

BITS ABOUT ANIMALS.

MOUNTAIN SHEEP, SHEPHERDING,
AND SHEPHERDS' DOGS.

By RUTH LAMB.

IN Cumberland and Westmoreland there is a famous breed of sheep which are said to be descended from Spanish ancestors. They are beautiful sagacious creatures to which one could not apply the term "silly," so commonly given to sheep by persons who see animals without observing their habits.

In Cumberland there is a tradition that their mountain sheep, so prettily marked and so *cute* looking, were brought to them by what has proved a fortunate accident.

A ship, containing a number of Spanish sheep of a remarkably fine breed, was wrecked on the Cumberland coast, but the live stock it carried were all saved, and were the ancestors of those which now feed on the heights of Helvellyn and Blencathara. They are lively, active creatures, which roam and feed on the fells during the summer, and spend their winters in the valleys, foddered from day to day by the hand of the shepherd.

People generally speak of sheep as helpless creatures, which stray away without any provocation so to do, and have not the slightest notion of taking care of themselves. In one sense they are helpless and timid, for nature has left them without the means of defending themselves; but when they stray it is not always in the purposeless fashion generally attributed to them, as the following anecdotes abundantly prove.

A farmer, living near Thirlmere, sold three sheep to go to a place near Keswick, above six miles off. A few months later, during the lambing season, the three sheep made their appearance at their old home, weary with their walk, and evidently with the intention of being tended by their former shepherd. They were of course restored to their proper owner, but they went back a larger flock than they came, for their lambs were born a few hours after they reached the old spot, where they had nursed the offspring of the previous year.

Two other sheep, sold from the same farm to another near Cockermouth, also started back again, after several months' absence. One reached Thirlmere safely, having passed through Keswick on its way; the other was seen and restored to its purchaser.

Another day there was considerable anxiety at the Thirlmere farm, because two extremely handsome and valuable rams had taken themselves off in company. These creatures had lived two years on the banks of Thirlmere, yet it is evident they had not forgotten their old home, for they were seen pattering away in the direction of Ennerdale, the spot from which they were originally brought. They did not reach it, however, for someone, recognising them by their marks, stopped them on the way, and sent a message to their owner, who fetched them home again, rejoicing.

In these northern counties a book is kept at each farmhouse, containing a description of the various marks placed upon the sheep, so that when any of them set off without the owner's leave, they are easily recognised and restored to their proper bounds.

Do not the above anecdotes show, not only remarkable memory of places and roads, and a fixed determination on the part of one animal, but prove that the two or three entered into a plan to act in concert, and travel together? It seems to me that the more sheep are noticed, the less we shall feel inclined to speak contemptuously of their want of sagacity.

They, however, require incessant care and watchfulness, for their enemies, though appar-

ently contemptible ones, are such as the sheep cannot battle with unassisted.

In mountainous districts the carrion crow is a terrible foe, and will sometimes peck out the eyes of a poor sheep, or even its tongue, when it is wearied and blown with the weight of its fleece. Then the flies are terrible pests, and the cause of indescribable torture to the poor creatures. Shepherding must, therefore, be untiringly followed up; and it is a most interesting sight to see the wiry dalesmen race up the sides of Helvellyn day by day, accompanied by their delightfully intelligent dogs.

In the level pastures of Lincolnshire and many other English counties, one colley, with sleek, well-covered sides, is amply sufficient for the work. He drives the flock towards a gate at which the shepherd stands, and they are counted, reviewed, and dispersed again with little cost of time or trouble.

But the mountain shepherd must have, at least, a couple of dogs to help in his task and to gather the sheep and lambs. They scour along from height to height, the shepherd shouting to his four-footed assistants, and using untranslatable ejaculations, which only the dogs appear to understand. These cries sound very much like those uttered by a little Japanese acrobat, whom I once saw flourishing his small limbs at the top of a ladder balanced on his father's chin. However, the dogs know what their masters say, and pay attention to it.

They are thin, wiry creatures, these Cumberland shepherds' assistants, and when I first patted some of my colley acquaintances there, I was quite shocked at the ease with which their ribs could be counted. I felt indignant that such good servants should be so badly fed, and ventured to express my opinion rather warmly.

For answer, I was allowed to see the huge bowls of porridge which awaited them on their return from the mountain, and the rapidity with which the food disappeared showed they had brought a good appetite back with them.

"These dogs cannot carry flesh," I was told. "They have too much travelling for that. Mountain work runs all the flesh off their bones, though they get plenty to eat. If they were fat they could not do their work. They would be exhausted, out of breath, and wearied with carrying their own weight before they were half-way up the mountain."

So I understood that there was a needs-be for the disreputable, thin appearance of the faithful beasts.

Sheep-dogs enjoy their work, and if the shepherd does not attend to his share of the duty, they will go off to the fells on their own account. To prevent this, one of the pair which are accustomed to go out together is usually kept under lock and key, so they go about the farm in turns.

During the hay-harvest a year ago, a succession of hot days were eagerly turned to account by the farmers, in order to get in the crop as quickly as possible, and for once shepherding was neglected. It happened that some person let the second dog, Ben, out of the stable, whilst Bess was also at liberty. Determining to do some shepherding at all hazards, and yet not daring to go on the mountain after their own sheep without the master's presence, they crossed the lake, ascended the opposite fells, and collected the whole flock of the farmer, who resided at the foot. They were driving them down for inspection, when they were discovered and sent off to mind their own business.

Before closing this paper, I should like to say a few words for these valuable and intelligent dogs. I know from experience that during the winter, when the sheep are in the low pastures and the services of the colley are less needed, he is often very badly treated and

insufficiently fed. I never heard of this being done in our own northern counties; but in January last a statement was made in a paper read before the Manchester Literary Club, which has positively haunted me whenever I have since looked at the beautiful, intelligent face of a colley dog at work.

The writer said that some of the Welsh farmers turn out the faithful creatures, which have guarded their flocks through nine months of the year, to shift for themselves as best they can; that they subsist, sometimes on the carcass of a sheep that has been killed by a fall from the rocks, or perished from cold, and sometimes, driven by starvation, they turn upon the flock of which they have been the faithful guardians, and take a lamb for themselves. If detected in this their lives would pay instant forfeit, though the cruel master, who could so illuse a hard-working, four-footed slave, is the one who really merits punishment.

One cannot help hoping that the exposure of such conduct may shame those who have been guilty of it into treating with more consideration their humble but indispensable assistants in the care of their flocks.

RECONCILED ENEMIES.

It is only a short time since I wrote of the jealousy of our adopted cat, Blackie, as manifested towards our proper cat, Kitty. And, more recently, they have become friends in a funny way. Kitty had a young family, from which a handsome tabby was selected to be kept and brought up for a fri-end—the race being a valuable one, and greatly prized as mousers.

Jealous Blackie was moved to interest herself in the mamma, and even popped her nose over the side of the basket and bestowed a patronising lick on both its inmates, to the discomfiture of the little terrier, which dodged to the opposite side and kept one eye on its old foe's claws and the other on the blind youngster down below.

The kitten thrived, and was most devotedly nursed for three weeks by its own mother, when Blackie, too, had a family, all of which were doomed to a watery grave. Whereupon, instead of lamenting over what could not be mended, Blackie took advantage of Kitty's absence, the first time that loving little mother went to take a walk abroad, jumped into the basket and took possession of the kitten.

She lavished caresses upon it, and coaxed the little fat, furry bundle to take her on as nurse number two, but at first without success. By dint of perseverance, she succeeded, and the real mother acquiesced in the arrangement in the kindest way.

From that time the cats nursed the little one by turns, and sometimes both would lie in the basket together, with the kitten between them, and Kitty's white paw thrown lovingly round the black neck of the pussy by whom she had been so often maltreated. Lady was no longer clawed by Blackie for venturing to look over the side, or interfered with when the kitten was big enough to seize the doggie's tail and caper round her.

I took my husband to look at the pretty group one day, and he said, with a smile, "It is not the first time that a helpless baby has been the means of reconciling old foes. Such things happen in human families, as well as amongst cats."

