

THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE & HOME MAGAZINE

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CONTENTS.

EDITORIAL:—
1—Illustration. 2—Editorial Notes; Messrs. David Morton & Sons' Ayreshires; A Coffee Humbug; Notice to Advertisers. 3—The Fat at Guelph. 4—Agricultural and Arts Association of the Province of Ontario; Ontario Fruit Growers' Association; Tree Seed Distribution.

STOCK:—
5—The Value of Fancy Points in Breeding Stock. 6—Our Abridged Report of the Hon. John Dryden's Speech, Delivered at Guelph at the Close of the Provincial Fat Stock Show; Tamworth Swine. 7—Timely Notes for January; Our Scottish Letter; More Hogs Wanted; First Prize Essay—The Care and Feeding of Breeding Ewes in Winter and Spring; The Theory and Practice of Sheep Breeding in Manitoba. 8—Practical Notes on Wintering Sheep: The Selection and Care of Breeding Ewes in Manitoba; Canadian Cattle Breeders' Association; How the Advocate is Appreciated; Chatty Letter from States. FARM:—
9—How Best to Overcome the Present Agricultural Depression; Agricultural Exhibitions; Agricultural Education in Wisconsin. 10—Horticultural Notes; Farmers' Clubs—When Started.

ENTOMOLOGY:—
10—Injurious Insects—No. 10.
POULTRY:—
11—Poultry on the Farm.

DAIRY:—
11—Churning Sweet Cream at Low Temperatures; Winter Dairying and Exhaustion of Soil.

VETERINARY:—
11—Veterinary College, Toronto, Canada.

FAMILY CIRCLE:—12.

MINNIE MAY'S DEPARTMENT:—12 and 13.

UNCLE TOM'S DEPARTMENT:—14.

NOTICES:—15.

STOCK Gossip:—15, 16, 17.

ADVERTISEMENTS:—15 to 20.

We have reason to believe our subscribers will be much pleased with the change made in the form of the "Advocate," and by the fact that it will hereafter be published twice each month. We hope each old subscriber will endeavor to increase our circulation by sending us at least one new name. We also request our subscribers to send us agricultural items of interest to our readers. Examine the label on your paper, if you are not paid to January, 1894, kindly remit us forthwith. After making payment notice your label, and if credit is not at once given, notify us immediately, that we may be able to trace the money. All P. O. orders and registered letters are at our risk. Carefully read the above announcement.

STOCK.

The Value of Fancy Points in Breeding Stock.

[Prepared for the last meeting of Dominion Sheep Breeders' Association by J. C. Snell, Edmonton, Ont.]

A very serious obstacle in the way of the successful development of the best qualities in many of the principal breeds of live stock is the undue value too often placed upon what, for want of a better name, we call "fancy points." It is no doubt necessary that, in order to distinguish between the various breeds, some general marks or characteristics should prevail in each, and as a rule these are found in their color markings. There are some breeds in which the peculiarity of color is so uniform and unvarying as to leave little room for doubt as to their purity of breeding, but there are scarcely any in which color alone, apart from other indications, can safely be accepted as an infallible guide.

It is a well-known fact that in many cases a grade or cross-bred animal, sometimes with not more than one or two crosses of pure-bred sires, shows all the orthodox color-markings of the breed to which the sires belong, and also partakes very largely of the general characteristics of the breed—so much so, indeed, that the inexperienced observer might easily be deceived, and without inquiring into the history of the case might accept them as the Simon pure. Even in the case of Galloway cattle, so generally true to color, and of such ancient lineage, there are exceptions to the rule,—a red one, or a brown, or one with a white spot in forehead or on the belly, a white switch, or even a white belt around the girth. Yet the purity of breeding of these cannot be successfully challenged, and on the other hand a half-bred Galloway may be black and hornless, and have all the appearance of a thoroughbred.

Perhaps in no class of stock is color so unsafe a guide to purity of breeding as in that of swine. Many of the breeds of swine are of solid color—that is, all white, or black, or red; yet a cross between two of the white breeds may produce offspring that would pass muster for either, and we have a strong suspicion that there have been cases where pigs from the same litter have figured in the prize lists of two different breeds without detection. And we have seen cases where from a cross between the Berkshires and one of the white breeds, some of the pigs have shown all the color-markings of one parent, and others the whole color of the other parent.

Probably no breed of swine has suffered so much from the severe demands of fashion in regard to color-markings as the Berkshires. There is no evidence that in the case of the original Berkshires the white markings were confined to the extremities and to the face, but what has been called the improved Berkshire has, as a rule, white feet, a white mark in the face, and a white switch on its tail. This uniformity of markings, we all admit, is very desirable, and its perpetuation commendable, if it can be done without the sacrifice of useful and more valuable qualities; but, as we have remarked in regard to other breeds, this uniformity is no infallible guide to purity, and if relied upon may lead to disaster in breeding, for it is well known a grade Berkshire may be as correctly marked as it could be done by an artist with paint and brush, while some of the purest and best bred, and some of the grandest individual specimens of the breed in point of form, symmetry, quality and constitution have been far from filling the bill of perfect markings. One of the best Berkshire sows that has ever figured in Canada, one which was imported, the daughter of a first-prize sow at the Royal Show, and which was sold for the highest price ever paid for a sow in Canada, had a white spot on her shoulder as large as a man's hand. Yet she was bought by one of the best judges on the continent of America, who has made a fortune from her descendants, and has one of the best herds in the world.

If by consent of the best breeders a strict adherence to definite markings was considered essential to the best interests of the breed and the breeders, there would be some reason for strictly conforming to the rule, but the standard of excellence adopted by the British and American Berkshire associations embraces no cast-iron rule as to color-markings, but allows as much variation in that respect as could reasonably be desired. It is the ignorant and inexperienced breeders, those who have had no training in the art of judging animals of improved breeding and quality, who demand a strict adherence to a non-essential rule, to require just so many white hairs in just such places, and even to split hairs if need be, while they are apt to overlook the more enduring and essential substance. No matter how perfect a pig may be in form and quality, in style and constitution, if he is not perfectly marked they will have none of him, but if he is neatly marked he will do, even if he is narrow, and leggy, and cat-hampered; and you can't convince the man who knows it all that there are many things in the make-up a first-class animal that are of vastly greater value and importance than fancy markings.

It is the same conceited, more nice than wise amateur breeder or judge who would condemn a model pig because of the presence of what is called a "rose" or "swirl" on its back—a few hairs turned in the opposite direction, a trifling thing at best, and of no possible injury as far as usefulness is concerned. Yet we have known good individuals discarded from the breeding harem for this, while much inferior ones were retained; and we have recently read of a case where clearly the best hog in a class was left out of the prize-list by a so-called expert judge, and when questioned as to his reason for re-

jecting it his reply was that he "never had and never would give a prize to a pig with a swirl." Such instances as this and other equally abused exhibitions of over-fastidiousness in regard to minor points are calculated to produce contempt for the professional expert judge who strains at a gnat and sometimes swallows a camel.

This is the class of men who have been at the head of the crowd that has demanded fancy colors in some of the breeds of cattle, and have succeeded in some cases in creating a boom for color that has been carried to such absurd lengths as to prove a boomerang for the breed. The unreasonable demand for red colors in Shorthorn cattle has in the last 20 years done incalculable damage to that breed. The fashion which grew into a mania for red, and all red, and nothing but red, was an outrage on the breed, and the best breeders and judges knew it all the time; but the ignorant and the indifferent, and the designing, sordid men, who for present gain were ready to wreck the future usefulness of the breed, fanned the flame till it threatened to consume the substance, and leave nothing but a wreck behind. It was well known that the original prevailing color of the breed was not red, but white and roan, and most of the best representatives of the breed in all its generations were of these colors, and the champion bull of America at present is a roan, while a sweepstakes bull in Canada is white; although red was also a standard color, and many good ones were of that color. But when a fashion gets possession and leads to discarding from the breeding harem the best in all useful qualities and retaining all that have red hair, no matter how inferior in form, quality and constitution, to perpetuate their weakness, and intensify their meanness, it is a calamity, if it is not a crime.

The same unreasonable prejudice has worked irreparable injury to the queen of butter breeds, the Jerseys. The demand for solid color as the first desideratum in a butter cow is simply absurd. It is well known that originally the breed was freely marked with white, and the first Jerseys we saw in this country were of good size, with deep bodies and large capacity for working food into milk and butter, and white markings were common. But the fashion for solid colors has got possession, and a bull with white marks on him, no matter how rich his breeding, or how high a record his dam may have as a worker, must be condemned and discarded, and this in spite of the fact that even in this day some of the very best performers of the breed are not of solid color. Mrs. Jones' famous cow, Massena, with a record of over 900 lbs. of butter in a year, having quite a large proportion of white, and Bisson's Belle, the queen of the Jerseys, with a record of over 1,000 lbs. in a year, is far from being of solid color; but a thoroughbred scrub Jersey that is utterly useless as a worker may fill the bill of fashion, and a half-bred Jersey may be solid fawn, and you can't convince the man who knows it all that a Jersey with white marks is pure-bred. Oh, no! You may tell that to the sailors, but he has cut his eye teeth and you can't deceive him!

There have been times when prejudice as to color has stood in the way of improvement in the breeding of horses, and no doubt has seriously interfered with improvement in all useful qualities; but fortunately common sense has again prevailed, and the good old saying that "a good horse is never a bad color," is acknowledged to be a true proverb yet. Too much value has also been placed upon fancy points in the breeding of sheep. The objections made by some people to a grey or brown face and legs in the case of Cotswold sheep is unreasonable, and is injurious to the breed. The experienced breeder knows that it belongs to the breed, that it is found in many of the best specimens in the best flock, both in England and in America, and that good judges and good breeders do not object to it, but rather like it, having learned from observation that, as a rule, those so marked are the strongest, healthiest sheep in the flock, having better constitutions and a greater ability to resist disease. But the uninformed and inexperienced are slow to believe that a Cotswold sheep so marked is pure-bred, though all the other indications of purity are present. The craze for extra covering on the forehead and crown of the Cotswold, and some other breeds, is also injurious to the interests of the breed and the breeder. I think it is safe to say that, as a rule, the sheep with the strongest constitution and the best developed conformation is not the one with the heaviest headgear; and too often a sheep that is exceptionally strong in all the most useful points, but deficient in this, is rejected as a breeder, while one that is far inferior in form, in quality and robustness of character is used, with the inevitable result that his weaknesses are perpetuated in the flock. I am free to say that some of the very smallest and weakest, the narrow chested and most effeminate, are the most perfectly covered on head and legs, but what does it amount to if they have none of the enduring qualities that are calculated to improve the breed and add to its real usefulness? As in the case of color markings, so in regard to this fad, it is no sure indication of pure breeding, for a half-bred may have it in perfection, while a thoroughbred may be deficient in that minor point.

One of the worst features about this whole business is that these fashions and fads, which are so manifestly and admittedly injurious to the best interests of our improved breeds of stock, are originated by the ignorant and inexperienced and unsuccessful breeders. Men, in many cases, who are mere speculators, and not deserving of the dignified title of breeders, have been allowed to lead and rule the course of men who know their business.