

Sheep and Sheep Breeding.

BY A. E. MANSELL.

I will name six things to keep in view which are essential to a practical and lasting success. They are (1) constitution, (2) form, (3) flesh, (4) wool, (5) character, (6) management. These things may appear simple and easy, but anyone is a marvel of practicability who can always keep these objects in the forefront when breeding pedigree animals. The pedigree-stock breeder is a fastidious man, and in buying sires he will have to give away some points, and there is always a strong temptation to neglect that which is useful and essential, and to place undue importance upon the fads and fashions of the day, especially upon what is most taking in the show-yard. I do not mean to throw cold water upon fashion; on the other hand, I would say, be in the fashion as much as you can, and try to take your part in leading it, but remember that fashion changes; even in the useful attributes of a sheep, therefore, do not be so much a slave to it as to sacrifice any of the essential qualities that in your better judgment will tend to the ultimate good and usefulness of the breed you have taken up.

Changes of Fashion.—We all know how much fashion has changed in our animals, especially in character and general appearance, the last thirty to fifty years. As an example I will mention bone as an important instance in this respect. The fine bone which was the ideal of Bakewell was generally favored by the last generation of breeders of sheep and cattle as denoting lightness of offal, but the fashion has gradually but surely changed in this respect. I have not named bone as an essential, but still it has always been thought by practical men to be such an indication of the most practical and useful qualities that it has been in the past, and is at the present time, viewed by a large proportion of breeders as of the utmost importance, the only difference being that the fine bone which was sought after in the past is now regarded as a fault. I have no extreme views about bone; I like to have plenty, and especially the right sort, but I would not always discard an animal for breeding because of small bone. I strongly believe, however, that you must not breed so as to get fine bone all through your flock, or you will lose strength of constitution and lean flesh; and, also, strong bone is required, to stand the forcing treatment of the present day.

Breeders' views in this respect, therefore, have been completely reversed, and this, in conjunction with many other examples that could be named, shows that everything that is not absolutely an essential, but only an indication to an essential, may be open to question. The moral of what I am now saying is, do not treat fashions as if they would never change, and do not consider the accepted indications of even the most useful and essential qualities as infallible, but never depart from what is really, and will always remain, an essential.

Importance of Small Signs to Breeders.—I would not, however, underrate the importance of indicators, because even very small signs are important in breeding. Every inch of an animal, from head to tail, and from top to toe, is an indicator of its value, and it is those who, after close inspection, and also at a distance, can read those signs truly that are the best judges. Often quite small marks on animals are greatly prized, as showing a strain of blood going back forty or fifty years. I will now briefly call attention to the six objects I have put before you. Space will not allow me to go into the multitude of points and indications that are bound up with these, and, of course, I am addressing those who are working upon different breeds, and attributes that are valued in some breeds of sheep are not cared for in others. "Constitution": I begin with constitution, because this is the foundation of everything. However perfect in most respects an animal is, all is useless without a robust constitution. All that indicates a good constitution should be sought after. Having this in view, capacity of chest is absolutely requisite. You must either have width or depth of chest, but to secure a robust and hardy animal you should have a combination of the two, with a deep shoulder, big girth, and good under line. You must have these points so as to ensure plenty of room for the heart and lungs, and other internal organs. I will only add at the present time, in connection with constitution, a wide loin and strong scragg.

What is "Form"?—The Leicester and other longwools excel in their top form, but the short-wool breeders, although aiming at the same perfection of top form, also require more depth of carcass and under line. The ideal form must always vary to some extent in different breeds, because all have not the same standard of excellence, for this is governed by locality, climate, treatment, and the purpose for which they are principally bred. To give an extreme example, I would say that the wide-chested sheep that are forced to such early

maturity in some districts would not be suitable to take the place of the deeper and narrower, but agile and hardy sheep that are bred on the hills. The first thing to be considered in regard to form is the legs; have a leg at each corner, and put on the ribs; if you can satisfy yourself as far as this, you have secured the foundation of a correct form all through. If you have the legs and shoulders as they should be, you can expect to see a straight spine, well-sprung ribs, with good chest, barrel, and under line, sufficient width behind, and a good carriage.

There will always be difference of opinion in regard to form; for example, some are most decided that the neck cannot be too short; others, and I am at one with the latter, think that a moderately long neck is desirable, if it is strong enough. Of course, a long, thin neck is bad and most unsightly, and fatal in the show-yard, whereas a neck which is thin but short will often pass muster, although such a neck indicates weakness of constitution, and a deficiency of lean flesh and muscle, quite as much, if not more, than the long, thin neck. I believe that if you keep on breeding from very short necks you will lose strength in your flock, and lean flesh, and at the same time the prolific breeding qualities of your ewes.

There is also a further difference of opinion in regard to the neck. I have been told that Jonas Webb was partial to the bottle-neck, and no doubt he had good reasons, but I will not enlarge upon this, as it is not the object of this paper to go into the hundred and one points connected with the essentials I have named, and I have only mentioned this one thing in order to show the vastness of the considerations a breeder has to keep in view.

Flesh and Wool.—The flesh appeals to most of

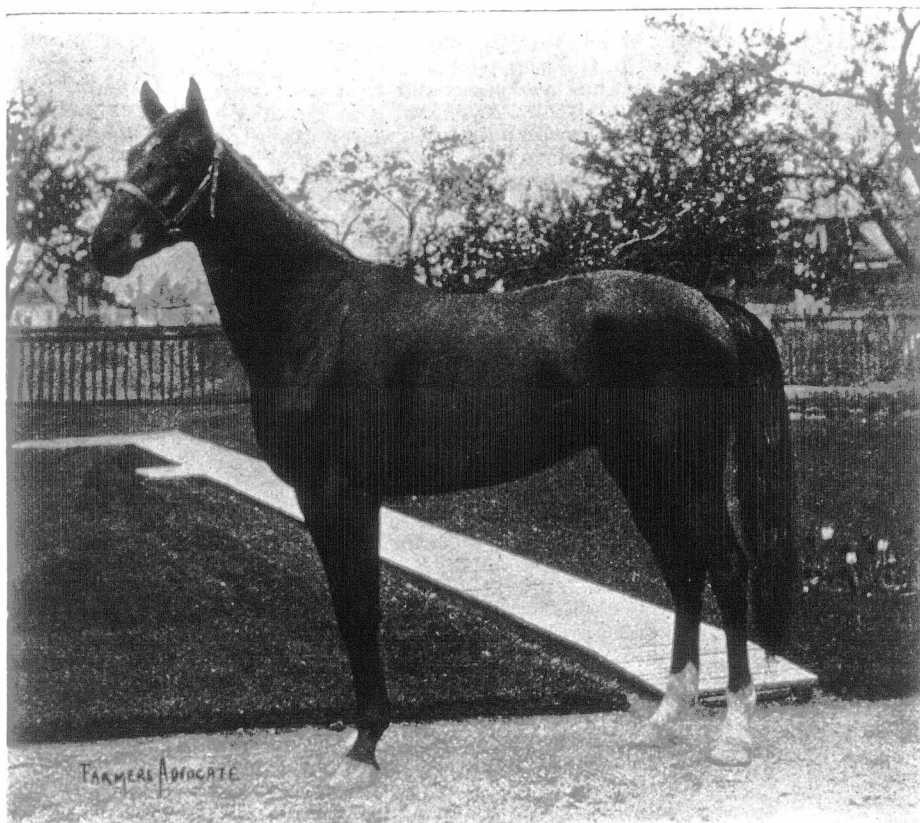
plenty of flaws. As with mankind, however, a good pedigree (I do not mean an aristocratic one, but a worthy one of long maintenance) is by far the best guarantee of good character, so in animals you must not expect to have satisfactory character without there has been careful and correct breeding maintained for a long time. To the superficial observer the difference is not much, but such observers will not have the insight to select sires. Nothing is more requisite to success in breeding than this insight.

Management.—I could say a great deal upon this subject, but if I could say all I knew it would be very little compared with what I have to learn. It is well to remember that the very best animals can easily be spoiled if badly managed. I would like to say, however, to all arable farmers, give this branch of your business all the care and thought you can, for sheep are the best crop you can produce, and by proper management sheep are the best means of growing all farm crops, and on some land the only way of securing crops. I would also add, give them plenty of attention, put on an extra hand if required, and you will be repaid the expense over and over again. Do not neglect them at harvest, or at any other time, and be most careful to avoid foot-rot. If well attended to and properly managed, you can largely increase the number of your sheep, only remembering that sheep, but especially lambs, will not thrive on stale pastures; the more change they have the better. If you wish to keep them thickly on the ground, and have them healthy and free from injurious parasites, you must grow crops for them, and keep them as much as possible on the arable land.

In conclusion, I would say that perhaps young breeders may think I have made the difficulties of breeding appear great, but do not be disheartened; the greatest pleasure of farming is breeding. Besides, you may make the breeding of valuable pedigree stock a much simpler and safer undertaking, if you are not too fond of experimenting on fresh lines. I quite think that anyone who has the ambition to take a leading part in altering and improving a breed must be bold in his selection of sires; in other words, he must experiment. In order to secure some quality in a marked degree, a sire must be bought that has this quality very pronounced, but to accomplish this you may have to put up with some bad qualities, and, of course, bad points in an impressive sire will cause you future trouble. If definite objects in breeding are to be attained, it is better to put up with a serious fault in a sire than to have one that is free from anything very objectionable, but still only a mediocre animal. It is well, however, for the type of our distinct breeds that the majority of breeders are so careful about the characteristics of the breed they have taken up, and that they work upon lines and principles that have been well proved.

Purchase of Sires.—If you wish to avoid the disappointments that follow on too much experimenting, I would advise the buying of sires with as few faults as possible, but especially keep in view all qualities that you think to be essential. Also, if you wish to avoid uncertainty, I would strongly advise you not to get too much admixture of blood. I would say, select one or two flocks that you consider the best from which to buy, and then always select the best sires you can from these flocks; if you do so you will not be far behind, and you may sometimes be quite as good as the flock from which you select. By doing this you will have as much change of blood as the flocks from which you buy. Remember, there is uncertainty in change of blood; new blood is, in fact, always an experiment. I am quite of opinion that no one can keep on breeding impressive and valuable sires with too much out-cross in breeding. I know a great number of people are very much afraid of breeding in one family; they think the constitution will be weakened. I quite agree that you must not sacrifice constitution for anything, but this is the test to depend upon; if you are maintaining and improving the constitution of your sheep, you know that you are perfectly safe, but this test has not always been kept in view, and the constitution has often been sacrificed both in sheep and cattle by following fashion in blood regardless of constitution. Breeding in concentrates and intensifies qualities (and here is the value of sires so bred), and you may keep strength of constitution so persistently in view as to intensify the robustness of your animals. The object of this paper is to put the value of all the points and attributes of a sheep in their true proportion.

I have endeavored to focus the attention of the young breeder to the essential points in breeding, and to impress upon him the absolute necessity of always keeping these points in view. The beauty of your animals is of the utmost importance, and there are reasons for all the fashions, and what may appear the fads and fancies of the day; therefore, you will be out of it if you disregard them, but



CAVALRY HORSE, CREMORNE.

(See Gossip, page 378.)

us very often, and all when they have their feet under the table think they are excellent judges of mutton, but it is the business of the sheep-breeder to form his judgment when the sheep is alive. With practice he will accomplish this by the hand. Speaking very briefly, the flesh must handle firm and springy to denote quality and leanness; it must be laid all over the frame in proper proportion; and here the form of the animal comes in again, for to have the flesh put on evenly you must have symmetry. There should be good development where the joints are most valuable. The leg of mutton is especially important as being the best joint, as well as denoting leanness of flesh all through the carcass, and we all know the unsightly appearance of a dressed carcass when there is the long, thin shank, with no plumpness in the twist.

It is extremely difficult to say anything about wool in a few words, especially when embracing all our British breeds. There is so much variation in what is sought after in this respect. I will chiefly confine myself to urging the great importance in all breeds of this essential. As a shortwool man I like a dense, even fleece, which when opened shows a pink, healthy skin. Such a fleece is always valuable, and also as good a sign as you can have of the right sort of flesh. The skin is valued as an indicator of the wool and the carcass.

The Importance of Character.—This is where the seeing eye comes in, and judging this by points is quite impossible, but character can be better discussed by the fanciers of each breed among themselves. How shall I, then, deal with this in a few words, without attempting description? Character gives the pedigree, as it were, without seeing the record. It sums up the whole breeding of the animal as the same word does for mankind, although with a long and good pedigree there are always