

DOGS OF PATAGONIA.

SHEEP TENDERS OF WONDERFUL INTELLIGENCE.

HUNTING AND FIGHTING DOGS.

DOGS THAT HAVE RELAPSED INTO THE WILD STATE.

The Shepherd Dogs Are as Valuable as Horses – How They Do Their Clever Work – Ten Dogs Will Care for a Flock of 2,000 Sheep – How They Round Up the Sheep and Separate Mixed Flocks – Keen Work of the Indian Hunting Dogs – One Little Animal that Fools Them – Menace of the Formidable Wild Dogs in the Northern Part of the Country.

It is likely that if a census of all the dogs of the world could be taken, the region lying between the Rio Negro, at the north end of Patagonia, and the Hermite Island, whose south end is Cape Horn, would be found to contain a greater number of dogs in proportion to the human population than any other region of its size in the world. It is, on the whole, a desert region, and the human population is scant, but its dogs are many. The dogs are numerous, one may say, because the population is scant. Save for the valley of the Chubut, where, as The Sun has told, a great colony of Welsh farmers is flourishing, there is not a farm in the region, and there is scarcely a village worthy of the name of town. Along the streams a few sheep ranches may be found, and south of the Rio Gallegos about all of the country is taken up by the shepherds, while the rich prairies of Tierra del Fuego are rapidly being populated by the same class of men. Elsewhere – and that term includes nine tenths of the region – only wandering Indians and white men who live as skin and feather hunters can be found. Naturally the shepherds use dogs in herding the sheep and a plenty of them, too, while for the men who hunt ostriches and the guanaco a pack of dogs is as necessary as a bunch of the desert horses. One man who had ridden through the desert north and south and crosswise for a thousand miles, told me that from five to six dogs to each individual he met was a low estimate.

The traveller who visits Patagonia is not likely to doubt this estimate, for, even if a casual observer only, he cannot ignore the dogs. But because at the ports where the regular coasting steamers stop the dogs are well behaved, the traveller might very easily make his entire voyage without learning that there was anything of special interest about the tribe of canis of which he everywhere will see specimens. I am bound to admit that, although on the lookout for interesting facts of all kinds, I had reached the Rio Gallegos before I realized what a remarkable share the dog had in the industries that sustain one part and enrich another of the various inhabitants of the region. I was talking with Gen. Edelmiro Mayer, the Governor of Santa Cruz territory, when the conversation turned on the wool industry, and then after a little he said:

"By the way, have you made the acquaintance of any of our shepherd dogs?"

"No, not exactly. I've seen them," I replied. "Are they in any way different from shepherds elsewhere?"

"I think so. May be just as bright dogs are found in Australia or on the plains in your country: but let me tell you that our dogs in Patagonia sell for exactly the prices as our horses, while some dogs are held higher than any horse."

"That's interesting. What does the dog do to make himself so valuable to his

owner?"

"I'll tell you all about it. We use for our sheep the Scotch collie breed, but we have to train them specially. The sheep here range over wide territories, feeding well scattered out. A herd of a thousand will be found scattered over a square league of land, and they are constantly travelling as they feed. They move over into the next league and the next still, as you may say, while you are rolling a cigarette. The shepherd who has charge of them must keep on the move or they will get out of sight before he knows what is going on. Now, suppose a shepherd for any reason wanted to round up such a herd, what kind of work would he make of it alone? But 1,000 is a small herd. One man commonly has charge of 2,000 here, because men are scarce. Imagine a man trying to bunch up 2,000 sheep that were scattered over a stretch of land six mile long and three wide, and were travelling away from him at the rate of four miles an hour all the time! He never could do it. It would be a hard ride for three or even five men to do it.

"Here, then, comes in the good quality of our dogs. The shepherd will have five or six dogs for 1,000 sheep, and nine or ten, maybe, for 2,000. He wants the sheep bunched, so he shouts to the dogs, who are frolicking about within easy call, and he says:

"'Ola! Ps-s-t! Bunch 'em on the knoll there!' 'Bunch 'em in that grassy hollow!'

"I just wish you'd stay over until the next steamer and ride out on the range to see it done! Away go the dogs trailing out in a line around those sheep like a band of Tehuelche Indians trying to surround a herd of guanacos – trailing around the sheep that are scattered over a stretch of desert six miles long by three wide – their heads in air, their bushy tails switching in the gale, and the welkin ringing with their merry voices. And what does the shepherd do help them? Not a thing. He gets down from his horse and builds a fire in the lee of a clump of calafat [sic] bushes if he wants to, but before he can leave his saddle for that purpose those sheep are on the gallop toward the spot he indicated. He may take twenty minute to get his fire well started, and if so he will find as he turns from gazing at the growing flames that the herd of sheep is all gathered just where he wanted them – gathered in a mass with the dogs at equal intervals around the bunch sitting on their haunches with tongues out and broad smiles on their faces on account of the fun they've had doing it.

"This done, the shepherd can ride away if he wish to do so and stay away for hours, and yet on returning he will find the sheep still gathered in the bunch and contented to stay there, while the dogs will be stretched out on the ground, but with their noses to the herd and eyes open. In short, the shepherd is a sort of superintendent – he is like the general manager of a factory. He determines in a general way that the sheep should feed in this or that part of the range or be gathered for inspection and so on. The dogs under verbal orders do the work with precision and hearty good will.

"But bunching is not their most interesting feat. You should see them when two herds get mixed. Jack and Bill are chums, and herding on adjoining ranges. Jack want to tell Bill about a pretty half-breed Tehuelche squaw he met over on the Chico, and rides over to Bill's range. While they chuckle over the maiden the two herds of sheep get all mixed up – Jack's 1,797 and Bill's 1,932 are all feeding together while the two packs of dogs alternately quarrel and make friends, and everything looks to a stranger as if a bad mess were made of it. Now, as a matter of fact, both of these herds are branded and their ears are cropp'd, but it takes an expert man to distinguish one of Bill's from one of

Jack's. If Bill and Jack had to separate the herds single-handed they would have to build two corrals and, picking out the sheep one at a time, put them in the enclosures. With the aid of ordinary good dogs, such as you have seen in the States, Bill and Jack could separate the herds and the dogs might keep them separate. Here is how we do it in Patagonia.

"Bill and Jack mount their horses and shout: "'Ola! P-s-s-t! Fetch 'em here, boys!' In a trice, as I have explained, the sheep all come galloping together in a bunch, and then the dogs sit down at intervals about the flock, Jack's dogs being on Jack's side of the bunch and Bill's on his side. As soon as all is quiet Jack waves his hand to Bill and Bill waves his hand, and each calls for certain of his dogs in pairs – Spot and Ring, Bushy and Shag – usually two pairs to each herd like that. Instantly the pairs of dogs respond and come to the shepherd in pairs, as well broken carriage horses will, while all the rest of the dogs get off their haunches and look eagerly first at the sheep and then at the shepherds. At another call – usually a wave of the hand, with the naming of the dogs – two more come running toward each shepherd and then go off to the rear to stop at a spot which each shepherd indicates as the place where his sheep are to be held, and then comes another dog, who take his place just behind the shepherd's horse, while the remaining dogs go galloping to and fro about the herd of sheep, barking, probably out of pure love of their work, while the sheep begin to stir and move about, knowing very well what is to come.

"Then comes the sport.

"'Bring them out, boys!' shout the shepherds, and with that the pair of dogs first called dash into the flock – clear to the centre of the flock, as likely as not, because of their enthusiasm. Pausing there each pair of dog grabs a sheep – a dog on each side of the sheep holding it by the ear – and out they come on the run, bringing that sheep between them. Clearing the flock, they rush past the horse on which the shepherd sits, and the next instant the dog that was in waiting there jumps in behind them and nips the led sheep on the leg with a snarling yelp, and away that sheep gallops as if a wildcat had it on the run. It gallops away for a dozen jumps, perhaps, and then the two dogs sent to the holding place in the rear take charge of it, and it very likely lies down as contentedly as if it had not had any trouble for a month.

"At this moment it would be worth while for the traveller to know the marks of the two herds of sheep, and to examine the sheep in the two bunches as the dogs separate the mixture. Every sheep behind Bill's horse would be found with Bill's mark, and every one behind Jack's horse Jack's mark. The dogs never make a mistake, and very soon Jack rides away with his 1,797 sheep before him, while Bill remains with his 1,932."

"How does the dog distinguish his sheep from others?" was asked.

"There are two theories. It is commonly believed that the dogs know their own by their odor, just as dogs follow the track of their masters along crowded streets in the city. On the other hand, some shepherds suppose that the dogs know the sheep by sight, just as you know your friends when you meet them in a crowd, no matter how great the crowd may be. It is certain that no dog is able to pick out sheep when first brought to a bunch, no matter what his training elsewhere may have been. A dog must have time to get acquainted with the sheep he is in charge of.

"Quite as necessary, but not quite as interesting as the shepherds, are the

hunting dogs. These are of two classes. One is a breed in which the blood of the greyhound predominates. They do not differ very much from a greyhound, except that they are a trifle stockier. Cross a staghound with a bloodhound and the progeny with a greyhound and I guess you would have about the breed wanted, but no one take the pains to do that. We have what you may call the Patagonia greyhound that is really a mongrel, but has just the qualities we want – good sight, good wind, great speed and staying qualities. These dogs are used by the shepherds to hunt panthers. The panthers are the great pest of the Patagonia range. They swarm, you may say, on the desert. The most of the shepherd's time is devoted to keeping the range as free of panthers as possible. The long, gaunt dogs run down the panther very easily, nip him in the most painful way possible, and when he turns on them they simply sit down and hold him till the shepherd comes with the Winchester. The disgust these dogs always exhibit when the shepherd falls to kill the beast at the first shot is at once interesting, amusing and praiseworthy. I have heard that they would allow a panther to escape when a greenhorn made a particularly bad shot.

"The other class of dogs is of a smaller and more substantial breed, but still a mongrel. It is the Patagonia fighting dog. – say a mixture of shepherd with retriever – and a dash of bull thrown in to give ferocity and grit. These dogs hunt well with the long and lank fellows, for when the panther has been stopped they adroitly avoid its claws and leaping in fasten on its neck and back. The tussle that ensues is worth a journey to Patagonia to see."

The rapid increase in the flocks of Patagonia is driving to the wall not only the natives – Indians – but a most interesting, if worthless, class of white men, the feather hunters. Of the interesting characteristics of these white nomads of the Patagonia desert something will be told at another time. That they all have packs of dogs has already been said: so, too, the Indians have tremendous packs. An Indian village, with a population of say twenty-five men, will have sometimes 200 dogs, all hunters.

The nomads of Patagonia depend almost entirely on the guanaco and the ostrich for their subsistence. The flesh, with ostrich eggs in the season, is about their only food. The skins of the guanaco serve at once for clothing, bedding, and wigwam covers. The ostrich feathers are exchanged at the settlements for the various white man's products these plainsmen like most – drinks, tobacco, and woven goods for the women. Although familiar with the use of firearms, neither white nor red nomads use them in the chase. They prefer dogs, horses, bolas, and knives. It is an interesting fact, they say, that about all the dogs to be found among the hunters of Patagonia are the progeny of the dogs introduced by the Welshmen of the Chubut colony of which The Sun has told a story. Almost without exception the dogs of the hunters are of the mongrel greyhound breed described by Gov. Mayer. Their manner of capturing the guanaco is like that of bringing the panther to bay, save that when they corner the guanaco they down and bite it to death. In hunting the ostrich the case is often different, especially if it be an old cock. There is a wild race across the plain down into a hollow, up the other side, down again, up again, the old cock ostrich with its long neck far out and wings drooping, while the dogs stretch out till their gaunt bellies seem to almost graze the earth, and then – the ostrich springs many feet to one side and is off on an angle, while the dogs fly on, sliding, scratching and ploughing up the gravel in a mad effort to check their impetuous headway.

At last they stop, and getting themselves together give one look at the old cock ostrich clawing his way toward the far side of the next league but one. Then they drop their heads and tails and with humiliation showing in every line and

motion of their lank bodies, sneak back to the troop of horses ever hunter must have.

Sad to relate the wit of the old cock does not save him, even when the dogs give up the chase. The hunter has been scampering along behind on a pony, waiting for just the move the bird had made. When the bird ran off at an angle the hunter cut across after the bird, swinging two round stones at the end of a six foot string, and then, just as the bird thinks to dodge again, these chain shot come whizzing through the air to tangle the string about the bird's legs and down he comes.

Remarkably interesting, too, is the intelligence shown by the Indian dogs when a herd of guanacos is to be rounded up. It is said that they fully understand what is to be done from the moment the boss hunter of the clan calls the rest about him to prepare for the hunt. With indescribable wriggles and leaps and barking they await the start, and then with one accord sober down and follow their masters till the game is seen. At that the whole pack – maybe 300 dogs – will stretch out in a lengthening file along the lee side of the game, while the ends of the line gradually work up to windward and enclose the bunch. By that time the keen-nosed sentinels of the game have scented the danger and are prancing and neighing like show horses at a county fair, but their signals to the herd come too late. They are within a narrowing circle of death and the white fangs of Patagonia hunting dog are soon buried in the flesh of the guanaco's neck.

It is an interesting fact, already alluded to in The Sun that the greatest pests the wheat growers of the Chubut valley have to meet are the wild geese and ducks of various kinds. It may seem impossible that water fowl should be a nuisance in a desert where rivers a hundred miles or more apart are about the only water to be found, but the very scarcity of streams makes the gatherings of wild fowl all the larger where water does exist, especially during the migrating season. It was simply impossible for a farmer to keep his fields free from the hungry birds with a gun. In this trouble, therefore, he turned to the dogs, and with great success. One of the sights worth seeing in both the Rio Chubut and the Rio Negro valleys is a pack of fierce dogs keeping the geese and ducks off a ten-acre plot of wheat, galloping hither and on, capturing here and there a more courageous gander or a less active goose, and throwing a cloud of white feathers in the air as they tear it to pieces, while the air above and around quivers with the metallic cries of the birds, the beating of myriad wings, and the savage voices of the eager hounds.

Among other uses to which dogs are put on the desert is the capturing of the armadillo. This animal is one of the class of beings that, like turtles, carry their bones on the outside; in fact, it can best be described to one wholly unfamiliar with it by saying that it is somewhat like a turtle, but it is shorter and thicker, it lives on land, it is a comparatively swift runner, and when overtaken its jointed armor enables it to roll itself into a ball. Armadillos are almost always fat, and when baked are the most delicious meat the desert affords – and that is saying a good deal. But the training of a dog to track and run down armadillos is the hardest task the Patagonian dog owner undertakes, for the reason that the desert is the home of another animal which the dog would much rather pursue. And what is very curious too, in this matter is the fact that the dog never does catch the animal he wishes to chase. This animal is a rodent, the vizcacha – a sort of prairie dog – of which some interesting fact will be told at another time. Left to himself, the dog pursues the rodents, with open jaws and bulging eyes, for a hundred times, maybe, but all in vain, for the pursued invariably plunges into its burrow, where no dog

can follow. At last the dog realizes the folly of the open chase and then adopts the tactics of the cat. Crouching to the ground, with stealthy tread and quivering tail, he strives to conceal himself behind one knoll as he creeps up on the rodent at the entrance to the next beyond. The quick-eyed game sees him coming all the time, but as if to tantalize him allows him to approach until dog enthusiasm can be restrained no longer. Then the dog makes a wild leap and the rodent a nimble plunge. The game is lost as before, so the dog tries creeping up on another and another – tries perhaps a dozen times – till his patience is gone, when once more he goes galloping about the vizcacha village, to wear himself out at last and go away home in the deepest humiliation. But no number of such humiliations breaks him of his desire to chase the rodent, and it is only after hundreds of whippings on the one hand and rewards on the other that he is led to stick to the armadillo trail when it crosses that of the prairie dog.

This eagerness of the dog to capture the prairie rodent is the basis of a practical joke on the dog that is a never-failing source of fun for the boys of Patagonia. The boys take the dogs away to the vizcacha village, carrying along a shovel and a piece of sheepskin or a bit of cowhide, or some other stuff that may be tied into a tough bundle of about the size of the rodent. At the village the dogs are encouraged to chase the nimble beasts about until all get well excited. Then the boys, with shout and cries, rush to a hole, where one begins digging, and adroitly throws out the skin bundle among the prancing dogs. The way the dogs pounce on the fraud and rend and pull and snarl and fight makes the Patagonia boys laugh till the tears come.

Readers familiar with Darwin's "Naturalist's Voyage Around the World" will remember that he tells an interesting story of the dogs used in herding sheep in the River Plate country. Shepherd puppies were taken from their mother as soon as possible and made to nurse a ewe instead. They were put to sleep on beds of wool in the sheepfold and, in short, were kept with the sheep continually. In this way they were made excellent shepherds, for the naturalist asserts that even the savage wild dogs in a pack would not attack the sheep when defended by one of these.

In those days (it was 1833) the use of dogs with the sheep was considered indispensable there, as it now is in Patagonia, but within recent years the sheep owners of the Argentine north of the Rio Negro have begun discarding dogs altogether. If the shepherd kept collies, the wife had to have a pug, the youngsters a Newfoundland, and the big boys a variety of hunters and retrievers. In fact, every ranch had a tremendous pack of dogs that were either useless or were used on occasional days. Now, life on an Argentine ranch was a pretty lonesome kind of a life at best. Neighbors were a long way off, but the native birds and beasts were close at hand. The instincts of the hunting dogs were strong within them. The pent-up existence in the kennel and house was slavery; beyond the corral fence were freedom and life. The hunters scented their game from afar and bounded away over the plain to find it. What was the satisfaction of gulping down table scraps at the house door compared with the intoxicating delight of sinking the fangs into a victim's neck and drinking its blood hot from the heart? They soon would have none of the slave existence. Meantime among the table scraps they had had mutton, and behind the corral they had had at least the smell of the blood of the sheep. Dogs by the hundred deserted the ranch for the range, and every such wild dog became a scourge to the sheep owner. The dogs hunted in packs and destroyed sheep by the hundred and even by the thousand. The curious conditions of affairs, wherein a sheep owner had on one hand a standing offer of a reward of \$4 for every wild dog killed on his range, and on the other hand kept a huge pack of dogs at the head station from which

the wild packs were recruited was often seen. But such a condition could not last. The home pack had to go. I have the record of one Argentine sheep ranch on which over 2,000 wild dogs have been killed, at a cost of over \$6,000 cash in bounties, and yet there were until recently plenty of tame dogs on that ranch.

Patagonia has no indigenous wolves. There is, indeed, a sort of a prairie wolf, called *aguará*, a red beast, slim and sharp nosed but it is extremely shy and is scant in number and practically harmless. The tame dogs that have gone wild, however, have given the country what is really a species of wolf. Dogs of all colors and breeds went wild and are still going away from the ranches to join the wild packs, but out of this mixture has come a distinct breed that is interesting to consider. They are rather larger than an ordinary collie or shepherd dog, but have hair of about the same length, while the color is a tawny yellow – a type perfectly suited to such a desert. So great is their ferocity that they have been known to drag boys from the backs of ponies and eat them alive, together with the ponies that had vainly striven to fly from the danger. In the north of Patagonia the wild dogs are so numerous as to be a danger as well as a pest, but there is no probability of any measure being taken for their extermination. In the south, or rather, in the region from Rio Chubut to Rio Gallegos, they are scarce because the life of the majority of dog owners – that is, the feather hunters – is yet about as wild as any that a dog could wish for; but the number is even there increasing with the increase of the sheep. When Darwin arrived at Port Desire he wrote in his diary that the zoology of the Patagonian desert was as scant as its flora. This may be true, but experience has shown that though Patagonia is a desert, arid and gaunt, there is no part of the world where civilized men and dogs may return more readily to the wild lives of their ancestors.