

The Sheep Men Come Back

By CHARLES MORROW WILSON

Six months to a year alone on the open range, two thousand sheep for companions, twenty to thirty dollars a month and chuck for pay—the life of the sheep-herder does not sound particularly alluring. Yet sheepherding is coming back, writes Mr. Morrow from the Southwest, and the sheepherder is attracting to himself some of the glamour which used to be reserved for the cowboy

DOWN in West Texas I heard the story of Jim Hughes, the faultless sheepherder. Jim hove into Pecos City broke, bedraggled and generally bedamned. And it seemed that there were only two possibilities of legitimate employment, washing dishes or herding sheep. Jim flipped a borrowed penny and took the latter. It appeared further that a drink-hardened old gentleman with gout and ingrown impulses for execration, had a couple thousand head of sheep that he wanted driven out to free range. Jim Hughes joined on as a herder—\$25 a month and chuck—took over the flock, headed it for the mesas, and as the season progressed, followed free grazing higher and higher into the mountains.

When the year was pretty well used and lambing season finished with, he headed back to Pecos for shearing, after ten good months of roughing it on a track of better than five hundred miles of open range. Jim went to give over his flock and collect pay.

But the boss wasn't there. It seems that he had been demonstrating to some wondering native how easily stick dynamite burns. But it happened not to be the right sort of dynamite. The boss had left for parts unknown with parts unfound. Jim drowned his sorrow with a couple of schooners of beer and asked advice.

Some said one thing and some said another, but the fact remained that there were the sheep, corralled for shearing, without water and without feed. So Jim went ahead with the shearing and took his flock out to range again. Another year passed and he came again to Pecos for shearing and settlement. This time he talked with a lawyer; but the legal mind required a week or so to function, and while it was functioning—there were near twenty-five hundred sheep in the pen going hungry.

Jim peddled enough wool to buy a scant stock of supplies and took to the free range for another long year. Next spring he headed into Pecos for a third time. By now Jim Hughes looked his part—shoes cut to shreds, clothes hanging in tatters, and moreover he bore the coloring and aroma of a Mexican professional. But there was his flock, plump and placid, increased a good fifty

per cent during the three seasons. Jim sought the county judge and village physician, a gentleman with a legal mind and a medicinal breath. The statutes of Texas had no good-sized mouthful to say on the subject but the judge interpreted that so far as he and Texas were concerned, the flock belonged to Jim Hughes.

Jim took his sheep, three thousand head of them, and sold them there in Pecos, \$1.50 each, cash on the barrel head. This done he bought himself a new shirt and a square meal, and invested in a few zestful drinks for himself and for the shearing crew. Then he put the balance of the cache in a merry-go-round—a gorgeous one with an organ that sounded off like a steam calliope; blood-red horses, flashing mirrors and a donkey engine with a whistle that would startle a liner.

It may be, of course, that this culmination of complete herding was all a mere whim of Fate; but the spectators in the Pecos country figure that it represents something, that it is a connotative of the spirit of a lost profession that is coming to be found again. In other words, a merry-go-round has points in common with sheepherding—you keep everlastingly going around and around. The old-time sheepherder is coming back again, taking over free ranges left deserted, incidentally coming back to claim at least a rim of the halo of romance which has so long been the tenure of the cowboy.

COWBOYS come and cowboys go, but sheepherders seem to remain pretty much the same. The centuries bring them little change; the open-range herder of today is probably very much the same as the open-range herder of Biblical days. He still carries his crook, made of a limb of valley cottonwood, and with it prods a stray or takes down a sheep to examine it for wounds or disease. The chances are too, that

tucked away in the herder's right pants' pocket is a sling-shot. And the chances are further that providing the boss isn't too embarrassingly close at hand, he uses it, just as the shepherds did back in the days of David. But if the boss is around there is apt to be another story. Either that, or else

another herder.

For a slingshot in sheepherding plays pretty much the same rôle as a bean shooter in the public-school system. From a standpoint of discipline, it is looked upon as a mischief-maker. But privately the weapon has its points of usefulness. The herder may use it to save steps. Suppose he sees a spry lamb or wether straying off from the flock. He can slip a rock into the pouch, give the sling a couple of whirls and away goes the rock, whizzing close by the fugitive, heading the strayer back into the flock. This is the case theoretically, at least. But practically speaking, the slingshot is liable to miss making a miss and hit the mark, possibly breaking the sheep's leg or rib. Or the herder might lose his temper and deliberately bombard a refractory member; he might use his slingshot to idle away hours better spent at making his roundings, or even to pick pugnacities with a passer-by.

THE HERDER may claim the right to carry a sling for protection against the wolves and coyote; but many employers specify that the herder is to dismiss these troubles by shooing them off; a proposition, which, so far as the herder is concerned, goes off like a one-legged man with a sprained ankle. But bosses have a way of holding out.

So the herder has his crook, the clothes on his back, his water bag, poncho, the promise of beef and beans and salt, a dog, possibly, first and last responsibility for a couple of thousand sheep, an open stretch of mountains and mesas for a playground, and the sun and stars to guide by.

The chances are that these are about all he has—approximately the least a man can get by on. Which is, in a way, altogether fitting and proper, for sheepherding is a man's job. It takes iron inwards, nerves of steel and the endurance of a Roman trooper.

Here is a general idea of an easy day at sheepherding. Sheep are up at sunrise. Punctual as West Pointers, they get up and start browsing. So the herder must be up and about even sooner. The average flock of open-range sheep numbers about two thousand head; sometimes less, sometimes more, but consistently close to two thousand, and very rarely is there more than the one herder to the flock.

The sheepherder's motivating principal is to keep the whole two thousand always in check, which probably sounds easier than it is. A flock of open-range sheep will spread over a good square mile of grazing space, and to make out on the range the chances are that the sheep will have to be kept moving along at the rate of two or three miles a day; more on frost-killed range, or in the dry country. So the herder gets stirring early. He makes for the highest convenient hill if there is one, a promontory from which he can best watch the meanderings of the various segments of the flock. Sheep are clannish creatures. A flock of two thousand will break itself into a dozen sub-flocks and move out in as many directions as New Orleans molasses on a restaurant waffle. Sometimes, by way of a double check, the herder will labor to have a belled wether with every clan; a castrate, that is, with a brass or copper bell tied about its neck. These bells tinkle away incessantly; the sounds carry far in the high, clear air and the keen-eared herder will learn to recognize the tones of the various bells, thereby being enabled to hear further than he can see.

So directly after breakfast the herder starts out from his lookout hill and walks around and around his flock heading stray groups back to center—not driving them back, better say shooing, perhaps, for on a scant range a flock must keep far spread. And if the herder knows the psychology of sheep, which he most likely does, he can save himself no end of trouble by calling to them, soft and soulful-like. Soothing and folkish sounds, these sheep calls are, half words, half chants—"Sooooo-ooo-shee-eee-eeep. Soo-hoooo-ooo, lo-o-o-e-e-ee, soulou, shhaaa-deec-

ah, ooooo-baaaaah, ca-pull-looo," and so on, far into the night; variations without end.

So he tramps his rounds, four miles a-going at the least, nearer eight, actually, perhaps, for mesa miles are long miles. The herder keeps rounding until the sun is high and the day is tired. Then the noon lull comes. The flock quiets and a good portion of it beds down to sleep. If all appears well the herder may possibly have opportunity to take out his poncho, a liberal dimensioned, tarred slicker, with combination utilities, spread it, and nap, or better say, cat-nap; for his nether eye is supposed to be open. When the flock commences making out for afternoon grazing he begins his tramp again, around and around he goes, until sunset or thereafter; then the time is come for the labor of bedding in. The propelling idea, then, is to head for a good mesa or a stretch of high country approximately level, where danger from freshets and varmints is at a minimum; there to assemble the whole flock in an area of a few acres, so the sheep may be watched during the night.

If the fates smile and the signs are good, the herder may scoop out a place for his hips, spread his poncho there underneath the open sky and make ready for slumber; slumber with re-

soaked flock are several. The herder must take to devious ways of self protection in case of mountain freshets. The folk way is to lay four rocks on a slope, one for each knee, one for each elbow. Then the herder kneels, his poncho over him like a tent. Thus the water drains from beneath him, but an hour of such crouching is enough to permanently paralyze an ordinary in-doors man.

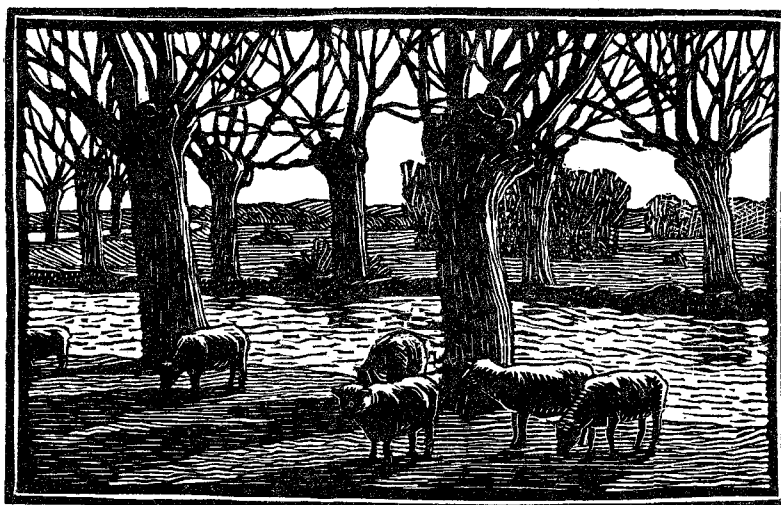
The chances are that the open-range herder is a Mexican or a hybrid thereof. But one can never tell. He may be a Chinese or an Englishman or a New Yorker. The chances are also that he draws from twenty to thirty dollars a month payable at shearing time and sustenance based upon the trinity of beans, beef and coffee. Certainly he is not pampered by over-dainty cookery or double-downy beds. Luck being with him he may be able to vary his monotony of diet with wild berries or fruit from an aroya orchard, or even to spend a night in the quarters of a Mexican farmer, but the chances are pretty scant.

Sheepherding is a year around game. Its first and last law is to keep eternally moving; two or three miles a day, more if the range is scant, day in and day out, six months to a year at a circuit. Generally the herder has a double impetus for keeping on the move—if he doesn't the flock suffers and he goes hungry himself. Supplies, grub for the herder, salt for the sheep and necessary incidentals, are left at prescribed intervals along the grazing route by the outfit's chuck wagon; ricked in the open usually and covered with rocks or tarpaulins. At any rate the placing is so reckoned that the herder must keep on moving or go without eating. And the lonesomeness of the open range is sufficient per se, without the added im-

pediments of an empty stomach. So the alternative is—keep to course or starve.

The worst bugaboo of open-range herding is the water hazard. Sheep can go for a week without water, but after a week without a drink they want water and want it bad. So the general idea is to keep the flock not further than

(Please Turn to Page 355)



"SHEEP BY THE RIVER"

A wood engraving by Gwendolyn Raverat

strictions and limitations. There are strange night noises and likely enough varmints in the offing and any one can feel assured that to get up and shoo off a bellicose timber wolf at three o'clock in the morning is practically no fun at all. And if it rains there is danger, for sheep sleeping in an aroya may be drowned and the difficulties of moving out again next morning with a water-

From the Life

Wonders

SHE COULD scarcely remember how old she was, but then it was not worth remembering. She had learned that much in her travels. With the entire world waiting to be looked at one had soon to find out what things were worth remembering.

But she certainly could remember how the world had appeared when she was first born into it. She always thought of it as her first birth for she had found that everything that happened to her was a sort of new birth. At that first one the world had looked enormous. With every new discovery of it the world stretched further and appeared wider.

In the beginning there was the house. The hallways were endless; it was inconceivable to think that they ever stopped going anywhere. The stairs plunged downward into unknown darknesses or soared into unimagined heights. What stretched beyond the attics she could never think.

The house led to another beginning—the beginning of the outside. The outside rushed away from her in all directions. She could never see the end of it or imagine where it went to.

There was one day when she felt she had begun to catch up with it. Her father had taken her in his carriage, and two great creatures called horses had dashed off over the cobble-stones pulling the carriage and herself behind them. They came quickly to the end of the street and to her wonder and stupefaction she saw where the street jumped overboard and disappeared under water.

There was another street along which they now drove behind the prancing horses, a street of earth and dust. There was no end to this street. The houses that lived along it grew tired and stopped.

After that, just to think about it made her feel as though she were drinking water too fast—quite breathless and excited. The streets that led to water to be crossed, or wilderness to be explored, was there no ending to any of them?

From the beginning, the world had all it could do to keep up with her. It managed to provide her first with carriages and boats, with horse-cars, then with great iron monsters snorting

steam; and finally it produced an ocean liner for her pleasure.

But as the clock went round it told off the world. Like the house which she had been born in and the town that she had known, the world was becoming an old, familiar picture. Before she had seen all of it, even, she could well imagine the rest.

FOR SHE had found the greatest wonder of all unfolding within herself; that she could sit quite still and look at stranger worlds than she had traveled through, by a new kind of looking. She found herself looking in this way at places she had never seen; at countries that lay behind other people's eyes, and wonders that sprang from other people's spirits. When she discovered this she stopped traveling about the world and went home.

For, somewhere, she owned a house. It was a strongly built house, close to the ground and welded to rock. The street on which it stood had once been quiet and far up town, but when she returned to it she could see that it had become part of the city. Where it had looked out before upon quiet sidewalks, its windows now were fascinated by new and changing faces, its walls bemused by hurrying footsteps.

This was her house. From cellar floor to roof she would fill it with treasures. She would have no further need of the world for she had brought it home with her.

Now she counted life by faces and by windows. For amazingly, above her small house, windows grew overnight; higher and higher—crowding above the small one where she sat—gazing down into the narrow street. And for every new window appearing against the sky, a hundred new faces—a hundred new worlds—rushed past her door. So lovely and so strange and so gallant that at last she could not resist them.

She would hurry to her room, put on her cloak and bonnet and slip through her own front door to be jostled and pushed and tumbled in the warm tide. That was better—now she was herself a world, lost in a breathless universe.

But all this time the visitors grew worse. When she had first come home

they had begun to bother her. Unlike the faces that her imagination loved and pursued the visitors all looked alike. When they came to see her they used identical words, for they had only one idea. The neighborhood was crowded. The noise was unendurable. The confusion was worse with every year. Did she not feel the need of rest and peace? Did she not wish to move to a quieter spot? Did she know how valuable her property had become?

Patiently she would answer "No," to all these questions. Then the visitors threatened her. The crowds would drive her out. In the end she would be beaten by the crowds.

When they were gone she would sit beside the window and watch the crowds. She would lean close and press her cheek upon the pane straining her eyes upward to catch the last glint of sun on the highest skyscraper. For all around her now the skyscrapers soared, and above them the airships hummed and buzzed. They promised her there would be more crowds and greater crowds. Faces, and still stranger and lovelier faces. She would run then to fetch her cloak and bonnet for her evening pilgrimage.

For around the corner the lights were beginning to blaze and into these lights the faces on her street would now be pouring. Lights that sprang higher and higher forcing back the stars and flinging a carpet of daylight for those millions of feet.

AS TIME went on the windows grew into a milky way above her house, until her street was never quiet. Until an evening when she had turned off the street called Broadway, through the cold air toward home, and saw it—the new face. She stopped and pressed her hand against her side.

"This is the only one I have not seen," she said, and knew she was too cold. She took out her latch-key and once inside her house, closed the door.

"They can have it now," she whispered. "I shall be leaving directly." She remembered then that she had traveled nearly a hundred years. And going to the window she traced once more the reach of the highest skyscraper; and beyond it—in dread and curiosity, but with a rising excitement—the stars.