

## SHEEP.

Anxious to promote the cultivation of a useful and profitable stock of sheep in British America, we shall occasionally give extracts from a very excellent "Treatise on Sheep," lately published by a Mr. Blacklock. In this number, we shall commence with the History of the Sheep, and all their different varieties, and some other information respecting them, that we trust will be interesting to our readers.

## HISTORY OF THE SHEEP.

(1). *Origin of the Sheep.*—As the origin of our domesticated animals has afforded scope for much curious speculation, so none have attracted a greater degree of attention in this respect than the sheep. Into these arguments, however, it would be absurd to enter; I shall therefore content myself with such opinions as are deemed the best.

Placed in the Class Mammalia, and Order Ruminantia, the innumerable varieties at present existing may, according to Cuvier, whose tact in arranging animals is universally acknowledged, all be referred to four species—the Argali of Siberia, the Mouflon of Sardinia, the Mouflon of America, and the Mouflon of Africa—though to be rigidly accurate in natural distinctions, he would refer them all to three, thereby excluding the third.

(2). *The Argali of Siberia (Ovis Ammon)* inhabits the mountains of Asia, where it attains the size of a fallow deer. The male has very large horns, with three rounded angles at the base, flattened in front, and striated transversely. The horns of the female are compressed, and hook-shaped. The hair is short in summer, and of a fawn-coloured grey; in winter it is thick, rigid, and of a reddish grey, with some white about the muzzle, throat, and under the belly. The Mouflon of Sardinia (*Ovis Montanus*, Fig. 7.) differs from it only in its inferior size, and in the smallness of the horns of the female.

(3). *The Mouflon of America (Ovis Montana)* closely resembles the Argali, and is supposed by some to be identical with it, and to have crossed from Asia to America at Behring's Straits by means of ice.

(4). *The Mouflon of Africa (Ovis Tragelaphus)* is distinguished by its soft and reddish hair, by its short tail, and by a long mane hanging under the neck, and another at each angle; it inhabits the rocky districts of Barbary, and has been observed in Egypt.

(5). *British Breeds.*—The breeds of our island, as they at present stand, may be divided into two kinds—long-woolled and short-woolled; the former embracing the Lincolnshire, the Teeswater, the Dishley, or New Leicester, and the Devonshire Nots; while the latter will include those of Dorset, Herefordshire, and Sussex, with the Cheviot, Mogg, and Black-faced variety.\*

(6). *The Lincolnshire* has no horns; the face is white; the carcass long and thin; the legs thick, white and rough; bones large; pelts thick; and the wool from 8 to 10 inches in length. The ewes weigh from 14 lbs. to 20 lbs. per quarter; and three-year old wethers 20 lbs. to 30 lbs. The fleece weighs from 8 lbs. to 14 lbs., and covers a coarse-grained slow-feeding carcass; so slow, indeed, at feeding, that it cannot be fattened at an early age, except upon rich land; but the breed is encouraged, from the great weight of wool that is shorn from them every year. It and its sub-varieties are extremely common in the English counties.

(7). *The Teeswater* sheep were originally bred from the same stock as the former, but have become different, from the size having received greater attention than the wool, which is inferior both in length and weight. They stand upon higher and finer boned legs, which support a firmer and heavier carcass, much wider upon the back and sides, and afford a fatter and finer-grained mutton—the two-year old wethers weighing from 25 lbs. to 30 lbs. per quarter. Marshall, in his work on Yorkshire, remarks, that they are not so compact, nor so complete in their form, as the Leicestershire sheep; nevertheless, the excellency of their flesh and fattening quality is not doubted, and their wool still remains superior. For the banks of the Tees, or any other rich fat land, they are singularly excellent.

(8). *The Dishley, or New Leicester*, is distinguished from other long-woolled breeds, by clean heads, straight broad flat backs, round bodies, small bones, thin pelts, and a disposition to fatten at an early age. But more of this hereafter. The weight of three-year old ewes is from 18 lbs. to 23 lbs. per quarter; and of two-year old wethers from 20 lbs. to 24 lbs. The wool averages from 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 9 lbs., and is thought by some to be inferior in quality to that of Cheviot sheep, but, from being fully fed at all seasons, they yield great quantities of it.

(9). *The Devonshire Nots* form the fourth hornless variety of long-woolled sheep. Forty or fifty years ago, they ranked as middle-woolled sheep, but they now figure among the long-woolled, under the name of Bampton—their fleece having been lengthened, and rendered finer, by crossing with the Leicesters. There is yet, however, much room for improvement in these crosses. They have white faces and legs, the latter being short, and the bones large, while the necks are thick, the backs high, and the sides good. They approach in weight to the Leicester, but the wool is heavier and coarser. In Devonshire are found a white-faced and horned variety, which are known as the Exmoor Land, from the place of their nativity. Though delicate in bone, they are not good, having a narrow flared carcass, while the weight of the quarters and fleece is a third short of the former variety.

(10). *The Dorsetshire* sheep are horned and white-faced, with a long thin carcass, and high small white legs. Three-year old wethers weigh from 16 lbs. to 20 lbs. a quarter; but the wool, being fine and short, weighs only from 3 lbs. to 4 lbs. a fleece. It is, however, amply compensated for by the mutton, which is of superior quality. The peculiar and most valuable property of this breed is the forwardness of the ewes, which take the ram at any period of the year, often lambing so early as September or October. They are, on this account, extremely useful for supplying large towns with house-lamb at Christmas.

(11). *Herefordshire or Ryeland* sheep have white legs and faces, and no horns. The wool grows close to the eyes. They are a small breed, suited to every market, weighing from 12 lbs. to 16 lbs. a quarter. The carcass is tolerably well formed, and the wool fine and short, each fleece weighing from 12 lb. to 24 lbs., rarely, however, exceeding 2 lbs. They were called *Ryeland* sheep, from a district in the southern part of Herefordshire being thought capable of growing nothing but rye. Though their figure is good, the back is not so level, nor the ribs so well rounded, as in the improved breeds. They fatten easily, however, and arrive soon at maturity, though reckoned inferior in these respects to the Cheviot variety.

(12). *The South Down*, like the Ryeland, are, from the delicacy of their constitution, unadapted for bleak situations, but sufficiently hardy and active for a low country; their average weight is from 15 lbs. to 18 lbs. a quarter; that of the fleece, which is very short and fine, being from 2½ lbs to 3 lbs. They are without horns, have grey faces and legs, a neck low set and small, and a breast neither wide nor deep; their mutton is fine in the grain, and of an excellent flavour, having been brought to great perfection by Mr. Ellman of Glynd, and other intelligent breeders. They are mostly found in Sussex, on dry chalky downs producing short fine herbage, and arrive early at maturity; in which respect they are equal to the Cheviot, though inferior to them in quantity of tailwool. Formerly they would not take on fat till four years old; now they are always at market when about two years of age, and many are killed before that period.

(13). *The Cheviot Sheep* have a bare head, with a long jaw, and white face, but no horns. Sometimes they have a shade of grey upon the nose, approaching to dark at the tip; at others, a tinge of lemon colour on the face, but these markings scarcely affect their value. The legs are clean, long, and small-boned, and covered with wool to the hough; but there is a sad want of depth at the breast, and of breath both there and on the chine. A fat carcass weighs from 12 lbs. to 18 lbs. per quarter, and a medium fleece about 3 lbs. The purest specimens of this breed are to be found on the Scotch side of the Cheviot hills, and on the high and stony mountain-farms which lie between that range and the source of the Teviot. These sheep are a capital mountain stock, provided the pasture resembles the Cheviot hills, in containing a good proportion of rich herbage.

(14). *Mogg Sheep.*—"In this variety," says Dr. Fleming, in his History of British Animals, "the face and legs are white, or rarely spotted with yellow, and the forehead covered with long wool. This is the native breed in Scotland, to the north of the Forth and Clyde. They are of small size, and seldom weigh above 8 or 10 lbs. per quarter. Some tribes have horns; others are destitute of them, and they vary in the length of the tail. They may be considered as the stock of the numerous modern and valuable varieties, which are bred in the best cultivated districts. The Shetland sheep belongs to this kind. The hair consists of firm wool next the skin, with long coarse hairs, indications of an inhabitant of an arctic climate."

(15). *The Black-faced or Heath Sheep* are known by their large spiral horns, wild-looking eyes, black legs and faces, with short firm carcasses, covered by long coarse wool, which weighs from 3 lbs. to 4 lbs.—As the form of this sheep has lately been much improved, by inducing a short and round carcass, they have acquired the name of *short* sheep, in contradistinction to the Cheviots, which are termed long sheep. When three years old, they fatten well, affording excellent highly-flavoured mutton, and weighing from 10 lbs. to 16 lbs. a quarter. They are the most valuable upland sheep in Britain, abounding in all the western counties of England and Scotland, and are now becoming great favourites in the London market.

(16). *The Merino.*—Though many foreign breeds have from time to time appeared in this country, yet almost all of them have been viewed merely as objects of curiosity, and, as such, have speedily been disregarded. Far different, however, was the reception of the Merinos. Brought into

\* Encyclopedia Britannica, 7th Edition, Article Agriculture.