

## ART. LIII.—Notes on Coloured Sheep.

By TAYLOR WHITE.

[Read before the Hawke's Bay Philosophical Institute, 11th Sept., 1888.]

THE heading of this paper approximates very closely to what I may call "shop;" but, as the animals chiefly mentioned are a distinct race, and more rare and ornamental than useful, the information contained can the more readily be classed as natural-history notes. I will first give the correspondence received, and then append a few observations of my own.

"Park Lodge, Baslow, Chesterfield,

"DEAR TAYLOR,—

"31st May, 1888.

"I have endeavoured to obtain as full particulars as possible with regard to the Duke of Devonshire's spotted and horned flock at Chatsworth. Little, however, is known of this, and it is only quite recently that the agent has endeavoured to improve the breed by importing new blood; still, the flock does not seem to have suffered badly by in-breeding, as big prices have been paid for sheep to cross with others. There seem to be a few similar flocks in the country, notably at Tabley and Canons Ashby, as you will see by enclosed copy of a letter.

"The Chatsworth sheep have mostly four horns—two upright ones on the top of the head and two curling over the face under the ears. Some ewes, I see, have only two (straight) horns. They do not let the rams run with the ewes. Their tails are not docked, on which there is seldom any wool to speak of. The sheep are kept solely for ornament; their wool is almost valueless, though I believe the mutton is considered a delicacy on account of its venison-like flavour.

"Yours very sincerely,

"W. MERVYN WRENCH."

*Extract.*—"The Duke of Devonshire recollects the sheep being at Chatsworth as far back as 1819, and Sir Dominic Coningham called them 'Jacob's sheep.'

"They would in olden times have been called 'merino.' I enclose, however, a copy of a letter from Sir H. Dryden which seems to point definitely to the correct name as being 'Spanish.'"

"Canons Ashby, Byfield, Northamptonshire,

"DEAR SIR,—

"28th October, 1884.

"I call the spotted sheep 'Spanish.' They have been for sixty years or more in this neighbourhood. I had the breed from a neighbour who had been in the Peninsular War, and he called them 'Spanish,' though I don't remember having asked him if he saw similar sheep in Spain.

"The breed has been at Tabley for nearly two hundred years, as shown by an old painting of the house at a certain date. Lord de Tabley has, I think, no special name for them but 'spotted.' The Tabley rams had straight horns—nearly all had four, and very long; but when he had a ram from me many came with the twisted horns, and Lord de Tabley complained that I had spoilt the beauty of his flock. At Tabley they kept all the rams for ornament, and never ate any of the mutton. These gentry were let live as long as they could, and amused themselves by continual fighting. I treat my flock as other flocks are treated, and have no other mutton.

"An officer told me he had seen such in the Basque Provinces, and there are many in Shetland more or less spotted, and Shetland has great trade with Spain. The Shetland people don't like the *spotted* ones, so the marking is not distinct, not being desired—that is, the spotted ones are got rid of.

"The size of the Tabley horns has *much* decreased—from, I suppose, breeding in-and-in. Many years ago a Spanish beggar-woman came here carrying a child on her back. I told her I could not speak Spanish; but she said, 'There are many of my countrymen here.' I made out that it was the *sheep*, and she explained that when the child saw the sheep it cried out that it recognised countrymen. I asked her more, and she said there were numbers of them where she lived; but I forget what part of Spain. The merino sheep are *totally distinct*.

"We have had some curious facts in breeding. When Lord de Tabley had a *curly-horned* ram from here, the rams had curly horns almost exclusively; when, by an accident, our spotted rams got to white ewes, the lambs were *all black*; when a white tup has got to our spotted ewes, the lambs were *all white* and *very white*. I always kill any crossbred lambs, so I can't say what their progeny would be.

"You may observe that the black wool is harsher and more curly than the white on the same sheep. This, years ago, made our wool less valuable than the white, but now the buyers make no difference, and I believe for some Scotch manufactures the mixture is liked, as it makes an undyed brown.

"Early in summer I always observe that the spots of black are below the level of the white ground. It is odd that I have never seen a black ground with white spots, except sometimes a white *cap*, never on the *body*.

"Yours faithfully,

"H. DRYDEN.

"Our sheep average about 56lb., and some wethers go up to 75lb."

From this the Duke of Devonshire's and Lord de Tabley's sheep appear identical—white spotted with black; two straight or slightly-curved upright horns, and two smaller horns bent back round the ears and pointed under them to the front; wool scant and inferior; known to have been at Tabley two hundred years.

Sir H. Dryden's sheep, with similar markings, but probably with only one pair of horns, twisted spirally as in the merino; wool of fair quantity and quality; in the neighbourhood of Canons Ashby over sixty years.

In the zoological collection at the Royal Park, Melbourne, some fifteen years ago, I saw a ewe having short dark shining red hair, having drooping ears and no horns, also a larger sheep with long brick-coloured wool, which I supposed to be a son of the ewe by a white-woolled ram; probably Chinese.

In England, the late celebrated novelist, Mayne Reid, had a flock which he describes as black with white face and white tip to the tail, without horns, which he called Jacob's sheep. He got the originals from a travelling mob, and had no knowledge where they were bred. He tried one season to show as a curiosity at the Royal Agricultural Show, but was not allowed, as "they were not a known breed." Afterwards he, being indignant at their rejection, wrote a letter to the *Times* about them. A supposed portrait of one was given in the *Live-stock Journal*, but it was coloured in black and white patches. They were said to breed true.

"*Shetland Sheep*.—At the last Royal Agricultural Show was a pen of five miniature ewes of jet-black colour, which were a great attraction to the visitors."—*Live-stock Journal*.

Darwin, in "Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication," speaks of a famous breed of black sheep at Karakool, Turkistan, with a valuable fleece of lustrous black wool. The wool was said to deteriorate when the animals were removed elsewhere.\*

Dr. Randal, in "American Sheep Husbandry," in describing the early attempts to introduce the merino sheep from Spain to America, says, "The several small lots first imported were allowed to die out, not being fancied at that time; but the very first, which with difficulty were obtained through the influence of the American Ambassador to Spain, when they arrived in 1803, were all black." I think five or seven were the number landed. This was either a swindle in picking a few black sheep from a white flock, or indicated a black merino flock existing at that time.

It is very remarkable that writers, in trying to trace the origin of the merino sheep, always imagine them to be of

---

\* See "Travels in Bokhara," by Sir A. Burnes.

English origin, for they are prevented from looking to North Africa owing to the heat of the climate causing sheep in that country to have a covering of hair; otherwise it would be supposed the Moors introduced them from Barbary.

On the other hand, these spotted sheep; the Herdwicks, on the Cumberland fells, with curled horns; the Cheviots, on the Border Hills, a polled race; and the sheep of the Shetlands, of very diminutive size, are all supposed to come from Spain, the popular tradition being that they are survivors from the wreck of the Spanish Armada, in the time of Queen Elizabeth. That crews from one or more of these vessels escaped to the Shetlands there seems to be good evidence; also, that these shipwrecked people taught the natives, with whom they intermarried, a particular secret in the art of weaving and dyeing woollen goods, which I believe is a speciality to this day.

Quoting from the "Technical Educator:" "Beautiful black lamb-skins are imported from the Crimea, and still more rich and glossy, with a short fur, from Astracan."

Most people are under the belief that flocks of sheep are necessarily white, but no doubt, if the matter were properly investigated, a number of pure breeds of coloured sheep would be found inhabiting out-of-the-way places.

Youatt says, "There is reason to believe that sheep in their early domesticated condition were brown or dingy black: during the classical period the sheep of Spain are described by several ancient authors as being black, red, or tawny."

Darwin remarks, "In the Tarentino the inhabitants keep black sheep alone, because the *Hypericum crispum* abounds there, and this plant does not injure the black sheep, but kills the white ones in about a fortnight's time."

"A so-called Spanish ram, which had two small black spots on the sides, when mated with seven Southdown ewes, produced thirteen lambs all perfectly black."—Mr. Wilmot, "Quarterly Review," 1849.

"The Rev. W. Darwin Fox believes that this ram belonged to a breed which he has himself kept, and which is always spotted black and white, and he finds that Leicester sheep crossed by rams of this breed always produced black lambs. He has recrossed these crossed sheep with pure white Leicesters during three successive generations, but always with the same result. Mr. Fox was told by the friend from whom the spotted breed was procured, that he likewise had gone on for six or seven generations crossing with white sheep, but still black lambs were invariably produced."—"Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication."

Returning to the spotted sheep: On breeding the Tabley and Canons Ashby sheep together, a change in the character of the horns is mentioned, but the colour of the wool seems

not to have altered, as it did when crossed with other breeds: this would lead to a supposition of affinity between the two flocks.

These spotted sheep have probably lived in the parks of Tabley and Chatsworth for a number of generations, and I see no reason why they should not be descendants of the original sheep of Britain.

The Chillingham and Hamilton cattle, one a white horned and the other a white polled race, are considered to be the remnant of the herds which used to roam the forests of Britain.

Both the cattle and sheep have been kept in parks belonging to wealthy families, and been handed down from generation to generation as special heirlooms or adjuncts of the parks, and so have been preserved to the present day. Therefore I see no reason why these sheep should not be the original unimproved British sheep. It is unreasonable to always look to other countries for the origin of our different breeds of British sheep.

---

ART. LIV.—*Notes on the Waikato River Basins.*

By L. CUSSEN.

[*Read before the Auckland Institute, 17th December, 1888.*]

PLATES XXXIV. AND XXXV.

THE Waikato River seems to have been subject to apparently abnormal changes in its course from an early period in its history. Incidental reference to these changes is to be found in several of the works on the geology and physiography of the country, but, so far as I know, the subject has never been dealt with in a comprehensive manner. At each change the river would appear to have left its natural valley, and, turning westward, to have found a new course through high mountainous country which separates one basin from the other. Thus it appears to have worked in a diagonal line across the country, from east to west, crossing three primary river-valleys. In consequence of these facts, the physiographical history of the basins, regarded as a description of the surface-configuration of the Waikato Valley due to a combination of the effects of volcanic action and planetary denudation, is of more than ordinary interest.

Unlike many of the large questions which geologists have to deal with, the study of the earth's surface-features is within the limits of our most familiar experiences, and requires no special scientific knowledge for its understanding. The plain