

THE SHEPHERD'S YEAR.

To a casual observer no alteration in the life and practice of the shepherd seems possible which does not involve the destruction of the rugged silence and the atmosphere distinctive of the fells as well, and few will have noticed that the system of mountain sheep-farming has been completely revolutionized within the last half-century. On every fell considerable areas have been enclosed, at first a few acres at a time, by dry stone walls; and later wholesale, by wire fencing; parish boundaries being first defined across the open moor, and the ground subdivided among the farms in proportion to their claims to heaf. The wilderness of peaks crowded round the Langdales, Wastdale, Borrowdale, Emmerdale and Eskdale is still undivided, but even there the danger of loss is so reduced that the shepherd's vigilance has been greatly relaxed.

Within the last seventy years the indigenous mountain sheep of Westmoreland and Cumberland has been improved out of all knowledge. However, it is still below the average size, though much larger than it once was—standing about thirty inches at the shoulder, and weighing about fifteen stones when full grown and in fair condition—carrying more and better wool, and being of a more robust constitution—the result of patient cross-breeding with the larger southern and the more hardy Scottish breeds.

Any one who has visited the great sheep fairs within a day's march of the fells will remember the two distinct types of animals—black-faced and gray-faced, together with an alarming number of crosses. Though cramped and hampered in their movements, these little gray-coated sheep show their alertness in repeated dashes for the

open, some even showing open defiance of the dogs in charge of them. At these fairs the difficulty of keeping flocks separate is great, and only possible by the help of the most intelligent and well-trained canines in the world. An instance of this rare intelligence is well remembered. Two farmers, returning from a fair, allowed their flocks to mix. After their ways parted, one discovered that three of his number were missing, and, therefore, next morning called upon the other. He had not noticed the addition, having straightway turned the whole drove into a large field among others. How to pick out the missing ones seemed impossible, as they had no distinctive brand mark, till one noticed his neighbor's dog, which followed him.

"Dosta think t' ahld dog 'll ken 'em?"

"Ah don't knah, but mebbe she will. Nell, tell mine!"

The dog chased round the flock and almost immediately singled three for special attention; the humans, it may be added, accepted this verdict.

The sheep-dogs of the fells are sheep-dogs alone, seldom descending to the chase, and bearing themselves upon all occasions with dignity and decorum. In breed they are chiefly Old English, or that crossed with the Scotch collie—very handy animals both of them. The pure-bred collie, being incapable of withstanding the exposure of a life on the mountain-side, is lost to its natural duties and instincts.

The dreary, gray-green slopes of the mountains are the best grazing-ground, and these, affording few picturesque views, are avoided by the popular touring routes. Yet, in an excursion between Little Langdale and Eskdale, over a pack-horse trail now little used, a flock of sheep, under the control of a

shepherd and two dogs, may be met. Passing over Wrynose, a man is seen coming up the narrow valley. In irregular strings, gray fleeces wander along at different levels, over scree and boulders, in and out of craggy ghylls, across patches of damp, wiry bent-grass, and it is difficult to understand that this crowd of animals is under complete command of the heavy-booted dalesman. Two dogs—one gray, the other black—are barely visible, yet so alert that at the first shrill whistle they will instantly drive the sheep nearest them more quickly forward (and what one sheep does the rest follow), or bring the wings of the flock nearer the centre, as desired. They are always on the lookout for stragglers, and it is indeed a smart animal that can break back without being caught.

The Shepherd's Year may be said to begin in the spring after the Shepherds' Meet. This festival was founded when communication between outlying districts was very difficult for the return to their owners of strayed sheep. When a wanderer was found during autumn or winter the shepherd incorporated it in his flock till the Meet, which was held at some secluded place among the fell-heads. The institution is now almost dead—its glory has departed, and the work-a-day fells do not tolerate useless ceremonies. The fells were then a wide stretch of open land, and no one had a right to count the eatage of another's sheep, but with the consolidation of the heaf-going rights these free-and-easy dealings came to an end.

The grass grows longer on the moors, the skylark loudly trills the signal of departure to the fell, and every day at daybreak the sheep collect at the gate at the head of the intakes, waiting for it to be opened. At last the day of liberation arrives, the shepherd climbs the dank slope and opens the way. In an instant the pathway is jammed by a hurrying, struggling mass of sheep anx-

ious to forget the privations of winter in the liberty of the spring; the shepherd affectionately, but in vain, exhorts the mob "to tak' time"; the dogs wander about, whimpering with delight at the prospect.

When the last sheep has darted past, the shepherd drives slowly along the hillside, with his dogs to right and left, within easy signalling distance. In a piece of country much broken by crags and ghylls, where there are abundant places for an idle sheep to be hidden and left behind, the dogs are rarely more than 300 yards away from their master, dividing the ground very skilfully, and watching it completely. When, however, a gently-sloping basin of green moorland is reached, they often take up positions near the horizon, trusting to hear the commanding whistle. At such times the distance will be over a mile from the shepherd. One would think that, in such dead silence as that settled upon the fells, oral instructions would be easily transmissible, but few good shepherds employ this method of command, except when "folding in" for the evening. Instead, successive generations have developed a code of whistles which are intelligible at immense distances, coupled with a system of motions with arms and body which is equally effective. A very pretty exhibition of the complete control exerted by the shepherd over his dogs was the following: We were walking up a narrow valley; in front was a farmhouse; on either side and behind it rose the cliffs, with a few slacks (or less severe slopes) by which approach was to be made to the open moor. A man, standing in the fold, was whistling commands to an unseen dog. We stopped to chat with him—for fell-head dwellers are not usually averse to a few minutes with the occasional visitor—but he motioned us to silence. We could then hear his dog barking on the moor above. A sheep

appeared on the sky line, followed by quite half a hundred more, after the last of which came a black-and-tan dog. As soon as they were in view the farmer gave no more signals; "t' dog could drive 'em haem," he said. His apology for not speaking at first was that "Ah was working t' sheep doon frae t' fell, and ah couldn't see what me dog was dewen!"

As spring dies into early summer the lambing season commences, and this is the most exhausting of all periods for the shepherd. While the sheep in the valleys bring forth their young in March and April, May is often here before the first lambs are born on the fells, and this is much earlier than it used to be, thanks to the cross-breeding previously mentioned. The chief anxiety at this time is to keep away the foxes, the presence of which terrifies the ewe and may do it serious harm. The fox is also very partial to newborn lambs. The gun is used freely, and dozens of animals are annually killed in those districts cursed by an "earth". The hawks, carrion-crows and ravens are rarely troublesome in these days of strict game-preserving, and the taking of nests among the crags is no longer an arduous necessity. Fell sheep have only one lamb each, as a rule, and this gains strength and size to a certain degree very rapidly. After the lambs have all come, the shepherd is more at liberty to wreak vengeance on the foxes. The fox-cubs are now playing about the "earths", and the shepherd plots against them. When the first gleams of sunshine are illuminating the fells, he crawls as near as possible, sheltering among the boulders. Under his coat he carefully carries a terrier, which at some convenient juncture he releases. Then commences a scurry towards the nearest hole. The squealing cubs dash in, the terrier—now thirsting for blood—follows. Subdued subterranean thunder commences

—the dog has met the female fox and is fighting for its life. It may come out blood-spattered and breathless, with a ludicrous consciousness of victory, or the silence which follows becomes a proof that Grip has been borne down and killed.

As summer advances, the smoky-gray fleeces grow long and the sheep pant wearily along the slopes. Night feeding is resorted to and the blazing noon sun sheltered from as far as possible. In the dale-head, in a basin abutting the moor, a dam is put across the beck, which, though a raging, muddy torrent in winter, has sunk to such a tiny trickle that a week often passes before sufficient water collects to wash the sheep. As a rule, a fold is chosen which, from its situation in some upper valley, allows a number of farmers to join forces for the washing. The flocks are driven across the fells, and skilfully manœuvred into the outer fold. From this they are thrown into the water, where some of the shepherds stand waist-deep to receive them, and prevent their drowning. When their coats are thoroughly saturated they are lifted out and examined for foot-rot and other ailments. The smell of strong disinfectants lingers about the place, with that of tobacco and ale, so that the air becomes almost rancid if no breeze is stirring. A sheep-washing is the most picturesque of fell-land events. The restless sheep waiting to undergo their unwelcome dipping, the sheep-dog

Patient, full of importance, and grand
in the pride of instinct,
Walking from side to side with a lordly
air, and superbly
Waving his bushy tail . . .

the shepherds heaving the sheep into the water or, waist-deep, standing there to catch them, the intent groups turning the animals over to examine their feet for the hated "rot", the released

sheep springing out over the wide hill-side, with clean fleeces contrasting strongly against the green, and above all the great green hills and crags echoing back the occasional bark, the frequent bleat, the murmur of conversation. While the washing is going on, opportunity is taken to give the lambs the mark of the branding iron, and to see that the older sheep are correctly marked. Fell sheep are branded with their owner's initial burnt into hoof or horn—the farms differing in the location of these marks according to the rule of the dale. The usual tar fleece-mark is palpably of little use on an animal which is constantly wandering or lying among moisture-beaded tussocks of grass, or soaking patches of heather and bracken. The iron is now seldom used for marking the face of sheep, but ear-punching has frequently to be resorted to for distinction of flocks.

On the day following the washing the shearers take up their work, and very rapidly they do it. According to unwritten law, the day after shearing is over is given up to sports. These are as in the days of "Christopher North" and the Lakeland Poets, who frequently joined in with the dalesmen. Every one tries his hand at wrestling, and some ludicrous contests take place. A couple of white-haired veterans get up to decide the victor in some bout which ended in a draw half a century ago. A ring is formed, a referee chosen, and the contest begins. They prance round, get holds, and slip them a dozen times, then settle to work. After a good deal of struggling they topple over, the worthy underneath averring that he stumbled over a tussock of grass, or slipped on a stone, "else he was just gahen to bring him ower t' buttock". The referee's decision is disputed, and, egged on by their laughing partisans, the loser challenges the other to another bout.

"Na, na, lad, ah've licked the' fair enew."

After "t' clippin'" the routine of the shepherd's work begins anew, but the summer mists have now to be contended with. Generally speaking, nowadays, the shepherd's chiefest dangers—and so far as actual casualties are concerned, they are quite mild—lies in these. At any other season the day shows at early morn what it will be. The night mists dissipate, and the sky becomes "clear as a bell" in spring, the jags and crannies of the distant mountains being very distinct; in autumn the western wind, piling billow upon billow of dense cloud on to the mountain, foretells to the shepherd that the valley cannot be left to-day. For weeks together in winter the mist hangs over the fells, soaking the spongy moss, but the shepherd does not need to venture forth then. When a gale is blowing on the hill-tops—and what is a barely perceptible breeze often is of immense strength there—the sheep are very loth to go up, and the shepherd, therefore, drives them on the more sheltered side and into the ghylls of the mountain.

When feeding, sheep have often to cross considerable beds of scree from one patch of herbage to another. So long as their footing does not give way there is no danger, but "with the slip of a sheep's feet goes his head", and very often they struggle wildly down hill with the débris they are dislodging. Terror robs them of all power of climbing. A boulder from the crags above may hasten the final fall into the rock basin or "doup", hundreds of feet below, where the scree-bed ends. On other occasions they become crag-fast whilst climbing. The sheep dare climb no further up the stiff angle, and the shepherd must not descend lest a gathering momentum should carry him past the animal and over the cliff. A rope is used, and, once a man is lowered, the animal regains courage, and, guided by

hand and voice, makes a final effort to get back to safety. Only occasionally are sheep blown over the cliffs during gales, but this is not so entirely due to the vigilance of the shepherd and his dogs in keeping them from such dangerous situations as to their natural aversion for windy positions. This comparative immunity does not, however, apply with so much force to some of the lower crags, especially those surrounding the deep pools of the mountain becks. The rocks in such a place are apt to be treacherous, not only being loose and broken, but masked with long fringes of rotten heather and bracken. Near the level of the cascade by which the water enters the "dub", the slope becomes more abrupt, and it is here that sheep lose their footing, and, help not being at hand, they are drowned. So many as half a dozen carcasses have been observed floating in the pool beneath a mountain waterfall.

The shepherd may be driving, on what appears to be a settled summer day, along an elevated valley, walled in by rocky ridges, when a cloud drives in behind him and beneath him, completely blotting out dogs and flock in a filmy gray veil. At such a time young shepherds may lose their bearings and wander into an adjacent valley, but the dogs will bring their charge safely home. Sheep do not move far when the mist hangs, but as soon as it rises make off like the wind. Experienced men, therefore, simply halt and wait for the clearing, which may be some hours distant. But even if he abandoned his flock the shepherd would not come to harm. The novice at traversing the fells under cloud may suddenly find himself on a ledge where an incautious movement threatens a fall into a tremendous chasm, but there have been signs of this far back. Occasionally a shepherd who has been caught in the mist walks home in front of his flock,

having passed through without seeing or hearing them. It is obvious that the air, being surcharged with particles of moisture so fine and dense as to convey a white impression to the eye, will not readily carry sound.

There are many opinions as to whether sheep-dogs are ever at a loss to determine their position as well as that of the flock. My own idea is that they locate themselves perfectly by hearing—and it is acknowledged that their sense in this direction has a wider range than ours. Some of the more observant shepherds, too, use this power. They are aware of wide differences in the sounds of wind and streams at different points of their beats, and of this we have a proof. We were wandering over Bowfell with an old shepherd. The mist hung in ragged edges half way down the Band; the ill-marked path ceased at the summit, and we blundered along toward Eskhause. The old man allowed us to guide until we came to where sheer cliffs seemed to drop in every direction, and we in despair appealed to him.

"Listen," he said.

A curlew whistled far above, the wind lisped among the crags and scree around, the merry rattle of a distant rill rose from beneath. The old man, without a word of explanation, took us round the hillock, and again we listened. The curlew was silent, the wind a trifle more boisterous, and a sound of rushing waters more clear.

"The sound heard on the far side of the hill was that of the outlet of Angle Tarn" (which, indeed, was almost sheer below), "whereas you now hear the infant Esk."

The weeks pass on—the days are sultry and the newly-shorn sheep, on a fine afternoon, commence to huddle towards the walls and under the crags, the foxes run slyly towards their earth, the hawks and ravens congregate round their unclimbable nesting-places

and scream derision at the deepening silence. A thunderstorm is approaching. For the past few days a dense bank of vapor has been collecting in the southwest, heavy and black at sunrise, dissipating into a distant blue at midday, and massing again at sunset. A slight breeze rustles among the grass and heather, cooling the feverish air; a sound like the slacking of quicklime falls up the valley. The sky grows still darker, and the shepherd seeks a shelter whence he can see his flock. There is a momentary lifting of the clouds, and then, dark-gray with falling rain, they swoop along the distant fells. A ragged flash of lightning illumines the valley-head, a peal of thunder crashes, and the storm begins. Every half-minute the scene is lit up, and a crash and roar re-echo through the glens. Now, to the parched slopes, the dingy crags, and the shrunken rills comes the rain in sheets. In half an hour every defile is full of water, and it is a time of great danger to the sheep who have sheltered there. Trapped by the flood on some grassy level, they are swept away and get drowned, and the screaming, wheeling scavengers of the fells mark where the body lies. The storm ceases almost as abruptly as it began, the sun shines out and the mountain sides are redolent of renewed life.

Now, summer days draw to a close; frost rime covers the grass at day-break, the days get shorter, high winds are frequent. At first the shepherd drives his flock along the higher ground, to conserve the more convenient forage for days when fog banks and snow will not permit a visit to the tops. The heather on the moor dies from purple to brown, the grassy slopes assume a flabby yellow, the becks swell out under the liberal rains, and everywhere the approach of winter is enclosed. A very anxious period to the shepherd is this. So long as there is

grass he must drive his flock along those wide upland plains where the cold northeaster races, over which snow and rain-squalls hover. The work is one of inconceivable discomfort, the most harrassing side of a disagreeable calling. During these patrols one or two sheep may clude the vigilance of the shepherd and his dogs, and these are seldom folded home. The fox and the raven squabble over the carcasses.

Occasionally the dogs bring the flock home through the whirling flakes without the shepherd's aid—he has walked, in the semi-darkness associated with a mountain snowstorm, on to the treacherous fringe of a ghyll, and been hurled fifty feet or more into its bed. Sometimes the fall is followed by unconsciousness, and this means death. One of the world's most plaintive scenes is that of a flock being guided home without human aid. The dogs halt at the head of the intake waiting for the gate to be opened, the sheep in dumb terror huddle towards the bars. Backward and forward the faithful collies wander, with an eye ever towards the mist-enveloped higher ground, expectant of their master's return. When this state of affairs is noticed from the farmhouses, a search party is instantly organized, and news of the mishap spreads like lightning far down the dale. In half an hour a dozen resolute men and a score of dogs are ready to face the white horror of the fells, and all night long, whether a screeching blizzard hold revel or the bright moon shines over quiet banks of snow, the search is carried on. The dogs are most useful now; their sense of smell allows them to mark down any body lying beneath the wreaths, and usually a rescue or a recovery of the body is effected ere the party turn towards home and rest.

The following record of searches for sheep among the snow-drifts gives an idea of the way in which discoveries of

the wanderers are sometimes made. "The snow abated before morning, when word came round that about fifty sheep were missing from Crag Forest Farm. Our friends straightway prepared to go and see if their services would be of use, but before the farm in question was reached we saw a party of men and dogs making towards the open fell. By cutting across one or two intakes, knee-deep in snow and slush, we intercepted them before they divided to examine the likeliest hollows and ghylls to right and left. Here and there a wind-swept summit or tall bleak crag loomed above the glittering white, a few dark lines alone showing the deeper ghylls. The wind was 'quiet' or 'lown'd', as the shepherds call it, or we would have been unable to cope with the drifting snow. . . . The men stopped where they said was a buried ghyll, and the dogs began to smell over the frozen crust. In a few minutes one barked, then followed a most exciting burrowing as the whole pack got together. Our party began to dig a few yards away from the place the dogs had located, for the ghyll was deep, and if the sheep were at its bottom a tunnel might have to be made. The powdery drift flew before the quickly-plied spades, and soon the foremost worker was below the level of the snow. As we scrambled down to take a turn with the tools (for the work was most exhausting), we found the heat in the excavation already great. In one corner a frozen mass was presently encountered. This was carefully dug round, and in a few seconds a sheep was liberated. 'No worse; it has only been one night in the snow,' was reported as we settled again to work. No further signs of life being found, a dog was brought down. After carefully smelling around in the semi-darkness he selected a particular corner and began whining and scraping a hole. He was instantly hauled away, and

digging commenced anew. More sheep are found; then, with a sigh of relief, we climbed into the open air. How fresh and biting after the smoor of the tunnel! More gullies and hollows were traversed, but the dogs gave no more alarms till we reached a point where a boundary wall dipped out of sight into the snow. After glancing along the surface the shepherds opened a shallow trench, and in less than ten minutes had exhumed almost a score of sheep. Seeing neither smear nor wrinkle on the glittering snow-crust, we asked how it was possible to locate the sheep so nearly, and the following explanation was vouchsafed: 'When caught in a snowstorm, a sheep immediately lies down in the shelter of a boulder, wall, or gully, broadside on, so to speak, to the gale. Its breath rises through the porous covering, and being partially condensed on reaching the air, a damp place is made on the surface of the drift. When the animals are barely covered the shepherd looks for this sign, but when they are very deep below, the damp points are so minute that they cannot be discovered.' "

Now, let the calendar move to the thirty-ninth day after the events already described.

"The scene on the fell is in strong contrast to the huge snow-bed we were last upon. There was a lingering beauty in the glittering levels, an impending horror in the awesome cliffs and the thin, straight lines which marked ghylls too deep for the snow to fill. But today, after a prolonged thaw (for December), the dead, yellow grass appears between long, narrowing swathes of grimy snow—the contrasts have toned down considerably, and only on the distant mountains is there a wreath of unpolluted white. Yesterday morning we were wandering over the forest with the shepherd and his dogs, when old Sam—a cur of vast intelligence, but

with so savage a temper that his fangs have long since been broken to prevent him injuring such sheep as he drives—gave that low whine inseparably associated in our minds with a sheep-rescue.

“Drat it, Sam, what is ther?” cried the shepherd; then, turning to us, “That’s t’ third time t’ ahld dog’s “set” when it’s cum be’t fell edge.”

“We walked to the edge of a rugged crag, below which a few tree-tops stuck through a mass of snow so firmly plastered that only an inappreciable quantity had yet thawed. The dog was now beside itself with delight and excitement—clearly some sheep were buried here. In a short half-hour a force of diggers had collected, and the necessary shafts were rapidly made, but not for four hours of stern hard work did we come against the steep cliff face and find—nought. We had taken a wrong direction. Old Sam (the dog) was brought down to indicate anew the whereabouts of our quest, and after digging some yards to our left we encountered one of those hardened blocks which we knew contained a sheep. After being entombed for almost forty days the poor creature was in a deplorable state. Its stomach seemed to have shrunk entirely away, its eyes were glazed and sightless, its whole body limp and powerless. The mouth opened, but so low had ebbed the stream of vigor that no sound issued. The sheep was barely alive. A little gin was at once administered to arouse the digestive organs so that nutrition might be given freely, after which blankets were brought up from the house. Wrapped in these the sheep—a very light burden indeed—was transported to the warm kitchen, where it was fully brought round. The dogs gave great trouble at this point, and we are told that the quietest of them would not hesitate to worry and kill any sheep it found in so emaciated a

condition. It has been remarked that sheep-worrying is always most rife during the early spring after such a mishap as an early winter snowstorm. Digging again, more dead than alive, another two were reached together. Though so closely imprisoned in the snow, one of them had been able to reach its companion, and had torn and eaten the wool from its quarters. The surgical skill at command could not remove the wool clogging its vitals, and a few hours after the rescue the sheep had to be killed. The last gallery cut in the snow enabled us to reach a sheep which had squeezed itself during the storm close to the cliff. The moss, so far as it could reach, had been devoured, the soil had been sucked from the crevices of the rock, and the bare stone itself had been polished by much licking. This sheep was unmistakably the best in condition of those rescued that day.”

Sheep which have been buried in the snow for such lengths of time are very slow to recover from the effects, and few of them are again sent to graze on the fell. They are fattened at all hazards and sold to the butchers.

When it is observed that the average mountain sheep-farm has twelve acres of land on the tops to one in the bottom, it will be apparent that the sheep turned off the grass in autumn would overstock the other land if a large number of the lambs or “hogs” were not wintered at other places than on their owner’s farm. On the moss land near the sea farmers are open to take them and keep them alive till spring, and to these places a good many are annually driven. Before this system was broached the mountain farmer could only hope to raise one-half of his lamb crop—about one-sixth succumbing to the perils of early days on the moors, and one-third more during the first winter of sheer hunger; for the hay crop in these elevated situations is a

very small one, and the other food is scarce. The sudden change of level and diet involved in wintering out has invariably a bad effect on these immature animals, and often a considerable number die.

For the ewes at home the winter is a time of privation. It makes the heart ache to see them follow the shepherd with his load of hay, greedily consuming whatever may fall; to see them, when snow is on the ground, endeavoring to scoop something eatable out of a frozen, half-rotten turnip; to see them lying against the walls for shelter when the blizzard runs riot up the valley, chewing their cud in quiet misery, perhaps thinking of the awful storm that is raging on the higher ground. The shepherd is having a hard time, too, in carrying food through the knee-deep slush, but there is a warm kitchen for his shelter when work is done. Still he approaches his hungering flock with genuine pity; he knows that sheep which left the moorland weighing over a couple of hundredweights will only carry half that weight back again, and that many will never range the mountains again. He feels savagely the hardship of it all, but he is powerless to alter it. Therefore he is glad when anything happens which can make him forget the dumb suffering of his flock. Card-playing at night and fox-hunting during the day are the only recreations possible in the dales. Every one, male and female, has sworn death to the foxes, and hounds always have an eager following. The whole population joins in the hunt, and more than one female has been chosen "Hunt Mayor" in different valleys. As this appointment requires a correct knowledge of "earths" and how they may be stopped, as well as of the especial propensities and whereabouts of the local foxes, it must be conceded that the ladies so honored could, at least, hold their own with the men in knowledge of the tech-

nicalities of hunting. The "Mayor" is the local deputy M. F. H., having complete direction of the field when hunting his own district. A new "Mayor" is generally chosen at the supper after the last hunt of the season in a particular district, and this feast is a great event in the shepherd's diary.

While in the district the hounds are maintained by the subscriptions of the farmers, many of whom contribute in kind, one sending in a sheep, perhaps, and another a bag of meal. The huntsmen's wages are quickly raised, and the farmers vie in offering to kennel the pack. At some ancient farmhouse a meet is called at the earliest hour there is light enough to see properly. Retiring by day into the most out-of-the-way parts of the mountains, the fells fox is forced to run some distance ere committing his depredations. He makes nightly sorties into the outlying valleys and distant levels, and in his attacks on fowl-houses is even less merciless than his brother of the shires. A single fox once raided a goose-hovel, no fewer than sixteen of which were missing when the place was visited by the owner next morning. Clearly the fox could not have deported this number of birds, and eventually the dead bodies were found buried in the midden, not twenty yards from the hut in which the geese had been kept. Bearing in mind, therefore, Master Reynard's propensity to wander far of nights, the huntsman is early afoot, and attempts to intercept his return. He draws the "lown'd" side of the fell (*i. e.*, that side on which the breeze is least felt) first, and rarely fails in getting a chase, for, as previously noted, the game is numerous. Striking a trail, the hounds race merrily into the fell-heads—Reynard in front, hearing their music, makes forward to gain his home before they can overhaul him, but finds the way baulked by a number of shepherds and their dogs who have climbed

to the earth whilst it was still dark. He turns to make for another "earth" more distant, but is often rolled over in his stride. As the morning goes on, more and more scents are struck, with the inevitable result that the pack splits up into threes and fours, each busy hunting for all it is worth with a detachment of the field chasing after it. No fewer than seven foxes have been known to be afoot in the hinterland surrounding Buckbarrow earth at one time, within the radius of half a mile.

The "earth-stoppers", it may be remarked, are often disappointed of a view of the hunting after all. I knew one man of over seventy climb from Saegill to the top of Buckbarrow before daylight. Arrived there, he stopped all the holes he could find, lit a small fire of peat, and stayed till nightfall, with his two dogs for company. This was a day when February rain-clouds closed thick about the fells, and his position could only have been one of great discomfort. Meantime,

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the huntsman, in a farmyard half a dozen miles away, was disconsolately wandering about alone, for, on the previous day, when the hounds were walking across the mist-piled division between two valleys, the majority of them had bolted on a hot scent, and could not be traced. However, they turned up at the kennels (at Ambleside some ten miles off in a line), having apparently run to Swarthfell earth, near the foot of Ullswater—a distance of at least a dozen miles as the crow flies. Whether they killed the fox they pursued so far and so well cannot be told, but I have a great desire to believe that it escaped and is still ranging the fells. May it be in front of our pack next time I go fox-hunting with the shepherds!

With such incidents as these to pass time in the happening and their recounting, the shepherd's winter drags slowly through, and longer, brighter days at length proclaim the advent of another year.

William T. Palmer.