

Black sheep are very uncommon; you would have to call

“Baa, baa, black sheep!”

long enough before you set eyes on one in Syria. White, or an ugly brown, is the usual colour; but the wool can be dyed blue and purple and scarlet.

The sheep’s milk is very nice, and is thought much better than cow’s milk; it is not generally drunk fresh, but allowed to become thick and rather sour. Children like the “leben,” or curdled milk, much better than new milk.

Now I must tell you that in the *very* old times you would have seen the shepherd fully armed.

What do I mean by that?

Why, he would have had a spear and a sword and a bow, and not even a shepherd-boy would go out without his great stick, as thick as your arm and as long as papa is tall; for long ago a good shepherd had to keep his sheep safe from bears and wolves, and even from lions, as David did; no wonder the poor sheep willingly followed their shepherd.

But do shepherds still mind their flocks by night as those shepherds did in the fields of Bethlehem? You know it says,

”When shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground.”

If they did not guard them carefully when they sleep out of doors, the wolves and jackals would soon worry them to death. No one can tell what may happen to a sheep when it has strayed away from the shepherd. It just wanders on, getting farther and farther away, and has not the sense to come back of itself; the good shepherd must go after it “until he find it.”

You know the beautiful story in the Gospel of that *one* poor sheep that was lost. How soon the faithful shepherd missed it and went to look for it, never resting till he had it safe upon his shoulder, rejoicing that he had found his “sheep which was lost.”

But do the sheep really know their own names, and come when they are called?

Yes, these wise sheep soon learn their names, and come trotting up at once when they hear them; but then the shepherd must call his *own* sheep. A traveller once tried to learn their names from the shepherd, and called the sheep to come to him, but it was of no use - “A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers.”

The shepherds call any sheep who has not yet learnt its name a *wild* sheep. Perhaps some day you may see a picture or a photograph of a sheepfold. A fold, in old times in Bible lands was not just a field with a little fence made of branches of trees piled together; no, that sort of fold would never have kept the sheep and lambs within it safe from wild beasts. It was a strong, stone building with high walls, so high that the sheep, once inside, were safe from every danger. Now, I wonder whether you can tell me when sheep are first mentioned in the Bible. Yes, you are quite right, - Abel’s lamb is the first lamb we read about, and Abel was the first shepherd.

What made Abel think of bringing one of his lambs as an offering to God?

It was God's Holy Spirit who put it into his heart. Abel knew he was a sinner and that he wanted something to die instead of him, if he were to live before God, and this lamb offered to God was a picture of the Holy One who was to come, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Just as Abel came with his lamb to God, and God was pleased with his offering, so may every little child who feels that he is not fit for God to look upon, come to Him in the name of Jesus, God's beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.