheep passing in a body through the narrow entrance. It looks peaceable enough, but the photograph could not possibly show the amount of insistency exerted by some of the dogs in the competition before they manage to get the leader of the sheep to pass through. With the shepherd in front and the dog behind, they get through, however, and after being collected, continue round the curve. Then looms up before the flock the third obstacle on the course, a mound of earth extending wholly across the course, and over 3ft. wide. This tries the temper of the sheep to the utmost. They make vain efforts to go around the obstruction instead of over it, but the dog knows his business, and keeps them on the course until their very noses are against the mound. Some of the dogs failed to keep the sheep together in this place, and lost their chance of a prize thereby. But in the competition shown in our illustration, the four-footed guide got his leader started, and all was well. Note how he let the hind sheep follow and devoted

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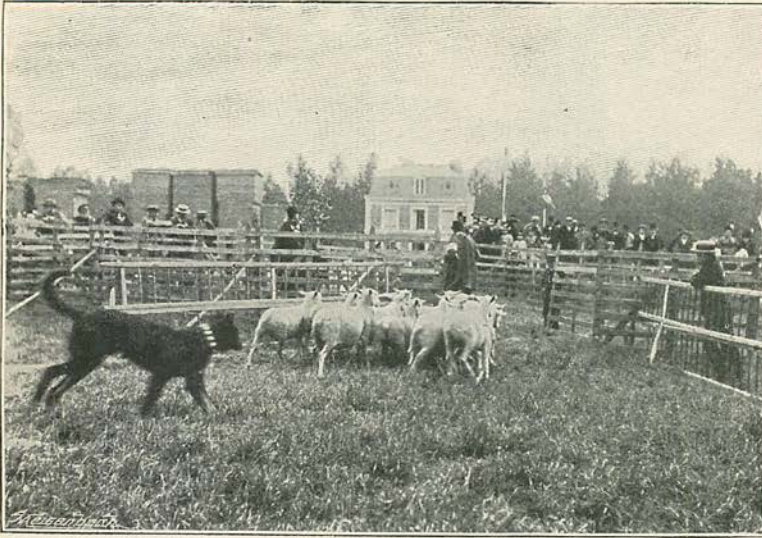
his earnest attention to the leaders keeping them in the straight and narrow path to victory.

The last stage in the competition is shown on this and the next page, and the pictures and sheep may possibly move rapidly enough to tell their own story. The illustration below shows the sheep passing in front of the pavilion; and the reader may note how perfectly the flock are obeying

the silent commands of the dog as he marshals them before the eagle eyes of the judges. Still are the judges on the look-out for bites. Still on their little tablets do they mark merits and demerits in the dog that the ordinary onlooker never sees. And still for two or more hours do they sit and watch the long processions of sheep go past, laughing at the stupidity of some competitors, and admiring the skill of others with the peculiar satisfaction of the expert. They never lift their eyes off until the sheep are driven into the arrival pen, where we may see them entering in the illustration; and then, when all is over, they compare their marks and pick the winner. Meanwhile,



THE SHEEP PASSING IN FRONT OF THE GRAND STAND.



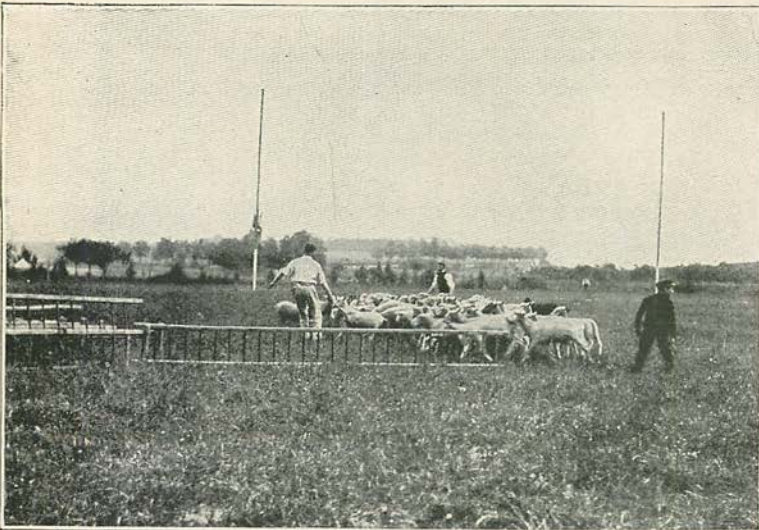
DOG DRIVING SHEEP INTO  
THE ARRIVAL PEN.

the shepherds who have taken part in the competition stand in their inclosure, as we may observe in the middle picture, watching the passing dogs and sheep, with rising or falling hopes, as the case may be.

The first part of



SHEPHERDS WHO HAVE  
TAKEN PART IN THE  
COMPETITION.



SHEEP BEING DRIVEN INTO A PEN WHERE THEY ARE SORTED FOR SALE.

the competitions is now over, and, like people at a play, we welcome an *entr'acte*. Therefore, let us turn for a moment to the illustration at the bottom of this page, which shows the sheep being driven into a pen where they are sorted for sale. Where so many sheep are got together, it is not surprising that an animated barter should go on. The

sheep, of course, are mainly intended for Paris, and probably the very animals that figure to-day in the competitions will fall prey tomorrow to the Paris butchers.

But there is still something interesting to be seen. We have said that there were three classes of competitions, and the first of these has now been described.



FLOCK OF SHEEP STARTING FOR THE RAILWAY STATION TO TAKE PART IN THE EMBARKATION COMPETITION.

The second is arranged for dogs belonging to cowherds and other herdsmen, and need not be described here, except to say that they are much the same as the first class. The third class of competition takes place at the railway station, and is intended to show the skill with which the dogs can conduct the sheep to the departure platform and discharge them into the cars. In the illustration above we may see the sheep starting for the station to take part in the competition, and in the last illustration we may note the method by which the dog gets the sheep into the car. As an example of the remarkable skill of the dogs, we may say that at the June competition one dog managed to get fifty sheep into the car from a distance of over 65ft. in *thirty-two seconds*. This was an exceptional record.

As the day ends, the prizes are awarded. The first prize is a gold medal, offered in the name of the

French Government by the Minister of Agriculture, a diploma, and 100f. In all, there are over forty prizes offered, including prizes for best dog of each breed, and recompenses to shepherds for long and faithful services. Every attempt is made to encourage the shepherds in their work, and to stimulate the training of the dogs. The number of sheep in the east of France has diminished in recent years, and a serious problem has to be faced. The French Sheep-Dog Club, under the intelligent leadership of M. Boulet, who is both an expert and an enthusiast on the subject, is doing all in its power to help, not only the dogs and the sheep, but also the nation. We may add that the photos. in this article showing the competitions have been lent to us for reproduction by M. Henry Lemoine, the celebrated amateur photographer of Paris.



EMBARKATION COMPETITION AT THE RAILWAY STATION.