



RAISING KARAKULS



A NEW INDUSTRY FOR UNITED STATES SHEEP BREEDERS

OUTCOME of Tests Made with the Only Herd of Arabi Sheep Ever Imported Proves Conclusively That This Country Can Excel Asia in Fur Raising.



R. C. C. YOUNG, author of the following article, imported the first and only herd of Karakul sheep ever brought into the United States. His father, who had been engaged in fur raising in Russia for twenty-five years, was unable to export any full blood Karakul rams from Bokhara, but Dr.

Young took up the work in this country in 1893, and finally, with the assistance of Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, brought five rams and ten ewes to Texas on December 4, 1908. This flock has increased to fifty-four head, and tests are in progress throughout the country to prove that American breeders not only can compete with Asiatic in raising Persian lamb, Astrachan and Krimmer furs, but can excel foreign rivals. The Department of Agriculture already has begun the final experiment, and Dr. Young himself is receiving the assistance of the American Breeders' Association.

BY DR. C. C. YOUNG.

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At one time Arabi sheep were found in a wild state in the semi-independent Khanate of Bokhara, Central Asia, but to-day one sees them in small numbers in the Kishlaks of the Kisel-Kurn and Kara-Kurn desert, which extends for five hundred miles north of Bokhara, in Western Turkestan.

Bokharans say that several centuries ago the small Arabi was domesticated with great difficulty, and not until the animal became seriously annoyed by hunters did it leave the arid regions of Bokhara. Some Uzbek authorities on Kara-Kul breeds, however, maintain that originally the Arabi did not inhabit Bokhara, but Arabia, and hence the name Arabi.

As there is nothing found in the animal history of Arabia about the Arabi sheep the real origin of the name Arabi is much in dispute. In the last fifty years the name Karakul has been substituted for Arabi, and means in Turkish "black lake." There is a town of Kara-Kule, which is on the railroad running east from Krasnoworsk, on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, to Merv, and thence to Andishan, not far from Tashkent, and many graded Arabi broad-tails have been brought there from the interior of Bokhara and the Kisel-Kurn and Kara-Kurn desert for exportation to Afghanistan, Persia, Caucasus and of late years European Russia, and now the name Karakul is used entirely to designate the Arabi sheep.

That the Arabi is the original broadtail from which all broadtail breeds descend is an indisputable fact and it is a pity that this hardy, fur producing and most lustrous and highly pigmented member of the ovine family has been allowed to become nearly extinct, thanks to the absence in Asia of woven wire fences, which make it almost impossible to prevent the animal from becoming contaminated with other classes of sheep.

One need but look at a genuine Arabi lamb skin and compare it with one containing even a small per cent of the blood of some other breed to realize what the world is about to lose and why the precious Arabi furs often adorn the heads of the rulers of Asia. To see the priceless skins on the walls of the palaces of the Shah of Persia and the Emirs of Bokhara, Turkestan and Afghanistan, alongside the costliest rugs and oil paintings, is a treat that those of us who have been permitted to view them will not soon forget.

gained by crossing our native sheep with the Arabi we will first give a description of the original wild Arabi, known also as the Small Arabi, and here we quote the Russian naturalist, Sinitzin:—

"Head small and narrow, with curved headline, ears small, feet thin and long, closely resembling those

bodyguard of Cossacks—the more the better—as the natives resent the intrusion of foreigners, who fall an easy prey to the thievish nomads, who have a sacred regard for the full blooded Arabi, and a trip through the "Hungersteppes" has cost many an adventurous Caucasian his life, especially when encountering Turkomen, Tadzhiks and Uzbecks, whose relentless permits them to rob travellers. It requires thousands of dollars to make the caravan trip, as the Kishlaks are far apart, and still more to get possession of the full blooded sheep, and to effect safe delivery at the nearest railway stations, often hundreds of miles away from the interior, is no easy task.

The Arabi is capable of storing, in a short time, great quantities of fat in its tail and buttocks, upon which it draws for sustenance when necessary. This is transmitted on any sheep receiving a Kara-Kul strain, making possible much quicker fattening and a great increase in weight. When a common sheep receives as much as twenty-five per cent of Arabi injection it develops a most appetizing mutton, with the "sheepy taste" completely eliminated.

Tests made on American Merinos proved this, and fair results were obtained with as little as twelve per cent of Kara-Kul blood. In Northern Michigan is raised a so-called Perstrano, which is a quarter bred Kara-Kul Shropshire resulting from crossing a Persian broadtail—the best of them are only half bred Kara-Kul longwools—to a Shropshire ewe, and yet even this small amount of Arabi blood gave some satisfaction. Needless to say that a quarter bred Kara-Kul-Lincoln would give better results, as any of the American longwools excel the Shropshires in quality of mutton, and also weight, and do not lessen the natural lustre of the Kara-Kul, thus assuring

domesticated sheep known, and we believe that it could be done with the Rocky Mountain sheep. The Kara-Kul in its habits is no doubt nearer to the goat than to the sheep family, and quite recently we succeeded in crossing a half bred Kara-Kul Shropshire ram to an Angora goat. As the Arabi seems to possess the property of neutralizing the strong musk flavor of the Merino, it will most probably do so with the goat family and thus assure us of a better meat.

On account of the wonderful natural lustre of the Angora goat, it can easily be seen that a magnificent commercial Kara-Kul-Angora fur will be obtained from this cross. We have the best proof of this in a black Kara-Kul-Shropshire-Angora kid which was born a few days ago and possesses great lustre, notwithstanding the fact that it only contains twenty-five per cent of Kara-Kul blood, and its lustre was naturally greatly reduced by the Shropshire strain.

The large Arabi has a massive head, short face, nose line greatly bent, ears large and pendulous, sometimes absent, feet thick, short and very strong. The tail is immense and triangular shaped, with a twist on the end, often weighing thirty-five pounds and coming clear to the ground, and has to be supported in some cases by a two wheeled cart, to which the animal is hitched to prevent dragging on the ground, making manipular coupling absolutely imperative. This class of Arabi contains some foreign strain of the common Asiatic longwool sheep family. The little lambs are not always horn black and occasionally one is born Auburn, another proof of some foreign strain.

The wool is gray, long and coarse, with occasionally a soft underwool, which indicates the presence of tightwool blood, and is not wanted, except on the front



Full Blood Kara-Kul Yearling Ewe, Xenid

wooled sheep from that which is indigenous to Astrachan. Persia never did produce such of the so-called Persian lamb, but as Sassans gave for years bought up the tight curled black skins in Afghanistan and marketed them the trade name "Persian lamb" will no doubt continue.

Excellent tight curled black skins are produced in Texas by crossing Kara-Kul rams with our American Lincolns and Cotswolds, and it is safe to predict that the Leicester and Welsleydales will give fully as good fur if not better. A three-quarter bred Texas Kara-Kul Shropshire skin recently produced in Texas was priced at \$10 by furrers in Chicago, and half bred Kara-Kuls, Lincoln and Cotswold lambskins will bring even more, which is due to the difference in lustre between the Shropshire and the silk wool Lincolns, Cotswolds, Leicesters and Welsleydales.

In fact, Asia cannot possibly expect to compete with us in lustre unless its sheep fur producers will first breed their native white sheep to English longwools and improve them in lustre before crossing them with graded broadtail Arabis, such as the Shirazi. England and the United States should raise the best commercial Kara-Kul fur in the world, and yet they never produced a skin until very recently.



From Left to Right Kara-Kul Rams, Lowden, Fasset and Teddy.



Karakul Lambs, Whose Fur, in Five or Six Months Will Be Light Gray, the Natural Color of the Matured Kara-Kul.

the breeder of a salable lustrous skin (gray Krimmer) that will bring from \$5 to \$8.

The Michigan tests also proved conclusively that Merinos that received a slight strain of Kara-Kul were very hardy and able to withstand the greatest cold, and seemed to prefer to remain outdoors in the snow, which is remarkable, as the Merino is not fond of severe cold weather.

Bokhara is noted for its severe cold winters and extremely hot summers, and this explains why the Arabi, being inured to such a climate, is able to with-

stand any amount of cold or heat, and it is doubtful if there is a harder animal in the world. This animal is able to go for weeks without water, and possesses a wonderful power of resistance. The small herd, which was brought to this country was a year and a half in transit and half of that time was spent in quarantine.

The non-broadtailed sheep of Asia that do not contain Kara-Kul strain are certainly very much inferior to our sheep, and yet our best mutton sheep cannot compare in quality of mutton with such graded Karakuls as the Persian broadtails, Astrachan broadtails, Krimmer broadtails, Shirazi, Doozboy, Zigal and African broadtails, all of which owe their hardiness, great weight and quality of mutton entirely to the Kara-Kul strain they contain.

In conclusion, we will say that those Karakuls which were born on our ranch, near Wichita Falls, Texas, possess all the true characteristics of the best of Arabis which we have seen in Bokhara, and were in no way affected by the difference in the climate, and we can say the same thing of the last crop of lambs which were born in Coahuila, Mex., where the entire flock was grazing for a period of six months, and on account of the cheap lands and practically free range we would have left them there permanently had we not become disenchanted with certain conditions due to local political influence.

There is an intermediate class of Karakuls resulting from crossing the small with the large Arabi, which has, however, no particular advantage over the other two classes. This country is predestined to develop the largest broadtail known by crossing the Kara-Kul with the Lincoln, and we have already ample proof to make this assertion. In days to come Asia will view the American broadtail with as much wonder and curiosity as we exhibit to-day when talking of the large Kara-Kul with its "terrible" tail.

In order to avoid all dangers resulting from in-breeding, another importation should be made and we have already received the very necessary concession to bring another flock of fifty head to this country, and have reasons to believe that on our second trip through the desert of Central Asia we shall be accompanied by certain gentlemen now connected with the Department of Agriculture, as there is very much left, indeed, to learn about this wonderful breed, which, in the near future, when wild fur producing animals will have become extinct, will have to be utilized for the protection of our people against severe cold weather.

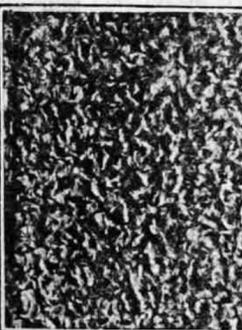
For more than four months they were held in quarantine at Ardenia, N. J., where they were confined to a dark barn, and the only photographs that were taken during that time were flashlights. This rigid quarantine is necessary in order to ascertain the presence of surra, which cannot be detected unless the animal under inspection is kept away from sunlight. Notwithstanding this and the tedious trip across the desert, detention in quarantine in Russia and the long trip across the ocean, we did not suffer the loss of a single head.

Quarantined in Darkness.

It is an easy matter to cross the Arabi with any



Three-Quarter Bred Kara-Kul Longwool Black Skin Known as Persian Lamb Worth Thirteen Dollars, Produced in Texas.



Three-Quarter Bred Black Kara-Kul Shropshire, Can't Possibly Call It Persian as the Parents and Also the Lamb Were Born in West Texas.



One-Quarter Bred Kara-Kul Longwool Known as Krimmer, a Gray Fur, Will Bring Five Dollars a Skin, Would Bring Ten Dollars if the Lustre Were More Pronounced.



Half Bred Kara-Kul Merino Lamb Skin, Black Fur, Known in South Russia as Peasant Fur, Produced in West Texas, Does Not Possess Sufficient Lustre, Is Therefore an Inferior Class of Fur, Would Not Bring Over Three Dollars a Skin.



Unborn Half Bred Texas Kara-Kul Shropshire Prematurely Obtained, a Black Velvet Figured Fur with a Wonderful Lustre, Which is Almost Entirely Absent if Skin is Obtained After Birth.



Half Bred Kara-Kul Cottswold, a Magnificent Black Fur, Would Fetch Under the Trade Name of Astrachan, Will Bring Eight Dollars a Skin.

There are not many people that can afford to wear full blood Arabi fur, but millions wear fur that owes its beauty to the Kara-Kul strain it contains. In some cases only as little as twelve and one-half per cent will produce a magnificent fur, as is the case with the gray Krimmer produced by the Tartars of Crimea when crossing half bred Kara-Kul rams with common white Russian long wool sheep. The black Astrachan fur, named after the Russian province Astrachan, is produced in a similar manner, but it takes more of the Kara-Kul blood than is the case with the Krimmer, as the color sought must be black. The loose and open curls of the Astrachan lamb skin are due to the particular white long wool blood which enters into its formation.

We attain similar results in this country by crossing a Kara-Kul ram with a black faced Highland ewe. The Persian lambskin produced in Bokhara, Turkestan and Afghanistan does not differ from the Astrachan, except that the curls are tight and should be closed, demanding a different kind of white long-

In 1908 we succeeded, thanks to President Roosevelt, in bringing, at a ruinous price, fifteen Karakuls to this country, and to-day we have fifty-six of them. We have enough full blood bucks to cover five hundred ewes, and before many years our sheep breeders will be enabled to buy graded Kara-Kul bucks which will make it possible for them to raise such commercial Kara-Kul furs as Persian lamb, Astrachan, Krimmer, Afghanistan, etc. Several eminent breeders have made tests for us, not only in Texas but also in the North, and the results were most convincing and gratifying.

At present the Department of Agriculture is making final tests, and this fall bulletins will probably be issued showing the many advantages derived from crossing native American sheep with Kara-Kuls. There is no doubt that in a few years our millions spent annually for Kara-Kul furs in Asia will remain among our sheep breeders in the United States. Before mentioning the other advantages

of the American mountain sheep; triangular, broad tail; average weight not over ten pounds, making manipular coupling unnecessary; always horned; whitish spot on the forehead, tail, feet and sides; wool long and hard, with an absence of soft underwool, grayish in the adult, except the wool on head, ears and all four legs, which is jet brilliant black, the same color as the new born lambs. After about two weeks the young lambs lose their beautiful tight curls and lustre, which makes it necessary to kill them quite young if the skins are wanted for fur.

"When a few months old they often turn brownish, but in one year become grayish. The mutton is absolutely void of the musk flavor which gives common sheep, especially the Merino family, the characteristic and, to many people, disagreeable 'sheepy taste,' and it is the most delicious meat known. Average weight about one hundred and fifty pounds."

To find a dozen Arabis that will answer this description requires months of camel travelling with a