

What About the Lhasa Apso by Madame Yolande de Zarobe

A little more than twenty years ago, the founder President of the Tibetan Dogs Club, Mlle Violette Dupont, had asked me to write a booklet on the Lhasa Apso. Apart from books written in English, at that time there was no French text on that breed with the exception of Dr. Lescure's thesis on the Lhasa Terrier. As far as I know, his thesis remains one of the most complete documents on the subject. Thanks to information which I was lucky enough to gather from the very mouth of the Honorable Mrs. Bailey and from Lady Freda Valentine - both at the origin of the breed in the West - I was able to write a text which recalled the main lines of the Lhasa Apso history.

Even at that time, the problem of the (growing) size was worrying the true amateurs. How far have we got today, after sixty years of breeding in the Western world? Certain fears have unfortunately turned out to be well grounded, fashion and its trail of exaggerations have pushed on so strongly that in the eighties, we had a dog in no way comparable with the original dog. As years passed, a "modern Lhasa Apso" has taken form.

Size which never stops growing, eyelid opening too large, skull too domed, neck too long, coats abundant but not the right texture (goat hair) all characteristics which, to make a long story short, are out of type. Authenticity has been steam-rollered for the benefit of the spectacular.

Personally, I consider this to be a mistake. One thing is to create beauty, but even so, breed should be respected. A good dog is the one which answers its function. The Lhasa Apso is a pet dog, it should therefore be a companion able to follow you wherever you go. Such a long haired coat constitutes a severe handicap for walks on rough ground. Where in the standard is it mentioned that hair must touch the ground? All it says is "of a good length" ("it must as the name implies have long hair, the longer the better, within reason" - The Honorable Mrs. Bailey - American Kennel Gazette - March 1937)

This dog is one which nature has fashioned to be adapted to a rough mountain country. This dog, which should be strong-backed, thick set but small-size, "heavy as lead" (dixit Lady Freda Valentine), is being denatured by trying to impose on it a style which does not belong to it, in one word, too sophisticated a style. The rule is for the dog to obey the standard and not the standard to obey the dog!

Neither should we forget the Tibetan religious legend which always associates it with Buddha's lion. Has this little dog ("sengtru" = lion dog) retained its leonine type, its strong neck well covered by a thick mane (cf. standard) its almond shaped eyes, its slightly upwards hind quarters which retaining a straight back, though not parallel with the ground, and its hooked tail? We should think again, return to the original standard, and its revisions, and carry out a comparative study, such as the text explanations which used to be our home-work when we were young.

This is an interesting task : its synthesis could be the ideal reference for judges and breeders, giving the picture of a dog representative of its breed, for if we classify it as a Tibetan dog, It must possess the characteristics of its origin. Otherwise, why call it a Tibetan dog?

We have become aware of the need to safeguard nature and animals threatened with extinction therefore why do we persist in altering the characteristics of our pets. This is an obvious paradox.

I am practically sure that the forces of energy and love which have led amateurs, at the cost of considerable efforts, to keep striving step after step, in search of the archetype imposed by fashion, these same forces will again, after a time of reflection, allow them to return to a more reasonable balance, to something more

natural, in fact to authenticity.

Things are beginning to move that way in Canada, England, Germany, France, Spain, Switzerland and even in the United States, which has hitherto been the apostle of extreme sophistication. Here, there, and everywhere, people are seeking to return to the true original type.

I hope and wish that France, who was the first country on the Continent to own Lhasa Apsos, (and in the opinion of the Honorable Mrs. Bailey there were the finest in Europe) breeders will seek out in their stocks those which have retained the characteristics of the proper type and that judges - who are the keepers of the standard - will encourage them to do so.

Y. de ZAROBÉ'