

“the lambs are weaned, each in his turn is placed upon a table that his wool and form may be minutely observed. The finest are selected for breeding and receive a first mark. When they are one year old, and prior to shearing them, another close examination of those previously marked takes place: those in which no defect can be found receive a second mark, and the rest are condemned. A few months afterwards a third and last scrutiny is made; the prime rams and ewes receive a third and final mark, but the slightest blemish is sufficient to cause the rejection of the animal.” These sheep are bred and valued almost exclusively for the fineness of their wool; and the result corresponds with the labour bestowed on their selection. Instruments have been invented to measure accurately the thickness of the fibres; and “an Austrian fleece has been produced of which twelve hairs equalled in thickness one from a Leicester sheep.”

Throughout the world, wherever silk is produced, the greatest care is bestowed on selecting the cocoons from which the moths for breeding are to be reared. A careful cultivator¹⁴ likewise examines the moths themselves, and destroys those that are not perfect. But what more immediately concerns us is that certain families in France devote themselves to raising eggs for sale.¹⁵ In China, near Shanghai, the inhabitants of two small districts have the privilege of raising eggs for the whole surrounding country, and that they may give up their whole time to this business, they are interdicted by law from producing silk.¹⁶

The care which successful breeders take in matching their birds is surprising. Sir John Sebright, whose fame is perpetuated by the “Sebright Bantam,” used to spend “two and three days in examining, consulting, and disputing with a friend which were the best of five or six birds.”¹⁷ Mr. Bult, whose pouter-pigeons won so many prizes, and were exported to North America under the charge of a man sent on purpose,

¹⁴ Robinet, ‘Vers à Soie,’ 1848, p. 271.

¹⁵ Quatrefages, ‘Les Maladies du Ver à Soie,’ 1859, p. 101.

¹⁶ M. Simon, in ‘Bull. de la Soc. d’Acclimat.,’ tom. ix., 1862, p. 221.

¹⁷ ‘The Poultry Chronicle,’ vol. i., 1854, p. 607.