

A SHEEP PARADISE.

SHEARING SCENES ON SANTA CRUZ ISLAND.

Pursuance of Sheep Roaming about Unattended—Sheep Shearers Work by the Piece and are Desperate Gamblers.

Travelers who pass up and down the Southern coast of California never fail to notice with interest the group of islanders to the seaward side of the Santa Barbara channel. Their peculiar outlines, their isolation, and the apparent absence of human life, render them objects of curiosity so long as the vessel remains within sight. They are by no means, however, so desolate and uninhabited as one might suppose from a passing glance. That is about all, by the way, that most people are able to obtain. The company that controls the largest of the group is very strict in its enforcement of a long-established rule that strangers shall not land thereon, while the difficulty of access is such that few, except those who have business there ever care to undertake the journey.

The islands of Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa and San Miguel are utilized as sheep ranges, and finely adapted for that purpose are they. There are no coyotes, lions or other animals which are so destructive to sheep on the mainland, while the cackle burr, which is such a nuisance and deteriorates the value of the wool so largely on the shore ranges, is unknown, at least on Santa Cruz island. There being no danger from any source, the sheep on the islands are allowed to wander at will without herders, the only care being to keep them from being at the semi-annual shearing.

On Santa Cruz island, which, by the way, is of considerable size, being from twenty-seven to thirty miles in length by about four in width, the sheep-rearing business is carried on upon an extensive and systematic scale. The shore line of the island is marked by ranges of hills, which afford fine pastures, the moist atmosphere of the ocean promoting a heavy growth of natural grasses and affording an abundance of feed, which keeps green much later than on the mainland.

Between these parallel ranges of hills is a lovely valley of large extent, where are located the headquarters of the company, and in which is a large extent of arable land upon which hay is raised by the thousands of tons for use in periods when the natural feed runs short. This hay is stacked up under shelter, and sometimes kept for two or three years in readiness for any demand that may arise. This idea was evolved years ago by the occurrence of a season of extraordinary drought, during which it became necessary to kill thousands of sheep for their pelts and the little tallow that adhered to their attenuated sides.

Although many thousands of sheep are kept on the island, it is not necessary to employ any one to look after them, except during the shearing season. At such times a large force of shearers, generally natives of California, is brought over from the mainland. These men are expert equestrians, as well as knights of the shears, and their first task on reaching their destination is to round up the sheep or at least so many of them as it is desired to keep in the shearing corrals at one time. These corrals are located near the island headquarters, in the centre of the great interior valley.

When everything is in readiness for operations to commence, horses are saddled, and bright and early in the morning the party of a hundred or more vaquero shepherds starts for one end of the island. Arrived there they string out so as to make a cordon extending across the island, and then with the hallooing and spurring of horses and scrambling over rough hills and across rugged barrancas, they work their way back toward headquarters, driving the constantly increasing band of sheep before them. It is an interesting spectacle both to watch and to participate in as the sheep are driven in dozens and hundreds and thousands toward the point where they are to be shorn of the great masses of wool which cumbers their backs and make travel in the hot sun a grievous task.

Arriving at the great corral the sheep are driven in, the horses unsaddled and turned loose and the riders proceed to the shearing shed, which quickly becomes a scene of the greatest animation. From the great corral a number of small pens, and into these are driven enough sheep to keep the men busy for an hour or two. The shed is open at the sides, but the sun is hot overhead, the dust and odor from the sheep is almost stifling. The men strip to the buff, frequently wearing nothing but a pair of overalls striped about the waist and a handkerchief tied around the head. Their bodies glisten with perspiration, there is a perfect babel of talking, swearing and other noise.

The work is all done by the piece, 5 cents being allowed for each sheep. Consequently the men work at the top of their speed. A sheep is grasped by the hind leg, thrown on his back, a firm hold taken by one hand and both legs of the shearer, and in an incredibly short time the fleece is removed. The writer timed a number of shearers, and found that the most expert consumed just four minutes and a half in taking a fleece, while the average time was about seven minutes.

As soon as the fleece is taken the sheep was turned into a pen with his shorn mates. The shearer ran with the fleece to the end of the room, put it on a bench, called out his name and was given a brass check representing 5 cents in value. The tally-keeper also entered a record opposite the name of each shearer as the fleece was deposited.

Another man seized the fleece, weighed it, called out the weight, which was also entered in a book, rolled up the wool, tied it up and tossed it into a bin, whence it was removed subsequently and packed in the great sacks used on this coast for such purposes.

Through the shearers an overcast moved continually, taking note of the manner in which the work was done. If any were too careless in their haste and cut the flesh of the sheep they were handling more frequently than was unavoidable they were admonished in such language as one may perhaps imagine, but could scarcely be repeated, and if the warning was not heeded a fine was imposed, or if the carelessness was too gross the shearer was discharged. Occasionally a fleece was deposited on the ground that was almost dyed with blood, and then a volley of profanity would be hurled at the head of the offender that added materially to the solidarity of the atmosphere.

So it went all day long, the men working on the jump and only stopping when the setting of the sun and the coming of night made it impossible to continue. Then the bell rang for supper, and the shearers, stopping for a hasty wash, poured into the mess-hall and devoured a hearty meal, in which fried, chile and "sheep meat" largely entered.

No sooner was the meal dispatched

and the rough dishes cleared away than a new feature of the shearer's existence was brought to light. Candles were lighted, greasy decks of cards produced, and soon two or three monte games were in progress. As eager as the men were to get the pieces of brass during the day that represented their earnings, they seemed even more eager now to get rid of them. No coin is given out until the close of the shearing season, and therefore the brass checks are the only currency that is used meantime on the island. These are piled up on the table, and as the game goes on one by one the players see their stacks diminish and drop out, until at last all the checks are in the hands of a few professionals and the game shuts down for the night.

The next day the same operation is gone through with, and at night the game goes on again. More than one of the shearers, when settling time comes, will not have a single brass check to be cashed, although he may have sheared hundreds of sheep and worked hard as it was possible. On the other hand, quantities of checks will be cashed for men who have not touched a sheep but have put in their days smoking cigarettes and watching their comrades sweating in the shearing sheds, knowing full well that they would be able to win all their earnings over the gambling table.—(San Francisco Chronicle.)

STARTLING EXPERIENCES.

A Georgian's Many Close Calls With Deadly Snakes.

There is a citizen at Valdosta, Ga., who has had some startling experiences with poisonous snakes during his life. He is entirely responsible, does not like notoriety and seldom talks of his adventures with reptiles, because he fears the recital of them would not be believed, and he does not care to figure as a Munchausen among snake story tellers.

Sometime ago he was attracted by the laughing of a child who was at play in the front yard. Looking through the window, he discovered to his horror that the child was playing with a great, live rattlesnake, which sprang its warning rattle just as the child was rescued from what would have been certain death.

At another time recently, while wading in a branch, he stepped on a large water moccasin, and narrowly escaped being bitten, as he had crushed the body of the animal and aroused its wrath. It did show fight, however, chasing him to dry land.

"On still another occasion," says this hero of many battles with snakes, "I had cause to tramp all day with some companions in a swamp, and it was during snake time of the year. During that day I had the misfortune to step on a moccasin, one of my feet broke through the moss-covered mud, and it threw me forward. I caught at a tussock just at me, and threw my hand on a large moccasin. It flinched, but did not move. I was stuck in the mud. Its forked tongue flashed in my face. I could not get up without a struggle, and I was afraid to make the effort, fearing that a movement on my part would bring the snake in my hand. I held my breath, while the moccasin went to my belt, and I drew therefrom a pistol. In an instant I got in the first blow, and the snake's head went off. A friend stood on a tussock five feet away watching the tragedy—in one act.

"Recently I was hunting cows in the pine woods. I rode a mule. I was going at a slow lope. Suddenly the beast threw its head down with a snort and plowed the earth with both fore hoofs in a desperate effort to take up. I went over the horn of the saddle and astride of the mule's neck; and would have pitched over my head on the spot had not seized the animal's ears, one in each hand, as I struggled wildly to prevent a fall. My head and chest went full over its head, but my grip on the long ears and my feet locked round its neck saved me for the time. Thus poised in a ridiculous attitude my beast regained its footing and then began bawling and darning about about about about brush and sapling until I rolled off on the ground. When I gained my feet I discovered a large rattlesnake in coil under a palmetto bush, just in front of the spot where the mule made the desperate effort to stop, and if I had gone over the animal's head I would have fallen head foremost upon the deadly reptile.

"More wonderful to relate, a little toddler, who was burdened with my name, came across a rattler one day and picked it up, and went running round playing with it, until an older brother discovered the child's peril and jerked it away from the snake."—(Atlanta Constitution.)

How to Kill the Rose Bug.

The editor of the Rural New Yorker announces that he has just discovered a sure way of killing the rose bug or rose chafer without injury to foliage. The bug has increased rapidly in the last few years and has devastated thousands of vineyards. The editor says: "Experiments made during the present season prove that this insect cannot survive a temperature of over 120 degrees Fahrenheit. The next step was to ascertain if this method of destruction could be put to an easy, practicable use. Water was heated to 170 degrees and poured into a pail. A small hand force-pump, with eight feet of hose and a half-inch iron pipe, five feet (thirteen feet in all), terminating with a cyclone nozzle, was then used to force the water upon the rose chafers of the magnolia flowers, in one of which there were not less than 150 of them. The first spray upon the beetles was shown by the thermometer to be 120 degrees. The rose bugs receiving the direct spray were dead in about one minute. The others recovered. The temperature of the water was then raised so that the mercury rose to 140 when the thermometer was placed within two inches of the nozzle. This was sprayed into a partly open magnolia flower containing fifty or more beetles. All were almost instantly killed. Neither foliage nor flowers was injured."

Weather Plants.

Garden and Forest quotes from a writer in the Illustrirte Gartenzeitung of Vienna, who, while he disputes the excessive claims that have been made for certain "weather plants," points out that a modest degree of power in forecasting atmospheric changes is possessed by a multitude of common plants. The pleasant fair-weather odor of Galium verum (Our Lady's bed-straw) becomes strong and pungent at the approach of rain. The leaves of Carlinia vulgaris close before rain. Calendula pluvialis (marigold) predicts rain when its flowers remain closed after seven in the morning. Oxalis acetosella (wood sorrel)

close its leaves at the approach of rain or cold. Lapsana communis keeps its flowers open at evening if it is to rain the following day, and closes them if fair weather is coming. The leaves of Draba verna (whitlowgrass) droop before rain. Alsine media predicts a clear day if its flowers open about nine o'clock, and a second one to follow if they remain open as late as four in the afternoon.

A DESERT BRIDE.

Interesting Account of a Marriage Among the Bedouins.

A Bedouin wedding, which I lately had the occasion to witness, took place in Kameh—a seaside resort near Alexandria—where many houses have a Bedouin ghafir, who pitches his tent near his master's house, and lives there with his family and cattle, if he has any. The bridegroom was the son of a friend's ghafir. Previous to the engagement the father had obtained three days' leave on the plea of his going down to Alexandria for the choice of a daughter-in-law. On the evening of the third day he was fired successfully announced to the native Bedouins the ghafir's return, and the happy result of his mission. The wedding was fixed for that day week.

Groups of Bedouins hastened to answer to the invitation, and after some talking and shouting the men soon formed a ring and began clapping hands, the body keeping time to the movements of the hands by going upward and downward. Now and then one of the fellows wailed forth a Bedouin song, while the others chorused. The women sat chatting before the tent and occasionally filled the air with the shrill sound of the zineit. No refreshment was offered and their sole light was the moon, whose silvery light gave a weird aspect to the whole scene. After an hour's amusement the guests retired.

The next evening the firing brought forth all the company of the preceding night. This time the great attraction was two dancing women, very picturesquely dressed, and their faces covered with a soft black muslin. They entered the ring formed by the men, each of them holding a long staff—an adjunct to the various movements of their figures. They went round and round, leaning at different intervals on their staffs, while the clapping of hands redoubled in whichever part of the ring the women appeared. I observed a young enthusiast take a handful of muslin, where one of the women had trodden and kiss it repeatedly. I noticed the bridegroom was absent, and, asking for the cause, was informed that he was too bashful to appear. Two hours later the company dispersed, to begin afresh at intervals during the short engagement.

At last the evening drawing dawned. A new tent had been pitched for the young couple, while in that of the old ones several cauldrons full of rice and water were boiling. When the rice was done some oil was poured over it, and then very large wooden bowls were brought forward to receive the contents of the cauldrons. These formed the whole menu of the wedding, and fast, and was attended to by the bridegroom's mother, aided by some other matrons. The ghafir and the young people had gone to fetch the bride. They had taken with them one of the ghafir's camels, which they had gayly decorated with red and blue cloth, and created a canopy on its back to receive the bride.

A large procession was formed, headed by horsemen and other Bedouins armed with guns, which they fired frequently. The bride, completely hidden from sight by the curtains of the canopy, and followed by the women, brought up the rear. They went on toward the tent, stopping before every friend's tent to dance a fire and sing. At about 4 o'clock in the afternoon the merry party arrived at the bridegroom's place. The latter had remained at home. The father, who was holding the camel's bridle, handed it over to his wife, who led the animal seven times around the bridal tent, each time accompanied by a chorus of singing and fire and singing. At about 4 o'clock in the afternoon the merry party arrived at the bridegroom's place. The latter had remained at home. The father, who was holding the camel's bridle, handed it over to his wife, who led the animal seven times around the bridal tent, each time accompanied by a chorus of singing and fire and singing. 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