TO BEGINNERS IN SHEEP HUSBANDRY.

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Sixth Paper.

Object of This Paper.—It is easy to smite the one that is down, whether it be man or beast, and just now there seem to be a good many trying to bring themselves into prominence by kicking a sheep. Yet, as I believe there is no other animal that contributes so largely to the comforts of man as the sheep, I, for one, shall stand by him. This paper will be devoted to the interests of the new beginner, which is the most critical time for the sheep husbandman, because, if he does not start out right, he is apt to lose money, get discouraged, and give up the business.

Choosing the Breed.—The new beginner must decide what breed he wants; that depends on what branch of sheep husbandry he intends to follow. If he wishes to raise lambs to sell at from eight to twelve weeks old, he must have one or both parents of the coarse woolled variety for the sake of early maturity. If your object is wool and mutton, there is no breed that is equal to the Merinoes. They will herd in large flocks better, and do well on less feed than any other breed. In starting a flock, it is generally the most profitable to buy the best of the kind, but if you lack means, the next best thing is healthy old sheep from a large flock. Put by themselves, they will often renew their age, and prove not a bad investment, but avoid young or middle-aged culls; they lack constitutional vigor, and are the most worthless stock one can purchase.

Breed to a Fixed Type.—Having selected your breed for a specific purpose, press steadily forward, having a fixed type of your breed in your mind, and constantly breed to it, and keep a sharp eye on the men who have made a success of the business you have chosen. Do not mix a little of this breed and a little of that, thinking to get a perfect flock. I have known men to try this, but not one to succeed. If you cross, let it be for a special purpose, and do not breed from the cross. I believe this a good rule to follow with all domestic animals.

Vicious Rams.—Although the sheep is a mild, docile animal, a vicious, ugly ram is a terror, and you should not allow a young one teased, or fooled with, as rams easily contract bad habits, and when vice is once fixed, they are nearly worthless, unless one could confine a few of them with those persons who are so anxious to destroy our wool industry, who would soon cry for protection.

Feeding for Market.—For the past nineteen years I have, to some extent, followed feeding sheep, or fattening them for market. During that time, I have bought a good many flocks of sheep, picked out those that would do to feed, and kept the remainder from one to three years—until they were matured—and then turned them off.

This has given me an opportunity to test the different breeds kept in our vicinity, viz.: the Merino, Cotswold, Lei-
oester, Shropshire, and a few Southdowns. This latter breed, is now extinct in our vicinity, so far as I know. These other breeds, are, as in their order named, for profit, according to my experience.

Coarse and Fine Wools.—I wish to give you a few figures. The pasture and feed that will keep eighty coarse wools, will keep one hundred and twenty fine wools. We will take wether lambs and keep them until they are four years old. The coarse wools will shear five pounds each, or four hundred pounds each year, a total of sixteen hundred pounds in four years, which, at 30c. per pound, will bring, for wool, in four years, $480.

The fine wools, will shear seven pounds each, or eight hundred and forty pounds each year, a total of three thousand three hundred and sixty pounds, in four years, which at 28c. per pound, will give you $940. We will now sell them. If you sell immediately after shearing, and each flock is equally fat, they will sell for the same price per hundred; if you sell from the first of January to the first of May, there is no sheep that sells in the Chicago market equal to the Merino.

The coarse wools ought to average one hundred and forty pounds each, which at 4c. per pound, would be $5.60 each, or $148 for the flock. Add this to the wool obtained from the same flock, and you have a total for both wool and mutton, of $928.

The fine wools ought to weigh one hundred and twenty pounds each, which at 4c. per pound, will give $4.80 per head, a total of $576. Adding this to the wool of the same flock, gives $1,516, a difference of $588 in favor of the fine wools; and I think I have given the coarse wools the advantage, if anything, in these figures.

Fine Wools for Money.—I live in the banner sheep town, of Dane County, and there are but few who have not dabbled with the so-called mutton sheep, at one time or another in their lives, and I have yet to learn of one who made money at it, while the fine wools have been the main prop to many of our most successful farmers. Our soil and climate seem well adapted to the Merinos, which have improved so much since they were first brought here from Spain, that one would hardly recognize them as belonging to the same family.

Personal Experience.—When I first commenced keeping sheep, I was prejudiced against the fine wools; this prejudice cost me a good deal of money. My flock got to shear less than four lbs. per head. I was disgusted, bought a full blood Merino ram that, when mature, weighed 185 lbs. and sheared 24 lbs. of wool, for which I paid $37. I soon brought up my flock to six lbs. each. I then had two hundred sheep. I think the profit on that one ram was at least $500, and I have since bred as large, broad backed, long wooled sheep, as I could find of this breed.

John Johnston’s Experience.—In looking over Randall’s Practical Shepherd the other day, I saw a letter from John Johnston, of Geneva, New York, one of the most successful and practical sheep men this county can boast of, who, after thirty years experience, chose full blood Merinos for feeding purposes. He knew what he was about.

I have been thus lengthy, because most men sooner or later stumble on this point.

Hints on Lamb Raising.—The raising of lambs is an important factor in sheep husbandry. I will give a few suggestions that will be of advantage. First, sort your sheep every fall, putting only those that show good flesh and vigor into the breeding pens. The weak-
er ones, turn with your lambs, first putting a permanent mark on all that are two years old and over. Not breeding from them, they will be apt to flesh up the next season, and then is the time to ship them. In a wild state, the weaker ones would die off, leaving only the more vigorous ones to perpetuate the race. You secure the same result by sorting them. I would also put the non-breeding mark upon all goitered, stiff-necked and puny lambs.

Weaning.—Lambs in large flocks should be weaned when they are four or five months’ old, and placed on good, succulent pasture. There is nothing better than a stubble field, with a good growth of young clover (something we have not had for the last two years). Feed a little grain as the feed begins to get short, but a trifle at first; new beginners are apt to fail in this respect.

Dry Feed—Salt and Water.—All sheep should become accustomed to dry feed by degrees, that is, brought in nights and fed, and turned out to graze during the day. Particularly is this the case with lambs. I have lost money at different times by not doing so. All sheep should have free access to salt and water.

Fattening.—I will now make a few suggestions as to fattening sheep. A restless, uneasy animal will not fatten. The first requisite in all fattening animals is peace and quiet. This, all will admit, but how to secure it is not at all times an easy matter. I used to wait until the fore part of winter, prepare my yards, gather in my sheep from where I had bought them, and commence feeding. There were sure to be a few wild ones that would jump and run at the least provocation, which would keep the flock restless and uneasy. I would have hard work to make the flock hold their own, for the first few weeks, while some would fall away.

I next tried letting them run out, coming into the yard during the day if they would, and at night I would shut them in and feed them. This worked better, but was not altogether satisfactory. The sheep being in a strange place, it caused more or less commotion driving them into the yards. The next season I bought and took home my sheep while the feed was yet good in my stubble; turned them near my barns, salted them a little, and, afterwards, to get them used to me, as the feed commenced to fail, I fed them a little grain and put the best hay I had in their racks to tempt their appetites. The result was, I had the heaviest and by far the fattest car-load of sheep that was ever shipped from our market. I have often tried it since, and think it the best possible way to handle a flock of sheep.

The Best Age.—I am often asked at what age do sheep fatten best. I think three, coming four, but all the way from lambs to that age you can pick out sheep that will feed well. I have had good success with lambs, turning them off at ten months' old, but the man who succeeds with sheep must not expect to get something for nothing. It is a profitable animal that pays well for good keep and care.

Rules for Feeding.—Always feed grain in a flat-bottomed, dry trough, it possible, a trifle at first. Increase until you reach to one and one-half pounds each, per day. In damp, muggy weather feed lighter. Be sure and not feed so as to have them leave grain in their trough. Do not disturb them in the morning; let them get up of their own accord and pick around a little before you feed them, like an indulgent mother with her lazy boy. If they do not get up in time
for breakfast you must keep it wait: ; for them.

Mixed Grains.—I like mixed grains for sheep better than to feed them all one kind, and in coarse feed give them as great a variety as possible, but the same kind at a stated time each day.

Catching.—In catching sheep, be gentle and careful. It does not hurt me quite as bad to see a man catch both his hands into the wool of a sheep as it would to see him snatch his wife by the hair, but it is only in extreme cases that either is excusable.

Feeding Racks.—The best rack I ever saw for feeding sheep hay, and saving your fodder, is made by sawing six inch boards into pieces, two feet and a half or three feet long, and nailing them at each end to two by four scantling, leaving a space six to eight inches between pieces.

Fleeces.—One word about wool, and I am done. A sheep that is in good flesh when it is sheared, and is kept so until it is sheared again, being kept in out of the storms during the time, will produce as good a fleece as it is profitable for that sheep to produce on this soil, and in this climate. A sheep that be fat in the fall, allowed to get very poor during the winter, turned to grass in the spring and allowed to gain before shearing, will be very apt to have a cotted fleece. He will at least have a rotten one.

Conclusion.—In deciding whether we can raise wool, or sugar, or any other product, let us not round up like a ground hog in his winter quarters, and say we can’t, as some said of the rebellion, you can never put it down, and of our national debt, we can never pay it; but first let us ask, do we need those products, and have we the proper soil and climate to produce them. If so, then let us say, as we have said in times past, by the enactment of wholesome laws, and their proper execution, by a firm reliance on the sons and daughters of a free people, and the blessings of a bountiful providence, we will produce them. Let us know no East, no West, no North or South, but one harmonious whole, and vote in the interests of our country. Then we will have in the future what we have had in the past, the best country for a poor man to raise a family in and fit them for the stern duties of life, history ever recorded.

Discussion.

MRS. BARLOW.—I want to say, that from our grade Shropshiredown sheep last spring, we sheared 200 sheep, and they averaged eight pounds to the sheep, and I sold my wool at twenty-five cents a pound, and if I had waited two days, I would have got twenty-seven. I am satisfied with Shropshiredowns. I will also say that I have thirty-four lambs which I expect to sell in the Minneapolis or St. Paul market this spring and realize at least $3. apiece for each one of them.

MR. ANDERSON.—I want to say a word for the mutton breeds of sheep. Mr. Cole, as I understood him, said that the coarse wool breed of sheep sheared about eight pounds on the average. Now, my experience is, they shear nearly double that. I had a good many last year that sheared over fifteen pounds apiece. I raise 100 per cent. of lambs from the ewes. Mr. Cole will raise 75 per cent. only from those small breeds.

I want to say to farmers who want to go into sheep husbandry, that they should get the fine wools if they want to, but do get the large breeds. If a farmer wishes to get a few sheep— fifty to one hundred, and I have one hundred in the same yard—let him have the mutton breeds. I had some last year that averaged seventy pounds apiece, and they sold at a good price.