

## SHEEP, THEIR TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS

NO. IV.

## THE FINE-WOOL BREED—AMERICAN MERINO.

The Merinos introduced into the United States were necessarily distributed among farmers of widely varying tastes and as widely differing opportunities for the bestowal of attention on feeding and breeding. This fact, considered in connection with the vicissitudes of agriculture in a new country, under extremes of climate to which Spanish Merinos had for so many generations been strangers, will account for the comparatively few real successes in acclimating and improving them that are recorded in the earlier history in the United States. But few of the many breeders who secured animals of the importations heretofore mentioned succeeded in establishing flocks that attracted public attention. These, however, were sufficient to lay the foundation for what is undoubtedly, when considered in view of all the requisites for a wool-bearing animal, combined with a fair mutton production, the superior of the several types of the fine wool breed. A large proportion of the Merino flocks of the United States, descendants of the importations from Spain, were subsequently interbred with the Saxon and French varieties, until many of the characteristics of these were pretty thoroughly engrafted into American flocks. Through the exceptions to this rule, however, a sufficient number of flocks have been found, tracing with reasonable proof of purity direct to their Spanish ancestry, to warrant the claim that the present highest type of American Merino is the direct descendant, without admixture of other blood, of animals included in some of the several importations from Spain made prior to the year 1812.

It is within the memory of men now living—less than fifty years—that the efforts of breeders began to concentrate toward the typical American Merino of today. The

standard attained with the characteristics peculiar to this sheep—both the result of that intelligence and persistence for which American breeders are conspicuous, and for which patriotism and justice should accord them full credit—have secured for it the generally recognized designation of *American Merino*. This is not only demanded by justice and a recognition of the facts of history; it has become necessary to an intelligent understanding of the Merino in all its varieties. To insist upon some other designation, in view of all the facts, is but to invite confusion for beginners, and bewilder the students of ovine history. With few exceptions, writers and speakers have recognized these facts, and the term American, as applied to the Merino, is now as well understood as are the terms French and Saxon when used in the same connection. The most conspicuous exception to this rule is made by the Vermont Merino Sheep Breeders' Association, which, as its Publishing Committee states, "decided that the term *improved Spanish Merino* more fully comprehends a direct descent from the Spanish Merino, with the great improvements that have been made upon them by American breeders since importation, and as more appropriate than any other." Unfortunately for the inquiring student, the committee omits the logic by which its conclusion was reached. While recognizing, on the same page, the existence of both Saxon and French Merinos—descendants from the same Spanish Cabanas whence importations to America were drawn—there is a conspicuous failure to show wherein *improved Spanish Merino* is alone applicable to the American type. Improved in respect of fineness of fleece? So is the Saxon. Improved in respect of size of carcass? So is the French. Improved in length of fibre? So is the Australian. True, the type of the Merino peculiar to the United States presents a marked improvement upon its Spanish progenitors in these respects, and others equally desirable from a utilitarian point of view—all of them clearly the result of *American* enterprise and intelligence, and removing the Merino still further from the standard of the last century than have the efforts of breeders in Germany, or France, or Australia. Then why not American Merino? If any considerable number of the breeders of the countries named should become of the same notion as the Vermont committee, and christen their favorites "Improved Spanish," the impolicy of so general a designation would be too apparent for defence, if not positively inexcusable.

The typical American Merino is a purely-bred descendant from importations from Spain made prior to the year 1812. This is known to all students of live-stock history, and is admitted by all publications assuming to be authorities. In this, sheep breeders have sought to combine purity of breeding with constitutional vigor, size, and symmetry of form, under a fleece yielding the highest percentage of valuable wool consistent with economy in keep and good breeding qualities.

In several of the States having organizations for the promotion of sheep breeding,

attempts have been made to define and detail the characteristics required in the perfect sheep. The standard most commonly accepted—having received the endorsement of a committee composed of exceptionally competent breeders, called to pass upon the fine-wool sheep at the International Exhibition of Sheep and Wool, held at Philadelphia in 1880, and adopted by the management of several leading fairs for the guidance of judges—is reproduced, as indexing the opinion of thoughtful breeders as to the relative importance of each of the points indicated. In explanation of what might otherwise permit the impression that very little importance is attached to blood—that is, purity of breeding—it should be understood that the standard is for pure-bred animals only; hence their admission as such is recognized by a single point; which is equivalent to saying that, upon satisfactory evidence, the judge is satisfied the animals are purely bred, as claimed:

## POINTS OF EXCELLENCE FOR AMERICAN MERINO SHEEP—100 DENOTING PERFECTION.

- Blood—Thoroughbred—i. e. purely-bred, from one or more of the direct importations of Merino sheep, from Spain, prior to the year 1812, without the admixture of any other blood ..... 1
- Constitution—Indicated by form of body; deep and large breast cavity, broad back, heavy quarters, with muscular development forming capacious abdomen. Skin thick, but soft, of fine texture, and pink color; expansive nostril, brilliant eyes, healthful countenance, and good size, age considered..... 15
- Size—In fair condition, with fleece of twelve months' growth; full-grown rams should weigh not less than 165 pounds, and ewes not less than 120 pounds. [The Philadelphia jury made these, rams 140 pounds, ewes 100 pounds.] ..... 7
- General Appearance—Good carriage, bold style, elastic movement, showing in particular parts, as well as general outline, symmetry of form ..... 8
- Body—Throughout heavy bones, well proportioned in length, smooth joints, ribs starting horizontally from backbone, and well rounded to the breast-bone, which should be wide, strong and prominent in front; strong backbone, straight and well-proportioned as to length. Heavy, muscular quarters, deep through and squarely formed behind and before, with shoulders well set on, neither projecting sharply above the backbone, nor standing so wide and flat as to incur liability to slip shoulder ..... 8
- Folds and Wrinkles—Folds on the ram should be larger than on the ewe. Large and pendulous folds from the chin or jaws succeeding each other down the neck to the brisket, ending with large fold or "apron" and extending up the sides of the neck, but lighter if at all extending over top of neck, two or three behind the fore-leg or shoulder, one on front of hind leg, hanging well down across the flank, two or more on rear of hind legs, or quarters, extending upward toward the tail, with one or two on and around the tail, giving the animal a square appearance on the hind quarters, and straight down as may be from end of tail to hock joints and hind feet. In addition to folds, small wrinkles over the body and belly are desirable, as forming a compactness of fleece, but not large enough to be apparent on the surface of grown fleeces, or to cause a jar in its quality, thus leaving the body of the fleece even in quality and free from the jar of large folds over the body ..... 10
- Head—Wide between the ears, and between the eyes, and across the nose; short from top of head to tip of nose; face straight, eyes clear and prominent; ears thick, medium size, and, together with the face, nose and lips, white, and covered with soft fur or downy wool. Ewes should give no appearance of horns; while upon rams the horns should be clear in color, symmetrically curved, without tendency to press upon the sides of the head or to extreme expansion ..... 6
- Neck—Medium length, good bone and muscular development, and, especially with the rams, heavier toward the shoulders, well set high up, and rising from that point to the back of the head ..... 5
- Legs and Feet—Legs medium or short in length, straight and set well apart forward and back, heavy bone, smooth joints, with large muscular development of the fore-arm; thick, heavy thighs, wide down to hock joints, and from knee joints downward covered with short wool, or the soft furry covering pecu-

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| liar to the ears and face; hoofs well-shaped and of clear color.....   | 5   |
| FLEECE—Covering—Tendency to hair and gure upon any part of the sheep is to be avoided. Evenness of fleece in length, quality, density, lustre, crimp, trueness, strength and elasticity, covering the entire body, belly and legs to the knees; head well covered forward, squarely to a line in front of the eyes; well filled between the eyes and ears or horns, and well upon the cheeks; muzzle clear, with small opening up to and around the eyes. Scrotum of rams covered with wool free from tendency to hair ..... | 15  |
| Quality—Medium, but such as is known in our market as fine delaine and fine clothing wool, distinctly better in quality, lustre, crimp and elasticity than the wools of the same length grown upon the common grade sheep.....   | 5   |
| Density—Shown by the compactness of the fleece, throughout which should open free but close, showing very little of the skin at any point, even at the extremities.....  | 10  |
| Length—At one year's growth not less than two and one-half inches, and as near as may be uniform in length to the extremities of the fleece.....   | 5   |
| Oil—Evenly distributed; soft and flowing freely from skin to surface; medium in quantity. . .  | 5   |
| Total.....   | 100 |