



XLI. Some circumstances relative to Merino sheep, chiefly collected from the Spanish shepherds, who attended those of the flock of Paular, lately presented to his majesty by the government of Spain; with particulars respecting that great national acquisition; and also respecting the sheep of the flock of Negrete, imported from Spain by his majesty in the year 1791

Sir Joseph Banks

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200 grains of oxide of iron and fused together, the result was,	A metallic button that weighed	48 grains.
	Revived with charcoal	36
		—
	Increase (equal to 6 per cent.)	12
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[To be continued.]

XLI. *Some Circumstances relative to Merino Sheep, chiefly collected from the Spanish Shepherds, who attended those of the Flock of Paular, lately presented to His Majesty by the Government of Spain; with Particulars respecting that great National Acquisition; and also respecting the Sheep of the Flock of Negrete, imported from Spain by His Majesty in the Year 1791*.* By Sir JOSEPH BANKS.

Soho Square, Feb. 18, 1809.

SIR JOHN,

AT a time like the present, when Spanish wools, though at a price unheard-of in the annals of traffic, still continue to find a market; thus clearly proving, that their value in the estimation of the consumer is far above any price that has been hitherto offered for them by the manufacturer; and when we must all agree, that the interruption of our trade with Spain may still continue for some time longer, I trust that a paper written with a view to facilitate the production of this valuable article in the United Kingdom, and to communicate some information relative to the important present of Merino sheep lately received by our most gracious Sovereign from the government of Spain, will be interesting to you, sir. I beg the favour of you, in case you shall approve it, to do me the honour of placing it at the disposal of the very useful institution over which you preside with so much advantage to the agricultural interests of this country.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient and faithful humble servant,

JOSEPH BANKS.

Sir John Sinclair, Bart. President
of the Board of Agriculture.

* From Communications to the Board of Agriculture.

A CONSIDERABLE part of Estremadura, Leon, and the neighbouring provinces of Spain, is appropriated to the maintenance of the Merino flocks, called by the Spaniards *Trashumantes*, as are also broad green roads, leading from one province to the other, and extensive resting-places, where the sheep are baited on the road. So careful is the police of the country to preserve them during their journeys from all hazard of disturbance or interruption, that no person, not even a foot passenger, is suffered to travel upon these roads while the sheep are in motion, unless he belongs to the flocks.

The country on which the sheep are depastured, both in the southern and the northern parts, is set out into divisions, separated from each other by land-marks only, without any kind of fences; each of these is called a *Dehesa*, and is of a size capable of maintaining a flock of about a thousand sheep; a greater number, of course, in the south country, where the lambs are reared, and fewer in the north country, where the sheep arrive after the flock has been culled.

Every proprietor must possess as many of these in each province as will maintain his flock. In the temperate season of winter and spring, the flocks remain in Estremadura, and there the ewes bring forth their lambs in December. As soon as the increasing heats of April and May have scorched up the grass, and rendered the pasturage scanty, they commence their march towards the mountains of Leon; and, after having been shorn on the road, at vast establishments called *Esquileos*, erected for that purpose, pass their summer in the elevated country, which supplies them with abundance of rich grass; and they do not leave the mountains till the frosts of September begin to damage the herbage.

A flock in the aggregate is called a *Cavaña*: this is divided into as many subdivisions as there are thousands of sheep belonging to it; each sheep, besides being sear-marked in the face with a hot iron when young, is branded after every shearing with a broad pitch brand, generally of the first letter of the name of the proprietor, and each subdivision is distinguished from the rest by the part of the sheep's body on which this mark is placed.

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By the laws of the Mesta, each Cavaña must be governed by an officer called Mayoral; for each subdivision of a thousand sheep, five shepherds and four dogs are appointed. Some of these inferior shepherds obtain the office of Rabadan, the duty of which is to give a general superintendence under the control of the Mayoral, also to prescribe and administer medicines to the sick sheep. At the time of travelling, and when the ewes are yeanning, one or two extra shepherds are allowed for each thousand sheep.

The number of Merino sheep in Spain is estimated by Burgoyne at 6,000,000; these of course must be attended by 30,000 shepherds, and 24,000 dogs at ordinary times, and they find occasional employment for 5 or 10,000 additional persons in the seasons of lambing and of travelling.

In their journey, each subdivision is attended by its own shepherds and dogs, and kept separate as far as may be from all others. The duty of the dogs is to chase the wolves, who are always upon the watch when the sheep are on the road, and are more wily than our foxes; they are taught also, when a sick sheep lags behind unobserved by the shepherds, to stay with and defend it, till some one returns back in search of it. There are besides in each subdivision about six tame wethers, called Mansos; these wear bells, and are obedient to the voices of the shepherds, who frequently give them small pieces of bread: some of the shepherds lead, the Mansos are always near them, and this disposes the flock to follow.

Every sheep is well acquainted with the situation of the Dehesa to which its subdivision belongs, and will at the end of the journey go straight to it, without the guidance of the shepherds. Here the flock grazes all the day under the eyes of the attendants: when the evening comes on, the sheep are collected together, and they soon lie down to rest; the shepherds and their dogs then lie down on the ground round the flock, and sleep, as they term it, under the stars, or in huts that afford little shelter from inclement weather; and this is their custom all the year, except that each is allowed, in his turn, an absence of about a month, which he spends

with his family; and it is remarkable, that the families of these shepherds reside entirely in Leon.

The shepherds who came with his majesty's flock were questioned on the subject of giving salt to their sheep: they declared that this is only done in the hottest season of the year, when the sheep are on the mountains; that in September it is left off; and that they dare not give salt to ewes forward with lamb, being of opinion that it causes abortion.

It is scarcely credible, though it appears on the best authority to be true, that under the operation of the laws of the Mesta, which confide the care of the sheep to the management of their shepherds, without admitting any interference on the part of the proprietor, no profit of the flock comes to the hands of the owner, except what is derived from the wool; the carcases of the culled sheep are consumed by the shepherds*, and it does not appear that any account is rendered by them to their employers, of the value of the skins, the tallow, &c.: the profit derived by a proprietor from a flock, is estimated on an average at about one shilling a head, and the produce of a capital vested in a flock is said to fluctuate between five and ten per cent.

The sheep are always low kept. It is the business of each Mayoral to increase his flock to as large a number as the land allotted to it can possibly maintain: when it has arrived at that pitch, all further increase is useless, as there is no sale for these sheep, unless some neighbouring flock has been reduced by mortality below its proper number: the most of the lambs are therefore every year killed as soon as they are yeaned, and each of those preserved is made to suck two or three ewes; the shepherds say, that the wool of an ewe that brings up her lamb without assistance is reduced in its value.

At shearing time the shepherds, shearers, washers, and a multitude of unnecessary attendants, are fed upon the flesh of the culled sheep; and it seems that the consumption oc-

* The shepherds, on discovering the drift of the questions put to them on this head, said that in settling the wages of the shearers and washers, at the Esquileos, allowance is made for the mutton with which they are fed.

occasioned by this season of feasting is sufficient to devour the whole of the sheep that are draughted from the flock. Mutton in Spain is not a favourite food ; in truth, it is not in that country prepared for the palate as it is in this. We have our lamb-fairs, our hog-fairs, our shearing-fairs, our fairs for culls, and our markets for fat sheep ; where the mutton, having passed through these different stages of preparation, each under the care of men whose soil and whose skill are best suited to the part they have been taught by their interest to assign to themselves, is offered for sale ; and if fat and good, it seldom fails to command a price by the pound, from five to ten per cent. dearer than that of beef. In Spain they have no such sheep fairs calculated to subdivide the education of each animal, by making it pass through many hands, as works of art do in a manufacturing concern ; and they have not any fat sheep markets that at all resemble ours. The low state of grazing in Spain ought not therefore to be wondered at, nor the poverty of the Spanish farmers ; they till a soil sufficiently productive by nature, but are robbed of the reward due to the occupier, by the want of an advantageous market for their produce, and the benefit of an extensive consumption ; till the manufacturing and mercantile parts of a community become opulent enough to pay liberal prices, the agricultural part of it cannot grow rich by selling.

That the sole purpose of the journeys taken annually by these sheep is to seek food in places where it can be found ; and that these migrations would not be undertaken, if either in the northern or the southern provinces a sufficiency of good pasture could be obtained during the whole year,—appears a matter of certainty. That change of pasture has no effect upon their wool, is clear, from all the experiments tried in other countries, and in Spain also : for Burgoyne tells us, that there are stationary flocks, both in Leon and in Estremadura, which produce wool quite as fine as that of the Trashumantes.

The sheep lately presented to his majesty are of the Cavaña of Pualar, one of the very finest in point of pile, and esteemed also above all others for the beauty of carcase. In

both these opinions, M. Lasteyrie, a French writer on sheep, who lived many years in Spain, and paid diligent attention to the Merino sheep, entirely agrees : he also tells us, that the Cavaña of Negrete, from whence the sheep imported by his majesty in the year 1791 were selected, is not only one of the finest piles, but produces also the largest-carcased sheep of all the Merinos. Mr. Burgoyne agrees with him in asserting, that the piles of Paular, Negrete, and Escorial, have been withheld from exportation, and retained for the royal manufactory of Gaudalaxara, ever since it was first established.

The Cavaña of Paular consists of 36,000 sheep. It originally belonged to the rich Carthusian monastery of that name, near Segovia ; soon after the Prince of the peace rose into power, he purchased the flock from the monks, with the land belonging to it, both in Estremadura and in Leon, at a price equal to twenty French francs a head, 16*s.* 8*d.* English. All the sheep lately arrived are marked with a large M. the mark of don Manuel.

The number sent from Spain to the king was 2000, equal to two subdivisions of the original Cavaña. To make the present the more valuable, these were selected by the shepherds from eight subdivisions, in order to choose young, well-shaped, and fine-woolled animals. This fact is evident, from the marks which are placed on eight different parts of the bodies of the sheep now at Kew.

The whole number embarked was 2,214 ; of these, 214 were presented by the Spaniards to some of his majesty's ministers, and 427 died on the journey, either at sea or on their way from Portsmouth to Kew. His majesty was graciously pleased to take upon himself the whole of the loss, which reduced the royal flock to 1573 ; several more have since died. As the time of giving the ram in Spain is July, the ewes were full of lamb when they embarked, several of them cast their lambs when the weather was bad at sea, and are rendered so weak and infirm by abortion, that it is much to be feared more will die, notwithstanding the great care taken of them by his majesty's shepherds. A few have died of the rot. This disease must have been contracted by
halting

halting on some swampy district, in their journey from the mountains to the sea at Gijon, where they were embarked, as one sheep died rotten at Portsmouth; there is every reason however to hope, that the disease will not spread, as the land on which they are now kept has never been subject to its ravages, being of a very light and sandy texture.

It is well worthy of observation, that although the Swedes, the Saxons, the Danes, the Prussians, the Austrians, and of late the French, have, either by the foresight of their governments, or the patriotic exertions of individuals, imported Merino sheep, no nation has hitherto ventured to assert, that they possess the complete and unmixed race of any one Cavaña; this circumstance does not appear to have been attended to any where but in England; though in fact, each Cavaña is a separate and distinct breed of sheep, not suffered by the Spaniards to mingle with others. The difference in value of the wool of different Spanish flocks is very great; at this time, when Spanish wool is unusually dear, the prima piles are worth more than 7s. a pound, and yet the inferior ones scarce reach 5s.* Even the French, attentive as that nation is to all things that concern the interest of individuals, appear to have overlooked this circumstance, and to have contented themselves with making up the numbers of their importations, without paying any regard to it; they have not at least stated in any of their publications, that attention was paid to the securing sheep of a prima pile, and keeping the breed of that pile pure and unmixed after they had obtained it.

Our merchants in Spanish wool range the prima piles in the following order of value, as appears by a statement in the year 1792.

Paular.

Negrete.

Muro.

Patrimonio; and 15 more not necessary to be enumerated. M. Lasteyrie, the French writer on sheep, ranges them not very differently; he states them as follows: but both En-

* Since this was written, Spanish wools have risen to an exorbitant price. Prima Leonesa is this week rated in the Farmer's Journal at 20s. a pound, and Seville at 13s. 6d.

lish and French agree that all the prima piles are nearly equal in fineness of fibre, and consequently in value to the manufacturer.

Escorial, called by us Patrimonio.

Guadalupe.

Paular.

Infantado.

Montareo.

Negrete, &c.

The Danes, he tells us, procured their sheep from the best piles; but there is no appearance of their having, since they obtained them, kept the flocks separate, nor are they at present so remarkable for fine wool as the Saxons, whose wool is now at least as fine as that of Spain is, upon an average of prima and second rate piles.

The Swedes were the first people who imported the Spanish breed. This good work was undertaken and completed by the patriotic exertions of a merchant of the name of Alstroemer, in the year 1723. The next who obtained an importation of Merino sheep were the Saxons, who are indebted for the benefits they enjoy from the improvement of their wools to the prince Xavier, administrator of the electorate during the minority of the elector, and brother-in-law to the king of Spain. The prince obtained a flock of these valuable animals in 1766, and in 1778 an addition to it of 100 rams and 200 ewes. The Danes followed his useful example, as also did both Prussia and Austria. Every one of these countries continue at this moment to profit largely by the improvement these sheep have occasioned in their agricultural concerns. So far from truth is the too common assertion, that their wool will not continue fine in any country but Spain, that in the year 1806, when the ports of Spain were closed against us, a very large quantity of fine wool, the produce of German Merino sheep, was imported into this country from Hamburgh, and used by our manufacturers as a substitute for Spanish wool. In truth, some of this wool was so fine that it carried in the British market as high a price as the best Spanish piles were sold for, in times of peace and amity.

[To be continued.]