

SHEEP HUSBANDRY IN THE INLAND EMPIRE.

THE business of raising sheep and wool is among the most important industries of the Inland Empire. The number of hands employed is not large, but the capital invested and the importance of the product command a good deal of attention. The wool interests contribute very materially to the general prosperity of Oregon and Washington.

The sheep business of Washington is conducted almost exclusively east of the Columbia river and south of the Spokane. In Oregon the plateau between the Cascade and Blue mountains, the Grand Ronde valley and Powder river valley are the home of the sheep. The rich farming sections like the Walla Walla, Yakima and Kittitas valleys are not destitute of sheep, but there the business is on a more modest scale, though, perhaps, not less profitable. It is not characterized by such pronounced migration between summer and winter pasture that constitute a great factor in the prosecution of range sheep business. In those and other farming sections sheep are raised and cared for very much as they are in the east—the animals take care of themselves almost entirely in the summer time, and in winter they are fed in some sheltered corral. Of course there are all phases, from the farmer with his small

flock carefully watched and tended, to the sheep owner with his thousands of head that oscillate between the valleys and the mountains, compelled to get their own living or starve. In speaking of the sheep business in this region, however, it is generally understood that the handling of large numbers of animals on the open range is referred to. The industry is the same in Idaho and Montana, except such modifications as the more rugged character of the country and the difference in climate impose on it.

The sheep man's unit is the band, which may contain any number of animals from 1,500 to 3,000. The only reasons for limiting the size of the band are economy and practicability in handling. With each band of sheep is a herder with his one or two dogs. The herder should remain with his sheep throughout the

year, guiding them to fresh pastures and protecting them from the wild beasts and other thieves that love mutton and pelts, and, if necessary, obtaining fodder for them in winter.

On embarking in the business, if a man has not considerable capital to start with, he usually secures an interest in some herder's band. Two or three small owners often combine their flocks into one band for a season, but the natural increase, in such cases, renders separation necessary after the first year, else the band would be too unwieldy for proper handling on the range. Some men own 10,000 or 12,000 head. These are put in bands of the size indicated above, and each band has its herder. The whole keep as near together as the condition of the range will permit, but they often spread over a number of miles of territory.

Starting from winter quarters in the valleys the herders press their bands toward the mountains early in the season. For a few weeks before shearing time (usually about the first of May) the sheep get good feed in the vicinity where they winter. But when shearing time comes the bands are taken, if possible, to some available point near a railway and a shearing station is erected. This consists of a corral for confining the sheep, with an apartment in which the animals can be easily caught. Adjoining this apartment is, sometimes,



HEAD OF A MERINO RAM.

a small enclosure with a canvas roof and a few boards laid on the ground for a floor, in which the shearers perform their work, though they often work without shelter and with canvas on the ground to keep the wool clean. As many sheep as are likely to be sheared during the day are kept in the main corral, and from time to time, as the shearing progresses, the small pen is filled from the main yard. From that pen the shearers take the animals, set them upon the board floor and deftly remove the fleeces, after which performance they are marked on the side with tar or black paint and released. Many thousand sheep are sheared at one station. At one point near Sprague more than 100,000 were sheared last season.

Many stories of the performances of sheep shearers are strong competitors of the traditional fish yarns.