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"HAVE OUR SHEEP ALWAYS BEEN DIPPED?"

The Story of Wool

BY

SARA WARE BASSETT

Author of "The Story of Lumber" and "The Story of Leather"

ILLUSTRATED BY

ELIZABETH OTIS

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To

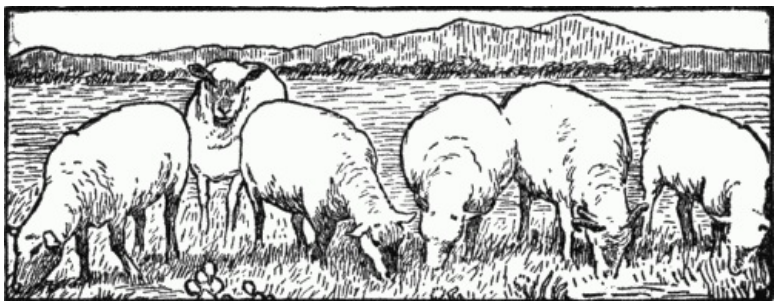
MY FATHER

It gives me pleasure to acknowledge the courtesy and coöperation of the United States Department of Agriculture.

S. W. B.

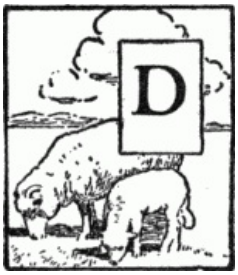
Contents

[9]



THE STORY OF WOOL

CHAPTER I
A MYSTERIOUS TELEGRAM



Donald Clark glanced up from his Latin grammar and watched his father as he tore open the envelope of a telegram and ran his eye over its contents. Evidently the message was puzzling. Again Mr. Clark read it. Donald wondered what it could be. All the afternoon the yellow envelope had been on the table, and more than once his mind had wandered from the lessons he
[10] was preparing to speculate on the possible tidings wrapped up in that sealed packet. Not that a telegram was an unheard-of event in the family. No, his father received many; most of them, however, went to the Boston office, and the boy could not imagine what this one was doing at their Cambridge home.

The moment his father entered the house Donald handed him the envelope and Mr. Clark quickly stripped it open; yet even though it now lay spread out before him the mystery it contained appeared to be unsolved. It was seldom that Donald asked questions, nevertheless he found himself wondering and wondering what it was that had brought that odd little wrinkle into his father's forehead. Donald understood that wrinkle; he had seen it many times and knew it never came unless some question arose to which it was difficult to frame an answer. As his father and he had lived alone together ever since he could remember they had grown to know each other very well, and had become the best of friends. It therefore followed that when one worried, both worried.

[11] As the boy looked on, his father glanced up suddenly and caught sight of the anxiety mirrored in his face. The man smiled kindly.

"I can find no answer to this riddle, Don," he said. "Listen! Perhaps you can help me. A few days ago I received word from Crescent Ranch that Johnson, our manager, had been thrown from his horse while out on the range and so badly hurt that he will never again be able to continue his work with us. They have taken him to the hospital at Glen City. The letter came from Tom Thornton, the head herder at the ranch. Thornton assured me that everything was going well, and that there was not the slightest need for me to come to Idaho."

Donald listened.

"Well, to-day I received this telegram. It is neither from Johnson nor Thornton. It reads:

"'You would do well to visit Crescent Ranch,' and it is signed—'Sandy McCulloch.'"

"Who is Sandy McCulloch?" asked Donald.

"That's the puzzle! I do not know. I never heard of any such person in my life—not that I
[12] remember. Evidently, though, he knows enough about me to know that I own that sheep ranch, and to think that I ought to go out there and see it. I do not understand it at all. What do you make of it, son?"

Donald thought carefully.

"Do you suppose anything is wrong on the ranch?"

"No, indeed! Thornton wrote particularly that everything was all right. He was Johnson's assistant, and he ought to know. Besides, he has been with us a long time, and is thoroughly familiar with every part of the work."

"Maybe it's a joke," ventured Donald.

"It would be a stupid sort of joke to get me from Boston to Idaho on a wild-goose chase. No, there is no joke about this," went on Mr. Clark, rising and pacing the floor. "Sandy McCulloch is real, and he has some real reason for wanting me to go to Crescent Ranch. I think I shall take his advice and go."

Donald was astounded. His father never left home.

[13] "And the office?"

"Uncle Harold will have to do double duty while I am gone."

"And—and—I?" inquired the boy hesitatingly.

Idaho seemed very far away—quite at the other end of the world.

"You? Oh, you'll have to go along too! I shall need you."

Donald drew a long breath.

"Let me see," continued his father, "this is the end of March, isn't it? Your spring term is about over. I happen to know you are well up in your work, for I met Mr. Hurlbert, the high school principal, only yesterday. I am sure that if you fall behind by going on this trip you will study all the harder to make up the work when you get back, won't you?"

"Yes, sir!" was the emphatic promise.

"You see I've no idea how long I shall be detained out West, therefore I have no mind to leave you here. You might be ill. Besides, I should miss you, Don."

"I'd much rather go with you, father."

[14] A quick light of pleasure flashed in the father's eyes.

"Then that's settled," he exclaimed decisively. "Now I'll tell you what I mean to do. I am not going to wire Crescent Ranch that we are coming. Instead we will drop down and surprise them. It won't take long to see how things are running, and even if it proves that everything is all right I shall not begrudge the trip, for I have felt for some time that I ought to go. Clark & Sons have owned that ranch for thirty years, and yet I have never been near it. It certainly is time I went."

"How did it happen you never did go, father?"

"Well, during your grandfather's life an old Scotchman managed the ranch and attended to shipping the wool. As we had nothing to do but to sell it, we did not bother much about the place, for we had perfect confidence in Old Angus, the manager. After your grandfather died, Uncle Harold and I had all we could do to attend to the business here. It grew so rapidly that it was
[15] about as much as two young fellows like ourselves could handle. We always meant to go out—one of us—but we never did. Then our faithful Scotchman died. We felt lost, I can tell you! He had had all the management of Crescent for twenty years and was one of the finest men in the world. He might have lived until now, perhaps, had he not been caught on the range in a blizzard while struggling to get a flock of sheep out of the storm and thereby lost his life."

Mr. Clark paused a moment.

"After him came Johnson. He has done his work well, so far as we know; but now he is out of the running too and we shall have to get some one else."

"Whom are you going to get?"

"I haven't the most remote idea. You see, Don, I know next to nothing about managing a ranch. I stay here in Boston and simply sell wool. This end of the business I know thoroughly, but the other end is Greek to me."

Donald laughed. He was just beginning Greek.

"I am glad you don't know about a ranch, father," he exclaimed.

[16] "Why?"

"Oh, because you seem to know almost everything else, and it is fun to find something you don't know."

There was admiration in the boy's words.

His father shook his head and there was a shadow of sadness in his smile as he replied:

"I know very little, Donald boy. The older I grow the less I know, too. You will feel that way when you are my age. Now here is a chance for us to learn something together. Let's go to Idaho and find out all we can about sheep-raising."

Within the next few days the plans for the journey were completed.

As one article after another was purchased and packed the trip unfolded into a most alluring pilgrimage. They must take their riding togs, for Uncle Harold reminded them that they would probably be in the saddle much of the time; their camping kit must go also; above all they must carry good revolvers and rifles. Donald's heart beat high. He and his father had always ridden a
[17] great deal together; it was their favorite sport. Now they were to have whole days of it. And added to this pleasure was the crowning glory of both a rifle and a revolver!

All this fairy-land of the future had come about through Sandy McCulloch!

Who was this wonderful Sandy? And why had he telegraphed?

Sandy McCulloch! The very name breathed a charm. Donald repeated it to himself constantly. He dreamed dreams and wove adventures about this mysterious Scotchman. He knew he should like Sandy. Who could help it? His name was enough.

In the meantime the days of preparation flew by. Donald's spring examinations were passed with honors—a fact which his father declared proved that he had taken his work in earnest and that he deserved an outing. Mr. Clark laughingly ventured the hope that he should be able to leave his business affairs in equally good condition.

"You have set quite a pace for me, Don! I am not sure whether I can take honors at the office or
[18] not. I have done the best I could, however, to put things into Uncle Harold's hands so to cause him as little trouble as possible."

Donald tried not to become impatient while these arrangements were being made.

At last dawned that clear April morning when the East was left behind and the journey to the West—that unknown land—was begun. Donald had never been West. The vastness of the country, the newness of the scenery surprised and delighted him. Geography had never seemed so real before. No longer were the various states pink, green, or purple splotches on the map; they were real living places with people, sunshine, and fresh air.

"I had no idea America was so big!" he gasped to his father.

"It's the finest country in the world, Don! Be proud and thankful that you are an American. No other land does so much for her people. Be humble, too. Never let a chance go by to do your part in helping the country that does so much for you."

[19] They were standing in the glassed-in rear of the train, and as Mr. Clark spoke he pointed to vast tracts of forest land that sped past them.

"I am afraid I can't do anything for a great country like this, father," said Donald, a little quiver in his voice.

"There is one thing we can all do—that is be good citizens. Every law we have was made for the good of our people. In so far as you keep these laws you will be aiding in building up a more perfect America. Bear your share in that work—do not be a hindrance, Don."

"I'll try, father," was the boy's grave reply.

To help in the progress of such a land as this! More than once Donald thought of his father's words as the train threaded its way along the banks of mighty rivers, rolled through great woodlands, or skirted cities which throbbed with the life of mighty industries.

And all this vast-reaching land was his country—his!

On every hand there were wonders!

[20] As the express thundered along he poured out question after question.

Why did people go way to Idaho to raise sheep? Why didn't his father raise his sheep in the East? Certainly there was room enough, plenty of room, that was much nearer than Idaho. How did sheep get into the mountains of Idaho anyway?

Mr. Clark ducked his head under the torrent of queries.

"You will drown me with questions!" he exclaimed laughing. "Well, I shall do my best to answer you. New Mexico was the first sheep center in our country. Herds were originally brought from Spain, and these flocks worked their way up from Mexico through New Mexico and California; here the hills supplied the coolness necessary to animals with such thick coats, and furnished them at the same time with plentiful grass for food. During the day the herds grazed, and at night they were driven into corrals of cedar built by the shepherds. These sheep were mostly Merinos, a variety raised in Spain. Afterward, in 1853, a man named William W. Hollister brought three
[21] hundred ewes across our continent to the West. Think what a journey it must have been!"

"Wasn't the railroad built?"

"No. Neither were there any bridges. There were rivers to swim and mountains to climb; furthermore there was many a search for water-holes, because Mr. Hollister was not well enough acquainted with the country to know where to find water for himself and the herd."

"I should not think a sheep would have lived through such a journey!" cried Donald.

"Many of them did, however," answered his father, "and that is how our western sheep-raising industry began. Now it is one of the great occupations of our land, and soon you and I are to know more about it."

"And about Sandy McCulloch, too, I hope," put in the boy.

"I hope so; only remember—not a word of that telegram to any one at the ranch. We shall get into Glen City this noon if our train is on time and we must trust to luck in getting to Crescent Ranch.
[22] It is fifteen miles from the station, up in the foot-hills of the Rockies."

"The—the—you don't mean the Rocky Mountains!" gasped Donald, his eyes very wide open.

"Certainly. Have you forgotten your geography?"

"Of course I know that a spur of the Rocky Mountains does run diagonally across Idaho; but somehow I never thought of really being in the Rocky Mountains!"

Mr. Clark enjoyed the outburst.

"To be where there are bears and bob-cats and——"

"Maybe, after all, you would rather have stayed at home and finished out your school year."

"I rather guess not!" was the lad's emphatic reply.

So impatient was he to see the marvels of this magic land that the last few hours of the journey seemed unending.

But they did end.

[23] Toward noon the heavy train pulled into Glen City and they bundled out on to the platform. They were the only passengers, but there was a great deal of freight—boxes, barrels, and cases of provisions. As they stood hesitating as to what they had better do a tall, bony young fellow approached the station agent and called with a decided suggestion of the Highlander in his accent:

"I dinna see those kegs of lime for Crescent Ranch, Mitchell."

"They're here. You will find them at the end of the platform. Come, and I'll help you pile them on your wagon."

Mr. Clark turned to the Scotchman.

"Are you going to Crescent Ranch?"

"Aye, I be, sir."

"Can you take my son and me along?"

The Scotchman studied him carefully.

"Have you business at the ranch?" he asked, looking keenly into the eyes of the speaker.

Mr. Clark met his gaze good-naturedly.

"We might possibly have," he answered. "At any rate we want to go up there. My name is Clark
[24] and I come from Boston."

"Clark, did you say, sir?"

"Yes."

The stolid stare of the Scotchman did not waver.

"Mayhap you're the owner, sir."

"Yes, I am."

A gleam of something very like satisfaction passed over the tanned features of the young man. Then his face settled back into its wonted calmness.

"It's welcome you are, sir," he said heartily. "I dinna think there'll be trouble about taking you and your son to Crescent."

He wheeled and led the way to a wagon, where he piled up some sacks of grain for his guests to sit upon. Then he lifted in their luggage and the freight for which he had come, and gathered the lines over the backs of his horses.

As the wagon toiled up the long, low hills Mr. Clark began asking questions about the ranch—he asked many questions concerning the country and the flocks. To all of these he received terse answers.

[25] Presently the Scotchman turned.

"It's little you be knowin' of sheepin', sir."

The remark was made with so much simplicity that it could not have been mistaken for rudeness.

"Very little."

"Keep it to yourself, man," was the laconic advice the Highlander tossed over his shoulder as he transferred his attention to his horses.

Mr. Clark bit his lip to hide a smile.

"What is your name, my lad?" he asked suddenly.

"Sandy McCulloch, sir," was the quiet answer.

Donald waited, listening eagerly to every turn of the conversation that followed, but to his astonishment neither his father nor Sandy McCulloch spoke one word regarding the mysterious telegram.

It was nightfall when the wagon that had brought them turned into a muddy drive and stopped before a bare looking house situated in a meadow, and surrounded by a number of vast barns and sheep-pens. Out of this house came a broad-shouldered, bronzed man who stood on the steps,
[26] waiting their approach. He wore trousers of sheepskin, a soiled flannel shirt, and round his neck —knotted in the back—was a red handkerchief. Donald noticed that into his belt of Mexican leather was tucked a revolver. He stared at the strangers inquiringly.

Mr. Clark jumped out as soon as the wagon stopped, and extended his hand.

"I do not know your name," he said pleasantly, "but mine is Clark. My son Donald and I have come from Boston to see the ranch."

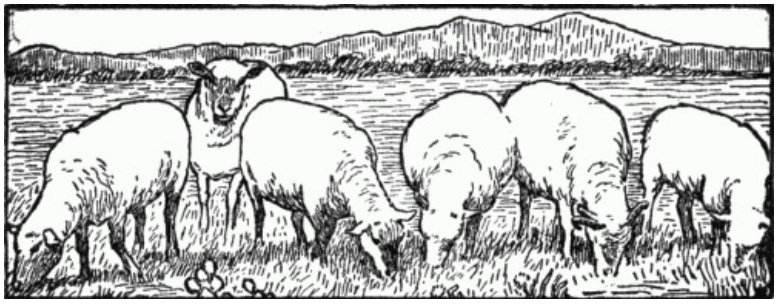
The man sprang forward.

"I'm Tom Thornton, sir. What a pleasure to have a visit from you! Such an unexpected visit, too."

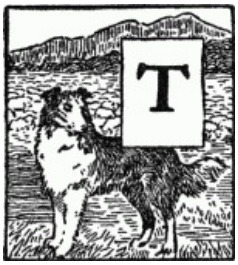
He slapped Mr. Clark heartily on the shoulder and took Donald's hand in a tight grip.

But though he talked loudly, and laughed a great deal while carrying in their luggage, for some reason Donald felt certain that really Tom Thornton was not glad to see them at all.

[27]



CHAPTER II
WHO SANDY WAS



The next morning both Donald and his father were astir early.

There was nothing to keep them within the great chilly house, and everything to lure them into the sunshine. The sky was without a cloud, and into its blueness stretched distant ranges of hazy mountains at whose feet nestled lower hills covered with faint green. Near at hand patches of meadow were toned to grayish white by grazing bands of sheep. On the still
[28] air came the flat, metallic note of herd-bells, and the bleating of numberless unseen flocks within the pens and barns.

What a novel scene it was!

The newcomers found their way to a sheltered corner where they could look out before them into the vastness.

It was all so strange, so interesting!

Somewhere in the ravine below they could catch the rushing music of a stream which wove itself

in and out a maze of rolling hills and was lost at last in the shadows of the green valleys.

As they stood silent and drank in the beauty about them, an angry voice broke the stillness.

It came from the interior of the barn near which they were standing.

"I tell you what, Tom Thornton, I'm with Sandy McCulloch. The sheep always were washed after shearing in Old Angus's day, and in Johnson's as well. That is how Crescent Ranch came to have the good name it now holds. There were no scabby sheep here to infect the rest of the herd."

[29] "What's that to you, Jack Owen? You are here to mind the boss, ain't you? What's the use of our working like beavers for ten days to dip the flock if we don't have to? Dipping is a dirty, tiresome job. You are not in for making work for yourself, are you?"

"The flocks will be ruined!"

"What do you care—they are not your sheep."

"Well, I have been on this ranch a long time, Thornton, and I can't help caring what becomes of 'em. I take the same pride in the place Sandy does. We have won a reputation here for doing things the way they ought to be done—for minding the laws—for having clean, healthy stock. Sandy says he shall dip his herd, anyway."

"Bother Sandy! He's talked to you men until he's got you all upset. You would have been with me if he had kept his mouth shut. But no matter what he says I am running this ranch at present. I mean to run it in the future, too. If you're wise you will do as I tell you."

"Mr. Clark may have something to say about the dipping."

[30] "Don't you fret," sneered Thornton. "I sounded him last night. He's a tenderfoot. I don't believe he knows a thing about sheeping."

Mr. Clark drew Donald into the sun-flooded field before he spoke.

Then, after a thoughtful silence he turned:

"Well, Don?"

"I wouldn't have that Thornton here another day, father!" broke out the boy hotly.

"Slowly, son, slowly! We must be sure about Thornton before we condemn him. He has been ten years on the ranch; more than that, we are without a manager, and we have none in view. Remember 'he stumbles who runs fast.' Take time, Don, take time."

Donald flushed.

"I know it is the best way, but I was so angry to hear him talking that way about you."

"Loyalty is a fine trait, Don." Mr. Clark laid his hand affectionately on his son's shoulder. "I like to see you loyal. But in this matter we must move slowly."

"What about this dipping, father? What is it?"

[31] "Something about washing the sheep. I do not clearly understand it myself."

"Shall you have it done?"

"What do you say?"

"Of course I do not know anything about it," Donald replied modestly, "but somehow I feel as if Sandy and the men are right."

"I think so too."

"Couldn't I ask Sandy what it is, father?"

"I am thinking of asking him myself, Don, if I get a good chance."

The chance came unexpectedly, for at that very moment Sandy McCulloch came out of one of the sheep-pens and crossed the walk to the central barn.

"What are you up to to-day, Sandy?" called Mr. Clark.

"I am going to dip my flock, sir, down in the south meadow."

"I am glad of that, for it will give us a chance to see it done," observed Mr. Clark. Then lowering his voice he asked: "Why do you dip the sheep, Sandy?"

[32] "Are you asking because you want to know?" inquired Sandy with the directness which characterized everything he said.

"Yes, Both Donald and I wish to learn."

"Well, sir, it is this way. After the shearing is over and the fleece removed, the coat of the sheep is light and therefore easily dried. We then take the flocks and run them through a bath of lime and sulphur. Some shepherds prefer a coal-tar dip. Whatever the dip is made of, the purpose is the same. It is to kill the parasites on the sheep and cure any diseases of the eyes. If sheep are

not dipped they get the 'scab.' Some bit of a creature gets under their skin and burrows until it makes the sheep sick. Often, too, the wool will peel off in great patches. One sheep will take it from another, until by and by the whole herd is infected."

Mr. Clark nodded.

"I never mean to let a sickly sheep go on the range," continued Sandy. "I try to flax round and find out what is the matter with him so I can cure him. We don't want our herd spoiling the feeding grounds and the water-holes and giving their diseases to all the flocks that graze after
[33] them. If we are let graze on the range the least we can do is to be decent about it—that's the way I look at it."

"Have our sheep always been dipped?"

"Aye, sir, that they have—dipped every spring after shearing; then we clipped their feet before they started for the range. Sheep, you know, walk on two toes, and if their feet are not trimmed they get sore from traveling so much. I suppose nature intended sheep to climb over the rocks and wear their hoofs down that way. They have a queer foot. Did you know that there is a little oily gland between the toes to make the hoof moist, and keep it from cracking?"

"No, I guess neither Donald nor I knew that, did we, Donald? Now about this dipping—do you thoroughly understand how it is done, Sandy?"

"I do that, sir."

Donald wondered why his father was so thoughtful.

"How long have you been at Crescent Ranch, Sandy?" asked Mr. Clark at last.

"Ever since I was a lad of fifteen, sir."

[34] "That must be about ten years!"

"Fourteen."

A new thought came to Mr. Clark.

"Why, then you must have known Old Angus," he exclaimed.

"I did, sir."

"He was a fine old man, they tell me."

"He was."

"I never saw him—I wish I had. It was a great loss to the ranch and to all of us when he went."

"It was indeed."

"You must remember him well, Sandy."

Throwing back his head with a gesture of pride, Sandy confronted Mr. Clark.

"I do, sir," he replied simply. "He was my father."

Mr. Clark and Donald stared.

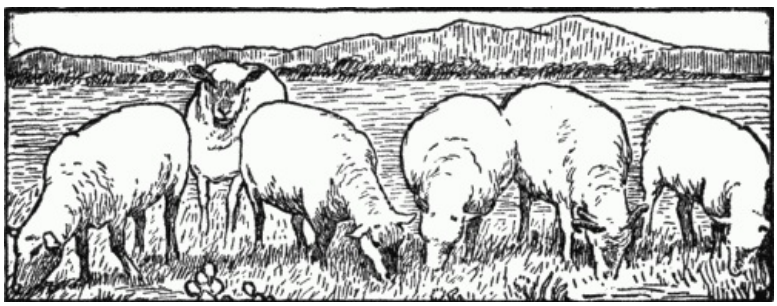
"Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?" cried Donald's father, stepping forward eagerly and seizing the hand of the young ranchman.

"I thought mayhap you knew it. If not—why prate about it? It's on my own feet I must stand and
[35] not on my father's. If I am of any use you will find it out fast enough, father or no father; if I'm not 'twere best you found that out as well."

"Independent as your forebears, Sandy!" laughed Mr. Clark.

"I be a McCulloch, sir!" was all Sandy said.

[36]



CHAPTER III
THE DIPPING

It was a great surprise to Tom Thornton when Mr. Clark informed him that he wanted the men to start in dipping the sheep as soon as they could get ready.

"I suppose, Thornton, you have everything in readiness for the work," continued the owner casually.

Thornton did not hesitate.

"Yes, indeed, sir. We can start right in to-day if you wish. It is for you to say. But really, Mr. Clark, the flock hardly needs it. Our sheep are in prime

[37] condition."

"That's all the more reason for keeping them so, Thornton," was the smiling reply.

"Of course that is true, sir. Very well. We will go ahead. I think I shall have time to give the orders, although I have got to be in Glen City about ten days shipping the clip."

"What?"

"Shipping the wool, sir."

"Oh, yes."

"I can start the work before I go."

"I don't think you need bother, Thornton," remarked Mr. Clark slowly. "You go on down to Glen City and finish up your business there."

"But somebody must see to the dipping if you really want it done."

"I'll attend to it."

"You!"

"Why not?"

"Why—why—nothing, sir. I beg your pardon. Only I thought you might be too tired after your trip."

[38] "Oh, no. I am not tired at all."

Thornton eyed him.

Even Donald was astonished.

Mr. Clark did not seem to be at all disturbed by the embarrassing stillness, but went on shaving down a stick he was whittling.

"I do not mean to manage the dipping myself," he explained at last. "I shall let Sandy McCulloch take charge of it."

"Sandy McCulloch! Why, sir, that boy could never do it in the world! He is a good lad—well enough in his way—but not very smart. Not at all like his father."

"Well, if he has no ability I shall soon find it out. I mean to try him, anyway."

"Oh, you can try him if you like, but I know the fellow better than you do. You are foolish to turn any big work over to him. He can't handle it."

"I intend to give him the chance."

Thornton's annoyance began to get beyond his control.

[39] "Very well. It is not my business," he snapped as he left the room.

The instant he was gone Donald, who could not keep silent another moment, cried:

"Oh, father! I am so glad you are going to let Sandy manage the dipping!"

"It is an experiment, Don. Sandy is young and he may make a mess of things—not because he does not mean well, but because he lacks experience. He has been here a long time, to be sure, but he never has taken any care beyond watching his own flocks."

"I do not think he will fail. The men will all help him. They like him."

"I can see that."

"And I like him too, father."

"So do I, son. I am trusting him with this work not only because I like him but because I feel sure that the son of such a father cannot go far astray. It was a great surprise to me when I found Sandy was the son of Old Angus. You see we all thought so much of the old Scotchman that he was Old Angus to everybody. I had almost forgotten he had another name. I don't think I ever
[40] heard any one call him Angus McCulloch in my life. And yet I remember the name now, for I can recall seeing it written out on checks and letters."

"It is a fine name," Donald declared.

"Sandy comes of good stock. I want to help him all I can. If he has the right stuff in him perhaps we can give him a lift. I wish we might, for I feel we owe his father more than we ever can repay."

It was great news to Sandy when he learned that not only was he to dip his own flock, but that into his hands was to be put the dipping of the entire herd.

"I'm no so sure I can manage it, Mr. Clark," he said modestly, lapsing, as he often did, into his broad Scotch. "I'll do the best I can though, sir."

"I am sure you will."

And Sandy did do his best!

The hot dip, with the proper proportions of lime and sulphur, was prepared, and Sandy tested its temperature by seeing if he could bear his hand in it. Then the long cement troughs were filled.
[41] These troughs were just wide enough so the sheep were not able to turn. Groups of sheep that had been driven from the larger enclosures to the small pens near the dipping troughs were then hurried, one by one, to the men standing at the head of the troughs; it was the duty of these men to push each sheep in turn down the smooth metal incline into the dip. The sheep slipped in easily. As they swam along through the steaming bath other men were posted midway and when a sheep passed they thrust the head twice under water with their crooks so that the eyes and heads—as well as the bodies—might be cleansed. At the far end of the troughs still other herders helped the bedraggled creatures out onto a draining platform where they dripped for a time and were afterward driven back into their pens.

"I shouldn't think the sheep would ever dry!" Donald remarked to Sandy as they watched the process.

"Oh, they do; only it takes a couple of days—and sometimes more before their wool is thoroughly dry," answered the Scotchman.

[42] Donald looked on, fascinated.

The work proceeded without a hitch.

The sheep were fed into the troughs, hurried on and away, only to give place to others. Whenever the dip cooled a fresh, hot supply was added. Within an hour Donald counted a hundred sheep swim their way through the one trough near which he chanced to be standing.

Sandy McCulloch was everywhere at once—now here, now there, giving orders. Gladly the herders obeyed him. They all liked Sandy, not only for his own sake but for the sake of Old Angus, his father, under whom most of them had worked in years past.

"Sandy's a fine lad!" Donald heard one of the herders say.

"There's not a better on Crescent Ranch!" was the prompt reply from a grizzled old Mexican who was ducking the heads of the herd that sped past him.

"He wouldn't make a bad boss of the ranch," murmured another in an undertone.

[43]

"HE WOULDN'T MAKE A BAD BOSS"

[44] Sandy did not hear them. He was too intent on his work. He went about it simply, yet with his whole soul. Day after day his cheery voice could be heard:

"Your dip is cooling, Bernardo! Warm it up a bit. Dinna you know you'll have your labor for your pains unless the stuff is hot as the sheep can bear it? Hurry your flock ahead there, José. Think you we want to be dipping sheep the rest of the season? If those ewes have drained off enough let the dogs drive them back to the pens. They'll rub their sides up against the boards and cleanse the pen as well as themselves. Now bring out the new herd that came last week from Kansas City. You'll find them in pens seventeen and eighteen. We kept them by themselves so they would scatter no disease through the flock. After they are dipped they can be put with the others."

The men took all he said good-naturedly. Sandy used no unnecessary words, but what he did say was crisp and to the point, and the herders liked it. They liked, too, to watch his face when his
[45] lips parted and his glistening white teeth gleamed between them. Sandy had a very contagious smile. He worked tirelessly, and ever as he moved about among the sheep two great Scotch collies tagged at his heels. Busy as he was he often bent down to pat one of the shaggy heads, and was rewarded by having the beautiful dogs thrust their long noses into his hand or rub up against his knees. It was amusing to Donald to watch these dogs dash after the sheep and drive them into the pens. Sometimes they leaped on the backs of the herd and ran the entire length of the line until they reached the ones at the front. They then proceeded to bite the necks of these leaders until they turned them in the desired direction. This done, the collies would run back and by nipping the heels of the sheep at the rear they would compel them to follow where they wished to have them go.

Donald had never seen anything like it.

During the time that the dipping process continued he did not lack for entertainment, you may be sure.

[46] "You'll soon have nothing more to do, Sandy," the boy said one night when he and the Scotchman were sitting in the twilight on the steps of the big barn.

"How's that, laddie?"

"Why, the dipping will be over to-morrow, won't it?"

"Yes; but that is only the beginning of trouble. We shall then put the herd out in the wet grass a while and soften their hoofs so they can be trimmed before the flocks start for the range. Then the bells must be put on, and the bands of sheep made up for the herders."

"What do you mean by making up the herd?"

"I'll try to tell you. Sheep, you must know, are the queerest creatures under the blue of heaven. It ain't in the power of man to understand them. Some minutes they are doing as you'd likely think they would; the next thing you know they are all stampeding off by themselves, and try as you will you cannot stop 'em. They dinna seem sometimes to have a bit of brains."

Donald laughed.

[47] "Aye! You may well laugh, sitting here, but it's no so funny when they go chasing after the leaders and jumping over the face of some cliff. Think of seeing a hundred of 'em piled up dead at your feet!"

"Did such a thing as that really ever happen, Sandy?" questioned Donald incredulously.

"It did so. Didn't bears get after a flock on one of the ranges and didn't the whole lot of scared creatures start running? If they had but waited either the dogs or the herders might have driven off the bears. But no! Nothing would do but they must run—and run they did. One after another they leaped over the edge of the rimrock until most of the flock was destroyed. Folks named the place 'Pile-Up Chasm.' It was a sorry loss to the owner."

"But I don't see why——"

"No, nor anybody else," interrupted Sandy. "That's the sort of thing they do. When they are frightened they never make a sound—they just run. If nobody heads them off they are like to run
[48] to their death; and when anybody does head them off it must be done carefully or the front ones will wheel about and pile up on all those coming toward them. Lots of sheep are killed in this way. They trample each other to death. Why, once a man down in Glen City was driving a big flock along when around a turn in the road came a motor-truck. The sheep got scared and the front ones whisked straight about. That started others. Soon there was a grand mix-up—sheep all panic-stricken and tramping over each other. The owner lost half his herd. Now you see why we have to have leaders."

"Leaders?"

"Yes. That is one part of making up the herds. We must put some sheep that are wiser than the rest in every flock that they may lead the stupid ones. I dinna ken where they'd be if we didn't. We take as leaders sheep that are 'flock-wise'—by that I mean old ewes or wethers that have long been in the herds and know the ways. Sometimes, also, we put in a goat or two, for a goat has the wit to find water and food for himself. Not so the sheep! Never a bit! You have to lead sheep
[49] clean up to grass and to water as well. They can never find anything for themselves."

"Do they know anything at all, Sandy?" queried Donald, laughing.

"They do so. In some ways they are canny enough. They will scent a storm, and when one is coming never a peg will they stir to graze. They give a queer cry, too, when they find water—a cry to tell the others in the flock; and if the water is brackish or tainted they make a different sound as if to warn the herd. Sheep are very fussy about what they drink. It's a strange lot they are, sure enough!"

"I shouldn't think they would know enough to follow their leaders even if they had any," remarked Donald.

"Well, you see there is a sort of instinct born in 'em to tag after each other. Besides, they learn to follow by playing games. Yes, indeed," protested Sandy, as Donald seemed to doubt his words, "sheep are very fond of games. There are a number of different ones that they play. The one they
[50] seem to like best is 'Follow the Leader.' I don't know as you ever played it, but when I was a lad I did."

"Of course I have played it. We used to do it at recess."

"Well, the sheep like it as well as you, and it is a lucky thing, for it teaches them one of the very things we want them to learn. They will often start out, one old sheep at the head, and all the others will fall into line and do just what that sheep at the front does. So they learn the trick of keeping their eyes on a few that are wiser than they, and doing what the knowing ones do. They seem to have no minds of their own—they just trail after their leaders. If we can get leaders that are able to see what we want done it is a great help."

"I should think so!"

"When we have selected our leaders we then scatter markers through each band of sheep."

"And what are markers, Sandy?"

"For a marker you must take a black-faced sheep—or, mayhap, one with a crumpled horn; he
[51] must have something queer about him so you will know him right off when he is mixed in with the flock. We put these markers at the beginning of every hundred sheep. It makes it easier to keep track of the herd."

"I'm sorry to be so stupid, Sandy," Donald said, "but I don't think I just understand about the markers."

"We have two thousand sheep in a band," explained the herder kindly. "Now if one of our markers is missing we reckon that a hundred sheep are gone. No one sheep ever strays off by himself, you

may be sure of that. When sheep stray they stray in bunches. If a marker wanders off you can safely figure that a lot of those around him have gone too. Roughly speaking we call it a hundred."

"But when you have such big bands of sheep and they are moving about I should not think the markers would be in the same place twice," persisted Donald, determined to fathom this puzzling problem.

[52] "You dinna ken sheep, laddie! They are as jealous to keep their rightful place in the flock as school children are to get the first place in the line. They will fight and fight if another takes the position that belongs to them. It is a silly idea, but an aid to the herders."

"And so the leaders and these markers really help the shepherds to manage the flock?"

"Aye. But you're leaving out the shepherd's best helper."

Sandy's face suddenly softened into tenderness.

"His best helper?" repeated Donald.

"Aye, laddie! His dogs!"

Bending down the Scotchman thrust his hand into the ruff of shaggy hair about the neck of one of the collies beside him. There was a low growl from the other dog, who rose and rested his pointed nose on Sandy's knee.

The man laughed.

"Robin," he said, addressing the collie before him, "must you always take it amiss if I have a word for Prince Charlie? You're no gentleman! Down, both of you!"

The collies crouched at his feet.

[53] "I never can speak to one without speaking to the other," he went on. "They are jealous as magpies."

"They are the finest dogs I ever saw, Sandy."

"I pride myself there are not many like them," agreed the herder. "I raised them from puppies and trained them myself. Now Colin, who also goes with me when I go to the hills, is a good dog, but he is not my own. He belongs to the ranch. So do Victor and Hector. You never feel the same toward them as you do with those you have brought up yourself. Robin and Prince Charlie are not to be matched in the county. But to see them at their best you must see 'em on the range."

"I wish I could!"

"So it's to the range you'd be going, is it? Well, well—belike when the herds are made up and we set out your father will let you go up into the hills a piece with me."

"Oh, Sandy," cried the boy, "would you take me? Do you suppose father would let me go?"

[54] "'Twill do no harm to ask him. I must wait, though, until I see the other herders off, and until Thornton is back from Glen City. The flocks must have a few days' rest after the dipping. Poor things! It is a sorry time they have being dipped in that hot bath just after they have lost their thick, warm coats; it makes them more chilly than ever. Then, too, they sometimes get small cuts while they are being sheared and the lime and sulphur makes the bruises smart. I am always sorry for the beasties. Yet after all I comfort myself with thinking that it is better they should be wretched for a little while than to be sick for a long while. It is like sitting in a dark room when you have the measles—you do not like it but you know you will be worse off if you don't do it."

Sandy laughed and so did Donald.

"Then it will be several days before you start for the range, Sandy."

"Yes. I must wait for Thornton. I can't leave your father here alone. He might want me."

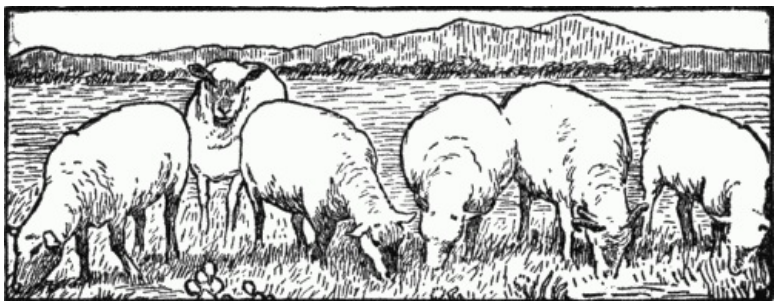
"You have been a great help to my father, Sandy."

[55] "It's little enough I've done. I would do a good sight more if the need came. A McCulloch would do anything in his power for Crescent Ranch or its owners."

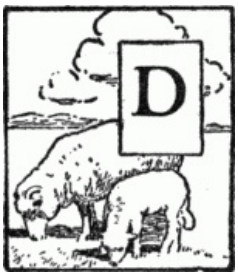
"I believe you, Sandy."

"You do well to believe me, lad, for I speak the living truth!"

[56]



CHAPTER IV
SANDY GIVES DONALD A LESSON



During the next few days preparations for the range went steadily forward.

Most of the herders had been so long at Crescent Ranch that they knew exactly what to do. It was an ancient story to men who had worked under Old Angus and Johnson.

To Donald, however, everything was new. From morning to night he trotted after Sandy until one day the young Scotchman remarked with a mischievous smile:

[57] "You put me verra much in mind of one of my collies—I declare if you don't!"

The boy chuckled.

"It is all so different from anything I ever saw before, Sandy. I am finding out so many things! Why, until yesterday I thought sheep were just sheep—all of them the same kind. Father mentioned Merinos, and I supposed they were all Merinos."

"Well! Well! And so you have found out that they are not all the same kind? How many kinds have you learned about, pray?"

Donald took Sandy's banter in good part.

"You needn't laugh, Sandy," he said. "Lots and lots of our sheep are Merinos, aren't they?"

"Aye, laddie. Merinos are a good sheep for wool-growing. They are no so bonny—having a wrinkled skin and wool on their faces; they are small, too. But their coat is fine and long, and they are kindly. The American Merinos are the best range sheep we have, because they are so hardy and stay together so well. Some sheep scatter. It seems to be in their blood to wander
[58] about. Of course you can't take sheep like that on the range. They would be all over the state."

"I should think it would be a great bother to cut the wool from a Merino when he is so wrinkly," suggested Donald thoughtfully.

"You show your wit—it is a bother. It takes much longer to clip them than it does a smooth-skinned sheep. Besides, their fleece is heavy, for it contains a great deal of oil—or as we call it, yolk. But have done with Merinos. What others did you learn about?"

"One of the herders told me about the Delaine Merinos and showed me the long parallel fibers in their wool; he also pointed out a French Merino, or—or—a——"

"Rambouillet!" laughed Sandy. "I was waiting to hear you twist your tongue around that word. It took me full a week to learn to say it, and even now I never say it in a hurry. We have many a French Merino here; they belong, though, to quite a different family from the other Merinos. You will find them a much larger sheep, and their wool coarse fibered. They are great eaters, these French Merinos."

[59] "Like me!" cried Donald.

"Verra like you!" agreed Sandy. "But it is no so easy filling them up. Why, they will eat a whole hillside in no time. They can beat you, too, on staying out in all sorts of weather. Here in Idaho we generally have fairly mild winters, so our sheep can be out all the year round. We have a few shacks down in the valley where we can shelter them if we have cold rains during the season. They feed down there along the river, eating sage-brush and dried hay from fall until spring. It is

often scant picking, but if it is too scant we give them grain, alfalfa hay, or sometimes pumpkins."

"Why, I never dreamed they stayed out all winter!" ejaculated Donald, opening his eyes.

"In a state where it is as mild as this one they can. Then in the spring when the shearing, dipping, and all is done, we start for the range. We never go, though, until the sun has baked the grass a while, for if the herd crops too early the sheep pull at the new shoots that are just taking hold in the soil and up they come—roots and all. Then in future you will have no grass—just bare ground.
[60] Very early grass is bad for sheep, too."

"What do people do where there are no ranges, Sandy?"

"Their sheep are kept in great fenced-in pastures and fed from troughs or feeding racks. They have alfalfa hay, turnips, rape, kale, corn, pumpkins and grain. The range sheep are the hardiest, though. Sheep were made to climb and scramble over rocky places, and they are stronger and healthier for doing it."

"I'd rather be a range sheep!" declared Donald.

"And I!" agreed Sandy promptly. "But you're no through telling me about the sorts of sheep you learned about. Didn't anybody tell you about the Cotswolds?"

Donald shook his head.

"Oh, that's a sad pity. They are such big, grand fellows with their white faces and white legs. And dinna forget the Lincolns. You will have no trouble in knowing a Lincoln. They are the heaviest sheep we have, and their wool is long. A Lincoln is handsome as a painting; in fact I'd far rather
[61] have one than some of the paintings I've seen. You want to get sight of one when its fleece is full! We have a scattering, too, of Leicesters and Dorset Horns, but the Dorsets are such fighters that I dinna care much for them. They will even attack the dogs."

"I never heard of sheep doing that!"

"Now and again they will, but not often."

Sandy paused and began to whistle softly to himself.

"Are—are those all the kinds of sheep, Sandy?" ventured Donald at last, after he had waited for some time and there seemed to be no prospect of Sandy coming to the end of his tune.

"All! Hear the lad! All! Indeed and that's not all! There are Cheviots from the English and Scotch hill country. You've had a cheviot suit, mayhap. Yes? Well, that's where you got it. Then there is the Tunis and the Persian. California, Nevada, and Texas raise Persians. They are a fat-tailed sheep. We never went in for them here. In England you will find a host of other sorts of sheep
[62] that are raised on the English Downs; most of them are short-haired and are raised not so much for their wool as for their mutton. There are Southdowns, Hampshire Downs, Sussex, Oxfords, Shropshire Downs, and the Dorset Horns. We always like some Shropshires in our herd."

"Oh, Sandy," groaned Donald with a wry smile, "I never, never can remember all these kinds."

"Dinna shed tears about it, laddie. The wool will keep growing on their backs just the same. But it's likely that you'll never again be thinking that a sheep is just a sheep!"

"Indeed I shan't!"

"As for myself," went on Sandy, "I like all kinds; I like the smell of them, and being with them on the range. You'll like the range, too, if your father lets you go. You'll like the big sky, the crisp air, and the peace of it."

"I hope he will let me go."

"Dinna fear! We will ask him to-night or to-morrow. Thornton will be back to-morrow. Then we'll be getting ready the wagons and our own kit."

"What wagons?"

[63] "Did you no see the canvas-topped wagons in the barn? Verra like gipsy wagons they are. We call them prairie schooners because they are the sort of wagon the first settlers crossed the country in. Ships of the Desert they were indeed! In the West we use them even now. When we go to the range three of these wagons go along part way and carry the food, establishing what we call central camps. From these camps provisions are brought to us."

"Don't you come down for your food!" exclaimed Donald, aghast.

"Nay, nay! Never a bit! When we are off, we're off! We never turn back until fall. Our food is sent to us on the range three times a week. A camp-tender comes on horseback bringing supplies on a packhorse or on a little Mexican burro. If we are not too far up in the hills this tender fetches the food all the way; if we are, he leaves it in some spot agreed upon and we go down and get it, leaving the flocks in care of the dogs. The schooners stay near enough to the home ranch so they
[64] can go back and forth now and then and get restocked. We ourselves take a few pots and pans to the range—just enough so we can cook our meals. It is like camping out anywhere else."

"I love camping!" cut in Donald.

"Then you'll like the range for certain."

"I know I shall. I hope I can go. What a lot I am learning, Sandy! Pretty soon I shall know more about sheep-raising than father does!"

"Dinna fret yourself about your father," was Sandy's dry retort. "He needs no pity. He can take care of himself."

Tom Thornton, however, did not seem to agree with Sandy's estimate of his employer. The moment he was back from Glen City he sought out Mr. Clark who, with Donald, was sitting before the fire in the barren living-room.

"The clip is off for the East at last, Mr. Clark," he said. "It is likely you will be following it soon yourself now that you have cast your eye over the ranch and found it running all right. Have you come to any decision as to who you'll appoint as manager?"

[65] Thornton glanced keenly at the ranch owner as he put his question.

"I do not think I shall appoint any manager at present, Thornton," replied Mr. Clark slowly. "I am in no haste to return East. Donald and I are enjoying our holiday here tremendously and for a while, at least, I think I shall stay and manage Crescent Ranch myself."

Thornton drew a quick breath.

It was evident that he was amazed and none too well pleased.

"It is hard work, sir—especially when you are not used to it."

"I am accustomed to hard work."

"The men will take advantage of you, sir—if I may be so bold as to say so. They know you were not brought up to sheeping. They will impose on you and shirk their duties."

"I am not afraid, Thornton," was the calm reply. "I have had a chance to test what they would do when they were dipping the sheep. It was as thorough a piece of work as one would wish to see done, and went smoothly as a sled in iced ruts. I never saw better team-work. Sandy directed
[66] things most ably."

"Sandy does well enough at times," was Thornton's grudging answer, "but you are depending on him too much. You may regret it later."

"I doubt it."

Thornton turned.

"Wait and see," was his curt reply.

After he had gone out Donald rose and came to his father's side.

"Thornton doesn't like Sandy, father."

"I am afraid he doesn't, Don."

"Why?"

"Think of a reason."

"Because Sandy is the son of Old Angus—is it that?"

"Possibly," responded Mr. Clark, "and yet I think it is not wholly that."

"Because Sandy is so good?"

"Perhaps."

"Because we both like Sandy so much?" persisted the boy.

"I shouldn't wonder."

[67] "Well, I don't see how any one could help liking Sandy! He is the best man on the place. He knows so much, and is so full of fun, father! And he is so kind to his dogs and to the sheep! Why, I believe he loves every sheep on Crescent Ranch."

"I am sure of it."

There was a silence.

"Father," burst out Donald when he could bear the silence no longer, "I believe Thornton wants you to appoint him manager of our ranch."

Mr. Clark's face lighted with pleasure.

"I am glad to hear you call it our ranch, Don," he said. "I want you to grow up and go to college and afterward I wish you to choose some useful work in the world. Whatever honorable thing you elect to do I shall gladly help you to carry out. But if it happened—not that I should ever urge it—but if it happened that by and by you wanted to take part of the care of this ranch on your shoulders it would make me very glad."

"I am sure I should like to," cried Donald impulsively.

[68] "No, no," his father responded, shaking his head. "Do not give your word so thoughtlessly. It is a serious matter to choose what you will do in life. You must take a long time to think about it—years, perhaps. You are only fourteen. There will be many an idea popping in and out of your head between now and the time you are twenty. Just stow the thought away; take it out sometimes, turn it over, and put it back again."

"I will, father."

"And now, just for a moment, let us suppose you really are twenty and are helping me with the ranch. The first thing we should be doing now would be trying to make up our minds about this new manager."

"Yes, I suppose we should."

"What should you say about that?"

"I wouldn't appoint Thornton, father!"

His father smiled at the instant decision.

"You must not be so positive in condemning Thornton, Don. We must be careful that we are right before we turn him down. To have the care of Crescent Ranch is a responsible position. We want
[69] a faithful man—somebody we can trust when we are in the East; somebody who will run the ranch exactly as if we were here."

"Thornton wouldn't!"

"That is what I am trying to find out," Mr. Clark said.

"Have you anybody in mind, father—anybody beside Thornton?"

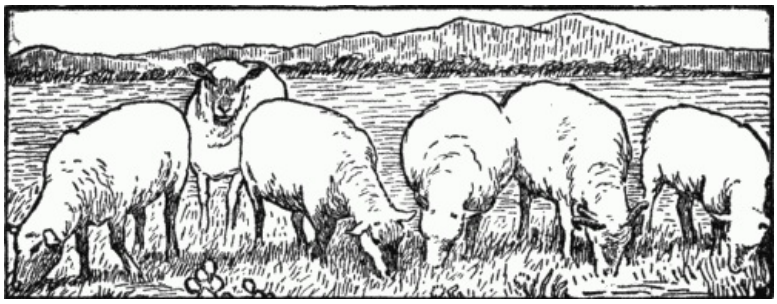
Mr. Clark fingered his watch-chain.

"I am watching my men, Don. It is the little things a man does rather than the big things that tell others what he is. Remember that. Watch the little things."

"I didn't know you were watching anybody at all," avowed Donald. "You did not seem to be doing much but wander round and have a good time."

"I am glad of that," answered his father.

[70]



CHAPTER V
THORNTON HAS A REPRIMAND

[71] Donald had now been long enough at the ranch so that he had discovered a number of ways in which he could be of use. Most of his efforts, to be sure, were confined to aiding Sandy; but as Sandy had almost more work than he could do he greatly appreciated the boy's help. Donald carried meal to the feeding-troughs, fed the dogs, ran errands, and carried messages from one pasture to another. He was not a little proud when one day Sandy bestowed on him the title of first assistant. To think of being the assistant of Sandy McCulloch! Donald's heart bounded! Of course he got tired. The days were long and the work was real. It was, however, good wholesome work in the open air—work that made his muscles ache at first and then grow steadily stronger.

One evening after he had put in an unusually active day and was sitting in the lamplight with his father Sandy came to the door of the room and asked:

"Might I come in and speak to you and Donald, Mr. Clark?"

Mr. Clark laid down his book. He always enjoyed a talk with Sandy.

"Certainly," he answered. "Come up by the fire, Sandy. The chilly evenings still hang on, don't they?"

"They do so. I'm thinking, Mr. Clark, that now Thornton is back again it is time I started for the range. Some of the herders have gone already, as you know; the rest will be off to-morrow. I ought to be getting under way soon if I want to land my flock in high, cool pasturage before the heat comes."

[72] "Very true, Sandy. I have kept you behind because your aid in starting off the wagons and the other herders was invaluable. But, as you say, there is no need to detain you longer. How soon could you get away?"

"I could start to-morrow if I had my permit."

"How is that?"

"As you remember, sir, we must have permits to graze on the range. You have paid enough money to the government to realize that."

"Yes, indeed. And I never grudge the money, either."

"What are permits, Sandy?" put in Donald eagerly.

"Well, laddie, long ago people who raised horses and sheep wandered over all the mountainsides with their herds, and fed them wherever grass was plenty. It was free land. Anybody could graze there. It was a fine thing for a man with thousands of sheep not to have to pay a cent for their food, wasn't it?"

"Of course."

"You would have thought there would have been enough for everybody to feed their stock
[73] peaceably, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Well now, it didn't work out so at all. The sheepmen and the cattlemen came to actual war. The cattlemen declared that their herds would not graze where the sheep had been because of some queer odor the sheep left behind them; they argued, moreover, that sheep gnawed the grass off so close to the roots that they destroyed the crop and left barren land. The sheepmen, on the other hand, complained because the cattle—loving to stand in the water—waded into the water-holes and spoiled them. Each faction tried to crowd the other off the range. Dreadful things happened. Vaqueros, or cowboys, would dash on horseback right into the midst of a flock and scatter the sheep in every direction. Often many of the sheep fled into the hills and their owners never could find them again. Or sometimes the cowboys would drive the sheep ahead of them over high precipices. Cattlemen, being on horseback, had a great scorn for sheep-herders, who were obliged to trail their flocks on foot. The feud between the two varieties of stock-raisers
[74] became worse and worse."

Donald listened breathlessly.

"More men took up stock-raising as time went on, and in consequence more herds were turned onto the range. Soon the results began to show. The young trees of the forest lands were trampled down, or nibbled and destroyed; water-holes, which the settlers had used as their water supply, began to be polluted; homesteaders, who had built houses and settled in the sheep-raising districts, were driven off the range and had no place where they could be sure of feeding their flocks. The worst evil, though, was that one band of sheep after another would feed in the same spot. The first flock would nip off the top of the grass; the next flock had to eat it closer in order to get food enough; and when the last flocks came they burrowed into the earth with their sharp noses and dug the grass up by the roots. Whole stretches of land that had once been green and beautiful were left bare so that nothing would grow on them for years and years. Cattle do
[75] not eat the turf so close as that, and I do not wonder that the vaqueros complained, do you?"

"I should think they would have!" agreed Donald heartily.

"Then, too, the sheep have small, sharp hoofs, you know; these hoofs cut through the soil so that if many sheep travel over a place they grind the earth to powder. Well, that is just what happened. The sheep left the hillsides nothing but patches of brown dust. Things went on from bad to worse until our government stepped in."

Donald kept his eyes intently on Sandy's face.

"What could our government do?" he asked earnestly.

"Well, it could do a good many things, and it did. First, it took about 160,000,000 acres of land as National Forests. It was no longer free pasture. It belonged to the United States."

"I should think the herders would have been pretty cross about that!"

"They were. You can see just how they felt. They made their living by raising stock, and to be deprived of pasturage angered them. At first the government intended to stop all herds from
[76] feeding in these National Reserves. They thought it was time to protect the forests that we might not have floods, landslides, and forest fires. They called it conserving the forests. Afterward, though, they considered that the western people made their living by raising cattle and sheep, and they worked out a plan whereby every owner who wanted to graze on the range should pay a certain sum to the United States Government for a permit, and should be allotted a particular pasture for his herd. The only restriction was that if an owner was granted a permit he must promise to obey the rules of the range. It was a wise and just arrangement. Only a certain number of sheep are now allowed to graze on a given area; there is therefore plenty of grass and no need for the flocks to eat the herbage down close and destroy it. The money for the permits, in the meantime, goes to the government, and enriches the United States treasury. Much of this money is spent in paying men to work on the range and better the conditions there, so really it comes back to the people who pay it."

[77] "I understand," Donald replied quickly, when Sandy paused for breath. "It is very interesting isn't it, father? But I do not see how they can prevent herders who have no permits from grazing on the range."

"They ought not to have to prevent them!" answered Sandy, hotly. "The herders ought to be decent enough to obey the law. If you are granted a favor you ought to be a gentleman in accepting it. Now I'm born of generations of shepherds—poor country folk they were, too; but my people ever had a sense of honor—they were gentlemen."

Sandy drew himself up and threw back his head as he spoke the words.

"I cannot imagine a McCulloch being anything but a gentleman, Sandy," said Mr. Clark, who had been listening carefully to Sandy's story of the range.

Sandy was pleased.

"It's many would not think so, Mr. Clark," he replied, as he stretched out his rough, brown hands.

"One can tell nothing from hands," laughed Mr. Clark. "The heart is the thing that tells the tale. A
[78] clean, honest heart makes a gentleman, and no one is a gentleman without it."

"But you are not telling me how they kept the herders without permits off the range," put in Donald mischievously.

"I almost forgot. The question always ruffles me. You did a bad thing to stir me up about it. I'll tell you. The United States had to put soldiers on the range—think of it—soldiers to protect the government from its own people! And when the government was working to help those very people, too. They called these soldiers rangers. It was their duty to patrol the dividing line of the National Reserves. Every herder who passed in must show his permit and let the ranger see that he had with him no more sheep than he ought to have. That was fair, wasn't it?"

"Perfectly!" nodded Donald.

"Alack! It is a sad thing that there are people in the world who do not love their country well enough to obey her laws. If they are too stupid to see the laws are for their good why can't they trust the government? Here the government was going to give the herders better pastures and
[79] keep their flocks from being molested in them. Wouldn't you think a man with a grain of sense would see the wisdom of the plan!" Sandy's temper began to rise once more. "But no! The herders just felt the rangers who had been stationed to carry out the laws were enemies who had taken away their freedom. So when the rangers did not see them they tried every way to steal into the reserves without permits. Two men would start with their flocks; one would take the attention of the ranger by showing his permit and while the ranger was busy with him the other man would slide into the reserve far down the line where he was not noticed."

"What a mean trick!" cried Donald. "And what if the ranger happened to see him?"

"Oh, he would gallop after him and ride into his flock, scattering it every which way as he tried to drive the sheep out of the reserve. Often the herder would lose hundreds of them."

"Served him right!"

"That's what I think, too," grinned Sandy. "The like are not all dead yet either—worse luck! And
[80] this brings me back to the matter of my permit, Mr. Clark. We are two permits short, sir. The new herds that came from Kansas City are not counted into our old rating. Did you think of that? Having more sheep this year we must pay in more money. You didn't happen to remember, did you, to get permits for those extra flocks?"

"No, Sandy, I didn't; but of course Thornton has attended to it. See, here he comes. We will ask him. Thornton," he called, as the big fellow passed the door, "what are we going to do about permits for the new herds? They are not included in the tax we now pay."

"Don't you worry about more permits, Mr. Clark. I can save you a penny on that," declared Thornton with a knowing wink. "You pay the government enough as it is. Leave it to me, sir. I'll see that the herds get into the range all right, and that it costs you no more. When Sandy goes in

he can talk with the ranger. All the rangers know him and they never will suspect him. In the
[81] meantime Owen can take the Kansas City herd and slip in further down the line. There is no danger of our being caught. Many a herder has done it and had no trouble."

"There will be no sliding sheep into the reserves without permits while I own Crescent Ranch, Thornton," said Mr. Clark sternly. "We will pay what we owe the government or we will keep fewer sheep."

"I was only trying to save you money, sir," Thornton hastened to explain.

"You took a very poor method to do it," was Mr. Clark's cold reply. "The money part of wool-growing is not your care. You are here to raise sheep in conformity to the laws of your country."

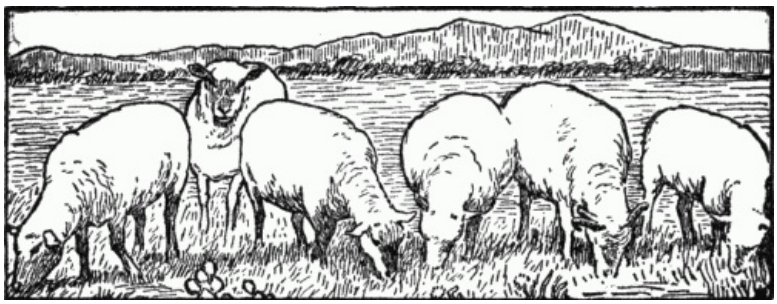
"A mighty poor set of laws they are," grumbled Thornton sullenly.

"You may not like them, but they are for your good nevertheless, and since you are an American it is up to you to obey them. I keep no man in my employ who is not—before everything else—a good citizen."

Thornton flushed, but made no reply.

Then darting an angry glance at Sandy from beneath his shaggy brows, he left the room.

[82]



CHAPTER VI
DONALD'S FIRST ADVENTURE ON THE RANGE

After Donald went to bed that night Mr. Clark and Sandy had a long talk and the next morning when Donald came to breakfast the first question his father asked was:

"How would you like to start for the range with Sandy, son, when the permits come?"

"Oh, father! Will you really let me? I have wanted so much to go! I am a good walker, you know, and I am used to camping. Besides, I should like to be with Sandy," he added shyly.

[83] "I am convinced that you could be with no better young fellow in the world, Don, than to be with Sandy McCulloch," replied Mr. Clark warmly. "Yes, I am going to let you go. I want you to help Sandy, however, all that you can. You must not be an idler and make extra trouble. You must take hold and do part of the work if you go. Do not think," he added kindly, "that I consider you a lazy lad, for you are far from it. You have been a great help on the ranch since you came. I have not been ignorant of many thoughtful things that you have been doing to help. I simply wish to remind you that on the range Sandy will have all he can do. In the midst of your pleasure do not forget your obligation to be useful. If you keep your eyes open you will see things that you can do, just as you have seen them here. You will have a thoroughly good time on the range, and I am glad to have you go. A little later I may want you to come back to the ranch to help me. You will be willing to do that, won't you?"

"Of course, father, I'll come whenever you send for me!" was the instant response. "But what are
[84] you going to do while I am gone? Can't you come too?"

"I'm afraid not. I do not see how I can leave things here just now. Provisions must be portioned out and sent to the central camps. Then there are many repairs to be made and I must attend to those. I wish, also, to look over the books while I am here. You see I have plenty to do. When I get my work done I may ride up into the hills and join you and Sandy."

"I wish you would," answered Donald. Then he added thoughtfully: "Father, if I stayed and helped you, could you get away any sooner?"

The older man smiled at the boy.

"That is generous of you, Donald boy. I appreciate it. No, I do not see how you could help me by remaining. You go with Sandy and when I need you I will send for you. In the meantime Thornton and I will get on very well here."

"Thornton! Isn't he going to the range with one of the new herds?"

"Not at present. There is a great deal of work to be done here. I prefer to keep him to help me."

[85] "I wish you would have somebody else to help you and let Thornton take the herd, father."

"I think he is better here."

"Very well. You know best," declared Donald. "Shall you really feel all right if I go with Sandy?"

"Yes, indeed. I want you to learn every phase of ranch life that you can. Then if anything ever decided you to take up wool-growing as a business you would come to it with a knowledge I never had. It would be far more interesting on that account. If, on the other hand, you decided on some other work in life you at least would have learned something of one of the great industries of our country and would be a broader-minded citizen in consequence."

"I am sure I should, father. Why, ever since I have seen how big America is I am lots prouder that I am an American."

His father smiled at his enthusiasm, then added gently:

"Yes, but size is not everything. It is what a country is doing, or trying to do, to better the
[86] conditions of her people that makes her truly great. You know some of the things that are done to make life happy, healthful, and comfortable for those who live in our cities. Now go out on the range. Look about you. See all that thoughtful, far-seeing men are doing to protect our forests, hillsides, streams; see how our government is entering into the life of those who live not in cities but on farms and ranches. You will find our country is doing much on the range beside merely issuing permits for us to graze there."

"What sort of things?"

"Sandy knows; he'll show you. In spite of the fact that he was born a Scotchman he is as good an American as I know. He appreciates the benefits of this wonderful land enough to desire to be a helpful, law-abiding citizen. He does not accept all the advantages America offers without giving something in return, you see."

"Sandy is too proud to take everything for nothing, father."

"He is also too honest, son. Now go and get your camping traps together. I expect by afternoon to
[87] have a telegram that will answer in place of permits until they can be mailed to us. As soon as they come you and Sandy can start off; and in case they do not come to-day I can send them after you by a mounted messenger. So I think you'd better set out anyway. Wear your tramping shoes and carry your sleeping-bag. You better ask Sandy if there is anything else he wants you to take."

Donald needed no second bidding.

He was in the highest of spirits.

An hour later and he had said good-bye to his father and Thornton, and was on his way to the range with Sandy McCulloch. At their backs a band of about two thousand sheep ambled along, the four dogs, Robin, Prince Charlie, Colin, and Hector, dashing in and out among them to keep the stragglers well in the path.

The trail Sandy was following led across the open fields and ascending gradually, made for the chain of low hills faintly outlined in the far-away blue haze. Beyond these hills loomed more distant mountains, their tops capped with snow. These mountains, Sandy told Donald, were the
[88] foot-hills of the Rockies.

It was quite evident that Sandy was now in his element. He swung along with slow but steady gait, carrying his pack easily and swinging his staff. His eye was alert for every movement of the flock. Now he would turn and draw some straying creature into place by putting his crook around one of its back legs. Sometimes he would motion the dogs to drive the herd along faster.

To an eastern-bred lad who had lived all his life in a city the scene was wonderfully novel. The great blue stretch of sky seemed endless. How still the country was! Had it not been for the muffled tramp of hoofs, the low bleating of the herd, the flat-toned note of the sheep-bells, there would not have been a sound. The quiet of the day cast its spell everywhere. Sandy, who was usually chary enough of his words, preserved even a stricter silence. Although his lips were parted with a contented smile, only once did he venture to break the quiet and that was when he
[89] softly hummed a bar or two of "There Were Hundred Pipers"—a favorite song of his.

At last Donald, who was bubbling over with questions, could bear it no longer.

"Are you always so quiet, Sandy, when you go to the range?" he asked.

The Scotchman roused himself.

"Why, laddie, I was almost forgetting you were here! Aye, being with a flock is a quiet life. You have nobody to talk to on the range—nobody except the dogs; so you fall into the way of thinking a heap and saying but little. I like it. Some herders, though, find it a hard sort of existence. Many a man has sat alone day after day on the range, watching the sheep work their way in and out of the flock until in his sleep he could picture that sea of gray and white moving, moving, moving! It was always before him, sleeping or waking. It is a bad thing for a shepherd to get into that state of mind. We call it getting locoed."

"What does that mean?"

[90] "You must know that on the hills grows a weed called loco-weed. Sometimes the sheep find and eat it, and it makes them dull and stupid—you know how you feel when you take gas to have your teeth pulled. Yes? Well, it's like that. We never let the herd get it if we can help it, and if they do we drive them away from it. They will go right back again, too, and eat more if you do not watch them. That's what loco-weed is."

"And the shepherds?"

"When a man gets dull and stupid by being alone so much, and sees sheep all the time—even when his eyes are shut—the best thing he can do is to leave the range. Some folks can stand being alone, others can't. Why, I have known of herders being alone until they actually wouldn't talk—they couldn't. They didn't want to speak or be spoken to and were ready to shoot any one who came upon them on the range and disturbed them. Once I knew of a herder leaving a ranch because the boss said good-morning to him. He complained that things were getting too sociable."

"I should think the herders would like to see people when they are alone so much."

[91] "Aye. Wouldn't you! But no. In Wyoming there is a law that no herder shall be sent out alone to tend flocks; men must go in pairs. More than that they must have little traveling libraries of a few books. The reason for that is to prevent them from sitting with their eyes fixed vacantly on the moving sheep all the time. It is a good law. Some time, likely, they will have it in all the states."

"I mean to tell father about it. We could do that at our ranch easily," said Donald. "Do you get lonely on the range, Sandy?"

"Nay, nay, laddie. It is many a year that I have been alone on the hills. I love it. There is always plenty to do. Sometimes I play tunes on my harmonica. Again I'll spend weeks carving flowers and figures on a staff. Then I have my dogs, and they are rare company. I sleep a good part of the day, you know, and watch the flock at night."

"But I should think you would sleep at night."

"I couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

[92] "Because there is more danger to the sheep at night. It is then that the wild creatures steal down and attack the herds."

"Wild creatures?"

"Bears, bob-cats, cougars, and coyotes."

"On the range!" cried Donald.

"Where else?"

"But I never thought of such animals being on the range!" murmured the boy.

Sandy flashed him a smile.

"You're no in a city park here, laddie," he observed emphatically. "There are all sorts of prowling creatures abroad at night. They are not after us—never fear. It is the poor, helpless sheep they are after."

"Do you suppose, Sandy, that I shall see a bear?" asked Donald, his eyes sparkling.

"Verra likely. For your sake I hope you may; for the sake of the herd I hope not. I have seen many on the range and have shot not a few. Down at the ranch I have a long chain made of bears' claws."

Donald's eyes opened wider and wider.

"I'd like to see a bear," cried he. "Just see him, you know—not have him hurt the sheep."

[93] "Mayhap you'll get your wish."

Thus—now talking, now lapsing into big, silent pauses, Donald and Sandy jogged on. At sundown they stopped for the night near a water-hole and here the flock was refreshed by a draught from a clear mountain stream. Then Sandy unpacked his saucepans, built a fire, and fried bacon which he laid—smoking hot—between two slices of bread. Was ever a meal so delicious, Donald

wondered! Supper finished, the little portable tent was set up, more wood heaped on the fire, and the camp pitched for the night. Donald was tired out. After the sheep were bedded down around them, he crept only too gladly into his sleeping-bag and was soon oblivious of the range, the herd, and even Sandy himself.

When he awoke it was with a sense of being cramped within a small space. He opened his eyes. It took him a few moments to collect his wits and remember where he was. Ah, yes! Here was the little low tent over his head, and just outside blinked the embers of the fire where he and Sandy had cooked their supper.

[94]

THEY STOPPED FOR THE NIGHT

[95] He sat up softly and peered out into the night.

The country was flooded with moonlight in the brilliancy of which the ridges of the far-off hills stood out clearly; even the pool in the midst of the pasture caught the radiance and gleamed like a mirror. But amid all the beauty a subtle feeling of solitude oppressed him. It seemed as if he was the only being in the whole world.

Further out he leaned.

Then he started suddenly.

All that great sea of human creatures that had surrounded him when he went to sleep had vanished!

Not a sheep was to be seen.

Thoroughly alarmed, he turned.

"Sandy!" he called. "Sandy!"

There was no reply.

With growing apprehension he thrust out his hand in the direction where the herder had been lying.

[96] The chill of the cold earth met his touch.

Terrified he sprang to his feet and bent down in the darkness.

There was no one with him in the tent! Sandy and the herd were gone!

For a while Donald stood very still. He was really alone, then—alone, miles from the home ranch, and not knowing the way back again! This was his first thought. The next was of Sandy.

All that Thornton had hinted flashed into his mind. Sandy was not to be trusted, Thornton had told his father. If they placed any dependence on the young Scotchman they would some time regret it.

Had Sandy deceived him?

What possible object could he have, Donald asked himself, in so quietly departing with the sheep and leaving him behind?

At least he had left the tent.

Had he taken the food and rifles with him?

With beating heart Donald scrambled for his match-box and made a light.

[97] No, there was the knapsack of provisions, the saucepan, the coffee-pot! In the corner, too, stood his own rifle. But Sandy's rifle was missing.

Donald reflected a moment.

Sandy must be coming back. Ah, that was it! But where had he gone? Why should he rise up in the middle of the night, take the flock and dogs, and steal off in this noiseless fashion? The boy could not solve the enigma.

For the present, at least, there was nothing to be done. He glanced at his watch. It was three o'clock. He turned into his sleeping-bag again, having first taken the precaution to put his rifle within easy reach. Yet try as he would he could not sleep. His eyes stared, broad awake, at the shadowy dome of the tent. He wished it was day.

As he lay there straining his ears for the cadence of approaching herd-bells he was conscious of a muffled sound—a dull, soft footfall, as if some one was loitering stealthily about the tent. He heard it again. Then he could distinctly hear a sniffing at the corner of the tent near which the provisions lay.

[98] Donald's heart leaped to his throat.

He could feel the blood pounding under his ears.

Who was coming so near with that velvety tread?

Noiselessly he wriggled out of his sleeping-bag and stood behind the flap of the tent, rifle in hand. Then he heard the unmistakable panting of some heavy creature—some creature so close to him that he could detect the rhythm of every breath it drew. Shaking in every limb he stole a look outside. Just beside the opening of his shelter he could see, clearly defined in the moonlight, a thick, dark shadow outlined on the grass. It was cast by some beast that was halting near the doorway.

In another second it would be upon him.

The boy caught his breath.

There was no time to think.

Raising his rifle, he fired at the great dark mass. Again he fired!

Had he struck the mark?

Another instant would tell.

[99] The creature would either roll over wounded, or would spring upon him.

He jammed back the trigger of his rifle. The tremor that had swept over him at first now left his hand. His arm was perfectly steady, his blood swinging in quick throbs through his body. He fired a third time.

There was a heavy thud, the rolling of a black mass on the ground, a gasp, a growl! Then all was quiet.

Still Donald dared not take any chances. He poured another round of shot into his victim. It did not move.

Then cautiously he crept outside, his rifle tight in his grasp.

There on the ground a shaggy object lay motionless.

He went nearer.

Then he gave a shout of astonishment.

It was a bear!

He had shot a bear—he, Donald Clark, alone and unaided, had really shot a bear! What a story to tell his father; and Sandy, too; and the fellows at home!

[100] Then, for the first time, he was conscious of a trembling in his arms. His knees felt strangely weak. Now that the excitement was over he realized that he wanted to sit down. His rifle slipped from his fingers and he dropped to the turf. There he rested in a dazed sort of way and reviewed the tragedy. Suppose he had not been awake? Suppose the bear had come into the tent while he lay there asleep and unarmed? In his heart he felt very grateful for his escape.

Then there followed a disquieting thought—suppose there were other bears! He had often read of their coming in groups of fives and sixes. It was no time for him to sit limply on the ground. He caught up his rifle and recharged its empty chambers. Then before the tent door he sat until sunrise, anxiously scanning the dim pasture-land and the distant rocky fastnesses. It seemed as if the day would never come.

Presently across the intervale he caught the faint tinkle of herd-bells. Over the brim of rolling green just ahead of him came the flock, Sandy leading them, and the collies nipping at their
[101] heels. The herder strode rapidly forward, waving his sombrero as he came. Donald ran to meet him.

"Are you safe and sound, laddie?" called Sandy when he got within shouting distance. "I have had a thousand minds about you—whether I ought not to have waked you, tired as you were, and taken you with me; or whether it was better to let you sleep. You see when the full moon rose the sheep set out grazing. It's a trick they have. Many a time they have done it; when they once set out no power on earth will stop them. So the dogs and I had to go along too. I reckoned you would sleep until we got back. The herd went farther, though, than I thought they would. I had great trouble rounding them up."

As he talked they neared the camp where Sandy's keen eye took in at a glance every detail of the scene before him. Then he looked sharply at Donald. Under the thick tan the boy could see him pale. His lips became livid.

[102] "Donald, lad, you are not hurt?" he cried, motioning to the bear that lay stretched on the grass.

"No, Sandy, not a bit. Truly I'm not. See! Isn't he a big one?"

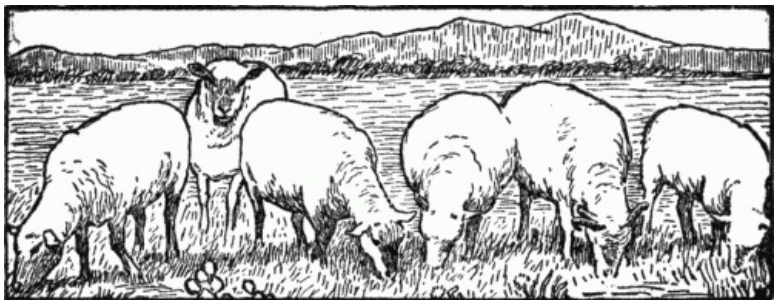
"He is many a size too big for a boy like you to be fighting alone. I was a blind idiot to leave you behind me. Thank the good Lord you got off without a scratch. When I think of what might have come to you——! The next time I'll no go grazing without you, Don. But who would have thought of a bear venturing into these lowlands! He must have been very hungry."

Later Donald had to relate every part of his adventure, and they skinned the black bear and spread his hide out in the sun.

"His coat is thicker than that of most bears at this season of the year. It will make a bonny rug for your father's office, Don. When the camp-tender comes we will send it back by him to the home ranch. Thornton can get it cured for you at Glen City and it will be a sightly present for your father. You are a son worth having!"

"I want to be, Sandy."

"Dinna bother your head. I've seen full a dozen lads worse than you!" was the grim reply.

[103] 

CHAPTER VII
A NARROW ESCAPE

It was not long before Donald felt almost as at home in the hill country as did Sandy himself. They pitched camp and stayed in one place until the grazing began to get scarce; then they "pulled up" and tramped on. Sandy knew the region well and was therefore seldom at a loss to find water-holes. During the night they watched the flock, and as soon as the herd had fed in the morning and was ready to come to rest they left the dogs on guard and slept.

[104] Donald usually slept soundly, for the fresh air and exercise kept him in perfect health. Sandy, on the other hand, slept with one eye open—or one ear open—the boy could never quite decide which it was. But the result was the same; by some mysterious means Sandy was always conscious of every move of his flock.

Donald never tired of watching the young Scotchman. What a picture he was in his flannel blouse, open at the throat; his baggy trousers and sheepskin belt; his sombrero with its band of Mexican leather; and the field-glasses slung over his shoulder! From these glasses, his rifle, and his crook he was seldom parted. His great knuckles, broad from the grasp of his staff, were like iron; and his lithe, wiry body was never weary. And yet with all his strength Sandy was the gentlest of men with his sheep.

To his dogs he was a god! Still, with all their devotion, the collies evidently understood that the sheep were their first care and they never deserted their watch to accompany Sandy when he went on a hunt for water-holes or more abundant feeding grounds. They were wonderfully

[105] intelligent animals—these collies. Donald constantly marveled at their cleverness. They were quick in singling out the slow or wayward sheep and would bite their heels to hurry them along. They also recognized the leaders and it was to them that they communicated the directions Sandy gave them. Yet Sandy seldom spoke to his dogs. A motion of his arm and they would spring forward and follow out his wish. Only when he commanded it did they bark. With their drooping, bushy tails and sharp noses they reminded Donald far more of wolves than dogs. Sandy was kind to all of them, but it was Robin and Prince Charlie of which he was most fond. They had been bred from dogs his father had brought from the Old Country, he explained to Donald. There were few persons in the world for whom he cared so much. Once when Robin had been lost on the range the herder had traveled the hills three whole days to find him.

"What makes shepherd dogs so different from other dogs, Sandy?" asked Donald one day.

[106] "Some of it is in their blood. They seem to want to herd sheep—they can't help it. Then some of the credit of a fine sheep dog is due to his training. Why, I was months working over Robin and the Prince. I had them with goats and sheep from the time they were born. As soon as they were big enough I began teaching them to come when I called 'em. A good dog has got to learn to come to you when you speak. If he has done wrong he has got to come and be punished. Some dogs will run away when they see that you have caught them doing the wrong thing. You cannot let a sheep dog do that."

"But how do you train them so they won't?"

"I will tell you. It seems a heartless sort of way, but I had to do it. I tied them with a long piece of rope; then I called them. As soon as they came I spanked them good and hard, and afterward I'd pat them and give them a scrap of meat. They understood in time. They would come anyway—sure thing. If I whacked 'em it was all the same to them. By and by when they got so they would mind, I didn't have to whack 'em, and now it is seldom I lay hand to 'em. It was no pleasure to

[107] me, I can tell you, and I quit it just as soon as I felt sure they would walk up like gentlemen whenever I spoke, no matter if they knew beforehand that they were to be whipped. You can see why this had to be, Don. Of course you know such dogs have the nature of wolves. In fact the better the shepherd dog, the more like a wolf he is. Now a wolf is a born enemy of sheep. Sometimes the wolf in a shepherd dog will get the better of him and he will turn about and kill the lambs instead of guarding them. If a sheep-dog is once a killer he has to die. You can never be sure of him again. So you cannot turn a dog loose on the range unless he will come to you when you speak."

"I suppose he might start killing sheep and you would not be able to get control of him," ventured Donald, much interested.

"That is just it! He must come even if he knows he is to be shot the next minute. There is no safety for the sheep unless it is so. My dogs would come to me willy-nilly."

"Isn't it wonderful?"

[108] "Yes, unless you have been months and months, as I was, getting them to do it; and even then it is rather wonderful. But a thing quite as wonderful as that is that they know every sheep in the flock. Let a ewe from another fold come in and they will scent her quick as lightning. And there is something else they will do: they understand well as ourselves that sheep will walk right over ledges and into pits, one after another; so the collies will stand guard at the edges of such places and warn 'em off. What is that but human, I ask you?"

Donald nodded.

"The men down at Crescent say," went on Sandy smiling broadly, "that I am daffy about dogs—my own dogs most of all. Well, haven't I cause? There is not a shepherd in this part of the country but would swap his collies for mine; or they'd buy them. I've been offered many a dollar for the two. But I'm no swapping my dogs, nor selling them, either! Sometimes, you know, we fat up sheep for the market and sell them as muttons. We then have to get the sheep into cars to send
[109] them off and it is no so easy if they haven't the mind to go. Well, you should see Robin and the Prince at the job. They will run right along the backs of the herd, biting the necks of the leaders until they get them aimed where they want 'em to go; then they'll nip the heels of the others till they march up the planks into the cars neat as a line of soldiers. Or they will drive a flock onto a boat the same way. It is a great thing to get dogs that can do that. It takes more wit than a man has. Once a sheep-raiser from California saw Robin down at Glen City getting a lot of sheep off to Chicago on the train and he was hot for having him. He offered me into the hundreds if I would let him take the collie back with him."

"And you wouldn't sell?"

"The money ain't coined would tempt me to part with either of my dogs!" Sandy replied, with a contented shake of his head.

He did not speak again, but lapsed into a thoughtful silence.

There were many of these long silences during those days on the hills and to his surprise Donald
[110] had come to enjoy them. At first he had looked forward eagerly to the coming of the camp-tender, who made his rounds three times a week. Not only did this Mexican bring fresh-baked bread, cold meat, and condensed milk to add to the campers' stock of salt pork, lentils, and coffee, but he brought messages from the outside world; gossip from the other herders; and now and then a letter from Donald's father. These visits were as exciting as to meet an ocean liner at sea. Gradually, however, Donald looked forward less and less to seeing the tiny Mexican burros with their loaded paniers wend their way up the hillsides. He grew into the shepherd life until like Sandy he found himself courting the sense of isolation and almost resenting the intrusion of the camp-tender.

He could now understand why the herders who had lived on the range for years were such a silent lot of men. When his father and he had first arrived at Crescent Ranch the shepherds had had so little to say that Donald, who was a sensitive lad, had felt sure that the men did not like to
[111] have them come. Later, however, he had found the herders kindly despite their taciturn manner. It was not ill-will but habitual silence.

"What a lot of things people say that they don't need to, Sandy," he observed to the Scotchman one day.

Sandy chuckled outright.

"So you have come to that way of thinking, have you? We'll make a shepherd of you yet! Well, well, it is true enough. Folks chatter and chatter and what does it amount to? Many's the time they wish afterward they had held their tongues. But it is all as we're made. Some drop into being contented on the range; others cannot bear the stillness. I was ever happy alone in the open; but my brother Douglas was uneasy as a colt."

"I didn't know you had a brother, Sandy!" exclaimed Donald, in surprise.

"Aye, a little lad, five years younger than myself."

"What—what became of him, Sandy?"

[112] "What became of him—that's a question that I wish I could answer! He came to Crescent Ranch years ago with my father and me and was about the place for a long time. But he was all for the city. He hated the quiet of the hills. He wanted to be seeing people and to be around in the rush of things, and he begged my father to let him go to some big place and find a job. My father was ever a strict man and he would have none of the youngster's going off by himself. There came a day, though, when the lad was so sore and unhappy that my father bid him set off for the East. There was no other way to satisfy the boy. But it was a sad time for my father—and for me, too."

"Where did he go?"

"To some city on the coast, I dinna just know where. We were ever thinking he would come back some day—but he never did. It is years now since I have had tidings from him. But sometimes when I am here by myself I cannot but wonder where he is and what has become of him. He'd be a man near twenty-five now."

"Does my father know this?"

"Likely not."

[113] "May I tell him?"

"Aye, to be sure. No boy should have secrets from his father."

"I can't see why a boy should want to," declared Donald. "Why, my father and I are—well, we are the greatest friends in the world! I like to be with him better than any one else."

"So I figure. He must be thinking now and again that he'd like a sight of you at Crescent instead

of seeing Thornton every day."

"What sort of a man is Thornton, Sandy?"

"What sort of a man do you take him to be?"

"I do not like him!" was the prompt reply.

"And wherefore?"

"Oh, I—don't—know."

"A poor reason. Dinna say that about any man until you get a better one."

Donald colored.

Sandy had dropped many a curt word that had brought the boy up, standing. Whatever else the young herder was he was just. Not only did Donald's liking, but his respect for him, increase.

[114] Ah, what happy days they passed together! Donald became so attached to the various camps that he hated to leave them. Sometimes he and Sandy would stay in a spot a week, sometimes ten days; then onward and upward over the great plateaus of the mountains they made their way. These flat reaches of pasture-land were like huge steps. It was hard to realize that they were constantly climbing. Yet up, up, up they went! Each camp was several hundred feet higher than the last. As they went on the pasturage became richer, the air cooler. Clear streams from melting, snowy summits rushed along, leaving pathways of music behind them. With a hawk's keenness Sandy chose the most fertile stretches of grass for the flock.

"The weight of the clip depends on good grazing," he explained to Donald.

"The clip?"

"Aye, the wool. Wool is sold by the pound, you must know. The better the feed, the thicker the wool. We must look out, though, for poisoned meadows. There do be many in this region."

"Poisoned meadows!"

[115] "Fields where poison herbage grows. Hundreds of sheep lose their lives devouring poisonous weeds. Keep your eye out for signs, laddie."

"Signs! Signs up here!"

"Where else? That is one of the many things our United States government does for us. It posts notices of poisoned meadows to warn the grazers on the range."

"That is a pretty nice thing to do!" Donald said.

"Sure enough it is," agreed Sandy. "Some day the survey will have all the water-holes catalogued along with the poisoned herbage, and will then be able to direct herders to the best grazing grounds. That is what the government is busy trying to do now."

"And yet sheep-owners kick at paying for permits," exclaimed Donald. "Why, lots of that permit money must come back in this way to the very men who pay it."

"For certain! And mind what I'm telling you—you will see more things that the government is doing for the herders when you get higher up. You will see great pastures fenced in with coyote-
[116] proof wire—pastures to be used in lambing time so the young creatures will be safe from prairie-dogs."

"Do you have coyotes on the range?"

"Do we? Do we? Folks would know you for a tenderfoot right off if they heard you ask that question! The coyote, I'd have you know, is the pest of the sheepman. He's the meanest critter—but there, why be talking? You'll see for yourself soon enough. The government has spent thousands of dollars killing coyotes on these ranges."

"To help the sheep-raisers?"

"So."

"Well, I don't wonder my father wanted Crescent Ranch to pay its full share for permits. Since we are getting all these advantages, we ought to bear our part of the expense, oughtn't we?" said Donald.

"That's my feeling. We ought to be proud, too, we are bearing it. It's a grand country! I wasn't born here, like you, but I came here as a child, and the bones of my people are here. I mean to
[117] live in America and take what it offers, and wouldn't I be the churl not to give the little I can in return! I haven't money, but I can live up to the laws. Scotchman though I be 'twill no hinder me from making a good American of myself."

"Bully for you, Sandy!" cried Donald. Then he added soberly: "I am going to be a better American when I get back home."

"Dinna wait till then, laddie—be a better one now!"

Sandy chanced to be deftly cutting the outline of a thistle on a spruce staff he was carving for the boy. Donald watched him in silence as he worked in the fading light. The sun had set behind the chain of near hills, and the plateau where they were camping was gray with shadows. Through the dusk they could see the flock lazily browsing among the junipers.

Suddenly there was a cry from Sandy.

He threw down the staff and sprang to his feet.

"The herd!" he shouted. "They're off!"

[118] Sure enough! Without a cry the leaders had started for the rimrock, and in their wake—straight for the face of the precipice—was running the entire flock.

"They're startled!" gasped Sandy. "We must head 'em off. Run for your life! We must get between the brainless creatures and the cliff before they go over."

Donald ran. He had never run so before. His training as a track sprinter stood him in good stead now. But he had never been a long-distance runner. Two hundred yards was his limit. Moreover he was not in training. But he ran—ran as he did not know he could run. He gained on the sheep. Sandy, in the meantime, was waving his arms to the dogs who, understanding his slightest motion, now dashed ahead. The sheep, however, were far in advance by this time. On they sped in mad panic. Donald could run no more. He began to lag, his heart beating like a hammer. Even Sandy, who from the opposite direction was racing for the edge of the rock, slackened his pace.

The race was a hopeless one.

[119] Then without warning, out of the trees at the left side of the field rode a horseman at full gallop. With flying hoofs he cut in ahead of the herd just as they neared the face of the rock.

The leaders swerved, circled, and turned about. The gait of the stampeding flock lessened. The dogs skilfully steered the approaching sheep out to one side where Sandy scattered them that they might not collide with the ranks coming toward them. Gradually the fears of the flock became quieted. Falling into a walk they worked their way into their customary places and turned about, feeding as they went.

Immediately when Sandy saw them safe he pressed forward to the side of the horseman where he beckoned Donald to join him.

"I spied your plight from the ridge above, Sandy McCulloch," called the rider. "The rest of the Crescent herd has gone in to the Reserve and I have had my eye out for you for days. I thought it was about time that you were coming along."

"It's a good turn you've done me this day, Sargeant," Donald heard Sandy say.

"You have done many a favor for me."

[120] "Dinna be talking. It is little I ever did for you. An errand or two perhaps, or carrying a message—but what is that? Any man would be glad to do the same. To-night, though, you have saved my whole herd. We should not have had a sheep left. Here is Master Donald Clark, the son of our owner," went on Sandy, as Donald came nearer. "Let him thank you. Don, this soldier is one of the government rangers."

Leaning from his saddle the horseman put out his hand.

"I am proud," he said, "to meet one of the owners of Crescent Ranch. If you are learning about the range, Master Clark, you cannot be in better company than to be with Sandy McCulloch. There is little about sheeping that he doesn't know; nor is there a cleaner-handed herder to be found. We never need to see his permit or count his sheep. He is no lawbreaker!"

"I hope none of our men are," replied Donald, shyly.

"Crescent Ranch has always had the reputation of being run on the square. We have no complaint
[121] to make," was the ranger's answer.

"We—my father means that it shall be," the boy asserted modestly.

"I do not doubt he does. You will have trouble, though, I fear, in finding another manager who can match Old Angus—or even Johnson. They were rare men who were famed throughout the county for their honesty and common sense."

"We shall try to find some other manager as good."

"May you be so fortunate. Good luck to you!"

With a wave of his hand the ranger cantered into the darkness and was soon lost from sight.

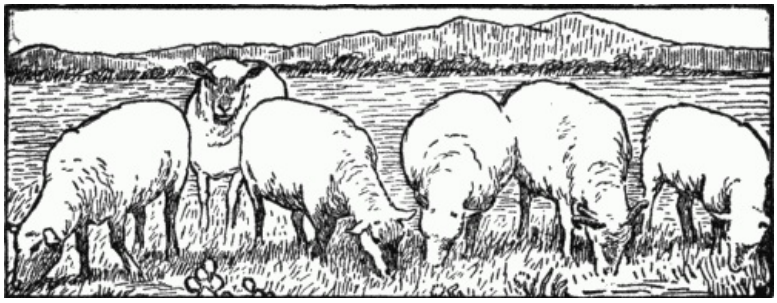
"You see, don't you, Don, that the rangers are not our natural born enemies after all," said Sandy, with a good-humored smile that bared his glistening teeth.

"I should say not!"

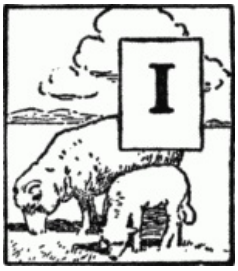
"They are all like that if we but live up to our part of the bargain. I never yet met a ranger who was not friendly and kind. But you cannot have folks for your friends if you do not meet them

half-way."

[122]



CHAPTER VIII
DONALD HAS A SURPRISE



It was something of a disappointment when one morning a week or two later the camp-tender, who had scrambled up over the rimrock, informed Donald that he was to return to the central camp where his father would meet him, and take him back to Crescent.

"The ponies are tethered just below, so you can ride down along with me," said the Mexican. "There is nothing the matter, only your father has more than he can do with but Thornton and Green to help him. He needs you for a

[123]

while. He told me to tell you that in a few weeks you might come back."

Donald looked regretfully at Sandy.

"I'm sorry to go, Sandy. I promised, though, that I would return to Crescent whenever father wanted me; of course I am anxious to help him all I can. I cannot realize that it is June, and that I have been two months on the range. What a jolly time we have had! It seems a pity to go and leave you here by yourself."

"It would not be the first time I have been alone in the hills," smiled Sandy.

"He'll not be by himself either," put in Pete, the Mexican, "for Tobin came up over the trail with me and is to bear Sandy company."

Donald's face brightened.

"I know you'll not be lonely, Sandy," he said, "but suppose anything happened to you—what if you happened to be hurt as Johnson was?"

"Aye, poor Johnson! What do they hear from him, Pete?"

[124]

"Mr. Clark has been to Glen City a number of times to see him. He is getting on finely! The ribs are mending and the hip, too. His heart is the trouble now; he is breaking his heart for Crescent and the range. The doctor says that he will never be able to come back to the ranch. Mr. Clark is going to settle him and his wife on a farm of their own in California, where their son is."

"Oh, I am very glad!" cried Donald. "Father said he should always look out for Johnson because he had been so faithful."

"It is like your father to do it—and like your grandfather, too, Don. May you be as good a man! Now get your traps together and be off with Pete. It's many a time I'll be thinking of you after you are gone, laddie."

"But you know I am coming back in a few weeks, Sandy."

"There's long weeks and short weeks; it all depends on what you're doing," was Sandy's whimsical answer. "Now be off. Why, you'd think I was seeing you to India instead of just down to the lowlands!"

[125]

As he dropped over the rimrock, Donald tried to laugh. It was not until he was mounted upon the little Mexican pony that he gained courage to look up. Outlined against the sky Sandy was standing on a point of rock, waving his sombrero. That was the last Donald saw of him.

Chatting as they rode down the mountainside the boy and Pete pressed forward over the trail. At

noon they dismounted and lunched on salt-pork and pilot bread. Then off they cantered again. The tiny ponies, sure-footed as mules, made their way over the steep inclines of the hilly country with astonishing daintiness, but although they maintained a fair and even speed it was sunset when the white top of the prairie schooner came into sight, drawn up beside a stream and sheltered by a group of great trees. Several Mexican ponies were pastured near it. The curtains at the end of the wagon were parted and fastened back and inside Donald could catch a glimpse of Manuel, the Mexican cook, busily preparing the food. A curl of faint smoke rose from the tin pipe which protruded through the canvas, arching the top of the wagon. Then as Donald looked, into the clearing came the erect figure of his father.

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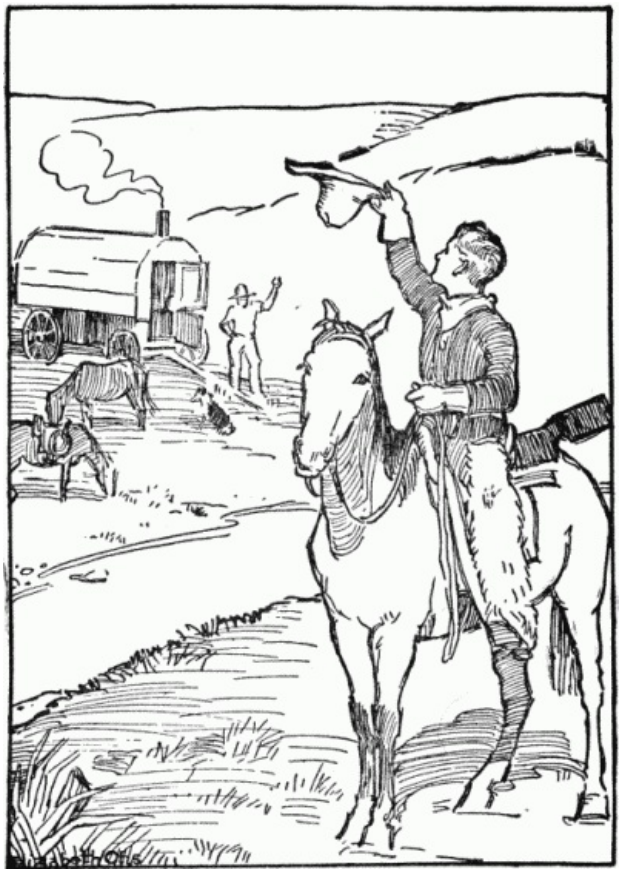

THE PANTING PONY STOOD STILL

[127] The boy gave a shrill whistle on his fingers and touched the spurs to his horse's flank.

"Father!" he called.

Another moment and the panting pony stood still near the wagon, his sides heaving.

Donald dismounted and ran to meet his father.

"Well, well!" was Mr. Clark's first exclamation. "How is this? I sent a pale-faced American boy to the range and I get an Indian in exchange!"

"I suppose I am tanned," laughed Donald. "I know my hands are. As for my face—I have not seen it since I started. We don't have looking-glasses in the hills."

"And you enjoyed your trip?"

"I had the time of my life, father! It is simply bully up there. I wish you had been along."

[128] "I am planning to go back with you in two or three weeks. It seemed a pity to bring you down, but I did need you, Don. If it had only been that I missed you I should not have sent, no matter how much I wanted to see you."

"I was glad to come, sir. How is everything at Crescent?"

"Going well. We are getting in a big crop of alfalfa from the south meadow. That is why I wanted you. You will now have to turn farmer and pitch hay for a while."

"All right!"

And that was what Donald did. For the next few weeks he was busy helping his father harvest the first crop of alfalfa grass, drying it, and storing it away in the great sprawling barn of the home ranch for winter feed. Days of hard work were succeeded by nights of heavy slumber. Life was very real. The boy was doing something—something that told—something that was of use to other

persons; he had a place to fill, duties for which he was responsible. Continually he found himself speaking of "our ranch" and suggesting to his father that "we" do such and such things.

[129] Mr. Clark rubbed his hands with satisfaction. Although he and Donald had always preserved a close comradeship no experience had ever drawn them so near together as had this common interest. It was happiness to each of them. From the time the boy tumbled out of bed in the early morning until he tumbled in again at dusk his whistle could be heard shrill above the click of mowing-machines, and the tramp of horses' hoofs.

At last came the day when the last load of alfalfa was housed under cover; then Mr. Clark said to Thornton:

"Well, Thornton, there seems to be nothing more for which we shall be needed at present. You can deal out the rations and send them to the three central camps without me; you can also order necessary supplies from Glen City. Some repairs remain for you to oversee, but I am sure you fully understand about them, and can manage them without my help. To-morrow, therefore, if the day is fine, Donald and I will set out for the range, I think."

Donald threw his hat into the air.

"To join Sandy, father?" he asked eagerly.

[130] "That is my plan."

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Clark looked amused at his enthusiasm.

"One would think you a born shepherd, Don, instead of a boy who has only been out on the range with a herder."

"Why do you call Sandy just a herder, father?" Donald asked, seeming to fear that the term was a slight to his friend the Scotchman.

"Because he is a herder, son. A shepherd is a man who herds or tends his own sheep—sheep that belong to him; a herder, on the contrary, is a man hired to care for other people's sheep. There is a great difference, you see. Generally speaking, a shepherd will take more pains with a flock than a herder will on the principle that we are more interested in our own possessions than in those which are not our own."

"No one could take better care of sheep, father, than Sandy does."

"I feel sure of that," agreed his father, gravely. "In fact all our herders are honest men—I am
[131] convinced of it. After the next shearing I mean to give to each man a small band of sheep for his own. He may run them with the flocks, sell the wool, and keep the money as a nest-egg. The men deserve a share in the profits of Crescent Ranch and I should like them to have it in return for their splendid spirit of loyalty."

"Even Thornton?"

Mr. Clark hesitated.

"I have been watching Thornton," he admitted slowly. "That is why I kept him with me, and why I stayed behind."

"Why, I never thought of that being the reason!"

"It was my chief reason."

"But now you are going off and leaving Thornton alone," Donald said, somewhat puzzled.

"Yes, and I am leaving him in a position of trust, too. The supplies and much of our business is in his hands. He knows it. If he proves himself worthy, I shall appoint him, when we leave here, as manager in Johnson's place; if he abuses the confidence I am placing in him he will force me to
[132] appoint some one else. I wish to be perfectly fair."

"But I do not like Thornton," declared Donald.

"We must never be guided by our prejudices, Don."

"And anyway," went on the boy, "I don't see how you will know what he is doing. You will be miles away in the hills. He could do almost anything he chose. Have you left some one to watch him, father?"

"No, indeed, son. That would be a mean method; don't you think so? To set a trap for a man, or to spy upon him would be contemptible!"

Donald hung his head, ashamed of the suggestion.

"No," continued Mr. Clark less severely, "I have left no one on guard over Thornton but himself. I am really trusting him."

"You will never find out what he does, then."

"Yes, I shall."

"I don't see how."

"Thornton himself shall tell me."

[133] Donald gasped.

"He never will tell you, father!" announced the boy positively.

"Wait and see. Now let us think no more of Thornton, for it is of Sandy that we are to talk. He has a great surprise for you."

"A surprise for me!"

"Yes."

Mr. Clark studied the lad's mystified expression with pleasure.

"A surprise for me!" repeated Donald. "What can it be!"

"You will see."

"Aren't you going to tell me?"

"No, not a word. It would spoil Sandy's fun."

"A surprise!" reiterated Donald over and over.

As they rode from the central camp up over the rough trail Don speculated constantly as to what could be in store for him. It seemed a long journey for he was impatient to solve the waiting enigma. What surprise could Sandy have concocted? At the border of the Reserve they met the
[134] ranger who chanced to be patrolling that portion of the government line. He remembered Donald very well and greeted him kindly; he also had a cordial word for Mr. Clark. Donald, however, begrudged even this brief delay and was glad when they plunged into the woods and were on their way through the National Forest.

Pete, the Mexican camp-tender who had come with them as guide, knew the country as an American boy knows his A B C's. He hunted out sheltered nooks where they could camp at night, taking great care to build the fire on a rocky base that it might not set ablaze the brush and litter of pine-needles about them.

"Many a careless shepherd sets a forest fire through being thoughtless," he said. "Acres of timber will be burned off a hillside by one person who did not put out his fire, or scattered sparks in the dried underbrush. Old Angus trained us Crescent men always to build our fires on a flat rock if we could; then there is no danger of our doing damage in the reserve or elsewhere."

"It is a wise plan," Mr. Clark said heartily. "I wish all herders were as careful."

[135] So they journeyed on—now in the sunlight of the plateaus, now in the shadows of the forest. Then one morning they suddenly emerged into an emerald meadow glowing with sunshine. There a beautiful sight met Donald's eye.

Spread out like a fan the herd was grazing on the rich herbage of the mountain pasture, their backs to the brilliant light as was their wont. But of these details Donald was not conscious. What held him spellbound was the miracle that had happened in his absence. Now he knew the surprise that Sandy had for him! Beside every ewe in the flock stood a tiny white lamb!

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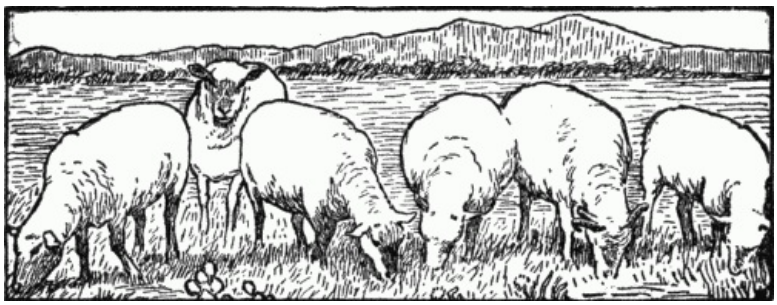
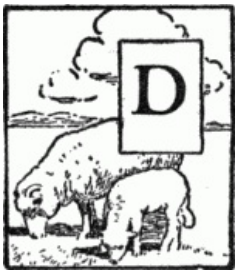


CHAPTER IX
A SECOND ADVENTURE



Donald's delight at being back on the range was equaled only by Sandy's pleasure at having him there. The first thing, of course, was to display the lambs to the boy and Mr. Clark.

With no little pride the Scotchman led the newcomers over the pasture, pointing out the finest blooded creatures in the flock.

"One would think, Sandy, that you were a mother hen with a brood of chicks!" laughed Donald's father. "Well, you have a right to be pleased with your herd. You have a fine lot of lambs."

[137] "They are no so handsome just now, sir," Sandy chuckled. "But give them time! A few weeks more, and a winsome sight they'll be."

"Are—are—lambs always so long-legged?" queried Donald timidly, anxious not to hurt Sandy's feelings. "These seem to have no bodies at all—just legs."

"That is their nature, lad. They have only enough body to keep their legs alive. Young lambs are ever like that. Later they fill out. It is their strong legs that enable them to travel with the flock as soon as they are three or four weeks old. But I am proud of them—legs or no legs. Now that they are here, our next task is to bring them through alive. We have lost but a few thus far. Luckily we had several sets of twins, so we have been able to give a lamb to every mother sheep that lost her baby. We fasten the strange lamb inside the skin of the dead one, and the mother is as well pleased as if she had her own back again."

"What a funny idea!" Donald said.

[138] "Yes, isn't it? You see sheep recognize their young merely by scent. The power of smell is remarkably keen in all sheep. They can tell their babies no other way. We do not want any of the ewes grieving because they have no lamb—they do grieve, poor things—so we have to fool them a little. It is a fair thing to do because the ewes with twins do not need two. They are just as happy with one," explained Sandy.

"And now you will have a big, big flock to take care of, won't you, Sandy?"

"Aye! There is much more to do now. I am glad you have come back, Don, for I can put you to work."

"You must put me to work also, Sandy," Mr. Clark observed, smiling.

Sandy shook his head.

"Well, I reckon not. It would be a fine thing for me to be asking a gentleman like you to put your hand to anything, now wouldn't it!"

Evidently the idea amused the herder.

[139] "Why not?" Mr. Clark asked seriously. "I am used to putting my hand to much hard work when I am at home. Everybody in this world works one way or another. Some of us work with our heads, some with our hands; but so long as it is all honest, helpful work and we do it the best we can, we are all on equal footing, Sandy. Now if you were in my office in Boston I might be teaching you kinds of work that would be new to you; here you can teach me. Try and forget everything, and just consider me a person who is interested in sheep and wants to learn about them. Let me join Donald in helping all I can."

"I'll take you at your word then, sir, since you urge me. I'm no denying it will make matters simpler. There is enough to do—more than enough, and extra help will be welcome. Luigi will be going down with the ponies, I suppose, sir."

"Yes, he is to take them back, and stay and aid Thornton at the ranch."

[140] "Then you will have a place to fill right away, Mr. Clark. Some of the men who have been helping have gone down already, but I have kept Tobin and a couple of the Mexicans. Still it is no so easy to protect so many lambs from the coyotes. Lambing time is their great feasting season. A coyote is a mean creature, sir. Yet despise 'em as you may you cannot help admiring their cunning. There is no smarter animal alive than a coyote!"

"Tell us about them."

Sandy dropped down on a rock beside Mr. Clark and Donald.

"A coyote, as of course you know, is a wee bit wolf, about the size of a fox, and there is no feed he enjoys so well as a young lamb. Coyotes seem to know when the lambs come and they make ready to raid the flocks. You'd think folks would be bright enough to catch 'em, but there ain't wit enough in the world to get ahead of them. They're the cutest! The tricks a coyote will invent, sir, pass belief. In spite of the fact this pasture is fenced with coyote-proof wire the creatures manage to get in—goodness only knows how."

"Have they bothered you much, Sandy?"

"Have they! Haven't we built fires round the herd every night and patrolled the whole distance, back and forth, until light? Luigi, Bernardo, Carlos, and I have been on our feet from twilight until sunrise, tramping like sentinels; yet with all our care we have lost six lambs already. Six is

[141] not many when you consider the numbers some herders lose, still it is just six too many. So you see if Luigi goes down over the trail to-day with the ponies we can find work for you and Donald to-night."

"Oh, I think it will be great fun to patrol!" cried Donald.

"Think you so? Well, mayhap you will find it sport, since you haven't been doing it night after night for two weeks, lad."

Donald regarded him good-naturedly.

"There will be plenty of work waiting you by day, too," Sandy went on. "Just now we are busy inserting the flock mark in the ear of each lamb—a metal button with a crescent on it. The next ranch to ours is Anchor Ranch, and their herd is marked with an anchor, while down beyond lies Star Ranch. It behooves us to keep close track of our herds and mark them carefully. Then in addition to the marking we must dock the tails of the lambs lest they become foul; and we must record every lamb. We have a book where we enter the number of the mother and opposite it the
[142] number of her lamb. That is the way we keep track of the breeds."

"Why, I had no idea you had so many things to do, Sandy," said Donald. "It is almost as bad as taking the census."

"It is, and it all has to be done correctly, too. You can look up in the books the history of every sheep we have at Crescent Ranch. The pure breed lambs have to be registered with the Breed Secretary, you know."

"Sheep-raising seems to lead from one thing into another," reflected Donald. "In the East none of us ever think of all that the wool goes through before it is made into clothes for us."

"It is better than any story," was Sandy's reply. "Herders get tired of it sometimes, but I never do. Sheeping is in my blood, I reckon. What with herding and trailing the flock, what with bears, and bob-cats, and cougars, and coyotes—I dinna see how it would ever be dull."

"That is because you love your work, Sandy," said Mr. Clark.

[143] "I do. Take me from the ranch, sir, and blindfold me even, and I verily believe I'd find my way back again. Now a bit more about the coyotes. If you are to be of help you must hear all I can tell you so that you will know the better how to fight 'em. Sometimes they'll yelp like a dog and trick you into thinking your own collies are in trouble; but do not trust them. 'Twill be no collies but themselves that are barking. Again they will cheat you into believing that they are far away, so gentle will be their cry; that is to throw you off the track. Or they will bark in two keys as if there were twice as many of them as there really are. They are the canny ones! Then when you pick up your gun and go where you think they are, they will no be there; 'twill be at a different spot they are at work."

"Well, Don," said Mr. Clark, "I do not see but you and I have something ahead of us. I am afraid we shall be of very little help, Sandy. Why, one ought to be an expert to catch such a gamester as a coyote!"

[144] "Then you're no grudging us the loss of six lambs, Mr. Clark."

"I do not see how you did so well—to lose only six in a great flock like this!"

"But even so, sir, I was that wrathful when I found I had been outwitted I could have cried. You see six or seven coyotes put their heads together, as they have a way of doing, and cut a group of lambs off from the herd—got between them and the flock. It took the dogs to drive 'em away. Robin and the Prince are great fighters, and Colin is not far behind. Before we got rid of them, though, we had lost three lambs. The next time they tried a different trick: part of them barked and drew the dogs to a corner of the pasture, and then the rest came down on the unprotected end of the fold and carried away three more lambs."

"Is there nothing that will stop them?" asked Donald.

"We have tried many things. Some herders put strychnine in the carcasses of dead lambs and poison a few of the coyotes; most of them are too clever to be caught that way, though. The
[145] government has also killed many. Perhaps to-night, Don, you may have a share in the good work. But I warn you do not send a bullet through one of my dogs, thinking his barking is the yelp of one of these range thieves."

"Indeed I'll be careful," Donald promised, as he sprang up and ran to the edge of the rimrock to wave a good-bye to Luigi, who was disappearing round a curve of the trail.

"The lad is happy as a king here on the range, Sandy," Mr. Clark remarked.

"He takes to it as if he had been bred on the hills, sir."

"I wish he might like the work well enough to go into the business with me some time."

"There is no telling. He is but young yet. When he is old as I, mayhap he may choose to settle down and be a wool-grower."

"How old are you, Sandy?"

"I should be near thirty, sir, I'm thinking, though I haven't always had a birthday cake out here on the hills," was the whimsical reply.

[146] "Thirty! A rare age for such a level head as yours!"

"I dinna ken about the head, Mr. Clark. My father used to say it was the heart that counted most. Now what say you to a basin of hot lentil soup?" inquired the Scotchman, changing the subject. "You and Donald must be hungry."

"I believe we are. Let us go down to the tent. I see Donald there already, building the fire."

After having eaten a hearty meal they left the flock which was resting or grazing near by in charge of the dogs, and Mr. Clark, Donald, and the men turned in to snatch a few hours' sleep in anticipation of the long watch before them.

It was deep twilight when they awoke.

Sandy shook Donald by the shoulder.

"We must be up and away, laddie," he said, as the boy turned drowsily. "It's a man's work—real work you're doing here; you are no playing sheep-raiser. Rouse your father, snatch a bit of bread, and come and help me set the watch-fires. See, the Mexicans are already ahead of us."

With quick step he was off.

"Dinna forget your rifle," he called as he went.

[147] Donald was on his feet.

"Father," he shouted, "Sandy says we must be starting out."

Mr. Clark sat up.

"I promised to obey Sandy, sure enough," he yawned, "and I like him all the better for routing me out, sleepy though I am. I will be with you in a moment. Where is Sandy?"

"Setting watch-fires along the outer edge of the pasture. He says to bring your rifle."

A little later and they had overtaken the Scotchman, who was striding along through the darkness, swinging his lantern.

"It is here I'll station you, Mr. Clark," said Sandy simply. "Patrol this border as far as the bonfire; then turn backward and go until you meet Bernardo. Donald will pace between the next two fires, and the Mexicans and myself will complete the circle round the flock. Be careful lest bob-cats steal down on you unawares; they come softly as mice, make no fuss, and kill so quickly that they seldom disturb the herd. It is likely we will no be troubled with them because of the fenced-in
[148] pasture. Now cougars will leap the fence without the dogs knowing them to be at hand, too, and will take their kill off over their shoulders and disappear. We have seen no cougars, though, this year, and here's hoping that we won't. While you are patrolling I'd advise you to fire now and again, even though no beasts are in sight; it scares them off. Now I've told you all I can. Good-night."

Away into the falling darkness sped Sandy.

Donald began his patrol. As he trudged back and forth on his beat he could catch an occasional glimpse of the Scotchman, who stopped to toss a few sticks on the fire or halted an instant to exchange a word with one of the Mexicans. The boy could also see his father's dim figure walking to and fro. It was dull work, this monotonous tramp. Donald looked up at the canopy of stars and thought he had never seen so many. He yawned, and yawned a second time. Still he kept up his even jog along the outskirts of the fold.

[149] Suddenly he was conscious of a low whine not far away. It was repeated. Then came a loud barking as if a pack of wolves were on the other side of the pasture. He heard Sandy's voice echoing on the clear air. Two shots followed. Perhaps the coyotes were over there; or could it be a cougar or a bear? How he longed to be in the midst of the sport! Why should he stay on this quiet, unmolested border of the pasture? Nothing was happening here! An impulse to join his father or Sandy swept over him; then a thought rose in his mind and held him back—if he left his patrol he would be a deserter, a deserter as blameworthy as any sentry who fled from his post. Straightening up proudly, the boy resumed his even pace.

It was just as he turned that he caught sight of a crouching form slipping along the ground toward the edge of the flock. With a sharp flash Donald's rifle rang out. He shot into the air, not daring to aim toward the pasture lest unwittingly he injure some of the sheep in the darkness. His shot was answered by a yelp and a quick rush. Colin bounded to his side, sniffed, and darted
[150] into the herd.

A commotion followed.

There was a struggle, a low growl of rage.

Then the collie trotted back to Donald's side dragging in his teeth a limp mass which he dropped at the lad's feet.

The boy struck a match and turned the creature over with his foot.

It was a coyote!

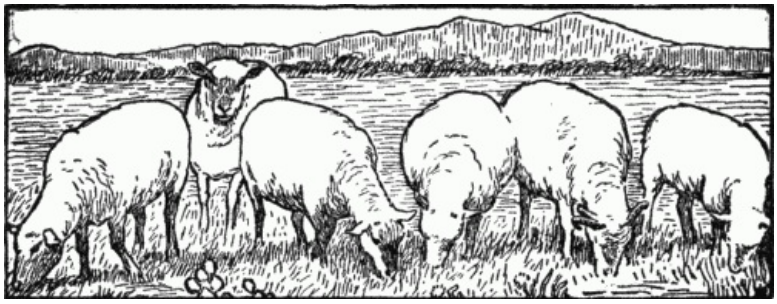
Then how glad he was that he had not left his post!

At dawn Sandy came to relieve him. The herder glanced first at the dead coyote, then at some faint tracks in the moist earth.

"You have interrupted a midnight orgy, Don," he declared at last, rubbing his hands together as he always did when anything pleased him very much. "Here are the marks of at least four coyotes that were stealing down on the flock when you fired. You got this one, and evidently drove off the others. I wish we had had as good luck on our side of the fold. In spite of his watchfulness
[151] Bernardo lost two lambs. He is one of our best herders, too, and he is sore about it. You have done a good night's work, lad. I am proud of my pupil!"

And as Donald heard Sandy's words his lips parted in a smile and he felt he would have patrolled a line twice as long to have earned the young Scotchman's praise.

[152]



CHAPTER X
A PREDICTION THAT CAME TRUE

When the lambs were three weeks old Sandy decided to break camp, leave the fenced lambing-pasture, and push on to higher ground.

"The sun is getting hot and we must have cooler quarters," he explained. "By nature sheep seek elevated ground, you know, and their health is better there. Now that their fleeces are getting so much thicker the poor beasts are too warm in the low places. What is more, they need the exercise of climbing. Grass, too, is becoming scant and we must not eat it down too close."

[153] Mr. Clark agreed.

Therefore a clear July morning saw the vast herd winding its way up the steep incline of the mountainside. Sandy went on ahead, guiding the flock to the best pasturage and the freshest water-holes. The lambs trotted at their mother's sides or frisked after them with the playfulness of kittens. When a plentiful water supply and rich grass was found Sandy often delayed the upward march a week or more, that the flock might make the most of the lush herbage. When feed was meager there were days of scrambling up rocky stretches, and nights of patrolling the fold. Then more days of climbing would follow. Sometimes a scarcity of water forced them to press on against their will.

They had now reached a high elevation, but the warmth of the July weather rendered the coolness welcome. The sheep gladly sought out the forest shade or, when they were above the timber-line, rested in the shadow of the high rocks. This rough land seemed to be the favorite
[154] place for their sports, and Donald and his father were never tired watching them.

A single sheep would mount a boulder, from which vantage ground he would stand looking down at the herd. In a moment several of the flock would rush forward, butt him from the rock, and one of them would take his place, only to be driven down and succeeded by the next victor. The sheep often played this for a long time.

"It is a good game, too," declared Sandy, "for to rush up the side of a high rock like that and not slip back makes them sure-footed."

Another game the flock sometimes played was Follow the Leader, one old ewe marching ahead,

followed by a line of sheep that went wherever she led them.

"They play it almost as well as we did at school," said Donald, much amused.

"That is a useful game too," went on Sandy. "By playing it the young lambs learn to follow the others, and do what they do. That is one way they get training to keep in the herd and obey the mind of the leader. It is really more of a lesson than a game. I suspect, though, they are like us—
[155] so long as they think it is a game they like to play it. Perhaps, now, if we were to hint to them it was a lesson they might never play it again."

Donald chuckled.

There were many times when it seemed to him that Sandy must be a boy of fourteen instead of a man of forty; yet the next moment the Scotchman would address him with the gravity of a grandfather, and immediately Donald felt very young indeed. A strange mixture of youth and wisdom was Sandy McCulloch!

As the lambs were now old enough to travel with the flock there was no further need for the Mexicans to linger on the range, and they therefore went back over the trail to busy themselves at the home ranch until shearing time. The camp-tender, too, did not now take time to make the difficult journey up into the mountains, but left supplies at a given spot in the lower pastures, or met some of the party half-way and delivered over the provisions. If the rations were left it fell to the lot of one of the campers on the upper range to ride down on the pony and bring back "the
[156] grub," as Sandy called it. Once when Mr. Clark went down it was only to find that the supplies had been scented out by a bear and dragged away; in consequence the party on the mountain were forced to get on without bread or fresh provisions until the tender made his next round.

At times it was Donald's turn to make this trip; on other days Sandy or Bernardo went. As there was always the chance of meeting a grizzly or a rattler the journey was not without its perils.

Thus the summer passed.

Then came the fall days, when threatened cold made it necessary to turn the heads of the herd toward the lower hills of the winter range. Downward they wended their way. Flurries of snow caught them unawares and at these blizzards Sandy's face always became grave, for it was in one of these sudden squalls that his father, Old Angus, had perished. Although the days were chilly and the nights still colder, Mr. Clark and Donald kept resolutely with the flock; but when they reached the lowlands and the Scotch herder directed his band of sheep toward the bronzed fields
[157] of sage-brush and dried hay lying along the river valley Donald and his father bade good-bye to Bernardo and Sandy and returned to the shelter of the home ranch.

Thornton welcomed them.

There was something new in his manner—a strange, unaccustomed dignity which lent to the man a charm he had never before possessed.

"Thornton did not shuffle toward us and look down as he usually does," observed Donald to his father when they were alone. "He is different, somehow. What is it?"

"I am not sure, son, but I cannot help feeling that Thornton has come to his best self. The best is in all of us. It is not, however, always uppermost. Perhaps it is going to triumph in Thornton."

There unquestionably was a change in the big rough man.

That evening he got out the books and went over all the accounts with Mr. Clark, telling him just what supplies he had ordered; what they had cost; and how much he had paid out in wages. In
[158] dealing with financial matters Mr. Clark was on his native heath. He studied the columns of figures critically. The accounts were correct to a cent, and he could readily see that every reasonable economy had been practiced in the management of the ranch.

"You have done well, Thornton," he said after he had finished looking over the bills and papers. "I am greatly obliged to you for your faithful work."

Donald saw a flush of pleasure rise to the man's cheek.

"My work has not always been faithful, Mr. Clark," Thornton declared with sudden determination. "I want to tell you, sir, that I was not setting out to be faithful to you at all. I wanted to get Johnson's place, and then I meant to run Crescent Ranch to please myself. I am going to confess the whole thing; I want to confess it because your confidence in me has made me ashamed of myself. You must have known somehow that I was not running things as they ought to be run, else you would never have come out here. Sandy knew it—so did all the old herders. Yet, save
[159] about the permits, you never have spoken a word of reproof, but have gone on trusting me. When you looked me so kindly in the eye and went away leaving me in care of the whole home ranch I somehow felt that you expected me to do the square thing."

His voice faltered.

Donald, who had been an uncomfortable listener, now rose and tried to steal out of the room unnoticed, but Thornton called him back.

"Do not go, lad. You may be owning Crescent Ranch some day, and I want you to hear what I have to say. There is not much more to tell. After you and your father had gone to the range with

Sandy I sat down and thought it all over. Here I was, alone! There was no getting away from myself. I reviewed all the plans I had made—how I was going to stock some of my friends at Glen City with provisions and charge it up to Clark & Sons; how I was going to pad the accounts and keep the money—I went over the whole thing, and I felt mean as a cur. It came to me that it was
[160] a pretty poor game. Then another plan came into my mind. You were giving me a chance to be decent—why didn't I take it? I did. I have been absolutely honest about running the ranch while you have been gone, Mr. Clark. I can look you and Donald in the eye just as Sandy, José, Bernardo, and the other men do who have been working for your interest all these years."

Mr. Clark put out his hand.

"I am glad you told me this, Thornton," he said quietly, "and I believe you. See, here is a sheet of paper; it is scrawled over with letters and figures of every sort. Turn it over."

Wonderingly the man obeyed. Nothing was written on the other side. It was a blank page.

"You see there is nothing on that side," went on Donald's father. "We can there write what we will. Turn your own page the same way. Let us forget the past. Now for the future! Will you take the position as manager of Crescent Ranch?"

Thornton was aghast.

"I, sir! I? After all that has happened?" he contrived to stammer.

"Why not?"

[161] "I couldn't do it, Mr. Clark. Not one of the men would believe in me. No, I am going to leave this place after the shearing is over, and go somewhere where no one knows me; there I can make a fresh start. And anyway, even if all this had not happened, I am not the man to be manager here. I have neither the confidence of the herders, nor the necessary knowledge about the flocks. But there is a man on Crescent Ranch who knows everything there is to know about sheep-raising—a man honest as the day, and who loves the place as if it was his own—Sandy McCulloch, sir. He is the only man for the position—there never has been any one else. Put him in as manager and you will never regret it."

Donald sprang up.

"Oh, father, do put Sandy in," he cried. "I never thought of Sandy as manager—he seems so young!"

"I have thought of him all along," Thornton continued. "That is why I was so ready with a word against him every chance I got. I have been afraid of him—afraid of his honesty and his goodness.
[162] It was not that he would tell tales about me; Sandy is too big-natured a man to do that. He would scorn to use a mean weapon. No, it was just because he was what he was that I feared him."

Mr. Clark was silent.

"You owe it to Old Angus, Sandy's father, to give the lad the place, sir," pleaded Thornton.

"And if I did what is to become of you, Thornton?" asked the owner slowly.

"Oh, I don't know. It does not matter. I will stay here until after the shearing, for it is a busy time and I might be of help. Then I can go and look up something else."

Donald watched his father as he bent forward and stirred the fire. The well-known little wrinkle had come in his forehead and the boy knew that his mind was busy.

"Thornton," said Mr. Clark at last, "have you relatives here in the West?"

"No, sir."

"Are you alone in the world?"

"Yes."

[163] "Would you like to go East with Donald and me when we return to Boston after the shearing?"

Thornton regarded him blankly.

"I need another man in my office," explained the wool-broker. "You have proved yourself a good accountant. Furthermore it would be greatly to our advantage to have a reliable helper who is familiar with ranch affairs and knows Sandy, the new manager. Then if I wanted some one, as I often have in the past, to make the trip out here and attend to business for me, you could do it."

Thornton got up and walked to the window. They could not see his face. He stood with his back toward them, looking out into the darkness.

Then suddenly he wheeled and came to Mr. Clark's side.

"You took me by surprise, sir," he said unsteadily. "I cannot thank you. I know well it is another chance you are giving me. I will take it and go East, and there I will prove to you that in the future you can trust me."

"You have proved that already, Thornton," replied Donald's father, as he smiled up into the face
[164] of the ranchman and gripped his coarse brown hand.

After Thornton had left the room Donald and his father were silent.

At last the boy said:

"You were right about Thornton, father. He was honest with you, just as you predicted he would be."

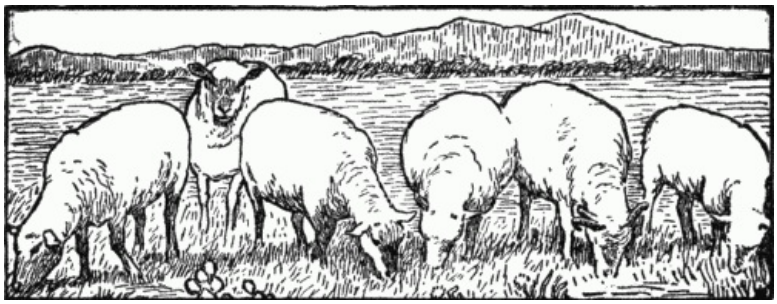
"I believe if you expect the best of a man you will usually get it," replied Mr. Clark. "There is something big and honest in each of us which springs to meet the big and honest in somebody else. Appeal to that best side of people and it will respond. I have seldom known the rule to fail. Now just one thing more. Do not forget that this man has given us his confidence. It is a thing we must hold sacred. Never repeat what you have heard. And above all remember that Thornton deserves both admiration and respect, for it is only great natures that admit they have done wrong."

Donald nodded.

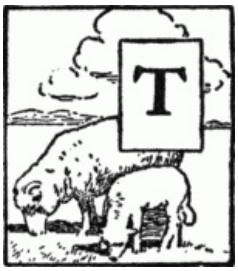
"I like Thornton better than I did before father," he said softly.

"So do I, son!"

[165]



CHAPTER XI
THE SHEARING



There was great rejoicing among the herders when, in the latter part of April, they drove their flocks to Glen City for the shearing, and heard that Sandy McCulloch had been made manager of Crescent Ranch.

Mr. Clark and Donald gave out the facts with greatest care—how Thornton was to become Clark & Son's confidential man at the Boston office; and how Sandy was to take the vast sheep-raising portion of the business under his direction.

"It is a proud day for you, Sandy!" cried José.

[166] "I'm no pretending I ain't pleased," replied Sandy, beaming on the Mexican, "but dinna think I'm proud. If I do my work well pride may come; still, it's no time for it now."

"Of course you'll do it well—how could you help it! It is in your blood," José declared. "You have your father's own knack about the flocks. It is the real love for herding—a kind of part of you, it seems."

"I get it from generations of shepherds who have tended the black-faced sheep among the broom and the heather on the hills of Scotland, I doubt not," answered Sandy.

"Well, it stands you in good stead, however you come by it," José called over his shoulder as he moved off toward the pen where his sheep were.

"I hope it may stand me in good stead in the future, Don," Sandy said gravely to the boy beside him.

"I am sure it will. Isn't it splendid, Sandy, to see the herders all so pleased and ready to follow out your orders? I think nothing could have made me happier than to have you put in to manage the
[167] ranch."

"I'm verra, verra glad myself, laddie. It is a thing I never dared hope for, and I would not have wanted to take the job from Thornton. But since he is going East and is to be well provided for it

makes everything right."

"And yet you telegraphed my father to come here, Sandy."

It was the first time the telegram had ever been mentioned between them.

Sandy hesitated.

"I felt your father should come out here and cast his eye over the place and, loving the ranch so well, I took it on myself to send for him. But I told no tales. It was his task to find the flaws if there were any. I am no certain what he found and I dinna want to hear. I simply know the snarls have straightened themselves out, and that Crescent Ranch is now going on better than it has in years. The men have all been glad for a glimpse of your father. It is no so much fun working for somebody you have never seen. It has been a great thing to have him come. And as for the herds
[168] —was there ever a finer sight?"

He swept his hand around dramatically.

On every side, in numbered pens, sheep were waiting to be sheared.

It was the first time Donald had seen the stock all together and it was indeed, as Sandy had declared, a fine sight.

The herders were not a little proud of the thickness of the fleeces of their respective flocks and much good-natured banter passed between them.

"Is it on corn-husks you have been feeding your ewes that they look so sickly?" called one Mexican to another.

The swarthy herdsman grinned.

"Mind your own band, Manuel Torquello! You haven't a fleece in your fold that will tip the scales at ten pounds."

Both men laughed and passed on.

"How much ought fleeces to weigh, Sandy?" asked Donald.

"From six to ten pounds—as the clip runs. Some are heavier, some lighter. It depends on the
[169] quality of the wool, and the amount of oil in it."

"I don't see why the shearing is not done at the ranch instead of driving all the sheep down here to Glen City," panted Donald as he tried to keep up with Sandy's strides.

"Why, you see, lad, it is much more convenient to have the wool clipped near the railroad. In that way we do away with carting it. The fleeces can be sheared, packed, weighed, and put right on the cars. Beside that, we get the power to run our plant from Glen City. Our shearing is done by electricity and not by hand, you know."

"It is mean of me to make you answer questions, Sandy, when you are in such a hurry," Donald ventured hesitatingly, "but I wish you had time to explain to me about the shearing."

Sandy was in a hurry—there was no denying that!

He and Donald had driven down from Crescent that morning, and were to meet Thornton and Mr. Clark as soon as possible at the shed where the shearing was to be done. Nevertheless, in spite of
[170] his haste, Sandy tried as he went along to answer Donald's question.

"There was a time long ago when all shearing was done by hand. In the spring bands of traveling shearers came from ranch to ranch and sheared the flocks for so much a day. Sometimes these men were Mexicans, sometimes Indians. As they made a business of shearing and nothing else they became verra skilful with the shears and could turn off many fleeces a day. It is an art to shear a sheep. Many a try must you have before you can do it. The smaller ranches still shear by hand, for it does not pay to run a power plant unless you have large flocks."

"I suppose a power plant does the work quicker," suggested Donald.

"No, I think good shearers can clip the fleeces almost as fast. The chief advantage in machinery is that it takes the wool off closer, and you do not need such skilled men to do the work. You just have to remember not to shear flocks this way in summer, for the wool would be cut so close that your sheep would be wild with flies and sunburn before their coats grew long enough to protect
[171] them."

They had now reached the plant, where they were to meet Donald's father and Thornton; they mounted the steps of the low building and went in. Immediately they were greeted by the whirr of wheels, the chatter of many herders, and the blatting of sheep.

Mr. Clark came forward.

"Well, Don," he said, "this is quite a sight, isn't it?"

"I should say it was! I had no idea shearing was done this way. It is just the way they clip horses or cut my hair."

His father smiled.

"Yes, it is done on the same principle. Let us watch this man here. He is just starting. I thought he would tie the feet of the sheep first, but he does not seem to be doing it; instead he is turning it up on its rump, and holding it with his left arm so its hoofs cannot touch the floor. They say sheep never kick or struggle if their feet are raised from the ground. Now he is starting with the
[172] shears. See! He is opening the wool by a cut down the right shoulder. How neatly the fleece comes off—almost in one piece, as if it was a jacket!"

"I guess that was a smooth-skinned sheep," laughed Donald, "or the shearer never could have done it so quickly."

The man who was shearing overheard him.

"It was a smooth-skinned one," he called. "Still, even the wrinkly Merinos loose their coats pretty fast. Watch and see. I have one right here."

Donald watched.

It was fascinating.

"I'd like to try it," he said glancing up at his father.

"I guess you'd have trouble!"

"I wouldn't mind the trouble if I wasn't afraid of cutting the sheep," replied the boy.

"Suppose you leave it until you come West the next time," called Sandy, who chanced to be passing and heard his words. "You mustn't do everything this trip, or you'll have nothing to look forward to when you come again."

"Perhaps it's as well for the sheep!" grunted the Mexican who was shearing.

[173]

"I'D LIKE TO TRY IT"

[174] "I shouldn't wonder!" answered Donald good-naturedly.

But what a charm there was in that crisp snip of the shears!

At last, however, Donald and his father moved on to where crews of men were busy at smooth board tables.

"What are they doing here?" Donald asked.

"They are tying fleeces," explained Mr. Clark.

"But don't they wash that dirty wool before they tie it up?" questioned the boy, astounded.

Sandy, who had joined them for the moment, laughed at Donald's disgust.

"You'd have us washing and ironing it, perhaps," he chuckled. "No, no! We used to wash all fleeces before they were clipped, 'tis true. But your father says that now buyers care little for them washed. Folks will pay about as much for good wool unwashed as washed. It is a lucky thing for us, because it saves us much trouble; more than that, it is better for the sheep not to be put
[175] through the water. The thick fleece stays damp for many days, and unless the creature is range-bred and therefore used to all weather it suffers a shock, and is liable to be sick. You can't shear a flock until about two weeks after washing, for not only must the fleece dry, but new yolk must form in the wool. If the wool is too dry the shears will not slip through it."

"But by the end of two weeks I should think the sheep would have his fleece all dirty again," objected Donald.

"That is just the point—he does."

"Why couldn't you wash the fleece after it is taken off?"

"We could. It is done sometimes. Your father can tell you that he sends off wool and has it scoured before selling it if a buyer wishes it done."

Mr. Clark nodded.

"But here," continued Sandy, "we wash no fleeces. We do take care, though, not to tie very dirty pieces in with the fleece. My father always insisted on the tying being honest. Only wool went
[176] into the bundle. You and your father must watch and see how quickly they do the tying."

As Sandy flitted away again Mr. Clark and Donald made their way to the long table where the boys who went about among the shearers and collected the fleeces were tossing them down.

Each fleece was spread out on the table, the belly and loose ends folded deftly inside; then the whole was fastened into a square bundle.

"It would seem as if any twine would do to tie a package like that, wouldn't it, Don?" said Mr. Clark.

"Of course."

"It is not so," went on his father. "There is nothing about which a wool-grower has to be more careful than about the twine with which he ties his fleeces. You must always avoid using a fiber twine—by that I mean hemp, or any variety having fibers which will break off in the wool. These fibers or particles get stuck in the fleeces, and later when the wool reaches the mill, the mill people do not like it. Either the bits of hemp have to be picked out—an endless job—or the wool is
[177] sent back. You can see that they could not dye wool with all these little particles in it. The hemp would take a different color from the rest of the wool, and would result in specked goods."

"What kind of twine do we use, father?" asked Donald, much interested.

"We use a paper twine. Other growers often tie their fleeces with glazed twine."

"I never should have thought twine could make so much trouble," mused the lad.

"You would think of it, though, if you had once been set to picking fiber out of wool as I was when I was a boy!" interrupted Sandy, as he darted past.

Donald and his father followed at the heels of the young Scotchman as he went through into another shed where the wool was being packed. Here lay great piles of tied fleeces and heaps of loose wool. About the shed stood wooden frames from the center of which swung burlap sacks used for packing the clip.

"Why do the men first stuff the two lower corners of the bags with wool and tie them?" the boy
[178] asked after he had looked on a few moments.

"We call those corners ears," replied his father. "Sacks of wool are not only awkward to handle but very heavy, and it is a help to have the corners, firmly tied, to take hold of."

Donald nodded. He was too busy looking about him to reply.

The men packing the wool took one of the burlap bags, fitted its mouth over a wooden hoop just the right size, and fastened the bag inside the frame in such a way that it hung its full length and just cleared the floor.

Then the packer began tossing wool into the sack.

When it was about half-full he jumped into it and tramped the fleeces down solidly.

Afterward he climbed out and another man wheeled a truck under the frame; then the packer freed the sack, and when it dropped it was promptly sewed up and wheeled to the scales, where it was weighed. Its weight was entered in a book by a man who kept the tally and the same figures were also roughly painted on the bag.

[179] "And there's the end of it!" exclaimed Sandy, who came up and stood beside Donald as Mr. Clark

walked away. "Now you know the wool business, Don!"

Donald shook his head.

"It will take me longer than this to know the wool business," he answered. "I mean when we get home, though, to get father to tell me the rest of it—about the selling and manufacturing."

"That part would be new to me too," said Sandy. "Here we have no selling; we do not even auction off our own wool, as you see, for our clip goes direct to our owners. But when a ranch sells its wool to other buyers the manager has lively days, I can tell you. Both Anchor and Star Ranch sell to brokers. They send out word that they have wool for sale and the Eastern buyers swarm here like flies. They bid on the wool—bid right against each other, even though sometimes they are the best of friends. The men get an idea of the price they want to pay by looking over the fleeces and seeing how they will grade up. Above everything else a wool buyer must have a
[180] trained eye, quick to detect the quality of the shipment offered for sale. That is what decides him on how high he will bid. After the buyers have got up to what they consider a reasonable price they stop bidding. The wool-grower must then accept the highest bid."

"But he may not be satisfied with the price," put in Donald.

"It makes no difference. They are supposed to make a fair bid on the clip."

"What if he shouldn't take it?"

"Why, then all the brokers who have bid on the wool leave town pledging each other not to bid on that particular shipment of wool for two weeks," replied Sandy.

"Why?" inquired Donald, opening his eyes.

"It is to protect the brokers. You can see the justice in it when you think a moment. These Easterners are busy men and they come a long way. They can't take a trip to some far-off ranch only to find the wool-grower has decided not to sell his fleeces; or that he will not sell them below
[181] a certain price. If a man really does not want to sell he must not get the buyers there; if he does he must be content with what they offer. Your father would have to buy his wool this way if he did not own Crescent Ranch; and even so he may send men to buy wool at outside ranches too, for all I know."

"I am going to ask him," Donald said.

"Do not ask him now. He might not want to talk his business over here. Wait until you get back East."

"I hate to think of going back home, Sandy," the boy declared, regret in his tones.

"All good things must come to an end, lad. You will go back, finish your schooling, go to college as your father wishes, and then, a gentleman grown, you will be choosing some work."

Sandy studied Donald keenly.

"Yes, I suppose that is just what I shall do. I am thinking some of studying law, Sandy."

The Scotchman's face fell, but Donald did not notice it.

"I've always thought I should like to stand up in court and make a great plea—a speech that
[182] would sweep people off their feet," went on Donald. "Or," he added reflectively, "I may be a judge."

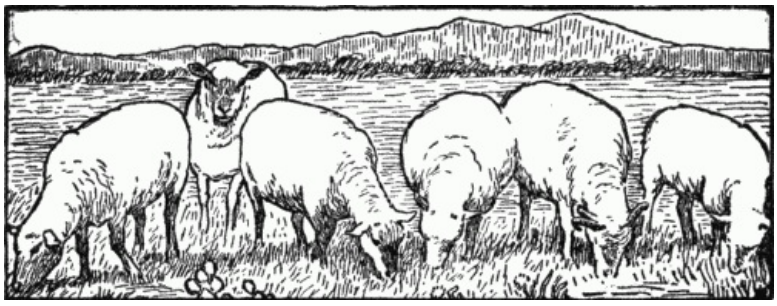
Sandy scratched his head.

"There's a good bit step between studying law and being a judge," said he.

"Perhaps after all I may decide not to be a judge," ruminated Donald. "I have always wanted to manage a baseball team and I may think I would rather do that."

"Go on with you!" Sandy cried. "Next you'll be having yourself a lighthouse-keeper." Then he added wistfully: "But no matter what you are, laddie, dinna forget Crescent Ranch."

[183]



CHAPTER XII
HOME TO THE EAST

Within two weeks Thornton, Mr. Clark, and Donald were back in Massachusetts, and the thread of Eastern life was once more taken up.

Donald did not return to school, since it was now so near June that to enter the class seemed useless; instead it was decided that he should have a tutor through the summer to help him make up the work he had lost, and thereby enable him to go on with his class in the fall. This tutor, however, had to be found, and until he was the boy was free from duties of every sort. It gave
[184] him a strange sense of loneliness to be with nothing to do. All his friends were in school—there was no one to play with.

"I think I'll go in to the office with you, father," he suggested one morning. "It is stupid staying round in Cambridge when all the fellows are slaving for their exams. I have been so busy while out on the ranch that now I do not know what to do with myself."

Mr. Clark agreed to the proposal cordially.

In consequence it came about that Donald joined Thornton at the large Boston warehouse. The store was not new to the boy, for he had often been there with his father; but to Thornton this part of the wool business was as novel as the first glimpses of ranching had been to Donald. The high building of yellow brick with floor after floor of hurrying men, the offices noisy with the hum of typewriters, the ring of telephones, the comings and goings of messenger-boys and mail-carriers—all this little universe of rush and confusion was an untried world to Thornton. Its strangeness dazed him.

[185] Mr. Clark promptly placed him in the accounting department, but to his surprise Thornton foundered there helplessly. It was one thing to keep books amid the quiet and leisure of Crescent Ranch, and quite another to struggle with columns of figures in the riot of modern business surroundings. At the end of three days the Westerner looked gray and tired, and had accomplished nothing.

"I don't know what I am going to do with him, Don," announced Mr. Clark, much troubled. "I have brought him here from Idaho, and of course I am bound to look out for him; yet there does not seem to be an earthly thing he can do. My plan was to set him to keeping books in Cook's place, and send Cook out to Crescent Ranch to help Sandy. Sandy, you know, cannot handle accounts. Poor lad—he had little opportunity for schooling in his youth, and the financial side of his work is his one weak spot. He realizes this himself, and it was only on the condition that I send him an assistant that he would undertake the management of the ranch at all. I expected, as I say, that
[186] Cook would go; evidently, however, Thornton is not going to be able to fill his place. What shall I do with Thornton, Don? We must find a niche for him somehow."

Donald reflected a moment.

"Had you thought, father, of trying him up-stairs?" he asked.

"No, I hadn't. We need a foreman up there, but I had not considered Thornton for the position. That is a happy inspiration, son. We will give him a try. He may make good yet."

Accordingly Thornton was sent to the upper floors of the warehouse, where the wool was stored. Here were great piles of loose wool reaching from floor to ceiling. Some piles contained only the finest wool; other piles that which was next-best in quality; still other piles were made up of the coarser varieties. There were piles of scoured wool, piles of South American and Australian wool —wool, wool, wool everywhere!

With keen interest Thornton looked about him. He wandered from one vast pyramid of fleeces to another, catching up handfuls of the different varieties and examining them. Then he walked to
[187] where the men were busy opening the first spring shipments of wool from Crescent Ranch. The wool was emptied from the sacks onto the floor in great heaps, and crews of men—skilled in judging the fiber—set to work to sort it, separating the different qualities into piles. Donald, who was looking on, saw a smile pass over Thornton's face—the first smile that had brightened it in days. Then, almost instinctively, the ranchman rolled up his sleeves and began to grade wool with the other men. He worked rapidly, for he was thoroughly familiar with what he was doing.

The next day when Donald went up-stairs he found Thornton directing a lot of green hands who were packing the sorted, or graded wool, in bags. Later in the week it chanced that the man who weighed the wool fell ill and the Westerner took his place at the scales, seeing that the sacks of wool were correctly weighed and recorded, that they were sewed up strongly, and marked for shipping.

Gradually the men, recognizing Thornton's ability, began to defer to his judgment. The month
[188] was not out before Clark & Sons began to wonder what they had done before Thornton came. So familiar did he make himself with the stock that even Mr. Clark sent for and consulted him about orders and shipments.

"He is proving himself a thoroughly useful man, Don," declared Mr. Clark rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "His knowledge of the ranch and of the wool itself is invaluable. It is just a case of putting the peg into the proper hole. Thornton was like a fish out of water here in the office. Now he is in his element. I shall make him foreman of the shipping department—a position just suited to him, and which he will fill well."

"I am so glad he has made good, father," said Donald. "Now, what are you going to do about an assistant for Sandy? That is the next question to settle, I suppose. Have you found any one?"

"Not yet. I have had a great deal to do, Don. I shall, however, look up some one as soon as possible. In the meantime, before you start in with your tutor, and Thornton gets so rushed that
[189] he cannot be spared, I want to take you both to Mortonstown to visit the Monitor Mills. Thornton has never seen the manufacture of woolen goods and will be the more intelligent for doing so; as for you, I am anxious to have you complete the story of wool-growing which you began at Crescent Ranch. To stop short of visiting a mill now would be like reading the opening chapters of a book and never finishing the volume."

"I do want to know the rest of the story very much, father," Donald replied. "I told Sandy when I was out West that I hoped you would some time take me to a mill. Since we got home, though, you have been so busy that I did not like to ask you."

"That was thoughtful of you, son. Ordinarily I should have preferred to wait; it chances, however, that something has come up which obliges me to see the Monitor people right away. So I shall go out there to-morrow, taking Thornton with me, and if you like you may go also."

"Of course I'd like!" exclaimed Donald eagerly.

[190] The next day proved to be so gloriously clear that instead of making the trip to Mortonstown by train Mr. Clark decided to run out in his touring-car. It was not a long ride—something over twenty-five miles—but to Thornton, unaccustomed to the luxury of a modern automobile, the journey was one of unalloyed delight.

"It is like riding in a sitting-room on wheels, isn't it?" he murmured with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Some day you will be having a car of your own, Thornton," Mr. Clark said, smiling.

"And riding to Idaho in it," put in Donald.

"Well, it is about the smoothest way I ever traveled!" declared the ranchman. "When we came East I thought that sleeping-car close to a moving palace; but this thing has the train beaten to a frazzle. You see I am used to jolting over rough roads in springless wagons, and it is something new to me to go along as if I was sliding down-hill on a velvet sofa-cushion."

Donald and his father heartily enjoyed the big fellow's pleasure.

[191] As for Thornton, when the car came to a stop before the puffing Mortonstown mills it was with regret that he dragged himself from the seat. Still, he had the ride home in anticipation—that was a comforting thought.

Once within the mills, however, even the memory of the homeward journey faded from his mind. The vast buildings throbbing with the beat of engines, the click and whirr of bobbins, and the clash of machinery, blotted out everything else.

When they entered Mr. Munger, the manager, who was expecting them, came forward cordially.

"We were glad to hear by telephone that you were coming out to-day, Mr. Clark," he said. "Mr. Bailey, the president, is waiting to see you in his private office."

"Very well," answered Mr. Clark. "Now while I am talking with him I should greatly appreciate it if my son Donald, and my foreman, Mr. Thornton, might go over the works. They have never visited a woolen mill."

"We shall be delighted to show them about," answered Mr. Munger. "I will send some one with
[192] them."

Turning, the manager beckoned to a young man who was busy at a desk.

"This gentleman," continued he, "has been with us many years and will be able to answer all your questions. Take these visitors through the factory, Mac, show them everything, and bring them back here. Now if you are ready, Mr. Clark, we will join Mr. Bailey."

Donald and Thornton moved away, following their guide into a building just across the yard. Here wool was being sorted by staplers who were expert in judging its quality. They worked at frames covered with wire netting which allowed the dirt to sift through, and as they handled the material and tossed it into the proper piles they picked out straws, burrs, and other waste caught in it.

"This sorting must be carefully done," explained the bookkeeper who was showing them about, "or the wool will not take the dye well. Much depends on having the fleeces clear of waste. We

[193] also are very particular about the sorting. The finest wool, as you know, comes from the sides of the sheep; that clipped from the head and legs is coarse and stiff. All this we separate before we send the fleeces on to be scoured. In this next room you will see how the material is washed."

They passed on and next saw how steam was blown through the wool, not only removing the dirt but softening the fibers. The fleeces were also washed in many great bowls of soap and water.

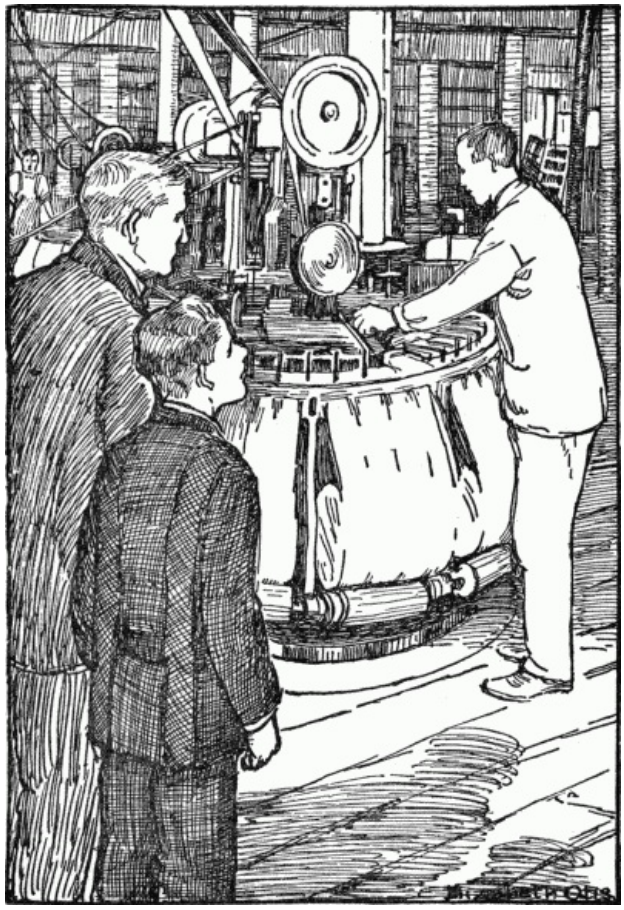
"Here again we must exercise great care that the water is clean and the soap pure, or the wool will not dye perfectly. We use a kind of potash soap which we are sure is of the best make. Another thing which renders the scouring of wool difficult is that we must not curl or snarl it while we are washing it."

"I don't see how you can help it," Donald said.

"We can if we take proper care," returned the bookkeeper.

"And what is this other machine for?" inquired Thornton, pointing to one at the end of the room.

[194]



"WHAT IS THIS OTHER MACHINE?"

[195] "That machine is picking the wool apart so that the air can get through it and help it to dry. After it is picked up light and fluffy we pass it through these heavy rollers, which are like wringers and which squeeze out the remaining moisture. Yet during all these processes we must always be careful not to snarl the wool. See, here is where it comes out white and clean, ready to go to the dyeing room."

Donald regarded the snowy fleeces with wonder.

"You would never dream it could be the same wool!" he said. "Isn't it beautiful? It is not much the way it looks when it leaves the ranch, is it, Thornton?"

"I should say not," agreed the Westerner emphatically. "The sheep ought to see how handsome their coats are."

"So they should!" answered the young bookkeeper. "You have been on a ranch then?"

"We have just come from one," Donald answered.

"Have you, indeed! It is a free life—not much like being shut up inside brick walls."

[196] "You have been West yourself, perhaps," ventured Thornton.

"Yes, years ago—when I was a boy; but not recently."

"Ah, you should see the sheep country now!" Thornton went on. "It is much improved, I reckon, since you were there."

"I imagine so," the young guide answered with a wistful smile. "It is so long since I have had a breath of real air that I have almost forgotten how it would seem."

"If you are wanting fresh air go out on the ranges and fill your lungs. You will find plenty there," declared the ranchman.

"That is just what they are trying to make me do," the young man replied, "I have not been very well this year and Mr. Munger thinks the confinement in the mill is telling on me. He wants me to go West for a vacation."

"And should you like to?" questioned Donald.

The man did not answer; instead he said:

"Suppose we go on. We must not waste too much time here. In this next room you will see how
[197] the dyeing is done. We use centrifugal machines, and beside those we have these others to keep the wool spread and turned. With all our care not to snarl or curl it, it will get matted and must therefore be picked apart again. So we pass it through these revolving drums which, you see, have sets of spikes on them; as the spikes on the different drums turn they catch in the wool and pick it all apart so it is again light and fluffy as it was before."

"Doesn't so much washing and dyeing take out all the yolk, and make the wool very dry?" inquired Thornton.

The young man conducting them seemed pleased at the question.

"Yes, it does! That is just the trouble. Therefore we are forced to set about getting some oil back into it; otherwise it would be so harsh and stiff that we could do nothing with it. So we put the thin layers of wool into these machines and carry them along to a spraying apparatus which sprays them evenly with oil. We use olive oil, but some other manufacturers prefer lard oil or oleine."

[198] "How funny to have to put oil back into the wool after you have just washed it out!" Donald remarked.

"It is funny, isn't it?" nodded the bookkeeper. "Now on this side of the room they are blending the fleeces. Sometimes we blend different qualities of wool to get a desired effect, or sometimes we blend the wool with cotton or a different fiber. We take a thin layer of wool, then put another layer of a different kind over it. We then pick it all up together until we get a uniform mixture."

"It is a surprise to me that the wool has to go through so much red tape before it comes to spinning," Thornton said.

"It is a long process," responded their guide. "I remember when I first saw it, it seemed endless. Now I think little of it."

"We get used to everything in time, I suppose," Thornton answered; then he added whimsically: "Still, I don't think I should ever get used to riding in an automobile."

A hearty laugh came from behind them, and turning they saw Mr. Clark and Mr. Munger, the
[199] manager.

"I came to hunt you up," said Mr. Clark. "I have finished my interview with Mr. Bailey, and it seemed to me that by this time you must have finished spinning your next-winter's overcoat, Don."

"But I haven't, father," retorted Donald, smiling into his father's face. "I have not even begun to make the cloth at all."

"The yarn is not spun yet, sir," put in the young man who was with them.

"You are a slow guide, Mac, I fear," Mr. Munger laughed, laying a kindly hand on his bookkeeper's shoulder. "That is the chief fault with you Scotchmen—you are too thorough. Now let us hurry along. These gentlemen must get back to Boston to-day, you know."

Mr. Munger bustled ahead, conducting his visitors across a bridge and into the next mill.

Here was the carding room. Layers of wool entered the carding engine and were combed by a multitude of wire teeth until all the fibers lay parallel; the thin film of wool then passed into a
[200] cone-like opening and came out later in a thick strand of untwisted fibers.

"It is now ready to go to the drawing-frames," Mr. Munger explained. "You will notice how these drawing-frames pull the wool into shape for twisting and spinning, drawing it out to uniform size and finally winding it on bobbins. The machine is a complicated one to explain, but you can watch and see what it does."

"How wonderful it is that machinery can do all this work," Mr. Clark observed thoughtfully.

"Yes, it is," Mr. Munger agreed. "Years ago every part of the process was done by hand. Little by little, however, machines have been perfected until now we have contrivances that seem almost

human. Shall we go now and see the yarn spun?"

When they reached the spinning room with its clatter of shifting bobbins Mr. Munger turned to Donald.

"I wonder if you know," he said, "that wool is worked into two different kinds of yarn—worsted yarn and woolen yarn. The fibers for worsted yarn are long and lie nearly parallel, and when
[201] woven result in a smooth surface. Broadcloth is made from worsted yarn. Woolen yarn, on the other hand, has its fibers lying in every direction and all these loose ends, when woven, give a rough surface. Of course after the cloth is milled it comes out smooth, but it is not as smooth and fine as a worsted cloth."

"I think I understand," Donald said. "Are we to see the cloth woven next?"

"Yes. You know we weave nothing but woolens; you must go to a worsted mill to see the other kinds of cloth made. The processes, though, are much alike."

Mr. Munger then hurried the party to the weaving mills, where amid an uproar of thousands of moving wheels, bobbins, and shuttles the threads of yarn traveled back and forth, back and forth, and came out of the looms as cloth. The cloth was then steamed, pressed, and rolled or folded.

"And now, young man," announced Mr. Munger to Donald jestingly, "you have seen the whole process, and there is no reason why your father should not give you some wool and let you make
[202] your own cloth for your next suit of clothes."

Although Donald was very tired he tried to smile.

"I think," he said, "that I would rather grow the wool on the ranch than make it into cloth here. It is far nicer out on the ranges."

"That is what I am trying to tell my young assistant," agreed Mr. Munger. "He is getting fagged, aren't you, Mac? You see he was brought up in the open country, and much as we think of him, we feel that he should go back to the Western mountains."

"Oh, I am all right, Mr. Munger," the bookkeeper hastened to say. "Just a bit tired, perhaps—that is all."

"If you are tired you should try the ranges of Idaho," Mr. Clark said. "My boy, here, and myself have recently returned from a year in the sheep country and feel like new men, don't we, Don? Undoubtedly the life there may not be as gay as in the city; still—to quote my manager, Sandy McCulloch, 'with bears, bob-cats, and coyotes, I dinna see how it could ever be dull.'"

[203] So perfectly had Mr. Clark imitated Sandy's voice and accent that Thornton and Donald both laughed. Then they stopped suddenly.

The young bookkeeper had turned very pale and was eying them with a startled face.

"Sandy McCulloch!" he repeated. "Did you say Sandy McCulloch, sir?"

"Yes, Sandy McCulloch," answered Mr. Clark. "Do you know him?"

"He must be of your kin, Mac!" interrupted Mr. Munger. "This lad, strangely enough, is a McCulloch himself—Douglas McCulloch."

"Then you must be—you are Sandy's brother!" cried Donald.

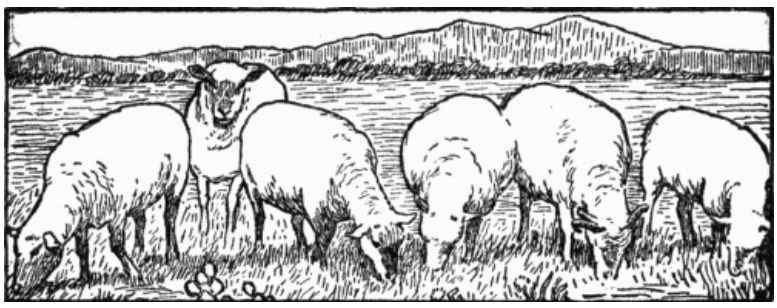
The young man swayed a little and put out his hand to steady himself.

It seemed to Donald as if he would never speak.

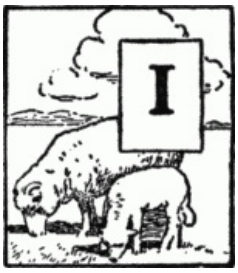
When he did his voice was tremulous with emotion.

"Yes," he replied almost in a whisper. "I am Sandy's brother. Tell me of Sandy and of my father."

[204]



CHAPTER XIII
DONALD DECIDES



It was a wonderful story, Donald thought.

He was never tired of living over how, in visiting the Mortonstown mills, they had so unexpectedly found Douglas McCulloch; how, because of ill health, he was on the point of going West; and how, with Mr. Munger's permission, Mr. Clark had offered him the position as Sandy's assistant at Crescent Ranch. It was little short of a miracle that it had all come about!

[205] It was interesting, too, to hear what had happened to Douglas after he left Idaho. When he first reached the East it was indeed a rude awakening from his dreams of city life; living was expensive, and work hard to find. Chance had borne him to the Monitor Mills where, because of his knowledge of wool, he had succeeded in getting a job at sorting fleeces. He had worked hard and patiently, and Mr. Bailey, who was quick to appreciate faithfulness, had promoted him until he had won the position of head bookkeeper. These years of vigorous work had, however, left their mark on one unaccustomed to long hours and little fresh air. In his heart the boy sighed for the hills—he wanted to be back again in the Western country which he so foolishly had insisted upon leaving. He became tired and thin, and the men for whom he worked were unselfish enough to see that unless he got back to the open ranges and to the sunlight he would soon be too ill to go.

And now the chance had come—it was almost unbelievable!

[206] "I cannot realize that I am really to join Sandy," exclaimed the Scotchman over and over. "It is almost too much good luck. As a lad I was so eager to get away from the range that I would never have dreamed the time could come when I would be pining to return there. I have had my taste of the East! I would have gone back long ago had they not been so good to me here."

"But why didn't you write to Sandy, Douglas?" inquired Donald.

"Well, you see, although my father let me leave Crescent Ranch it disappointed him not a little to have me do so. Sandy thought, since my father felt that way, that I ought not to go, and we had words about it. I was very angry with Sandy at the time, but I see now that he was right. I wish I had stayed with my father. Then when I began to be homesick here and it all turned out just as Sandy had said I was ashamed to write. Even now I am almost afraid Sandy will not want to see me."

[207] "Indeed he will!" cried Donald. "Why, often he talked about you when we were on the range together, and wished he might see you. My father has wired him already and he can hardly wait to get you back to Idaho."

"If only my father were there!" said Douglas sadly. "I shall never forgive myself that I came East and left him. I wish I had the chance to live over again and I would do differently."

"If we did not learn wisdom by what we do there would be no use in living, Douglas," Mr. Clark put in kindly. "At least you are going West to Sandy—going to be a great help to him in his work."

"I am so thankful that I can," replied the younger brother. "Think of going once more to Idaho and running that great ranch with him! It is more than I deserve."

"Make the most of your good fortune, Douglas," Mr. Clark said, "and do not disappoint Sandy and me."

"I will try, sir!" was the humble response.

Douglas McCulloch was as good as his word.

[208] From the moment he and Sandy were united at Crescent Ranch he threw himself heart and soul into his new work. The charm of the hills stole over him with a fascination they had never held in those far-off days when he was a restless boy, eager for the excitement of city life. Douglas had had his fling, and he returned to the vast Western land older and wiser.

Together he and Sandy set about improving the ranch. They subscribed to magazines on sheep-raising; they visited other ranches and kept abreast of the times; they installed newer and more hygienic methods of wool-growing. Never had Crescent Ranch been so perfectly run. With two intelligent and unwearying young men at its head it bid fair to outshine the fame it had possessed in Old Angus's day. Gradually men interested in sheeping came from far and near to visit it. Clark & Sons began to be very proud to be the owners of such a treasure.

Thornton, in the meantime, had become Mr. Clark's right hand man at the Eastern office. From foreman he had worked up to being superintendent, and had then been promoted to traveling for the firm and selling wool. His devotion to Mr. Clark and everything that concerned him was

unfailing.

[209] During these years Donald had completed his school work; had taken his four years at college; and loyal to his early ambition, had entered the Law School. If it was a disappointment to his father for him to choose the law instead of a business career Mr. Clark did not say so. He kept closely in touch with the boy's studies and was proud of the future before him.

It was just as everything seemed to be moving so ideally that the first great calamity fell upon Clark & Sons. One morning a telegram came from Sandy saying that a big fire had swept the ranch, leveling to the ground house, barns, and sheep-pens. The blaze had come about through no one's carelessness. Lightning had struck the central barn, and before aid could be summoned the entire place had been destroyed.

Fortunately no one had been injured. The herders, together with their flocks, were on the range; and the crops of alfalfa had not been cut and were therefore saved.

"It might have been much worse, Don," said Mr. Clark in reviewing the situation. "We have lost
[210] no men, no sheep, no hay, no wool. Suppose the fire had come in shearing time and had destroyed all the fleeces; or suppose the blaze had come about through carelessness and Sandy and Douglas had had themselves to blame for it. As it is, it is nobody's fault—I am glad of that—and nothing has been lost but can be restored. The buildings are well covered by insurance and can be rebuilt during the summer. The chief trouble is that all this has happened at a time when I am very busy. I ought to go to Idaho, but I hardly see——"

"Can't I go, father?" interrupted Donald quickly. "I don't see why I couldn't adjust the insurance and help about having new buildings put up. Sandy and Douglas have good judgment, and before I started you could tell me just what you want done. Besides," he added shyly, "I am now through my first year at the Law School and have some little knowledge of legal affairs—that is, I know more than I used to."

Mr. Clark beamed.

[211] "You could go in my place perfectly well, Don, if you are willing to give up your summer vacation to it. It would certainly be a great help. But how about those house-parties you had planned for?"

"I can decline those, father. I'd be glad to go!" was Donald's reply. "I always promised Sandy I would come West again some time, and I should really enjoy another glimpse of the hills."

So it was arranged.

Within two days Donald was speeding West, and almost before he realized it he was back at Crescent Ranch.

Then came letters for Mr. Clark.

The insurance was adjusted and with the aid of the McCullochs, Donald was drawing up plans for new barns—barns with cement floors, and far better ventilated and equipped than the old ones had been. Almost every day brought to the Eastern office pages and pages of sketches for sheep-folds and modern contrivances for lessening the labor of wool-growing. Every line of these letters bubbled with enthusiasm. There could be no possible question that Donald's heart was in every
[212] word he wrote.

Summer passed and the time for the beginning of the college term drew near.

Mr. Clark began to look for the boy's return.

Still there was no Donald!

Then came another letter:

Crescent Ranch, Glen City, Idaho.

DEAR FATHER:

You have been so generous in letting me follow out my own wishes as to my future, that I hardly know how to write you. I hope you will not be disappointed when you hear what I am going to say. The fact is, dad, after thinking the matter well over I have changed my mind about studying law. I have become tremendously interested in Crescent Ranch and in wool-growing, and I am wild to jump into the work.

If I thought you approved I should like to stay out here and see the buildings finished and then go to Kansas City with Sandy to select more sheep. If, however, you wish me to continue my law course I am perfectly willing to come East and take my degree.

Please wire.

Affectionately your son,
DONALD CLARK.

[213] Donald's father read the letter twice. Then he called his stenographer.

"Lawson," he said briskly, "I want to dictate a telegram and have you get it off right away. Here is the message:

"Mr. Donald Clark,
Crescent Ranch, Glen City, Idaho.

"Cut out the law. Take up sheeping. Three cheers for you!

"(Signed) WILLARD PAYSON CLARK.

"Now repeat the message."

The stenographer did so.

Mr. Clark chuckled aloud.

"That is O. K., Lawson. Send it along as soon as possible. Oh, and Lawson—here is a gold-piece which goes with that telegram. Keep it in memory of this day, for it is the happiest one of my life. Mr. Donald is coming into Clark & Sons!"

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