

"Coming Up with the Sheep."

A Story of an Ontario Farm Flock--By Prof. Wade Toole, O. A. C., Guelph.

It was early April. A boy of few summers was basking in the sunshine of the south side of a large sheep pen dreaming of the barefoot days to come and wondering whether his father would decide to wash the sheep on May 24 and so provide him with a day's fishing, or whether the then comparatively new practice of shearing unwashed would appeal to the head of the household and the upwards of forty grade Shropshires would, in a few days, be shorn and the wool disposed of without washing. This was a question of considerable import to the boy who took more interest in the sheep than in any other class of live stock on the farm. The live stock instinct is bred in the boys whose parents and fore-parents have been live stock breeders. The boy's liking for sheep was not accident. His father and grandfather before him had been interested breeders of good grade flocks. Small wonder was it then that the lad had a natural liking for sheep and was wont to spend the sunny afternoons in April in the well-bedded, warm yard with the lambs. He grew to know them individually and could point out their mothers when the shepherd of the flock found it necessary to identify lambs and ewes—to put it in the words of his mother, who was more proud than ashamed of the statement, "Billy came up with the sheep".

As the years rolled by swiftly for the old folks and dragged along for Billy, the latter's knowledge of sheep increased from the practical experience he obtained, almost unconsciously, from close association with his father's flock which was still grade Shropshires. Feeding, care and management were learned at the time of life when such things come easiest and stick closest. Interest increased with years and finally the decision was made to sell out the grade flock and make a start with pure-breds, a decision which all breeders should make after achieving success with grades. Good grades are sufficient with which to learn the sheep business in Ontario but once learned it is better business to buy and breed sheep of better blood. The grades were sold off to the butcher and a modest beginning in pure-breds was made. The story of this flock is the story of many another flock and one in which the man contemplating starting in better sheep may be interested.

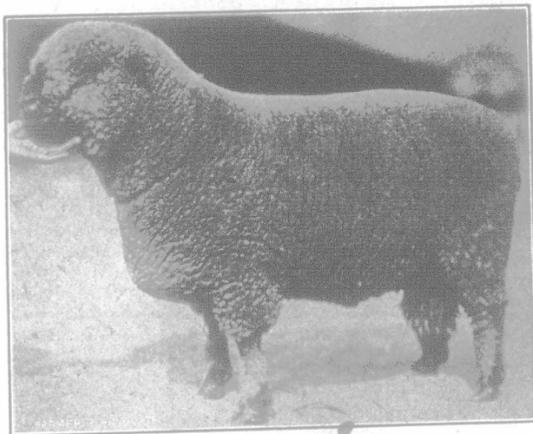
At a closing-out sale of farm stock and implements the four best yearling ewes and the two best lambs of the high-class flock of pure-bred Shropshire sheep included in the auction fell to the bids of Billy's father after close consultation with the boy. They were a bonny lot and it was with considerable pride that they were driven home to Bellevue Farm in the stock rack and unloaded for the inspection of the rest of the family and the neighbors. A start was made in pure-breds and success seemed reasonably sure, for the farm was well-watered, a never-failing spring creek crossing it, the land was fairly high, grades had done well and it seemed selected pure-breds should go on and do likewise. The foundation six ewes cost, in those days of ten-cent wool and four-dollar lambs, in the neighborhood of \$100, a price considered fairly high, but they were "good stuff" as the stockman says and it always pays to buy the best available when starting a flock. A substantial building can never be built on an insecure foundation. The breeder is building for years, possibly for many generations, consequently he must lay a foundation which will be permanent. The best in type, individuality and blood is always the cheapest in the end.

In the grade flock which had been discarded, but in which good pure-bred rams had always been used, a lambing record of one hundred and thirty-three to one hundred and fifty per cent. was common. The pure-breds did not prove so successful. Small lamb crops and heavy losses, even under the best of care, made the task of breeding up to a fairly large flock for the one-hundred-and-fifty-acre farm an uphill fight. The bulk of the lambs were males for which there was, at that time comparatively little demand and the lamb losses were heavy. For the first three years the flock did not increase to above eight head of females and ram and wool sales were not sufficient to pay for feed and care. Some less resolute would have abandoned the idea of attempting to succeed with the pure-breds and would have reverted to grades. Billy's father was almost on the point of doing so but remembered what all live stock men should never forget, namely, that the only road to success is to stick to the business. The "in-and-out" in live stock breeding is always out of pocket. Understanding fully the boy's keen interest in sheep the flock was traded by the father to the son for a pure-bred Shorthorn heifer which the latter had brought up from a calf.

Stick-to-itiveness counted in the long run. The next spring the lamb crop raised made an increase in the flock of one hundred and twenty-five per cent. and after selling the rams, which went at a better price, the ewe flock began to show substantial improvement numerically. A gradual but slow increase was made year after year. The best ewe lambs were retained in the flock and the old ewes and ram lambs sold off annually. The money for wool and all stock sold was banked and only drawn upon to purchase sires for the flock. A good pure-bred ram was in those days procurable for from \$20 to \$25 and these were the prices paid for sires.

Eventually the ewe flock comprised fifteen ewes and the first year this number were bred twenty-two lambs were raised. These twenty-two lambs sold in the late fall for eleven dollars each and, with the wool, a substantial return was coming in from the flock. Billy was at the time in attendance at the Ontario Agricultural College and was using the returns from the flock of sheep to pay for an education in agriculture. The money for this entire four-year course was made from this flock of Shropshires which were fed free of charge from the grass and crop of the farm. The success that crowned the effort was largely due to care and attention coupled with the determination to make the flock pay.

The greatest factor in making the flock give substantial returns was undoubtedly the use in three consecutive seasons of a very high-class, imported ram and here is a point for all to consider. A stock ram had been purchased in the Old Land by one of Ontario's largest breeders. He had cost in the neighborhood of \$150 on the other side of the water. This was a high price at the time and the ram was a high-quality, two-shear individual. He was very fat, weighed 318 pounds and was clumsy on his feet. Only four ewes of the flock bred to him proved in lamb and the following fall he



Only One, but Half the Flock.

was considered by his owner as unsafe for use. Billy saw the ram and liked him. For use on his fifteen ewes he did not feel justified in paying \$60 for an imported "field" ram which was the price prevailing for such that particular autumn. The breeder offered the \$150 ram for \$25 saying also that he was "no good". He added, however, that if the old ram was taken and proved impotent that the use of one of the imported field rams could be secured at no cost. Billy figured that under such conditions he was sure to get his ewes bred to a first-class imported ram at a reasonable cost so he took the old ram home early in October and turned him with his fifteen ewes. The flock had a habit of grazing at the far end of the farm coming to the buildings each night. The distance travelled to and fro was nearly a mile, night and morning. The old ram, stiff and fat, tried to follow. At first he did not succeed but finally, as the fat slipped off, he was able to make the round trip and gradually became quite active. Not a ewe proved in lamb to the first service as shown by the color marking of paint used on the ram's breast, but to the second service all but one proved safe in lamb and that one conceived at a later service, the fifteen ewes dropping the record number of thirty-one lambs of which they raised twenty-six. This ram was used three

years in the flock and then sold and was afterwards used for at least two years in each of two other flocks with grand success. His stock brought the prices which provided the funds to complete Billy's college course. The lambs were large, well-covered individuals, in keen demand. A point here to remember—do not let the ram get too fat. Exercise and moderate feeding are necessary to potency. Always save a good breeding ram from the flock. A mature, tried sire is worth far more than an untried ram.

It was finally decided to sell the flock with the rest of the live stock and implements of the place. A choice Canadian-bred yearling ram was purchased for thirty dollars and the ewes were bred to him. The ram sold for nearly sixty dollars in the spring, the flock for over \$300. They had paid for a four-year college course and left \$300 to the good. The pure-breds paid in the end.

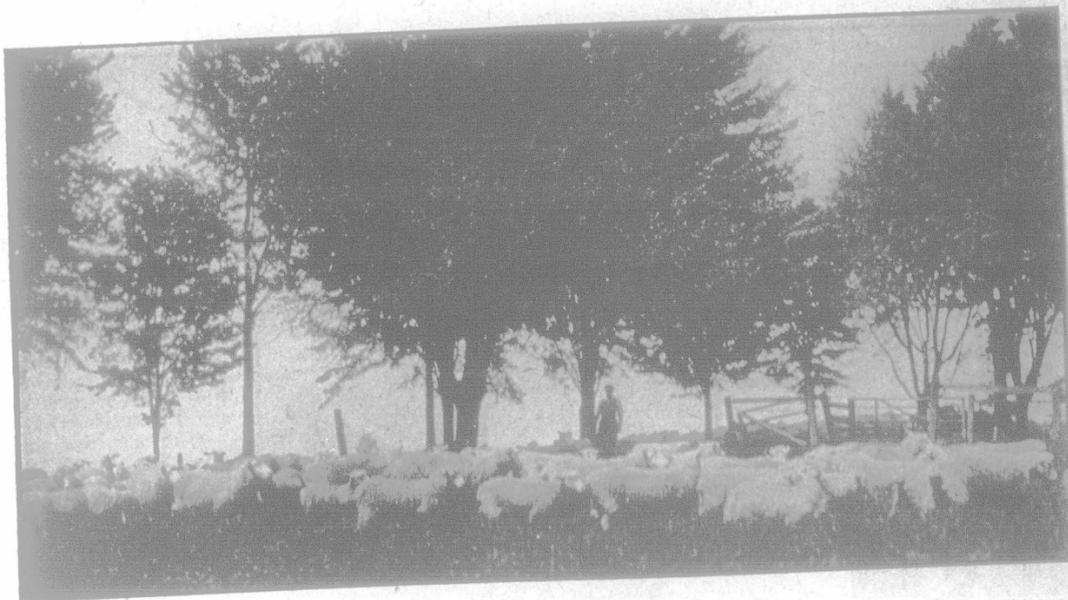
After a year had elapsed a new flock of the same breed was established. These have gone on an made money for their owner. Last year the money returns from the flock built up from the purchase of about thirty lambs in 1911, and from which large sales have been made each year since they reached breeding age, were over \$1,500. Good rams have been used. In the larger flock of forty to fifty ewes the breeder is warranted in purchasing a first-class, imported ram. The increased price of the lambs and improved breeding value of the flock will more than make up the extra cost.

The flock grazes all summer mostly on a blue grass and white dutch clover mixture. They are moved from field to field and have sufficient range to avoid sheep troubles which are due to pasturing too long on a limited area. Winter feeding has consisted largely of pulped turnips, clover hay and oats. The sheep are allowed outside in an open yard a greater part of the time. A warm lambing pen is provided. Success is due to good feeding care, exercise and the use of high-class rams.

The story of one flock is told. What has been done others can do. Sheep never were in greater demand than at the present time. Seventy-five-cent wool and expensive mutton augur well for the future of sheep breeding in Canada. The work is pleasant; the returns are commensurate with the care. Weeds are less prevalent when sheep are kept. Most of the general farms in Ontario would profit by the keeping of a flock of sheep. Let the breeder choose the breed he likes, if possible get the boys interested and then study results. A small flock at first is a good rule. Grow up with the business and you'll not be sorry the boys "came up with the sheep."

Last year the Alberta Sheep Breeders' Association sold 153,000 pounds of wool for 280 members of the Association at an average of 60 cents a pound, realizing a total amount of \$91,408. The several grades were sold at different prices, the highest priced grade, fine medium combing, selling for 64 cents a pound, down to 20 cents for tags. This year the Association will sell for between 350 and 400 members of the Association, between 225,000 and 250,000 pounds, representing a value of between \$150,000 and \$175,000. After being graded at Calgary, the wool will be shipped in car lots to the Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers' Limited, Toronto, for sale, in order to get the best net returns for the members. A charge of 3 1/2 per cent. will be made to provide for the expense of grading and handling at Calgary, and also handling and selling at Toronto.

Keep the flock to a high standard by systematically culling out ewes which are poor milkers, shy breeders or light shearers.



A Large Flock of Long-wools on an Ontario Farm.