

A FLOCK OF WOOL.

IT has been reserved for California—which has vulgarized *dairy* into “milk-ranch” and *shepherd* into “sheep-herder”—to make the latter less respected than any other man, save John Chinaman. In pristine times, shepherding was reputable enough. Palestine, from first to last, was a land of shepherds, and its greatest monarch learned first to sway the ancestral crook. The Egyptians—though, in their later days, men who had the smell of flocks and of herds upon their garments were an abomination unto them—were well content before, to sit under a dynasty of Hyksos, or Shepherd Kings.

Theocritus and Virgil make their lasso-lorn swains wail beneath the ilex and the beech, lolling on their backs, and uttering erotic sentiments among their flocks of goats—a singular place for poetical emanations. In the crisp and cranky air of the Highlands, where we hear the Ettrick Shepherd calling to his *collie*, “Sirrah, they’re a’ awa,” we may, with him, become poetical; but what is there that is natural in the elevated talk of Lycidas, delivered in the midst of a flock of villainous goats? The keeper of sheep even the exquisite courtier, Horace, honors; and he does not scorn to liken himself to the tawny dog of Spar-

ta, which, with ears erect, pursues the wild beast through the forest.

But who celebrates the praises of the Pacific shepherd? So bad a savor has fallen upon his business that even the word *shepherd* promises to be eliminated from conversation. It is amusing to see the number of shifts and dodges by which, from him who measures his farm as Dido did, down to the hireling at \$25 a month, every one tries to give the despised substantive the slip. On the poll-lists of Monterey and San Luis Obispo counties, citizens whose worldly substance is in wool, record themselves under the abominable appellation of “sheep-raisers.” He who owns a Mexican grant, but lives in the metropolis, and does not know *bronchocele* from “loss of the cud,” desires to be known as a “wool-grower.” It is quite the mode in the South, with certain who affect Spanish ways, to call themselves *rancheros*. The man who actually does the labor is a despised “sheep-herder.” A man may have broken stones for the Commonwealth, charging nothing for his labor; he may even have presided at a political ward meeting: but if ever he comes so far down as to be obliged to follow the sheep and fill his belly with husks, in this fat country, it would be better not

to mention the matter to his acquaintances.

One reason—and it is, perhaps, the principal one—for this disrepute into which shepherding has fallen, may be found in the quality of the persons who have generally drifted into the business.

During the sleepy half-century of missionary rule, the few flocks of the country were driven to their broad and quiet pastures in the valleys by the Indians, or by Spaniards of very low degree. Then came the golden discoveries of Sacramento, and in a few months there swept upon these shores a tide of noble and adventurous manhood, of whom a vast number, having failed miserably in heaping to themselves riches, were obliged to get hold of a clew in any other direction that invited. There were no farms then, and the few who found employment in any thing found it as shepherds—so descending to the level of the contemned “Greasers.” The curse of “degradation,” which the Negroes of the South have riveted upon plantation labor, the Diggers and half-breeds have trailed over shepherding in California.

No other race less sturdy and stubborn than the Anglo-Saxon, in its contempt for inferior races, would find this a matter of much significance. Accordingly, we discover that the comparative number of Europeans shepherding in the State is noteworthy.

It deserves to be said, however, in behalf of the American, that he finds little congenial in this calling. Of all men of these modern times, imagine our dyspeptic and red-hot generation loafing over the golden, sunny hills of California after a flock of silly sheep! It is easy to see what cut of men would naturally gravitate into the business. None but the riffraff are there—vagrant miners, who gamble off their wages as soon as they draw it; runaway sailors from ships in San Francisco, who sell their blankets for a pillow-case of biscuits, and then go

two days without any thing to eat; vagabond soldiers, who fall asleep on their post, and let the *coyotes* pull away a sheep.

The great sheep-runs of California, like those of Australia, seem to be a sort of mild form of Botany Bay for their respective mother countries. Old shepherds, of long experience in either country, will tell you of dozens of men, college-bred, whom themselves or their friends have exiled—not, perhaps, like Barrington’s patriots, “for their country’s good,” but for the suppression of scandal—and who now are gathering their mystical and melancholy crop of wild oats, at the same time they watch the sheep, upon the hills, pick theirs—“comrades of the wolf and owl.” One of the great shepherds on the Nasciminto told me that, during one year, he employed on his *rancho* a bishop’s son, a banker, an editor, a civil engineer, and a book-keeper, all of them college *alumni*.

Every summer day, at noon, there are many hours when the shepherd lolls at ease, beneath a tree, which, if not conducive to the cultivation of his *silvestrem musam*, are, at least, salutary in the light they throw upon his college larks, and in their suggestions of what might have been. Even the latest magazine is sometimes found in the shepherd’s camp. Neither are the Muses altogether neglected—“*et me fecere poetam Pierides*.” I have seen following the sheep a bankrupt genius, who—not unmindful of the example of Alexander the Great, who is said to have always carried about with him a piece of good literature—carefully treasured in his pocket poems of his own composition, clipped from the newspaper.

At this point, it will be worth while to digress a little, to say somewhat of California laborers in general.

Within the last two years, I have made it my business to walk something

over thirteen hundred miles within this State, and about an equal distance in the South, and may say that my opportunities for observation have probably been better than those of most newspaper writers, at least, who collect their impressions in railway coaches, or in the hospitable drive through the orchard. My sympathies are naturally with the working-man; nevertheless, I am bound to say that the White labor of California is less stable and less reliable to-day than the Black labor of the South. This is not saying that the causes are with them entirely, nor even in principal part. California has the best circulation of money, and the best circulation of labor, of all the States. The roads are as full of confirmed and incurable tramps as were ever those of the South in the worst days of the anarchy of emancipation which I witnessed. Farmers willingly give \$5 a month more to him who will stay three months, even, than to him who stays only one. Laborers are off every whip-stitch. One wants to go down to Arizona; another one has cracked his knee-pan; another one fears the ague; another one has just heard from Sally.

The Labor Exchange is, perhaps, a benefit for San Francisco; but, as to the outside regions, I doubt its utility. It stirs up the labor of the country; like the heart in the human body, it continually draws from the extremities, only to project forth again. Above all other things, the agricultural labor ought to be stationary. There are five hundred more idle men in the metropolis every day than there would be if the Exchange did not exist. Labor in the country ought to be sought there, and not in the city. It is not far to seek. Whatever California may have been, nobody ever sets out now for employment—desiring to find any thing but some evanescent and evaporating “job”—who can not find it before night. The Exchange fur-

nishes another excuse for these miserable jobbers to throng into the metropolis.

On the other hand, the employers of California are not the most exemplary. Farm laborers are universally banished into the barn, or stable, to sleep—an indignity which is not put upon White Men, even in the South. Many exact labor on Sunday. Owning the most generous soil in the world, the farmers and shepherds of this State set upon their tables more wretched food than you will find in Arkansas. The bane of the country, in the southern portion, at least, is large *ranchos*, absenteeism, and the consequent management of laborers by overseers. This banishes the best men into the city. California resembles ancient Greece in the inferiority of its rural population, both served and serving, compared with city dwellers. There is something dry, something dusty, something windy about the country which repels men; in the city alone can they nourish up the juices of life. The most wretched houses, the most wretched gates, the wildest betting and racing, the least hard and downright work that I have seen in any of the States, save Texas only. As Dickens says he can always judge a hotel by its castor, so you can always judge a farmer by his gate; and I have seen just three farm-gates in California for which I had any respect.

To return to our muttons. The anchorite life of the shepherd is eminently conducive to meditation and philosophy, if he be so inclined. Far in among the mountains,

“By the brink
Of sequestered pools in woodland valleys,
Where the slaves of Nature stoop to drink,”

he has his cabin of “shakes,” eight feet by ten, and his hurdle of brushwood. Once in a fortnight there comes to him, from the great outside world, a donkey-load of news, and mutton, and beans. The supercilious *coyotes* examine and

defile the corners of his habitation. He hears at midnight the coarse, rough hairs of the grizzly brush against his cabin door, and the hungry howl of the panther floats athwart his dreams. What long, long thoughts are his, as he lounges "mony a canty day" over the ripe and yellow mountains, all tenderly *mauve* with haze. This is his health. This is the *aroma philosophorum* which shall prolong the years of his days on earth. In the morning he leads his flock on the oaten mountains, by the borders of the brightly ever-green *chamisal*; and at evening, on the scraps of plains and valleys, among the moss-hung oaks, and the whited, plummy tufts of the bunch-grass. Or, from some "specular height," he looks down on the saturnine and awful desolation of late autumn: the far, dun reaches of rolling tables, thinly flecked with the dwarfish oaks, and the sharp-cut, purple peaks. Or perhaps you will find him squatted with his faithful dog between his knees, while, in the vast mustard plain about, you can not see a sheep, and only hear the multitudinous crackling and surging in the mustard. You will not heed his tatters, for his gadding flock has led him many a chase in the sage and rosemary—the same which are commissioned by the birds to collect from his sheep their internal revenue. There is no heir-loom crook in his band, but, instead thereof, a plug of navy tobacco. Ah! this exposes him at once, and cuts short all the poetical fancies we might have devoted to him; for, perhaps, there is moored even yet in San Francisco Bay, or at San Diego, the ship from which he ignominiously deserted.

But perhaps he is a Digger Indian, for I have seen one such in this capacity. He was employed on an acquaintance's *rancho*, and a most eccentric shepherd was he. He was young, and had a face as round as the moon, and pretty black eyes, which scintillated with mischief. He would turn more somer-

saults, and hang head downward from more trees in one day, than any other mortal. He tied numerous small sacks of pebbles and other little kickshaws on the limbs of trees, apparently as charms. One day, his employer missed his hatchet, and thought it was hopelessly lost, but finally discovered that the *muchacho* had carried it for weeks, and had cut innumerable Latin crosses on the tree-trunks. A revolver was bought for him, but he regarded it with dislike. At length, he was persuaded to carry it two days in succession. On the second day, he saw a wildcat, crept toward it with true Indian stealth, lay flat on his belly, held the pistol to his face, and fired. It kicked him in the ear, and after that he would never carry it again. A genuine child of the Forest, his movements were perfectly cat-like, and he never called aloud to his sheep, but imitated the *coyote* or the cat. He was the only Indian whom I ever heard whistle; now and then timidly piping a little chirrup in imitation of his employer. The Indian nature is either too melancholy or too vacuous ever to find vent in this civilized accomplishment. But I have often heard his childish voice repeating over and over again, among the echoing hills, with the most musical intonation I ever heard, phrases in that most musical of languages, the Spanish, such as: "*Pobre cordero manco*," "*El chiquito coyotito*," "*El coyotito chocolate*."

He had the Indian indolence, seeming scarcely to look at his sheep throughout the day, but he brought them all at night. O, for the divine art of taking your time for it!—for the inimitable and indescribable felicity of limberness and of laziness with which that Indian piloted his sheep among the hills! Set an American at it who was in any degree representative, and he would run, and whoop, and swing his arms, and tear his breeches, and protest the flock was absolutely going to the devil all the while—which they undoubt-

edly would be, for he would be worrying them into a leanness like that of the Pharaonic cows. Let them eat, man, and you sit down on this cool stone.

May my right arm forget her cunning if I do not justice, also, by his bitch, Todd! Let me give her portrait: Just the size of a *coyote*, which may possibly have assisted in her genealogy, but with black, straight hair, a little curly on the tail; white belly, feet, and tip of tail; tawny legs, and two tawny spots above the eyes, which were red where they usually are white; sharp snout; eyes close together, but pleasant; ears short, and keenly pricked up. A single incident will show her fidelity. She was trained to hunt for and fetch up feeble lambs, which lie asleep behind the flock. On one occasion, she was sent back some distance, and found a pair of twins. Unable to bring both in her mouth, and afraid to leave one, lest it might be devoured by the *coyotes* before her return, she lay down and guarded them through the night. When found in the morning, the two little foundlings lay warmly housed beside her, while an impudent young *coyote* lay stretched on the ground—a warning to all intruders.

Every spring, the sheep are divided into flocks ("bands," every body says in California) of about a thousand each. When all the pastures are green, and the hill-sides fragrant with the prodigal flowery wealth of the land, and through all the heat of summer, shepherding is a task of pleasure, and the shepherd can read a novel every day, if he desires. But in autumn, when the acorns drop, and the long streamers of moss begin to grow heavy in the early rains, and fall, it is a prodigious pother of running to keep them in bounds, and their gadding propensities greatly stir up the wrath of the shepherds. It is then, also, that *coyotes* are most troublesome, and considerable loss ensues among straggling sheep; but no wise shepherd would, on that ac-

count, clear his ground of trees. In addition to their effect on the climate, they are, in drougthy years, the only reliance.

Herein, too, is the great rock of peril to the shepherds—*i. e.*, in the occasional drougths. I know a run of at least 10,000 acres, on the Nascimiento, which, in the great drougth of '63-4, barely maintained 2,000 sheep, and that only at the sacrifice of hundreds of the best trees.

It is this possibility of the recurrence of drougths, and the impracticability of making any considerable provision against them, so far as shepherds are concerned, which sadly cut into the capacities of California as a wool-producing country.

The great preponderance of annual grasses is also a drawback. Bunch-grass is the only important species which is able to survive the summer, and is not dependent on its seeds for a fresh start in autumn; but its tufts are so scattered that they scarcely cover a sixth of the ground. This is what makes the summer capacity of the runs so weak, and, indeed, the whole capacity: for a chain is no stronger than its weakest link. Would that I had the pen of a Virgil, that I might fitly celebrate the excellences of bunch-grass! It is all that saves California from being, as a pastoral country, a great impostor—a wonderfully picturesque, richly colored, and aromatical impostor.

Can nothing be done to thicken up this perennial grass? It is useless to sow annual grasses, for, during at least three months, they are nothing but powder. Harrowing has been suggested. To the present generation of horse-racing and betting farmers, it may appear absurd to harrow high and wooded hills, but they would better not laugh. They may yet come even to that. What is certain is, as I am told by a careful observer, that a harrow pulled accident-

ally through a field of wild *alfileria*, just at the beginning of the early autumn rains, brought an incredible streak of grass, while, on both sides of the harrow's track, it was not worth mowing. A word, etc.

Notwithstanding all these drawbacks, shepherding is pretty profitable. On a *ranch* of 15,000 acres, a man may—if he have not too many neighbors to pare off his margins—keep 15,000 sheep. I will set down the annual expenses in a table:

Interest on investment,	\$14,400
Herdling,	2,520
Shearing,	900
Hauling, (1 cent)	750
Repairs, (say)	250
Total,	\$18,820

In San Luis Obispo and the best wool counties, one hundred per cent. (one lamb for every ewe) is looked for; but when the genial gods smile on the flocks, they often give one hundred and thirty or fifty per cent. increase. Five pounds of unwashed wool is the average for California.

Fat sheep,	\$24,000
Wool, (spring clip)	9,750
Wool, (fall clip)	2,730
Total,	\$36,480

This leaves a yearly profit of \$17,660. Land is here computed at \$5 an acre, but there are millions of acres in the State which would make good the above computation, that are not worth above \$1.50 an acre. Wool, too, is estimated at only 13 cents, which, as soon as the clips are a little more bred up, will be quite too little. All things taken togeth-

er, the shepherd has the best outlook of all who depend on the soil in southern California.

The various climates and needs of California must determine the best breed for each locality. In the raw and nasty ocean gusts, such as whistle down the Salinas Valley, Merinoes seem to be pinched together, and do not prosper even as well as in England. More than that: the Merino fleece deteriorates in the littoral humidity, as it does along the Thames, and has to be bred up by occasional importations from dryer climates. But in the parched summers, away from the coast, like those of their native Spain, they thrive better than do the English long-wooled flocks, and their mutton is nearly as toothsome. While the grass is green, South-Downs grow lustily and juicily, but the withering summers sap their hams. Cotswolds make immense carcasses, but both they and South-Downs are too dainty feeders for California. Their mutton is too fat and too tallowy for southern eaters, but it suits the robuster stomachs of San Francisco better. The native mustangs make good mutton, unless it is flavored with browse, but they are great gadders; and, as for wool, you might almost as well go pluck a crow.

Until California has more populous cities, wool will rank mutton in importance; and, for the production of this, Merinoes probably are, all things considered, best adapted. English long-wooled breeds generally require more care, and juicier pastures, than can easily be given in the present situation.