

Foreword



THE antiquity of the Ass is very great and undisputed, and the world's literature is packed with references to the Ass, the Donkey, the Mule, or any other of the many names by which it has been known. It was not, however, until recent times that the donkey, unlike the horse, enjoyed the advantage of having books devoted solely to its breeding, training, and welfare, all of which have sought to advise and satisfy the needs of the hordes of owners who have fallen to its charms. No doubt these have been, and are, serving a very useful purpose.

No practical advice of this sort, however, will be found in this most excellent book of Anthony Dent's, no word of help to the puzzled owner of this lovable animal; instead he tells us at considerable length and in great detail the fascinating story of the humble ass throughout the ages, much too of that strange, greatly misunderstood, yet to many of us much to be admired, relative, the Mule.

Many facts and countless figures can well make very dull reading, especially when offered at book-length, yet, reading this book, I find myself fascinated by the story of the donkey, by the charm and humour with which it is told, and frankly somewhat bewildered by the author's exceptional diligence and erudition. One gets the impression that Anthony Dent has searched every corner of the earth to tell us about all there is to be known of the donkey, and during his journey collected many intriguing and unusual drawings to embellish this outstanding work.

Having as it were enriched the earth to tell us of the various types and where to find them, he ends up in Ceylon, where donkeys, we learn, are few in number. The donkey of Ceylon, he writes, "is a dwarf, but a comely dwarf, of charming proportions, an attractive dark-brown, almost coffee-coloured. All donkey foals are enchanting, but the Ceylonese especially so with their thimble-sized hoofs and large round eyes. If anyone

had designed a plush toy, in this shape, with this colour and texture of coat, you would say it was unreal and sentimental. But no. It seems God can be sentimental too, sometimes." Of course every donkey-lover should read this book—and share my enjoyment, which has been great. Here is surely the Complete Story of the Donkey.

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