

CATTLE RANCHING IN THE WEST.

The *North British Agriculturist* publishes a letter from an Edinburgh gentleman who has spent two years at the ranching business, and communicates a few of his experiences to a Scottish friend, as follows:

It is not to be supposed that you are going into the country with the intention of buying up cattle to the number of thousands, in which case it would be necessary for you to run an outfit of your own. As I take it, you would go with the intention of buying a bunch of, say, from two to three hundred at the most to commence with, which is a good solid foundation for a man to lay towards the rearing of a goodly pile, and in this case you would not be at any further expense than, perhaps, the price of your mount, and perhaps not even that if you should be lucky enough to strike a job in some outfit with plenty of horses on the range on which you have been located. But even if you had to supply yourself with horse flesh, there is nothing to kick about in that; for by giving your work to a large outfit, receiving wages or not, according to agreement, you would get your cattle run fee—*i.e.*, in going their rounds over the range, either branding or gathering beef, your calves would be branded, and your beefsteers gathered and shipped to market, if you so desired, along with their own. There is no trade that I know of where a man is less out of pocket for running expenses than this one is. You also get your board for nothing all summer, which is a very material consideration. In most trades there is an exemplification of the proverb that big fish always swallow little ones. Not so in the cattle raising business, however. Small men under the existing system have all the "show" in the world to make their way, and make their way, too, at almost no expense to themselves. The grazing costs them nothing; for every man has an equal right to the thousands of acres of land which belongs to no one, and which constitutes the range free as the air to all; and as the running, as I said before, costs next to nothing, hence are derived the handsome profits which the ranchman makes each fall when he pockets a cheque for his beef from Kansas City, St. Louis, or Chicago, and settles down for the winter to sleep if he wishes, or to "bum round," as the spirit moves him, until the month of May of the ensuing year.

Just before the boys go into camp in spring they are actively engaged in rounding-up the saddle horses for work upon the range. These are usually kept during the winter months in huge pastures, usually formed in one or more of the many canyons which intersect the western plains, where there is plenty of shelter; for, in the Southern States and Territories, at least, ranchmen feed none of their horses during winter, with the exception, of course, of the few which they keep up at the ranch to ride around on once in a while. It is really wonderful to notice in what good fix these horses come out in spring, after having had to "rustle" hard for their living all the winter—a fact which proves most satisfactorily the highly nutritive qualities of the natural grasses of the American west. Where many horses are kept it is but natural that some few of them should be missing when they are wanted, and when this is the case, one of the boys, or perhaps two, according to the size of the outfit and the number of horses "out," go horse-hunting—that is, go riding over the prairie looking through every bunch of horses, or of mares and colts (and they are very often to be found amongst the latter) which they strike, and also giving a call at all the contiguous ranches to learn whether any of the boys there have seen or heard anything of the missing animals. Here, I may remark by the way, it is always best, if possible, to have horses which have been raised on the range on which you are located, for a horse raised at a certain place will never stray very far away from it; and if, as will sometimes occur, you

happen to lose him when away at any distance, it does not matter how far, it is ten chances to one that he will pull direct for his own range, and will most likely be peacefully grazing there on your return.

The general business of "rounding-up," or collecting bunches of cattle from the general herd, at particular spots, for the purpose of selection and branding, is described with much spirit. Convenient spots, at some distance apart, of from five to ten miles, are selected for this operation, and the cow punchers, beginning at dawn, draw gradually up to the first of these with the bunches of stock collected by them in their ride. When all have arrived with their bunches of cattle on the agreed-on spot, the whole bunch is rounded up closely, riders holding the cattle together while one or perhaps two boys at a time ride in amongst them and cut out first all cows and unbranded calves, and second, all cattle that are strangers to the range, and have no business there. The former are driven to the nearest corral and the calves branded, while the latter are driven to what is called the "day herd," or herd which accompanies the round-up till it bursts up, and composed, as I said, of cattle belonging to other ranges, and cattle belonging to ranchmen on the range, but whose ranches are at another part of the range. In this last case the cattle are only kept in the day herd until the round-up reaches the owners' ranches, where they are dropped out. This prevents cattle drifting off their proper range to such an extent as would otherwise happen were they allowed to roam together at their own pleasure, and never be turned back when they got towards the confines of their range. By the time the cutting out and branding is accomplished it is time for dinner, which the cooks have all ready for us. After dinner fresh horses are caught up, and another round-up made in the afternoon, while the wagons, etc., again move on to where camp is to be made for the night. When supper is over, the horses are driven into camp once more, to be hobbled for the night and turned loose, while those whose turn it is to stand guard over the cattle in the day herd during the night, each catch a horse, which he saddles, and pickets close to camp, ready for use at a moment's notice. In good weather night guard is pleasant enough, but in bad weather one does feel almost inclined to hate the fellow who comes to wake him up.

When cattle do stampede, all one can do (and it is a most dangerous job) is to get to the lead and endeavor to stop them in their headlong career, but before you can effect this, you have often to run alongside of the leaders for miles before you can head them off, and when, at last, you succeed in doing so there is no alternative left but to round them up close and remain with the bunch until daylight. A man has to take many a leap in the dark in a stampede; for he has often to ride, he knows not whither, over an unknown country, and whatever be its conformation, be it rough and rocky, or smooth and full of prairie dog and badger holes, he has no choice, but to spur on. What causes a stampede no one can tell. A very little thing will do it once the majority of the cattle have gone to sleep. A sneeze from one of the boys on guard, or a rabbit running past the herd, will sometimes start them off. So will a bird alighting in their midst, and even the slight noise made by the stumbling of a horse has been sufficient to send them a-flying. When they do go, they are up and away, in a body, like a flash, as closely crowded together as the men in a Roman phalanx, and are nearly as difficult to turn so long as they remain in a body. The noise made by the clashing of horns, and the thunder of hoofs as they speed along, is perfectly indescribable, and all-sufficient to drive away all presence of mind from any "tenderfoot" who may be on guard for the first time.

When the round-up is over, each man drives his cattle to their proper range, and every one pulls for

his ranch. At the general round-up in fall, however, ranchmen take the opportunity afforded by so many hands to gather their "beef," thus making a "cleaner" hunt than they could possibly make with their own outfits alone; and immediately after the round-up is over, instead of going home, they "hit the road" with the beef steers, to some point of shipment, it may be 50, it may be 100, or even 200 miles away. You would naturally think that driving fat cattle such distances would reduce them very much in flesh, but if they are properly driven such is not the case. Properly speaking, they ought scarcely to be driven at all, but merely headed in the right direction, and grazed along at the rate of not more than ten miles a day; and if you do seem to lose a little time on the way, the time you lose is money in your pocket, for the cattle will not merely not fall off in condition, but may even improve on the change of range. If the owner himself is unable to go on the trail with his beef, he should always send some trusted man along with them. There is nothing to do on the range from the end of November till the following February, and during that time you can do as you please and go where you please. If we are busy as bees in the summer, we have also the privilege of sleeping like bears all the winter. By the month of February, however, the cattle begin to bog down in the water holes and creeks, for by that time many of the old cows have become so weak and thin that if they should get ever so slightly stuck in the mud when they go to the watering places, they have not the strength in them to extricate themselves, and their feeble attempts to do so only serve to plant them firmer in the mud than ever. Many, doubtless, die before aid arrives, but the boys save many by riding around the range and along the creeks, visiting all the places where there is any likelihood of cattle miring, and pulling them out with their horses. This is effected by means of the lariat, which the cowboy invariably carries on his saddle. Throwing the loop over the horns of the animal bogged, we hitch the hand end of the lariat round the horn of our saddles, and clapping the "old steel" to our horses we drag them out. If a cow is not very deeply embedded in the mud, and has not been very long in it, she is usually able to rise and walk off; but I think you will generally find that if she has been in the mud over night, the chances of her ever getting up are very small. When they do get up, if you are not in your saddle, get there at once, for the cow is a most ungrateful animal, and will hook you just as though you had not been acting the good Samaritan.

BUTCHERS AT THE FAT STOCK SHOW.

Farmer's Call.

A noticeable feature of the Fat Stock Show was the presence of butchers from all parts of the country, and it is doubtful if any other men more critically studied the features of the show or profited more by the visit. They came to make a study of the points of those animals which experts had pronounced superior beef animals, and to see which breed furnished those animals which cut the most nicely marbled meat. They went home educated to discriminate more nicely and rigidly when buying. And these men are ultimate buyers of the great bulk of the cattle, swine and sheep put upon the market; hence the education they got at Chicago will have a wide and pronounced influence. In the future they will pay a yet better figure for good animals and a yet lower figure for poor animals. It has been the popular supposition that the Fat Stock Show would, among other things, stimulate the stock growers of the country to rear better animals; it would appear that by educating the ultimate buyers in the way we have noted, it will *compel* the stock raisers to consult their own interests by putting better animals upon the market.