

A SHEEP HERDER'S LIFE.

ON a summer's evening a few years ago, in the wild country known as the "frontier," a youth of seventeen was wearily wending his way homeward after a long day of herding sheep on the prairies. He presented a decidedly forlorn appearance. Two years before, when at home in New England, he was accustomed to call himself a "gentleman." But now we see only a sunburnt face, very much begrimed with dust and perspiration, and a lean, bent figure, clad in a faded blue flannel shirt, coarse brown canvas trousers—so stained and discolored by grease and dirt as to be almost black—clumsy, ill-fitting shoes, much the worse for wear, and an old felt hat that only by great exercise of imagination could one fancy had ever been white. Stretching out in front of him is the flock—some fifteen hundred in number—of all sizes and ages, from the long-legged wethers at the head to the aggravating little two-month-old lambs loitering behind, which give endless trouble to the inexperienced, by their absurd practice of pretending to be too tired to move another step, until in desperation the herder leaves them to the tender mercies of wolf and mountain lion (puma), upon which, after one or two pettish "baas," they rejoin the flock. Our friend, however, is much too old a hand to take the least notice of these small members of his flock. He strolls languidly along, tired and thirsty, after his fifteen hours' tramp under a burning sun, with nothing to eat since breakfast—at 4:30 A. M.—and nothing to drink since two in the afternoon, and it is now nearly eight. Not that he thinks of complaining of that—it is the custom of the country; and as the same thing has occurred every day for the last two months he is used to it by this time—or ought to be. Something does nevertheless trouble his mind, and as this lonely life begets the curious habit of audible soliloquy, we can gather the substance of his grievance from the following ejaculations:

"Well, I guess the dug-out (herder's hut) ought to be finished to-day; if so, I shall be sent into camp to-morrow. What a blessing that will be! it does one good to think of it. No more chores—when you come in at night dead beat—cutting wood, drawing water and washing up the dishes, till your back nearly breaks, and it is half-past ten o'clock before you can go to bed. And then, if the sheep are not out before sun-up the next morning—that is to say, half-past four— isn't there a pretty row?"

"In camp; ah! let's see; to begin with, I shan't have a single chore worth mentioning, for the water is close to the cabin, plenty of driftwood handy—only to be picked up—and not a soul to cook or do for but myself. Won't it be fine? You bet your life it will!"

With these comforting reflections and hopes for future happiness, our herder whistles briskly to the sheep, and goes home to his supper and inevitable "chores" with a lighter heart than he had done for many a long day.

As this is simply a sketch of the life in camp anticipated with so much glee, we will pass over the events of the next twenty-four hours, merely saying that our friend's hopes were fulfilled; and we will rejoin him the following

day as he is escorting his sheep homeward again—this time to "camp." Before, however, his experiences therein are related, perhaps it will give my readers a better idea of the life if I describe first of all his surroundings.

To begin with, the camp is utterly isolated from the rest of mankind. The "home ranch," thirty miles to the eastward, is the only habitation within reach. North, south and west stretch the rolling prairies, broken only by the mesas (tablelands), the rocky sides of which give shelter to the wolves, bears and pumas that are still to be found in the wilder parts of the Western Territories.

The camp itself is what is called a "dug-out"—that is, a small hut, partly built above ground, with logs chinked with mud, and partly dug out of a hill, which was from fifty to one hundred feet in height, supposed by the settlers to have been raised by Indians or Mexicans to indicate the presence of water. This "dug-out" is six feet square in size, with a flat board roof covered with earth, piled thickly in the centre, and thinned down toward the edges to allow the water to run off. At one corner of the roof a hole had been made, through which an old stove-pipe was pushed, and called by courtesy a chimney. Underneath this contrivance was an open fireplace; there was no pretence of a grate of any sort; the draught must be kept up by a scientific arrangement of the fuel, the learning to contrive which is more productive of profanity than anything else I know, but is absolutely necessary in camp.

The furniture of this mansion consists of a three-legged stool—originally intended for milking purposes—and two blankets. The first a large double one, standing for bedstead, mattress and sheets, and the second a single one, which answers for the counterpane. The pillow is composed of the sleeper's coat, vest and—if the night is very warm and the sheep are quiet—trousers. Peeping from under the pillow is a large revolver, the herder's companion, philosopher and friend—never far from his hand by day or night. In what sorry plight would the Western man be without his beloved six-shooter! In that lonely life you may strip him of everything, may take even his horse, but leave him his revolver.

Next in order come the utensils. These are nine in number. 1. A shallow round tin dish, about eighteen inches in diameter, used at different times for washing clothes, face, hands and dishes; also for kneading and making up the bread. 2. A three-legged iron pot, called also—like the chimney, by courtesy—a bake-oven; therein the bread is baked, coffee roasted and meat boiled. 3. A long-handled tin spoon. 4. A frying pan. 5. A coffee pot. 6. A tin plate. 7. Ditto cup. 8. A fork, which, by the by, has a detestable habit of eloping with the spoon, and never being at hand when wanted, its duties being performed by 9—the all-useful, indispensable "butcher knife," which completes our list.

The provisions are as follows: A side of bacon, salted, not cured, a sack of flour, ditto of green coffee, a bag of black Mexican beans, a tin of soda (to be used instead of yeast), a barrel of mutton soaked in brine (to vary the monotony of the bacon) and a few onions.