

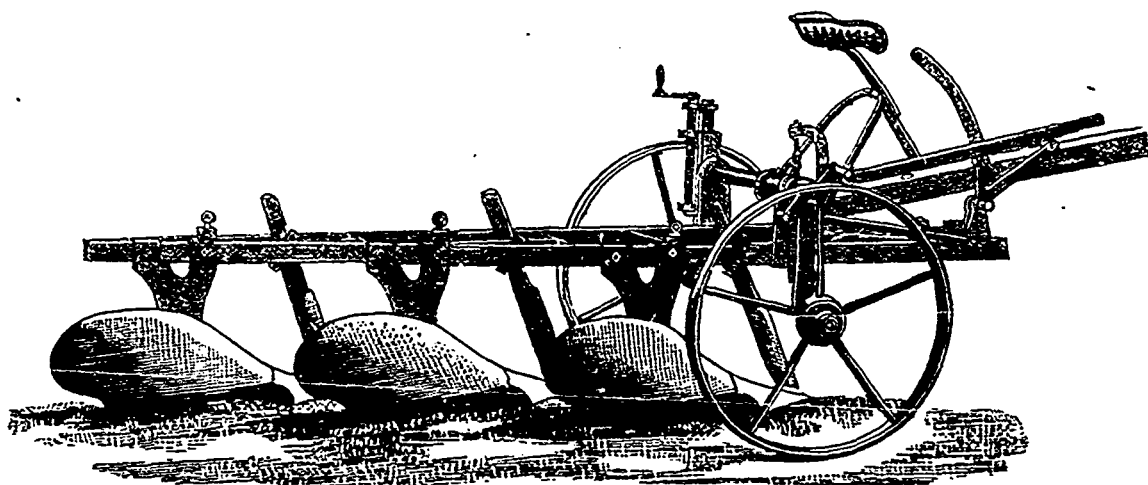
the two extreme points of the West Midlands. Cannock Chase is at the eastern, and Clun Forest at the western extremity. The centre of the picture has to be filled up by what occurred in Mid-Staffordshire and West Staffordshire and all over Shropshire.

Several decades ago there were developed great industries in coal and iron at Wellington, Coalport, and other districts in Shropshire. Wolverhampton, simultaneously, largely increased in population. The demand for mutton and lamb, of course, largely increased at the same time. To meet this demand, and to take advantage of it for their own profit, the farmers of Shropshire extended their turnip and green crops, and looked further afield for breeding sheep. The native stocks, in short, were not equal to the increased demand.

Breeding sheep were sought and bought in the midland and southern counties every autumn for many years, and they were walked to Shropshire and Staffordshire by thousands. Numbers of farmers paid this annual southward visit with

These were somewhat leggy and flat-ribbed sheep, with black points, and some of them had short horns curving prettily upwards. They of course took some time to get fat, and the mutton the noble marquis used to put before his guests was four or five years old. But so much for quality.

Then there were the shorter-legged and more early maturing stock which had been cultivated in and around Clun Forest. The sheep undoubtedly had—and the old-established flocks still have—a large strain of the Welsh breed. Their contour and walk still show this. The ewes of this breed are bought in large numbers for producing fat lambs near London on the Essex and Herts sides. They are reputed to be the most prolific in yielding milk of any known breed. So well is this reputation established in the districts named, that the farmers do not mind losing 5s. per head on the ewes when they are sold out fat in the following summer, as they produce such good and early lambs that they make from 35s. to 45s. and 50s. in April and May. This is, no doubt, the reason why



HOWARD'S GANG PLOUGH.

this view. The occupier of Patshull at that time, Colonel Jones, was a pioneer in this movement. Some farmers bought Leicester ewes, others Southdown, and others Hants-down ewes, while according as taste ran for an increase of wool, or early maturity was required, so Longwoolled rams were put to Shortwoolled ewes, or the opposite practice was pursued. Thus Shropshire became filled in the course of time with a large stock of all the best breeds of sheep in England. So much was this the case that ultimately there was no necessity for the farmers of the West Midlands to turn southwards in search of stock sheep. There still remained flocks of the old native breeds. Eventually these native breeds and the migrated stocks were brought together. Hence the want of uniformity in colour quality, and length of wool that existed thirty or forty years ago. And hence, too, this breed of sheep, like the Anglo Saxon race of mankind, is equal to every quality of food, and adapted for almost every climate.

The stock of the old Cannock Chase sheep has no doubt given this breed the fine dark colour and fine flavour of their flesh. We have been informed that the flock of Beaudesert is the oldest one of this breed which has a recorded history. The quality of their flesh and fat has been celebrated for many years as being more like venison than mutton. So much was this the case that the late Marquis of Anglesea had unlimited standing orders from the distinguished guests who visited him to send quarters, sides, or carcasses to noblemen and gentlemen all over the kingdom, and could his agent have produced ten times as many, the demand would not have been supplied.

Shropshire ewes may be justly looked upon as equal to any breed for suckling their lambs.

It was among these two breeds that the Leicesters and Downs, as above described, were introduced. Of course great want of uniformity and type was the result. Different opinions and tastes on the part of farmers had also much to do with this. Some preferred the old-fashioned mottle face with a Southdown type, while others liked larger sheep and black points. All this want of uniformity was made more and more conspicuous when the Shropshire breeders prevailed on the Royal Agricultural Society's authorities to appoint separate classes for the Shropshire breed of sheep. Judges at shows of course also differed in opinions. One year, two out of the three were in favour of the more Southdown colour and type, while the next year, two were in favour of dark colour, and more size, notwithstanding the legs of the sheep were a little longer, and that the latter required more cake and corn to mature them early, or more time to get them fat in the ordinary way. The advocates of the latter argued, that there were several breeds of small sheep, some of which were deficient of flesh as compared with the fat they produced. Upon this they said "we have in the Shropshires large frames and ample lean of a dark rich colour. The smaller Downlike frames must be discarded, and the larger sizes cultivated." The results, as seen at the present time, have clearly proved that the latter advocates were right.

This conflict of opinions and diversity of taste led to warm discussions. It was shown that in more than one instance