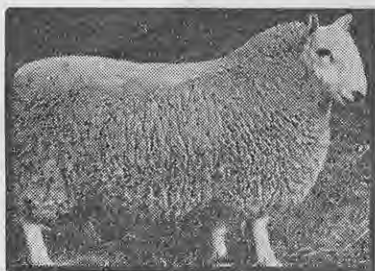


BRITISH BREEDS OF SHEEP . . .



The Cheviot, one of the most important breeds in Britain. It is the most cosmopolitan of breeds.

Cheviot and Blackface

The Cheviot's earliest known home was the border hills, but the Blackface probably originated in the Pennine region, where its relatives such as the Swaledale and the Lonk still live. The breed was well established in the southern uplands of Scotland as far back as the 15th century. Its invasion of the highlands is of much more recent date.

As a breed the Cheviot is good to look at, with a distinctive appearance, but it is not a good breed for wet, lowland pastures. Other hill breeds are better adapted to withstand high-rainfall conditions. In Britain's eyes the Cheviot produces a good type of wool for a hill breed. Cheviot wool is naturally more soft and fine than Blackface wool and thus lent itself to improvement, becoming the raw material of the famous tweed industry of the Scottish borders. On the other hand, attempts to improve the long, coarse-textured fleece of the Blackface have resulted in a fleece lacking in protection in the rigorous conditions of its mountain country.

Apparently there was plenty of exchange of blood under the conditions prevailing along the border until the time of the union, and the breeds must have been mixed freely. Robson, of Belford and Bowmont Water, who was the first great improver of Cheviots, undoubtedly brought some sheep from the south. He is said to have used a ram from Bakewell, but his grandson held that after extensive travelling in England he bought several rams of a breed then existing in Lincolnshire. Robson's work gave the Cheviot a better carcass and an increase of 20 per cent. in fleece weight without loss of hardiness. This early gain of the Cheviots pushed the Blackface back to the highest and poorest land.

However, because of its hardiness and thriftiness the Blackface holds its own and apparently will continue to do so over a vast area such as the heather-clad hills of Scotland and the Pennine chain, on Dartmoor, and even on the Cornish moors. Men responsible for the early improvement of the Scotch Blackface were Gillespie of Douglas Mill, Charles Howatson of Glenbuck, and the Archibalds of Overshiels farming in Upper Lanarkshire and the inland part of Ayrshire.

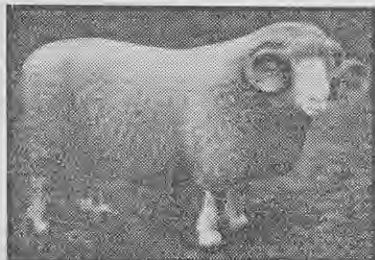
The enclosure of the common land, which created much opposition in the Cotswolds in the 16th century, was repeated in the highlands between 1770 and 1840.

The forming of large sheep farms created a vast amount of human misery, equalled only by that caused by the industrialists of the new factories in the north of England.

The Blackface breed was the immediate instrument of this policy, advancing from the southern uplands to the southern and central highlands. The foreigners were more or less welcomed in the southern highlands about 1760, but in the north with their alien shepherds they were hated as the enemies of the old highland way of life. They had reached Caithness by the end of the 18th century, and when a disastrous outbreak of disease occurred among the goats and the little old soft-wooled Kerry sheep of the northernmost county in 1806-07 the Blackfaces were left supreme.

The rival Cheviots were not far behind with such champions as Sir John Sinclair, who by 1802 had 3000 of these ewes on his estate at Langwell, in Caithness. Rising prices for finer qualities of wool after 1800 helped their campaign.

The displacement of the crofters to new villages by the sea or abroad to the colonies was completed by the



The Dorset Horn, which will breed earlier in the year than any other type of sheep in Britain.

capitalist farmers from the neighbourhood of Northumberland moving in with their thousands of sheep, complete with shepherds and dogs. Professor Scott Watson gives some idea of the magnitude of the emigration when he says that one of these men, Reed, alone held a run in the Strath of Helmsdale which was 18 miles long by 8 miles at its widest, grazing more than 18,000 sheep.

Herdwick

The origin of the Herdwick, the breed of the Lake District and of considerable numerical importance, is obscured in romance. The legend of 40 scraggy Merinos struggling ashore from a wreck of the Spanish Armada on the coast of Drigg can, it seems, be discounted. More probably they are the descendants of some Scottish sheep taken off a wreck on the Cumberland coast in the early 18th century and acquired by the farmers of Wastdalehead. Their owners regarded them with almost superstitious awe and formed themselves into an association with the main object, apparently, of keeping the Herdwick to themselves.

It is one of the most hardy and thrifty types in Britain. It is not akin to the Blackface breeds, though its

fleece is very coarse textured. Some rams are horned and some polled. The outstanding feature of the breed is the change in face and leg colour from the dark of the lamb to grey and then with age to white.

Welsh Mountain

The modern taste for a small, fine-grained, lean joint in mutton and lamb has brought the Welsh Mountain breed more into prominence. This is the smallest British breed, descended from early types indigenous to the country—the original tan-faced, short- and dense-wooled Celtic sheep—and was long thought hardly worth improvement.

Wales has much high land on which the rainfall is heavy and the poor-quality herbage will support only a thrifty breed of sheep. Because of its suitability for this type of hill country, Thomas ranks the Welsh Mountain as of first-class importance and value. The Cheviot is polled in both sexes, but the Welsh Mountain rams are strongly horned. The breed would have a wider distribution in England but for one unfortunate disadvantage for the lowlander—its tendency either to burrow through poor fences or to take them in its stride.

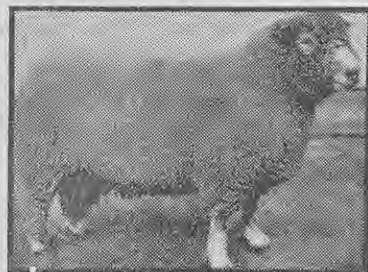
Only in recent times have systematic efforts been made with the aid of science to fine down the wool while ridding the fleece of undesirable kemp fibres and still retaining a fleece that will keep the newly-born lamb warm and dry. To improve the fleshing of the breed while retaining its hardiness and thrift on the scant herbage is another aim. This is no easy task, and it seems that improvement of the hill pastures must accompany flock improvement.

Intermediate Breeds

For the purpose of this classification the group of intermediate breeds represents a transition stage between breeds developed for and kept on the highest land and the lowland breeds, short and long woolled. It appears that more could have been achieved in flock improvement in this limited area if breeders had concentrated on the development of only one breed. As it is, none of these three breeds—Kerry Hill, Clun Forest, and Radnor Forest—is of great importance.

Short-wooled Breeds

The majority of the short-wooled breeds are associated with lowland farming systems or arable farming on



The Ryeland, a very old breed. It is a fairly-small and very docile sheep.