

Good judges have frequently carefully examined the flocks of Europe with the object of securing breeding animals that promised, in some important particular, improvement upon the best fine-wool specimens in this country, and have as often returned with the conviction that the model fine-wool sheep—for the American husbandman—was the American Merino.

This conclusion is not to be ascribed to pride of country or such local prejudice as might be expected, in some measure, to give bias to judgment and lend shape to conclusions. It will be found to be sustained by the closest analysis. In weight of fleece proportioned to weight of carcass; in weight of cleansed wool from such fleece; in aggregate return upon necessary investment, the strictest comparison among the several fine-wool varieties will be found favoring the American Merino.

A noticeable increase in size and weight of carcass has been made within the time most especially covering the improvement of the Merino at the hands of American breeders. For a while (and at present in certain localities with certain individuals), efforts of breeders have been directed toward the development of wool production without materially increasing the size of the carcass. This, however, is not the most popular standard, and a still further increase in size of body, so far and so fast as it may be secured without sacrifice of other merits, may be looked for—in fact, is demanded by those sections of the country that now furnish the market for the majority of breeding stock, and which are hereafter to constitute the main wool-producing localities.

Such increase in size will be neither rapid nor extreme; but that it will come, may be predicted with little risk of disappointment. While the American Merino is unquestionably most prominent and valuable as a wool-bearing sheep, from the fact that efforts of breeders have been mainly, if not exclusively, exerted in developing that characteristic, it is clear to the observant student of live-stock husbandry that this animal is destined to a future of no inconsiderable importance in the relation it will sustain with reference to the meat supply for a rapidly augmenting population. Already the overflow of male animals from frontier flocks, largely of Merino blood, has recognition in meat stock centers. These animals, when approaching the age of fleece deterioration, can be most profitably disposed of as mutton stock; and as their compact and well-fatted carcasses become familiar to consumers, the remaining prejudice against Merino mutton—a prejudice with less foundation than the casual observer would suspect—will gradually disappear. This conclusion finds ample warrant in the fact that in the principal markets of the country the price of mutton sheep is now determined more by the *condition* than by the *breed* of the animals offered. Hence, it follows that the increase in size already secured—amounting to 25 per cent to 40 per cent over original importations—is by no means likely to prove the limit. The full extent of the increase of carcass is most fully

realized by the close observer or upon measurement. The improved symmetry secured by imparting rotundity to the body, shortening the legs, deepening the chest, broadening and filling the hips and thighs, and otherwise generally improving the physical development, has brought weight without materially adding to height, the first point to meet the eye of the non-critical observer.

The increase in weight of body, while interfering somewhat with a record of high percentage of wool to weight of carcass—a point upon which some breeders place more stress than its importance seems to warrant—finds compensation in increased flesh yield and improved constitutional vigor, considerations of prime importance in laying the foundation of flocks to be handled with view to a profit on labor and investment.

The most conspicuous improvement in the American Merino upon its imported ancestry is apparent in the fleece. Here the gross weight from a single animal has been increased three hundred per cent to four hundred per cent in some instances—say from 7½ lbs. to 37 lbs. in rams' fleeces. Scouring tests show that the amount of cleansed wool from these representative fleeces has been more than double, while being otherwise improved. In fineness of fiber certain specimens of American Merinos will be found rivaling the standard Saxon of a few decades ago. In 1878, Dr. H. A. Cutting, of Lunenburg, Vt., at the request of the Vermont Merino Sheep Breeders' Association, carefully measured a series of samples of wool fibers from American Merino sheep. The average diameter of rams' wool in the collection was ascertained to be 1-1045 of an inch; the finest, 1-1411. Ewes' wool, average diameter, 1-1308; finest, 1-1881 of an inch. When these measurements are compared with those earlier ones recognized by Youatt, Randall and others, a most remarkable improvement is manifested, even after due allowance has been made for the greater accuracy obtainable under improved appliances now within reach of scientists, for a comparison of samples obtained many years since with those from flocks of the present day, fails to disclose to the unaided eye so great a reduction in diameters as is indicated by these figures—in reality as much as one-half.

SHEEP, THEIR TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS

NO. V.

FINE WOOL—THE AMERICAN MERINO.

The Merino is the only sheep among the many breeds introduced into the United States that has attained a higher type in the hands of American breeders than is to be found among the best specimens in the country whence imported. While with other breeds and varieties steady and heavy drafts are being necessarily made upon their "native land" for animals, with the hope to improve upon the American-bred animals of the same type, the breeders of Merinos find in the fine-wool flocks of the United States the best specimens of their favorite sheep.