

Why We Needed A New Standard For The Cairns

By ALICE ROGERS and CORINNE S. W. WARD

This article first appeared in the October 1, 1934 issue of the AK Gazette and is reprinted with permission.

SINCE the revision by the Cairn Terrier Club of America of their standard of the breed, there has been a great deal of comment, both pro and con, and we think that there can be no better introduction to this article than to quote from the "Cairn Cracks" of *Our Dogs*, dated July 27. Rev. T. W. L. Caspersz says:

"The question of the revision of the standard for cairn terriers was mooted some five or six years ago. Still nothing has been done and the standard drawn up more than 20 years ago, when the breed as a show proposition was in its infancy, remains unaltered. Some few months ago the Cairn Terrier Club of America put out a revised standard. Those of us, who are in frequent communication with American breeders, were by no means at a loss to understand the reason for this. Our friends across the Atlantic were anxious to secure a more definite and clearer description of the cairn, than that which the British clubs had put out. We have cairns all around us, and not a few of us have had 20 years experience of them, and do not need to consult any written definition of what they should look like."

IN America things are quite different. The breed to begin with is not indigenous to that country. Every single cairn or its near ancestors has had to be imported. Our American friends are in just the same position, as we should be if we set out to breed Boston terriers in England. Cairns are a foreign breed to them. That is one reason why they want a plain and explicit description of them in their standard.

There is another reason. American breeders are just as keen to maintain the true cairn character and type as we are in Britain. They know the importance of having judges who know the breed, but many of their shows are judged by terrier judges accustomed to judge other terrier breeds with which, as everyone knows, the cairn has points of contact but more points of difference. And it must be remembered that it is the points of divergence that matter most. There is no more certain way to make a hash of it than to judge cairns on foxterrier or Scottish terrier lines. The shibboleths, which are regarded of such supreme importance in other terrier breeds, count for little or nothing in ours."

Mr. Caspersz goes on to say:

"Had our British standard been adequate, cairn enthusiasts across the Atlantic would never have been compelled to adopt their own. This is surely sufficient indication that we should set our house in order without delay."

This expressed opinion of such a well known authority should give us great satisfaction, as it clearly shows that, while our new standard may not be perfect, we have made a move in the right direction!

A judge is concerned with the origin, history, and development of a breed, only in so far as they have been factors in the creation of breed type and character. A breed is a group of individuals, possessing distinctive characteristics not common to other members of the same species, and so firmly fixed as to be uniformly transmitted.

BREED type is the sum total of those distinctive characteristics by which the breed group may be differentiated — as size, peculiarity of conformation, coat, head, and the especial features for which the breed was originated or developed. In any typical specimen of a breed is reflected, more or less, the three factors that have influenced its development. These are the foundation stock, the environment by which this origin in blood has been molded, and the ideal or purpose for which selection has been made. The last is the final factor in every case.

In order to maintain this breed identity, all these distinguishing breed characteristics should receive consideration, but those of a utility character, which relate to performance, should be stressed more than minor breed excellences or defects. Utility to the breed's use is as important today as it has been in the past.

It is these distinctive working characteristics, of course, that the breeder is interested in in the selection of his stock, and they should equally concern the judge in the show ring.

These primary considerations are of enhanced significance in the case of the breed now under consideration, because of the peculiar fact that the cairn terrier is a modern attempt to reproduce, in its most typical form, the old working terrier of the Isle of Skye, the Hebrides, and the West Highlands of Scotland. Hence the judge has a much greater concern with the origin, history, and uses of this breed than would ordinarily be the case. In fact, for proper understanding of the cairn, it is necessary that the judge should know what these old terriers were like and what they were used for.

Fortunately in the case of the cairn more facts are available, than in most breeds, of its origin, early history, and the purpose for which selection was made. The judge can thus receive a distinct and definite idea of what this old working terrier was. This knowledge is absolutely fundamental to his ability to judge the breed for the purpose for which the dog is bred, whether practical or purely theoretical, and should be the basic thought in judging.

T. W. L. Martin in his "History of the Dog," written in 1845, says of the Isle of Skye terrier, the direct ancestor of the cairns of today:

“THE Isle of Skye terrier is covered with long course hair; its limbs are very short but muscular; its back is long; its ears erect; the eyes are large and bright; the muzzle short and pointed. The color is sandy, brown, reddish, or white. The breed is much used for otter hunting on the wild shores of the western isles of Scotland, and though the dogs are of small size, their courage is equal to any encounter, while from their peculiarity of form, they are able to enter the holes between the rocks, into which a large animal could not force its way.”

Coming down to more modern times, shortly after the recognition of the cairn terrier by the English Kennel Club, Darley Matheson in *Terriers* says of the cairn:

“To be typical a cairn should weigh from 14 to 16 lbs. for dogs, and bitches a couple of pounds below the weight named. Given a terrier of this weight in hard working condition, it can readily work in a fox or badger earth, the bolting of which animals, likewise the otter, comprises the chief duties of this lithesome terrier.

“All the wild animals referred to are considerably heavier than the weight of a cairn terrier, but it must be distinctly understood that this terrier is not intended for actual combat with them, but merely for expelling them from their homes. It is, however, requisite that a dog should have sufficient pluck to hold its own, if compelled to enter into conflict, which it could not do if less than about a stone in weight - 14 lbs. in England. On the other hand, if it is too big, it cannot work with freedom in a confined space.”

We have thus from these and many early descriptions a definite idea that these old terriers were longish, lowish dogs, short on the leg, with short, pointed muzzles, hard coats not more than one and one-half inches long, and from their peculiarity of form were very lithesome and active.

WE see also that they had courage, and that they were used for bolting foxes, badgers, otters, and other vermin, principally among rocks, ledges, and cliffs, and therefore were not primarily a digging terrier. Their activity was their chief asset, and they were a working, sporting terrier and nothing else.

Those judging cairns today should bear these facts in mind, and should not put up dogs in the show ring, which are utterly incapable of the work for which the breed was developed. While standards as we know them today did not exist in those days, even then these terriers had begun to develop a distinct breed type, as can be seen from these descriptions of the early days. The purpose for which selections had been made had, even then put it its work. While there was undoubtedly a great deal of

variation in appearance, color, and minor details, the result was definitely the production of a small, active, game, working terrier of the short-legged class, with short stout limbs, a longish body, and a dog, whose activity and sporting instincts made him a useful member of the family, and a vermin killer par excellence.

MRS. C. J. ROSS, recently writing in *Our Dogs*, says:

"We argue that the cairn terrier is the crack vermin killer of his country - he is, or ought to be, a game, hardy, little dog, sagacious in hunting and death to all vermin. His suitability to going to earth is beyond all question, his constitution, and formation must surely go far to make him popular with all who desire a sporting, working terrier up to hunting in all weathers."

This suitability the English recognized when the breed was taken up by the fancier and admitted in the Kennel Club's *Stud Book*, for, in writing their standard, they expressed as their object the keeping of the breed to the best old working type and gave as the proper weight 14 lbs. or a stone. Their standard otherwise describes this old-time terrier as well as could be done within such brief limits.

On the introduction of the breed to America and the formation of the Cairn Terrier Club of America with the same expressed ideal as the British, namely the preservation of this old working terrier, they adopted the British standard verbatim.

SOME years later the club changed the "ideal weight - 14 lbs." of the English Standard to "12 to 15 lbs. for dogs and 11 to 13 lbs. for bitches," a very great variation in weight for a dog the general size of the cairn and running from three pounds below to one pound above the English standard.

The gradual result of this later change from the English standard was the development here in America of tiny, wiry, ratty looking little dogs, with very little substance and bone, suggestive of the Pomeranian, and in every sense a toy. There were, of course, some of these that were quite smart in appearance, and real little terriers. But they were far too small for any stretch of the imagination to conceive them foiling an otter, fox, or badger in his native heath. This type was fostered then, and is fostered today as a result of the agitation brought forward by some of the lady fanciers, writers, and judges, in favor of what they erroneously conceive to be the "old fashioned type," with "wistful expression" and purposely "light in bone." Or, as we discern it, a close approximation to a toy.

If, however, it is granted that the cairn is a short-legged, working terrier and not a toy, then it must have bone and substance enough to do the work it is bred for, ably and properly. Further, it must also have the fundamental anatomical conformation

that set apart the race of terriers - a level back, a big spring of rib carried well back, strong loins and hind quarters, and straight, strong forelegs with good feet and pads.

IT is, of course, easier to breed leggy, light-boned dogs, with thin ferrety feet, than it is to breed them with short, straight, well-boned legs with good feet and pads. But with the too leggy, light-boned cairns go those faults that, in nearly all breeds of terriers, are the natural accompaniment of this conformation—slackness in loins, and lack of rib.

We do not want to see a cairn too short of back, for in this breed, as we understand its original purpose, liberty of action is necessary. It is not shortness of back but compactness of body, big ribs carried well back, strong loins, deep chest, and short, stout legs that are desirable and give the breed that appearance that Glynn called "cairniness." These qualities will give that desirable compact look, while, actually, the back of such a dog may well be longer than one that appears much longer on account of lack of rib and slackness of loins. Or, in other words, the cairn which is primarily a terrier, should have as all other terrier breeds, the fundamental terrier conformation, modified, of course, slightly by its own peculiarity of form and breed type.

If we read the standard correctly, this compactness is emphasized as one of the required characteristics of cairns, but as we have tried to point out, it must not be confused with shortness of back, because a too short-backed cairn loses at once its breed character.

The following champions of the breed—many of whom have gone to the Happy Hunting Ground or are not longer young—had or have this conformation, make, and shape, with good short legs, good feet and pads, good length of back, and above all, true cairn breed type, and are the type, we believe, that should be generally accepted by fanciers and judges as correct. In dogs, Ch. Knipton Dean of Tapscot—whose pictures never do him justice—Ch. Brian of Trefusis, Ch. Dochfour Oliver, Ch. Gillad of Cairmore, Ch. Silver Doctor, Ch. Cairnvreckan Merlin; and in bitches Ch. Patience of Otford of Tapscot, Ch. Prudence of Otford of Tapscot, Ch. Cornor Ross-shire Trefoil, Ch. Knocwood Jean, Ch. Rincon Belle Bonus, Ch. Rose-Bay's Wee Jean, and Ch. Glencairn Gillian o'Tapscot.

If it were possible to have them all together again in their prime, what competition⁷ there would be in the classes, and we venture to say that many of the cairns, who are winning today, would go without ribbons, if they had to meet this old guard. How many of the owners of those great cairns, as they read this, can put forward a young candidate, which they honestly think is better or as good as those named above?

In our opinion, it is of far more importance in breeding and judging cairns to look for, and stick to a type that has the ability to perform the purpose of its breed, even with minor faults, than to place these small toyish ones up no matter how wistful, appealing, and pretty little pets they may look. The dogs mentioned above were all true terriers, short-legged, compact, and extremely appealing in appearance - far more so than many we see today that are actually, both in size and appearance, only a hop or two ahead of a Pomeranian.

A year or so ago Rev. Caspersz asked:

"Is the future of the cairn among the terrier breeds or among the toy dogs? The very mention of such a question will probably provoke a veritable storm of protest, but it is one which must be faced. The adaptability which has made our breed so popular is at the same time a danger. The future of the cairn is in the hands of breeders and judges."

Commenting on this in the *English Kennel Gazette*, Mrs. Dixon says:

"May I suggest the principal responsibility is in the hands of the judges. So long as judges are not agreed about type, so long will you have all types of cairns winning. Breeders, in most cases, breed what they can sell and win prizes with. And in many cases they try to suit the judges. Whereas, if the type were properly established, this variation could not occur."

What Mrs. Dixon says is largely true, but, at the same time it must be remembered that the judge can only work with what he has in the ring. The cairn, unfortunately, is largely a ladies dog, and will become more so, and unquestionably swing over to the toy group, if their terrier characters and correct breed type are not more surely emphasized. The question of Rev. Caspersz should be heeded.

To remedy this situation in 1933, the Cairn Terrier Club of America, realizing the error of having a different weight and size for the cairn in America than in England, changed the American weights to 14 lbs. for dogs and 13 lbs. for bitches recognizing the fact that the bitches are smaller, and, certainly in the old Isle of Skye, bitches were decidedly smaller than the dogs.

IN all other respects, despite any opinion to the contrary, the two standards are in accordance and describe the same dog, with only very minor differences in wording, the old working terrier of the Isle of Skye and West Highlands of Scotland. By this revision of the standard, certain definite points have been accomplished: the American and English standards agree on the weight of a cairn; the elimination of the too small 12 and 13 lb. dogs has been made, doing away with the toyish type;

also the too-big, coarse, common cairn, too often associated with the 15 lb. Dog and quite as undesirable, has been eliminated.

Thus today, there is but one correct size for the cairn in both England and America, weighing 14 lbs. and with the proportions that go with that weight.

THIS correct size is an essential of correct breed type, and should be so understood by all judges, thereby creating a tendency toward uniformity in size, and eventually in type, which time and selection should accomplish for the breeder, and which the judge can bring about in the show ring, if he will only read, study, and properly interpret the standard.

In its first sentence the standard says: "General appearance—that of an active, game, hardy, small, working terrier of the short-legged class." The emphasis should be on the word "terrier." It is due solely to the fact that the breed is a terrier, that they appeal to men at all.

P. Enry Jones in the Cairn Terrier Association year book says: "The cairn terrier is a terrier, and if properly handled, one of the gamest dogs living, and may I, as one of the small fry in the cairn terrier world, enter my protest against the present tendency to breed a type more fitted for the muff, than where nature intended him to be—underground fighting his enemies."

Darley Matheson in *Terriers* says: "That these terriers should be short on their limbs is an essential part of their conformation, and it is equally necessary to have perfectly straight limbs, with plenty of bone and substance in them, so as to do their work properly.



An undesirable type too high on the leg, too short in back



Again an undesirable type, this time too long in back and too low on leg

. . . Terriers must be bred 'straight in front', deviations slight or otherwise all being indicative of defective conformation."

Mrs. Fleming, of the famous Out-of-the-West Kennels, is quoted by Miss Carlisle in one of her interesting articles in the KENNEL GAZETTE some years ago: "If this dog—Doughall Out-of-the-West—had a fault, and if his progeny have a fault, it is being inclined to be too classical, too full of quality, just a trifle fine drawn all over. Doughall was built like a race horse, which is the right build for a cairn. The cart horse is the Sealyham."

Miss Carlisle then goes on to say, "The cobby, too short-backed cairn approaches the cart horse type. . . . Am glad to have my own conviction about the real cairn made more definite by correspondence, with those in whom we have confidence, engendered by our knowledge of their great experience. All agree that the cairn must not have a short body and he can have too 'smart' a tail and he must not have a 'long, heavy snout'."

This is right to the point. On the question of head, one of the points that the cairn differs in from all other terriers, the Baroness Burton in the Cairn Terrier Association year book writes: "The head is to my mind the most important point in a cairn terrier. Thereby virtually hangs all true type. The cairn with a good head is half through.

"The novice will ask, 'What is a good head?' The head should be wedge-shaped. The skull wide between the ears, tapering to the nose. The width between



This is the ideal cairn, perfectly proportioned in its length of leg and back

the ears is most essential. The ears should not be set too wide apart, or at the side of the head, nor yet near together on top of the skull. They should be very small and very pointed, preferably black in color. The eyes must be dark hazel, medium in size, and not prominent. Personally, I penalize a dog less for large eyes than for small, round 'boot buttons,' black ones. The latter denotes a modern Scottie cross. The large eye was quite usual thirty and more years ago. No cairn can have a proper expression unless it has eye lashes, a very simple fact to bear in mind, but one which proves itself every time.

"The head should be well feathered, viz., covered with hair about three to four inches long. If possible, this hair should not be too silky, as this tends to give a Dandie Dinmount appearance; but a silky topknot is far more typical and far less objectionable than a bare head.

"The muzzle and foreface should only be fairly strong and certainly not long. A lion, a panther and an otter all have marvelously powerful jaws, but no one can call them long. Do not think I am advocating a miserable, little, weak, simpery face. I am not. A cairn's face should resemble that of a cat, more than that of a Scotch terrier. The real old cairn fanciers, the Gaelic speakers, alluded to the perfect cairn head as 'Endeercath,' which means 'cat's face'."

IN one other respect, a cairn has some differences from other terriers, and it is one of the breed's distinctive features: Coat. Mrs. Dixon writes: "A true cairn has two coats: a very soft, thick undercoat, and a harsh outercoat, about one and a half to two inches long, sufficiently wiry to throw off moisture. They are very easily kept in order. A good brushing and combing daily does wonders. With regard to trimming, I

think a better word is 'tidying' as trimming is misleading and makes you immediately think of the wooden images one sees, trimmed until they resemble toy dogs which have lost their little green stand.

"'Tidying' means keeping the ears clear of long hair and the feet also; and only allowing a little feathering on the tail, leaving enough to balance it. Otherwise, leave them alone, and keep them hardy, shaggy, lovable, varminty, little terriers, one of the few remaining breeds which are shown as nature made them."

Unfortunately, the judging of dogs is not a science in which results are reached with the exactness of mathematics. It depends upon human knowledge and experience, for, in passing on any breed of dogs, the judge needs to employ a close observation and most careful reasoning. The results are more or less approximate, and necessarily, dependent on the amount of knowledge of the particular breed possessed by the judge, upon the accuracy with which his observations are made, and on the correctness of the judgments with which his decisions are reached. Errors may be due to lack of knowledge of animal form, lack of breed knowledge, inaccuracy in observation, failure to make his comparisons correctly, mistakes in judgment in arriving at final conclusions, but the chief cause for the lack of proper judging is failure to consider breed type or character over and above all other requirements.

Full information as to what constitutes correct breed type, conformation, size, make and shape in a breed, is then the first requisite for successful judging. In other words, the judge must know what breed excellence is in order to be consistent in his awards. He must make decisions, which may afterward be maintained with justice. He must have an absolutely definite idea of breed uses and requirements to insure selecting his winners to the accepted standard of the breed.

This is difficult, for a standard forms itself clearly in one's mind only as the results of experience, observation, and study have merged together into a clearly defined mental image of the ideal breed type. To formulate this ideal is absolutely necessary as the basis of breeding, and even more so to be successful in judging. To acquire this ideal, it is necessary to be familiar with the highest types and the best qualities of the particular breed, as exemplified not alone by the successful winners of the day, but the great dogs of the breed in the past.

In the case of the cairn terrier, the names of some of these great dogs of the past have been mentioned, and it is hoped that those who may judge the cairn can find some useful hints for acceptance in this outline of the history, origin, and uses of the cairn; and the opinions of various well-known judges, writers, and breeders on cairn type.

In order to carry out the object of the Club, we wish to avoid in the cairn terrier the inroads of modernization. In proportion to his height at the shoulder the cairn is a distinctly longer bodied dog than the Sealyham, West Highland White, or Scottish terrier in relation to their height at shoulder and their body length. We do not want the short backs of these three breeds on the cairn. We do not want a long, strong fore-face. We do not want the cairn 'on the leg', but neither do we want him a low-legged dog.

In this regard, we must remember the work he is bred for. He must be a very agile and active dog, one who can easily and with as little effort as possible, jump from rock to rock and balance himself on steeply sloping surfaces. Therefore, his legs should be of medium length, not as short as those of the Sealyham and Scottish terriers, nor as long as the foxterrier.

We must strenuously avoid exaggerations of all kinds in the cairn, for at present, with the exception of the white West Highland terrier, he is the only terrier breed which is—or should be—devoid of any abnormal features.

We do not, decidedly, want him to become one of the trimmed breeds. In swinging away from the too small toyish cairns we must be very careful not to go to the other extreme. Big, coarse, common cairns are equally undesirable. These things we decidedly wish to avoid. We repeat that we want the cairn to be a dog weighing 14 lbs. and of proper proportions to go with that weight. His height at the shoulder should be approximately two-thirds his body length.

We want the prospective judge to read and study the cairn standard and bear in mind that the modern cairn is an attempt to reproduce in his most typical form the old working terrier of the Isle of Skye and the West Highlands of Scotland, and that he should be able to meet the performance, and carry out the purpose for which these dogs were bred.