

The Great Pyrenees

One of the newest breeds in America and one of the oldest in Europe.

BY WILL S. MONROE, *President of the Great Pyrenees Club of America.*

THE Thibet Mastiff, Siber, Leighton, and other canine historians maintain,¹ is the prototype from which the modern Mastiff types have descended—the English Mastiff of the British Isles, the Great Pyrenees of the mountains of France and Spain, the Molossis groups of the Balkans and Asia Minor, the Kommodore and the Kuvass of the plains of Hungary, the Leonberg of Central Europe, the St. Bernard of the Alps, and the Dogue de Bordeaux of South-West France.

The type of the Thibet Mastiff has remained practically unchanged for thousands of years. A description of the breed is contained in Chinese writings that date back to 1121 B. C. The bas-relief in the Kensington Museum at London from the ruins of Babylon and Ninevah and the palace of Assurbianipal (constructed in 930 B. C.) depict the breed. Marco Polo, who visited the plateau of Tibet several times during the thirteenth century has left accounts that are in agreement with the descriptions given by Brooke, Dougall, Siber, and other travellers of our own day.

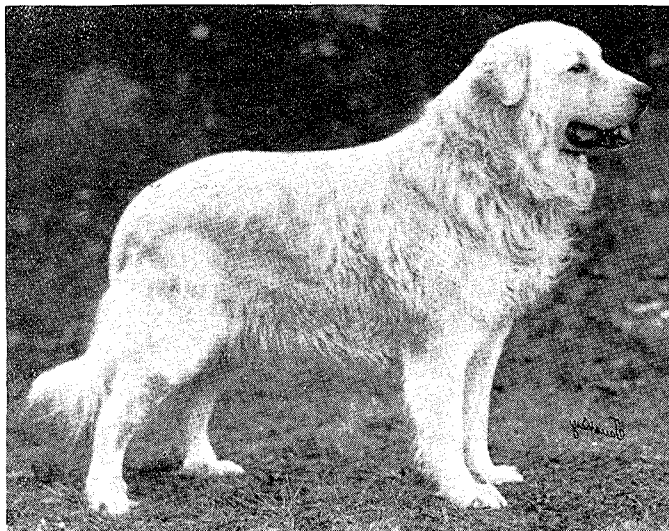
I have seen the Tibet Mastiff in England. His chief characteristic is his majestic form, noble head, sturdy forelegs, dewclaws on the hind legs (found on the Great Pyrenees and mountain dogs of other breeds), a dense coat with a woolly undercoat, and a handsome bushy tail that is often carried high, even curled over the back. The head is not large in comparison with the great size of the body; the skull is slightly rounded; the muzzle is rather long; the nose and lips are black, the eyes are dark but not large, and the small ears are triangular at the tip. The color is frequently black, sometimes black and tan or entirely reddish tan.

The Thibet Mastiff is a house dog and guardian of the live stock and other property. He is not a sheep dog, in the sense of driving and leading the flocks, but rather the protector against fierce animals and bandits. He has an aversion for male strangers (a characteristic of my Basque), but with women and children he is docile and good-tempered. But, for differences of color, he bears striking resemblance to the Great Pyrenees, long called the Pyrenean Mastiff.

Formerly it was supposed that the Mastiffs of England and Spain and France had been brought from Thibet by the Huns and other wandering Mongolian tribes during the Fourth and Fifth Centuries. Modern historians fix the date of their appearance in Western Europe many centuries earlier. In the long trek, covering thousands of years, the Asiatic Mastiffs accompanied Eurasian tribes to India, Persia, and Asia Minor. Those that became the ancestors of the Molossoides, the Kuvass, the Kommodores, and the Leonbergs probably crossed to Europe by the Bosphorus. But the English Mastiff reached Britain and the Pyrenean Mastiffs were brought to Spain by Phoenecian traders from Sidon and Tyre by water routes. The Phoenicians, a Semitic people, remarkable for their industry and enterprise, had early established commercial marts throughout maritime South-West Asia and on the shores of the Mediterranean. The commercial city of Sidon was established about 1,500 B. C., and that of Tyre about 1,200 B. C. About 1,100 they established a commercial center at Cadiz in Andalusia, Spain.

They were the foremost traders of their day and their nautical skill and geographical position made their markets the centers of exchange between the East and the West. It is known that they voyaged to Cornwall to barter their commodities (glassware, purple dyes, and manufactured implements) for British tin and other useful metals; and that they brought with them the ancestors of the present-day English Mastiff, the oldest known British breed of dogs. Similarly, the Pyrenean Mastiff, as he was earlier called, was brought to Cadiz. For centuries he was confined to the Spanish slopes of the Pyrenees mountains. Ultimately he was introduced to the northern or French side to protect the flocks of the Basques and other native tribes from the ravages of fierce wild animals and plundering hordes of bandits. Later they were introduced into most of the countries of Europe, where they were known as Chiens de Pyrenees; and, during the first quarter of the last century, they were taken to Scotland to cross with the Scotch Deerhound. It will be recalled that the sire of the famous "Maida" of Sir Walter Scott was a Mastiff from the Pyrenees. In Great Britain today they are called Pyrenean Mountain Dogs.

The earliest introduction of the breed in America was in 1824 when the Marquis de Lafayette, who had fought on the side of the Colonists in the American War of Independence, visited the United States to receive the honors and emoluments of our government and people for his distinguished services. He brought two Pyrenean Mastiffs, unfortunately both males, as a gift to his friend and the manager of his properties in the United States, John Stuart Skinner, Esq. Skinner writes of the dogs: "The Pyrenean dog is of great size, immense strength, and indomitable courage . . . With an iron collar around his neck, having pointed nails in it, he is enabled to hunt and kill the wolf . . . This race of dogs the most useful, the most noble, the most courageous of any other. He never loses his self-possession, nor forgets the voice of his master, to whom he is al-



CH. URDOS DE SOUM

(A. K. C. 866752)

Owned by Mr. and Mrs. Crane, Needham, Mass.

ways very obedient.²

Nearly a century later, Mr. and Mrs. Francis V. Crane, of Needham, Mass., imported from the Pyrenees the first breeding pair—Urdos de Soum and Blanchette. My Basque of Basquaerie was the first born in the first litter. He was born June the 20th, 1933; and at the age of eighteen months, he weighed 128 pounds, to date, the heaviest American-bred Great Pyrenees. His height is 29 inches; his length from the shoulder blades to the root of the tail, 29 inches, and from the dome of the head to the point of the nose, 11 inches. Ch Urdos de Soum, his sire, is entirely white, and Blanchette, the dam, white, with badger-color markings on the sides of the head and at the root of the tail. Basque has the badger-color markings on the sides of the head.

¹ Max Siber: *Le Dogue du Thibet*, Geneva 1897. Robert Leighton: *The New Book of the Dog—a Comprehensive Natural History of British Dogs and their Foreign Relatives*. London, 1911, 2 volumes.

² John S. Skinner: *The Dog and the Sportsman*. Philadelphia, 1845.

The Great Pyrenees are generally white, but frequently with markings of badger, grey, or lemon-color. Dogs that are entirely white are preferred, although I find that badger markings on the sides of the head, as in my Basque, give the dogs a more kindly expression than when the head is entirely white. In a recent extended tour in France in the regions of the Pyrenees Mountains, long the chief habitat of the breed, I was told that all-white specimens suggested pure-bred dogs, whereas those with pronounced color-markings were regarded as inferior cross-bred specimens. However, this is more or less a mooted question, on which fanciers themselves are not entirely agreed.

The American Standard for Great Pyrenees states that the average height at the shoulders should be from 27 to 32 inches in dogs and 25 to 29 inches for bitches. The weight for dogs should be from 100 to 125 pounds and for bitches 90 to 115 pounds. These figures suggest that the type today is distinctly smaller than a half century back, if we are to accept as accurate the measurements of authors in the 1850's, '60's, and '70's. Even before the outbreak of the World War there had been marked deterioration among the dogs bred, and particularly those bred by peasant farmers in the mountain valleys. The World War decimated the breed, most of the larger dogs having been drafted for ambulance, messenger, sentry, and scouting service; and larger numbers, not drafted, died from limitation of food. This left behind, particularly in the mountainous regions, the smaller and weaker dogs, the forebears of the present generations.

Fanciers in France and in Europe generally today are doing much to bring the breed back to its original size and type. A third of a century back, M. and Mme. Dretzen inaugurated a movement to this end; they diligently toured the mountain valleys of the Pyrenees, but they found chiefly inferior cross-bred specimens. Out of 350 dogs that they examined, they found only six that conformed to the original type, as presenting the true characteristics of the race. "Parthos," one of the specimens selected, became the sire of some of the finest dogs subsequently bred in France. He was milky white and his weight exceeded 155 pounds. Mr. Leighton, who knew the six breeding members selected by the Dretzens, remarks that the other five specimens considerably exceeded the size of "Parthos." In recent times a specialty club of the friends of the Great Pyrenees (Amateurs de Chiens Pyrénéens), in which M. Sénac-Lagrange has been a moving spirit, has done much to continue the movement so well begun by M. and Mme. Dretzen.

In America a large measure of credit is due to Mr. and Mrs. Francis V. Crane for the importation of some good dogs and the establishment of Basquaerie Kennels at Needham, Mass. Since the importation of Ch. Urdos de Soum and Blanchette, four years ago, they have bred forty-two pups now living. Fifteen adult dogs and bitches, besides the original pair, have been imported by the Cranes and others from France.

The American-bred pups are widely scattered throughout the United States and Canada, and one has gone to England. One Great Pyrenees dog has gone to the Grenfell Mission at St. Anothon's, Labrador, and a pup was recently shipped from Basquaerie to the Diocese of the Arctic, in Northwest British America.

Since the exhibition of Urdos de Soum and Blanchette at the Westminster Show in New York City in 1933, Great Pyrenees have been conspicuous and much admired at practically all the important shows in the North Atlantic States. Urdos de Soum was the first to attain championship, since which time seven other members of the Basquaerie Kennels have reached that distinction. The demand for the new breed is encouraging, and the owners are genuinely enthusiastic. The dog is generally recognized as one of the noblest specimens of "Man's Best Friend." Mrs. Crane, who has written the best account of his virtues in the following paragraph: "He possesses to an uncanny degree the understanding of man's every whim and action; he is devoted to the point of giving



BASQUE OF BASQUAERIE
(A. K. C. 896873)
PROFESSOR MONROE

his all in service and love for his master; he is faithful to the last degree; he is one of the most intelligent dogs in the world; and, combined with it all, he is one of the most picturesque and beautiful animals. Lithe and quick in action, he can keep up with a horse with ease; and, of unlimited stamina and strength, he can withstand any amount of hardship, exercise, and exposure. To those who really know and love the Great Pyrenees, it seems that he leaves nothing to be desired, and that he combines within him-

self, to a degree attainable in perhaps no other breed, the every tribute man looks for and admires."³

A number of abortive efforts have been made to introduce the breed in Great Britain. Mme. Harper Trois Fontaines has within the past year established a kennel at her country estate at Moor Park, Middlesex, near London. She has been fortunate in securing several fine specimens for breeding stock; and, with her great love of the breed and her stupendous energy, success seems certain to follow her efforts. She was unfortunate in the loss



KOP de CAREIL
(K. C. 40421)
MME. HARPER TROIS FONTAINES

of two valuable dogs during the interminable British quarantine. The three handsome specimens now at the Kennel de Fontenay are Kop de Careil, Jannette de Bois, and Nethou de Langladure. Kop is a large and handsome dog from Careil Kennels at Château de Jacques Coeur, near Roanne, France. His pedigree is excellent. He was born July, 1933, and measures at the shoulders 32 inches. Jannette is from the same Kennels, although of different parentage. Her dam is Ch. Norah de Careil. She is a large and attractive bitch. The third member of Mme. Harper's kennel is Nethou de Langladure, who, at the age of fifteen months, measures 28 inches at the shoulders. His sire is one of the best known champions in France, Estagel d'Argeles, belonging to the Countess Sauvigny et Berthier, and his dam Ch. Ariel de Soum.

³ Mary Winslow Crane: *The Great Pyrenees (with the Standard adopted by the Great Pyrenees Club of America). Pure-Bred Dogs. The American Kennel Club, New York, 1935. pp. 303-310.*