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Some Effects of Soil on Sheep.

The influence of "environment" in modifying our breeds of sheep and the wool which they grow is becoming better understood every day, and those who attend to such matters have a decided pull over their neighbours. Climate or meteorological conditions have of course great power, but in addition to these the nature of the soil has had perhaps more to do in making things as we now find them than any other one factor. The different breeds are now so much differentiated from one another, and so thoroughly imbued with the characteristics of their individual districts, that removal to another locality is as often followed by failure as not. Thus one gentleman who tried Hampshires in Cambridgeshire had to give up the experiment, and another found Cotswolds unsuited to Suffolk.

Even where the experiment may prove a financial success

it is found that the sheep change their nature or characteristics, and would appear in time to approximate to those native to the locality, and this in spite of repeated importations of first-class rams. It has been said that if a flock of sheep were divided into lots, and each lot sent to different districts of Britain and kept from inter-breeding with other kinds, each would in the course of a few generations develop points and peculiarities which could easily be accentuated by selection only, and thus "breeds" be manufactured altogether different from the original strain. These changes would take place altogether independently of food or climate, because these two factors tend to approximate to one level as the result of modern farming. Cane, corn, turnips, and pasturage are all made as good as we can, and on pretty much the same lines everywhere, and it is only in the case of natural pasturage that the natural effects of food can manifest themselves. Even natural pasturage is drained and limed and otherwise interfered with so as to bring it up as nearly as possible to the standard of good quality. Again, climate is pretty much a result of the physical configuration of the land or the nature of the subjacent rock within the narrow limits of the British Islands, and here again we endeavour to "level up" by artificial shelter, plantations, draining, &c. We thus come back to the soil as the real basis of the difference and changes which occur naturally, and on to which man has engrafted his selection, crossing, development, &c.

The wool itself takes peculiarities, quite independently of the animals on which it grows, when the locality is changed. Each breed has normally a variety of its own while kept to its own native district, but this changes when they are removed to a different district. Some soils colour wool to such an extent that it can never be washed white, while if sheep from different localities are mixed it is generally possible to