

Sussex sheep fail in this invaluable quality is very clear : the universal practice of the breeders of that county was, and probably is, to keep a very large flock of ewes, and in order to keep this flock on their farms, they sold all their wether lambs off at the October fairs, and sent the ewe-lambs—then called tegs—out to be grazed by the farmers of the Weald. As the Weald grass is not by any means of a feeding quality, and as it was to the interests of the Weald men to take in as many tegs as they could manage to keep alive during the winter, the poor things were returned to their owners in the spring in a pitiable condition.

And it must not be imagined that it was only the poorer class of farmers that exiled their ewe tegs in this barbarous fashion : by no means. I was present at a contest in Firle Park, near Lewes, Sussex, in 1852, when six of the principal breeders of Sussex Downs each entered, for a sweepstakes, five selected ewe-tegs that had been "out at keep on the same farm" during the preceding winter. The tegs were shown and judged afterwards, and were just about a skin and a frame work of bones. Among the six competitors were Arthur Denman, William Rigden, my farm-tutor, and, if I remember rightly, Hugh Gerringe, now of Kingston by-the-sea : the two latter well known as exhibitors of Southdowns at the exhibitions of the Royal Agricultural and the Smithfield Club. I ask any unbiassed man if rams, the produce of ewes thus treated during their first winter, were likely to impart *early maturity* to their progeny ?

No doubt all the ram-breeders, like Rigden and Gerringe, kept a certain number of ewes at home on good food for the purpose of breeding their exhibition sheep, but the great majority—at least $\frac{9}{10}$ —of their ewe-tegs were treated as above described.

As for the Cotswold cross, we all know the value of that in forming the breed now called Oxfords under the management of good old Mr. Druce of Eyusham ; but, though it may be possible, and even probable, that, here and there, an inferior flock of Hampshire-down ewes may have been served by a Cotswold ram because he was at a handy distance, yet I am sure that this was never anything like a general practice. If it had been, certainly this cross would not have been the cause of the early maturity of the Hampshire-downs, for the Cotswolds are no more precocious than the Sussex-downs. It may be worth remarking that the cross of the Hampshire-downs and Cotswolds—*pur sang*—generally win the first prize for cross-bred sheep at the Smithfield Club exhibition. (1)

From what has been said, I think it is fair to draw the conclusion that the cause of the early maturity of the Hampshire-downs is an innate peculiarity of the original parent-stock.

THE HAMPSHIRE DOWN SHEEP.

The high favour in which Hampshire down sheep are held is shown year after year by the large attendance of purchasers at the Hampshire fairs. The auction sales of the county and the high-prices of breeding stock tell the same story. The sheep are distinguished by size, by heavy flesh and wool, by their early maturity, and their black faces and strong features. Early in the present century the prevailing sheep of Hampshire were large, upstanding, horned sheep ; with white faces and Roman noses. The breed was closely allied to the horned sheep of Wiltshire and the native Berkshire. These three were all sturdy breeds, with strong horns and tremendous Roman noses (the latter of which features they have bequeathed, in a modified form, to the modern Hampshires), and were found to be quite competent to take care of themselves under the old

system of feeding in common. The last flocks of the primitive race disappeared with the inclosure of the commons. Early in the century Southdown flocks replaced them ; or the flocks were merged in the Southdowns by the successive use of Southdown rams, a process which commenced as long since as the last century.

In effecting this cross the Hampshire breeders selected the largest, coarsest, and blackest-faced rams of the breed which Mr. Ellman was then engaged in improving. The use of the Southdown for the improvement of the native breeds became general throughout the whole of the South Western chalk districts, including the counties of Hants, Wilts, Berks, and Dorset, and these crosses with the pure Sussex were continued till the horns of the old breeds had entirely disappeared, and the colour of the faces had changed from white to brown or black or in some cases to black speckled with white. A change also took place in their shape, in the broader backs, rounder barrels, shorter legs, with perhaps some improvement in the quality of the mutton. The sheep of fifty years ago contrasted strongly with those which have since been derived from a more recent and still deeper dip into the Southdown blood. Still certain merits have throughout been justly claimed for the old sort. They undoubtedly possessed hardness, size, and a disposition to make early growth, all of which were excellent qualities on which to found a new breed.

The prices commanded by Hampshire sheep for many years past form a practical test of their excellence. We learn from an unpublished narrative—written some years since by an able hand, and now kindly placed at our disposal to assist the historical part of the brief notice—that at Overton Fair, held July 1, the best lambs ranged, fifty years ago, from 30s. to 40s. per head, and that 50s. was not an uncommon price for ewes. The best breeders made 3 guineas a head of their draft ewes. So long as twenty-five years ago Mr. John Pain, then of Houghton, sold 100 wether lambs (8 months 2 weeks old) to an Essex grazier at 47s. 6d. each, and the culls at 40s. This was after 100 ram lambs had been saved from the flock ; Mr. Pain being one of the most noted ram breeders of his time in Hants. It was not the custom then for breeders to bring the wether lambs to market so forward in condition as they do now ; yet, to mention another instance of the high prices of former days, Mr. Mortimore, of Andover, twenty to thirty years ago, sold his 400 to 500 half-bred Hampshire Downs and Cotswold lambs at from 40s. to 48s., and did so many years successively.

Owing to the improved price of mutton, as well as increased demand for the breed for crossing purpose, these prices have been considerably exceeded during years past. Mr. John Barton, of Hackwood Farm, has sold 100 wether lambs in June, at 60s., in one case, and 62s. in another ; after saving eighty ram lambs from a flock of 450 ewes. Mr. G. Judd, of Barton Stacy, has sold 200 wether lambs in October, at 84s. each ; and Mr. De Mornay, of Col d'Arbres, has fattened off as mutton the whole of his wether lambs, at ages ranging from seven to nine months, averaging for sheep entirely fed in the field, 14 stone, one animal at ten months having scaled 241lb., yielding 18½ stone dead weight. (1) These great prices and weights indicate a change which has taken place in the management of sheep in Hants, where many breeders are now in the habit of fattening their lambs instead of selling them as stores.

The old method of managing a farm in the extensive chalk districts consisted in breeding stock sheep, for sale as lambs, and full mouthed ewes, with a view to growing corn. The flock was regarded as of primary importance, since it provided in the cheapest manner the manure by which the naturally poor chalk soils were made fertile. And so important was

(1) As they have done again at the last show

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(1) 8 pounds to the stone.