

Parsons and other exhibitors—among whom we may specially name Mr. Humphrey, Oak Ash; Mr. Rawlence, Bulbridge, Mr. Morrison, Fonthill; Mr. F. R. Moore, Mr. Lambert, and Mr. Perry-Keene, has long been talked of as "the Coming Sheep." We do not quite understand what meaning the phrase is intended to convey. If it is that the Hampshire Downs will hold their own in the show-yard with any breed with which they enter into competition, then the claim has been already fully established. If it is that the breed is fitted above all others for large sections of the country and for particular systems of management, that also has been conclusively proved. It has further been shown that in feeding on the early maturity principle it has come out well ahead; and the fact, which has already been indicated, that the prizes at the shows this year have been carried away mostly by breeders in other counties, makes it evident that it is adapted to widely diversified conditions of soil and climate. We go with the advocates of "the Coming Sheep" thus far. But if it is considered probable that the Hampshires will crowd out either the Southdowns or the other breeds in the "making" of which that impressive variety has played a conspicuous part, we must express a wholesome scepticism as to this result being brought about. The late Mr. Torr, of Aylesby, never rendered better service than when, in spite of his own personal preferences, he insisted on the great importance of keeping up our local breeds of cattle, and his opinion is equally forcible when applied to the many admirable descriptions of sheep which it is the good fortune of this country to possess. Of this, at all events, we are satisfied, that Hampshire breeders could not possibly find a sort better suited for their purposes than the breed which for so many years they have so skilfully and sedulously cultivated, and it must be gratifying to them to find that the Hampshire Down is rapidly extending all over the country.

The West Stratton flock was commenced in 1870 by Mr. Parson's father at Monk Sherborne, near Basingstoke, where he occupied a farm belonging to the late Rev. L. M. Halton, rector of Woolhampton, Berks. The late Mr. Parsons had for many years been well known as a sheep breeder. He was born in 1798, and, prior to 1846, he resided at Aston Tirrald, near Wallingford. In 1846 he went to Monk Sherborne, and paid great attention, as he had previously done, to the management of his flock. The present owner of the flock lived at Monk Sherborne, until 1874, when he removed to West Stratton. The late Mr. Parsons had sold off his previous flock by auction at Basingstoke in 1865, when some ewes were purchased by Mr. James Rawlence, of Bulbridge, at what was then considered the fabulous price of £8 each. Mr. John Barton, of Hackwood, was also a buyer at that sale, and the present West Stratton flock is descended from the old Monk Sherborne flock through a ewe presented to Mr. Parsons by Mr. Barton, which ewe was bred from one purchased at the late Mr. Parsons's sale in 1865. The sheep disposed of at that sale were descendants in uninterrupted succession from the flock started by Mr. Parsons, senior, somewhere about the year 1816, so that the existing flock is one of the oldest among the Hampshire strains, extending back for a period of seventy years. Since 1870 Mr. Parsons has always purchased rams from the foremost breeders of the day, including Messrs. F. Budd, J. Barton, W. E. Pain, A. Twitchen, W. M. Harris, and G. Judd, in Hampshire, and Messrs. Morrison, J. Read, R. Dibben, and F. Moore, in Wiltshire. In 1879 a ram lamb was hired from Mr. Morrison, Fonthill, for six weeks at 100gs, and from this sheep were descended many of those which won such a large number of prizes at the various leading shows, including the champion plate at Islington. We have here another example of the great influence of blood in establishing a true breeding stock.

The flock which was thus founded on the choicest mat-

rials made its first appearance in the show-yard in 1873 at Basingstoke fair, when the first prize was gained for wether lambs. Next year at the Bath and West Show Mr. Parsons was first for shearling ewes. In 1876 the champion prize for ewes at the Royal Counties, and first for fat ewes at Smithfield, were among the winnings, and since then the flock has every year taken a leading position at the shows. The great victory at Smithfield in 1883 has already been alluded to. The wether lambs that then gained the champion prize, beating very strong entries of all the other breeds, had an average weight at ten months old of 207lb., the dead weight being 136lb. each. It was generally considered that in 1884 a similar honour should have fallen to the West Stratton flock, for the pen exhibited at Smithfield that year weighed over 6 cwt., while those that won the champion prize were only 5½ cwt., and in symmetry and quality Mr. Parsons's were quite the equals of the winning sheep the previous year. To prove that the flock was still in the front rank when in 1885 Mr. Parsons was obliged to withdraw from exhibition, we may state that in that year the West Stratton flock supplied the first prize yearling ewes at the Bath and West Show at Brighton, the first and third prize shearling rams, first prize shearling ewes, and second prize ram-lambs at the Royal Counties Show at Southampton, and the first prize shearling ram at Overton fair. The prizes gained at the great fairs prove that the excellence of the flock is not confined to a few selected specimens, but is widely diffused. At Winchester, in 1878, 1879, and 1880, Mr. Parsons was first for ewe lambs, and in one of the finest displays of sheep ever witnessed at Winchester fair in 1884 two first prizes were awarded to the flock, there being 100 ewes in the two winning lots.

Did space permit we should like to print a minute account of the management of this first-class flock, which may well be taken as typical of the breed, its eminence having been attained as the result of skill in breeding and unremitting care in management. The farm extends to eight hundred and fifty acres on the chalk formation eight miles north of Winchester, and two miles from Micheldever station. The bulk of the land, which varies considerably in character a good deal of it being poor and thin soil, is under cultivation. A small strip of water meadow is a useful adjunct. The practice has been between lambing time, which commences in January, and the period of the late summer fairs, when the wether lambs, cull ewes, have been sold, to divide the flock into various lots, those which ought at the earliest date to be ready for disposal going first into the folds. The ram lambs, for example, go into a field of tares and pick off the tops, being then removed to the early rape or cabbages. As soon as they go from a half-acre field, another lot of sheep enters it, the old ewes coming last and clearing up. Other portions of the flock are similarly treated by changing from crop to crop. In an ordinary season it is the custom to carry through the flock in this manner:—On the 1st of August the rams are turned with the ewes, care being exercised in suitable mating. (1) At this time the ewes are on late vetches, or rape, or aftermath clover, following the ewe-lambs, and they run in the stubbles, but they do not enter the young seeds. The lambs are fed on the seeds during the day, and when the tares and clover are gone, get a fold of rape and turnips, sown together, at night. When the ewes have fed by day in the stubbles, they follow the lambs at night and clear up their folds for them. At the end of September the whole flock is folded on the lattermath sainfoin in the day time—the young animals going before—and on turnips at night. This food often lasts until Christmas. When the

(1) That is, ewes having some imperfection are put with a ram likely to correct it.