

THE IRISH WOLFHOUND

MASCOTS FOR THE IRISH BRIGADE.

Mr. John Redmond, M.P., in the course of a letter to the press a few weeks ago, said:—

'I may say that, through the generosity and public spirit of a leading Irishman and friend of mine in England, Mr. Thomas Ryan, of Buxton, I have been placed in a position of being able to present, as a mascot, an Irish wolfhound to each of the three Irish Brigades. The dogs are most splendid animals, of the purest strain, and they come from the finest Irish wolfhound kennel. One of them stands 9½ hands high to the shoulder. I hope personally to have the opportunity of presenting these dogs to the brigades.'

In connection with Mr. Redmond's intimation, the following particulars regarding the Irish wolfhound will be of special interest:—

The Irish wolfhound may best be described as a big, powerful dog of the greyhound type: he is rough in coat, long and enormously strong in jaws, and possesses great bone. He has a turn of speed faster in a sprint than a foxhound, but slower than the greyhound and the deerhound, both of which are smaller and lighter. It is said that the Scottish deerhound is a descendant of the Irish wolfhound; and it is probable that when the Irish colonised Scotland under Rueda, like all other peoples who settle in a new country, they took their domesticated animals, including their dogs (says an exchange). They were noble dogs, too, big, strong, courageous brutes, and able enough to tackle anything in Scotia Minor, as Scotland was styled by the old writers, Scotia Major being Ireland itself.

There is a remarkable quantity of evidence that the old wolfdog of Ireland was noted for his nobility of character and his prowess. It is questionable if any dog has been so written about as the Irish wolfdog. There are many references to him, and the late Capt. George A. Graham, of Dursley, England, when he brought forward the idea of re-establishing the breed about forty years ago, sought long for the allusions ancient writers made to the Irish wolfdog or wolfhound as he is known to-day.

The dog flourished at the time of the early kings of Ireland, and, with the harp and shamrock, he is regarded as one of the national emblems of the country. The Irish wolfdogs were formerly placed as the supporters of the arms of the ancient monarchs of Ireland. They were collared with the motto 'Gentle when stroked, fierce when provoked.' It is worthy of note that the Welsh laws of the ninth century made it an illegal act to maim or kill an Irish wolfdog; further, the fine was heavy and larger than most imposed for the wilful wounding or destruction of the ordinary greyhound. The Irish wolfdog was valued among the nations; but he appears to have died out in the eighteenth century. It is supposed that the last wolf was killed at Dingle, Ireland, in 1710.

History of the Irish Wolfdog.

The Rev. Edmund Hogan, in his *History of the Irish Wolfdog*, tells that in the first century of the Christian era the King of Connaught and the King of Ulster each offered the King of Leinster 6000 cows, a chariot and horses for a famous wolfhound, and went to war to decide the issue.

Going back over the centuries, it is interesting to note that Pliny relates a combat in which the dogs of Epirus bore a part. He describes them as much taller than mastiffs and of greyhound form, detailing an account of their conquests with a lion and an elephant. The allusion to the greyhound-like dog and bigger than the mastiff certainly points to the old Irish wolfdog. It is difficult to imagine that any dog would have the strength or the physical proportions to withstand the stroke of a lion or the swing or stamp of the elephant, but it is admitted the Irish dog was very strong, and perhaps even more so in the days of the old Roman arena. Strabo (B.C. 54, A.D. 24) describes a large and powerful greyhound as having been in use among

the Celtic and British nations, and as being held in such high estimation by them as to have been imported into Gaul for the purposes of the chase. Silius describes a large and powerful greyhound as having been imported into Ireland by the Belgae, thus identifying the Irish wolfdog with the celebrated Belgic dogs of antiquity, which were taken to Rome.

Sir James Warr, in his *Antiquities of Ireland*, thus writes regarding the Irish wolfdog about 1630:— 'I must here take notice of those hounds which from their hunting of wolves are commonly called wolfdogs—being creatures of great size and strength and of a fine shape.' Camden about 1568 says:— 'The Irish wolfhound is similar in shape to the greyhounds, bigger than a mastiff and tractable as a spaniel.' Stamburst's description of Ireland about 1560 contains this short account of the Irish wolfdog:— 'Ireland is stored of cows, excellent horses, of hawks, fish, and fowls. They are not without wolves, and greyhounds to hunt them, bigger of bone and limb than a colt.' In November, 1562, the Irish chieftain, Shane O'Neill, forwarded to Queen Elizabeth of England, through Robert Earl of Leicester, a present of two horses, two hawks, and two Irish wolfdogs, and in 1585 Sir John Perrott, who was Deputy of Ireland, sent out to Sir Francis Walsingham, then Secretary of State, in London, a brace of good wolfdogs, one black and one white. When Sir Thomas Rowe was Ambassador at the Court of the Great Mogul, in the year 1613, that emperor desired him to send for some Irish greyhounds as the most welcome present he could make.

Getting Scarce.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, as before written, the true wolfdogs of Ireland were getting scarce. Smith (1774), in his *History of Waterford*, says that the dog, formerly abounding in the country, was becoming nearly extinct; that the dog was much taller than the mastiff, but made more like a greyhound. Pennant (1776-81) remarks that the dog was then scarce. Bewick (1792) asserts that the Irish wolfdog was the largest of its kind and the most beautiful. It was at one time serviceable for hunting the fox, the stag, and the hare.

The antiquity of the Irish dog is vouched for. He died out, but there remained the Scottish deerhound, his offshoot, and the German boarhound of the light type to breed from; and from this alliance and careful after breeding, the quality of the deerhound being kept in sight, the present-day Irish wolfhound was produced. That he is a magnificent animal no one will doubt; and, further, he is fit and able to tackle a wolf, although he might not be always capable of overtaking the large timber wolf. The wolf moves along at an easy but deceiving gait, quickening his pace when he is forced; and it is because of his speed and his endurance that it is difficult to run him down with a good pack of foxhounds. It has taken four consecutive days, not running him at night, on the same wolf to make him turn round and face his enemies.

More for Ornament than Use.

The Irish wolfhound is kept to-day more for ornament than for use, and he is seldom taken out for actual work. If he met a wolf in a corner he would put up a good fight, and probably could overcome a full-grown wolf. In breeding for great size in Irish wolfhounds considerable difficulty has been experienced by breeders in raising them so that they shall attain all those properties that go to make a big, sound dog. Many of them go wrong in their hindquarters, and their incarried hocks point to a serious defect—a weakness, in fact. This fault, however, is prevalent in large breeds, such as mastiffs and St. Bernards, which, because of their massive frames or bodies, break down in the pasterns as puppies; also in their hocks. That is the reason great size of bone is required in the Irish wolfhound. All this substance is wanted as a prop to support the heavy-bodied dog. Sound food and gentle exercise do the rest.

Habits of Irish Wolfdog.

It is best, if there is space and opportunity, to allow the Irish wolfhound puppy absolute freedom from