

SHEEP-HUSBANDRY IN NEBRASKA.

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THAT portion of Nebraska Territory adapted to the rearing of sheep is the eastern half, extending 225 miles north and south, and 200 miles east and west. There is a large region of country extending still further west, comprised between the 40th and 43d degrees north latitude, which will probably remain uninhabited by man, and those domestic animals which are wont to follow him in his progress towards the verge of civilization, for half a century yet to come. This large tract of country is worthless to the farmer or stock-grower, save in the valleys of the Platte, Republican, and a few smaller streams; and even in these valleys we find the grass of a quality too coarse and long to prove either palatable or nutritious to our different varieties of sheep.

The vast fields of rolling prairie or rocky ridges between the river valleys of this section produce but little save an abundant crop of cactus and weeds, the uses of which it would be difficult to determine. But in our more fertile region of 45,000 to 50,000 square miles west of the Missouri, watered by the *Niobrara*, the *Platte*, the *Republican*, and the many smaller streams emptying their waters into these and the Missouri, there is, we think, every inducement that Dame Nature could hold out to the enterprising sheep-husbandman to "come and possess the land."

CLIMATE.

Lying nearly 1,500 miles from the nearest sea-coast, and north of the 40th degree north latitude, it must be evident to the observer that Nebraska is liable to greater extremes of heat and cold than those States of the same latitude bordering on the Atlantic. An isothermal line of 52 degrees, commencing, say, at or near the city of New York, will be observed to pass through southern Pennsylvania, middle Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, southern Iowa, and through Nebraska, south of the Platte river, and near Nebraska City.

The elevation above the sea level is from 1,225 feet at Nebraska City, on the Missouri, to 2,360 feet at Fort Kearney, 175 miles further west. The mean temperature near the river is about 50 degrees, while the average annual fall of rain does not exceed 28 inches, and of this the most by far in the winter and spring. The atmosphere is thin, cool, and dry. The summer and autumn are usually characterized by what our farmers denominate "a want of rain;" and this "want" is generally experienced till December, and often dry winds and dusty garments greet the new year. As we write, (November 22,) a citizen largely engaged in sheep-raising informs us that his sheep still graze at large, attended only by a boy to protect them from wolves and dogs—the latter much more destructive than the former. He thinks his flock is doing much better on grass than they would on dry feed.

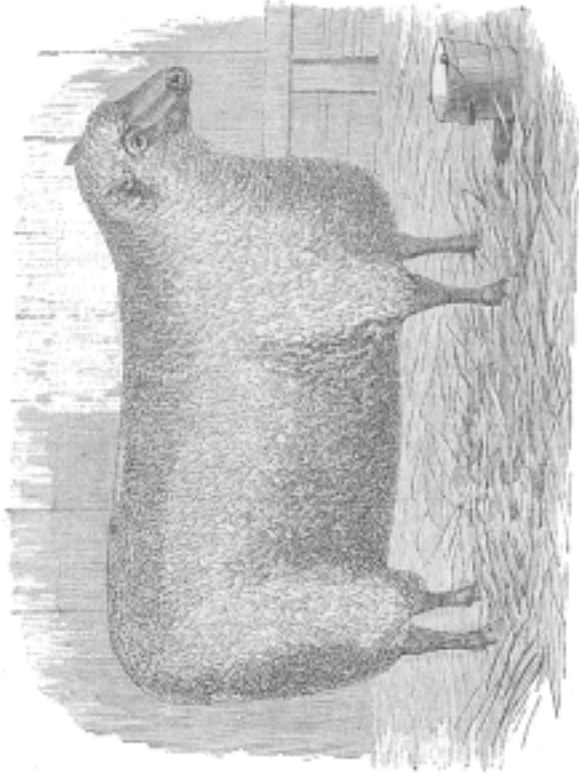
We think there can be but one objection to the climate of Nebraska as a sheep-growing region, and this is found in the fact that we are liable to experience cold northeast winds in the winter, rendering it necessary to provide more ample shed-room than in more eastern localities of the same mean annual temperature.

SOIL.

Our soil is a rich prairie loam, free from sand; clay is seldom, if ever, found, save in the immediate vicinity of a few small streams. A characteristic of this soil is its ability to withstand continued drought, as well as frequent heavy rains. The farmer is not often disappointed; in fact, we believe a good average crop of coarse grain has been realized every year since the organization of the Territory. The native prairie grass is found to be nutritious, and sheep fatten upon it as readily, we think, as on the different grasses of eastern States. But should it be objected that this prairie grass soon disappears where flocks are herded for any great length of time, we reply that our soil is peculiarly adapted to the blue grass, red-top and white clover. We have noticed large fields of these grasses in Nebraska, and believe they may be profitably grown. As a matter of economy, however, we recommend the raising of Hungarian grass and corn for winter feed. The rich oleaginous seed of the Hungarian is better than oats or corn, and imparts its oil to the fleece. The straw, if not too ripe when cut, is equal to the brightest oat straw, while two crops may be grown on the land in one season. Corn is most economically fed on the stalk, but we do not approve this economy. The weak members of the flock and the lambs are not rapid "shellers," and do not, therefore, secure the amount of grain they are entitled to, while, if slightly over-fed, they are apt to leave ears which are thickly covered with the husk untouched. We prefer feeding corn-stalks during cold weather as a coarse food, and corn in the ear twice per day. We find a change from prairie grass to corn-stalks, again to Hungarian, and again to sheaf-oats, to be advisable; and the observant shepherd will not be at a loss to decide when such changes should be made. We hear many cautions against "over-feeding." We are of the opinion that too many fears are entertained in regard to this point. Sheep, if fed regularly and plentifully, are not apt to eat more than *enough*, nor more than is profitable to the husbandman. Feed *judiciously*, but feed *freely*. Both the fleece and the carcass will repay you.

BREEDS OF SHEEP.

Located, as we are, remote from any large city, and not enjoying the facilities of railroads in shipping stock to market, we deem it unnecessary to discuss the question as to whether it is expedient to raise what are termed the mutton-breeds of sheep in Nebraska. Ten years hence we may decide to rear sheep both for wool and the carcass, but at present we must seek those breeds which produce the greatest number of pounds of that wool which will sell for the most money. The common coarse wools which have been driven from Missouri and Kentucky are poor shearers, indifferent mutton-sheep, and are altogether unprofitable to the farmer. But two breeds seem to be in favor in our Territory—the Spanish and French merinos. It is urged by some that the French are larger, a better mutton-sheep, and that as shearers they are equal to the Spanish; by others, that the Spanish are stronger in constitution and yield a heavier fleece of *better* wool. We regret there are not more of both classes of *pure blood* in our Territory, and that so little attention is devoted to the *weight* and *quality* of the fleece. After careful inquiry, and from our own experience, we are led to the conclusion that the Spanish are entitled to the preference, both because they are more hardy and the wool is of superior quality. Many, however, will prefer crossing their French ewes with Spanish rams of pure blood; and the cross, we are free to admit, is an excellent one in many respects. The size is increased, there is a larger staple, with less yolk or gum to be extracted in cleansing. The most important object to be attained, however, with us, (and it is one of prime importance to every sheep-husbandman who desires to sell fine wool, so as to realize the greatest profit,) is to secure pure-blooded



SOUTHDOWN "SON OF ARCHBISHOP."
Owned by H. S. White, South Framingham, Mass.

Spanish merino rams. We can obtain these only by paying what to western men seem exorbitant prices. The only safe plan to adopt to procure good blood, at the least expense, is to order such a ram as is desired of some breeder of established reputation, the excellence of whose stock has been proved. The writer has two Vermont Spanish merino rams, one of which he values highly, and which promises to make one of the best sheep, both as to constitution and weight of fleece, in the western country. He hazards but little in pronouncing him the best west of the Mississippi river. This ram is from the flock of Nathan Cushing, Woodstock, Vermont. Mr. Edwin Hammond, of Middlebury, Vermont, probably has sheep of as pure blood as any in the United States, and the man who sends to him for a pure-blood Spanish merino ram may rest assured that he will get what he bargains for. To either of the above gentlemen we beg leave to recommend our western wool-growers who desire to increase the value of their flocks.

During the continuance of the present war the price of the coarse wools will rule high. Upon the return of peace fine wools will advance in price, or coarse wools somewhat decline, till they have reached their proper level. It therefore behooves the western farmer to prepare for the demand he may reasonably anticipate a year or two hence. But if a pound of fine wool will command no higher price in eastern markets than a pound of coarse, is it, nevertheless, not the interest of the farmer to produce the fine in preference to the coarse? We think it is, decidedly. Every scientific man will testify to the fact that the fabric wrought of fine wool confines more caloric than that manufactured from the coarser material; and what manufacturer or consumer would not prefer the fine staple?

But another argument in favor of the fine wool breeds of sheep for Nebraska is the fact that they produce at least one-third more in weight than the coarse. The writer found that his flock of merinos averaged $5\frac{3}{4}$ pounds after having been driven from Ohio the previous season, while his coarse wools sheared but $3\frac{1}{2}$ pounds, though they had been in the Territory two seasons. We now estimate the next clip to favor the merinos in the ratio of 2 to 1. Whenever we find the price of fine wool in the eastern market exceeding that of the coarse, the cost of carriage adds another inducement, to those already mentioned, to the farmer to choose the breeds which yield the fine staple. He will find that the transportation of 100 pounds of fine wool, worth, say, \$100, costs no more than that of 100 pounds of coarse, worth, perhaps, \$60. And this question of the transportation of wool compared with that of grain or live stock is an important one to the farmers in Nebraska and those States and Territories remote from the seaboard. The writer shipped 2,000 pounds of wool from Nebraska City to Philadelphia, via Missouri river, to St. Louis, thence by rail, at a cost of \$56, or, say, three cents per pound, including insurance. This wool was worth in Philadelphia \$1 per pound. What would have been the cost of shipping and insurance of any other product of the farm worth the same amount of money? We ask the careful attention of western farmers to this subject; it is one the great importance of which they have failed to realize. To all we would say, let your farms be the homes of "flocks" as well as that of "herds." If you have the coarse wools, *keep them*; if you have not the fine wools, *get them* as speedily as possible. Purchase pure bred Spanish merino rams, and soon we will have flocks which will compare favorably with any on our continent.