

## THE GRAZIER AND BREEDER.

## BREEDS OF BRITISH SHEEP—XI.

*Shropshire-Downs.*

Residents of the Eastern States of America who travel in the rural districts of England are often struck by the sparseness of the population. For a century past, the people have more and more collected into the towns. The growing importance of the manufacturing interests has drawn constantly increasing numbers into the workshops. Beside this, changes have taken place in agricultural methods, so that a greater profit is found in large farms, and, hence, the smaller ones have been united and the number of farmers reduced. In addition to these changes in pieces of residence and in occupation, the continuance of an old custom of retaining tracts called "commons," belonging in most cases to the parish, and free for all to pasture animals upon them, helps to make the country in some sections almost uninhabited, and quite given up to the flocks and herds that feed upon it. The amount of land still remaining in commons is surprising. Such was in the past and, to a considerable extent, still is, part of the county of Salop. (1) The Morfe and Long Mynd commons were of vast extent, and carried very large numbers of their own native sheep, which were in no wise remarkable, except for their unusual healthfulness. The same breed also occupied the 25,000 acres of Cannock Chase, in Staffordshire, on the east. They undoubtedly were a good strong foundation to improve upon. As farming operations advanced, and root and other feeding crops were grown, and as the common lands were gradually enclosed and cultivated, this native sheep could not so quickly respond to better feeding as was desirable, and therefore recourse was had to other breeds for their improvement. Leicesters, Cotswolds and South-Downs were all used, it is impossible now to learn in what relative proportions. Of course these various crosses produced very different animals, and for a considerable time the flocks of Shropshire were as unlike each other as well could be. But gradually intelligent breeders fixed the type that seemed most desirable, and, by careful selection from these cross-bred animals, slowly established a breed that, while not yet so uniform in character as is desirable, stands very high in the public estimation, and is increasing so greatly in numbers as to be found monopolising lands far away from home. In the fertile valleys of Wales on the west, on the rich dairy lands of Cheshire to the north, and elsewhere so far away as Yorkshire, great numbers of them are to be seen. In Shropshire itself they are very numerous alike in the hilly portions of the south and west, the level lands of the north, and the rich meadows along the Severn. They appear likely to monopolize the western central portion of the country. Their popularity in their home-county was well illustrated at this season's Royal Show at Shrewsbury, where the number on exhibition was greatly in excess of all other breeds, as was noticed soon after in the COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

The formation of the Shropshire breed began so recently as about fifty years ago, although cross breeding was practised long before. It was recognized by the Royal Agricultural Society some twenty years since. The sheep of the commons were horned, and had black faces and legs, dressed from fifty to sixty pounds of meat, and sheared two or three pounds of moderately fine wool. Now they are without horns, and have gray faces like the modern South-Downs. An effort is made by the English breeders to retain the dark faces which the Leicester and Cotswold blood have tended to destroy. The head is well shaped, the ears are large but well set on the head, and the neck is quite meaty. The back is straight and good, the breast broad and deep, the shoulders are massive, and the ribs are well developed. Fat wethers have dressed

(1) Salop: Shropshire.

250 pounds. They do not mature so rapidly as such long wools as the Leicesters and Cotswolds, but their flesh is of decidedly better quality. They sometimes take prizes over the Hampshire-Downs as old sheep, but in their turn are beaten by them in the younger classes. Their wool is shorter than the Oxfordshire-Downs, not showing so much of the Cotswold character, and is longer than that of the Hampshire-Downs. It weighs seven or eight pounds to the fleece. The ewes are very prolific, and are excellent mothers.

From what I have seen of the Shropshire Downs, I believe them to be a very valuable breed, and suited to extensive use in America. They are strong, hardy sheep, of good size, but not too large, and give meat that will decidedly raise the mutton standard in our markets. They do not go to pieces on short pasture, while they stand high feeding well. In their home district they are kept more upon grass than are the larger breeds in theirs, except perhaps the Lincoln. Elsewhere they are mainly kept upon cultivated crops.

In speaking of English sheep-husbandry, reference is so frequently made to cultivated crops that it may be well here to state how sheep are carried through the year upon them. In April the new feed begins, and then the mangolds, carried through the winter, are helped out by winter oats, rye and some of the earliest clovers. In May the different clovers and vetches are depended upon, and the same are used in June and July. In August, cabbages are added to these. In September cabbages and rape are the main reliance. In October the early turnips are ready, and in some sections mustard (1) is much used. During November turnips are more heavily fed. In the three winter months, turnips and swedes are the stand-bys, and in March mangolds are begun upon. Of course during all the year such grasses as the farms afford, and, in the winter, hay, straw, cake and grain are used. These green crops are nearly always fed upon the ground where grown, movable hurdles being used to enclose such portions as the flock will daily consume. If the sheep are being fattened, they are moved a little faster than this, and store sheep clean up the food left behind them. While the lambs are with the ewes, they are allowed to run through "creeps" in the hurdles, and to pick such food as they may fancy in the yet untouched crop.

They have many kinds of clovers and leguminous plants we never see in America. We should be fortunate if some of them were better suited to our soils and climate. A field of crimson clover—*Trifolium incarnatum* (2)—in full bloom is very beautiful, as also is the much grown, lighter colored sainfoin—*Onobrychis sativa*. The lupins and vetches also grace their utility with beauty. (3) JAMES WOOD.

Mt. Kisco, N. Y.

## Cutting and Planting Potatoes.

An immense amount of work is involved in properly planting a large area in potatoes. I do not wonder that in the hurry of the planting season so much of it is carelessly or mistakenly done. Even the cutting of the seed, if done as it should be, requires a number of days of slow, dirty and disagreeable work. I set out with the idea that this year I would cut all my seed potatoes myself, and according to the plan recommended by Dr. Sturtevant—single eyes cut deeply. But I find it very difficult to cut the single eyes without getting the pieces smaller than I like to risk at one set in a hill. I have finally concluded to plant some in that way and mark the places, while the remainder will be planted two eyes in

(1) Mustard is used only for the ewes and non-fattening sheep.

A. R. J. F.

(2) Would not answer here. The frost would destroy it. Sainfoin wants a chalk sub-soil.

A. R. J. F.

(3) How sincerely I apologise for having omitted this description of the second best breed of English sheep! A. R. J. F.