

Deall Clippin' was a week "farrarder" than was usual, owing to the sun and the "mawk," or blue-bottle fly, and it was my fortune to receive an invitation to attend "Brig-End Clippin'!" so thither on the appointed Friday I went. . . .

The Deall Clippin' had been instituted as an annual "do" for the second week in July, time out of mind.

"Fornsett clipping on Monday; Smeathwaite, Tuesday; Thirlspot, Wednesday; Stanah, Thursday; Brig-End, Friday; and Kessick market daay o' Setterday." This had been the shepherd's calendar for the "Deall" in second week in July, from a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, and when one considers that the men who handled the shears had collected from 300 to 500 sheep from the fells each day, sorted them out, sheared them, marked them, and sent them back to the fells, one feels that Keswick market day, as a bye day, and a good "rust," or rest day on Sunday, must have been welcome enough.

"And who does the clipping?" I asked.

"Nebhors," said my friend. "Times is alterin' sadly. Chaps comes fra Scotland now and teks a flock by contract, but 'ne a good' comes of it. Fellows clip away here a bit and theer a bit; it's nowt to them, they get t' brass and away wi' them, but theer's nowt like nebbors for shearin' sheep, mind ye. They tak time to job, theer's no p'ay—but theer's meat, and it's aw i' a friendly waay to-gither."

There was something very touching in the way my old friend of the dark and glittering eye spoke of the days of good fellowship in sheep-shearing times, days which were now giving way to hard contract.

"Not," continued he, "but what i' the auld daays a deal o' the 'woo' was eaten up, I dar say. It was oft mair of an occasion for a downreet jollification than owt else, but than farmin' fowk works hard, and a bit of plessor yance over does naeboddy harm."

Our host smiled, and just nodded with his head towards this or that clipping-stool, as his friends and helpers came up, and without another word they took their seats astraddle of the quaint four-legged racks, on which their friends the Herdwicks were to be laid, and the clipping began.

There was not quite the same idyllic beauty about the farm scene as that I was accustomed to in Yewdale, where under those stern crags, that always seem to remind one of Mount Sinai in miniature, one used to see the whole drama of the shearing-time enacted beneath the magnificent canopy of the "burnished sycamore."

As I thought on these things, I heard a shepherd from his shearing-stool close by cry:

"John, what's te lug mark?"

And John answered, "Cropped nar, upper-and-under-halved far."

"Hes te gitten yan o' mine?"

"Ay that have I," replied the cheery clipper, "by lug-mark on 'im," which, being interpreted meant that one of John Hawkrigg's sheep had strayed and got mixed up with Bristow's, of Bridge End, whose sheep were "cropped nar," or cropped on the near ear, but differed from Hawkrigg's in having only the upper part of the far ear halved, while Hawkrigg's sheep had their far side or right ear halved both on the upper and under part.

But the ear marks were spoken of as "lug marks," and little did they, who were clipping that day under the hill of the log sayer at Legburthwaite, realize that the word lug is only another way of spelling the word log or law, and the ear mark was the mark of the law which gave a lawful ownership of the sheep in question. "What's te lug mark?" though the speaker did not know it, was really only a Viking or Norse way of saying, "What is thy law mark?" . . .

Very little was said; one heard the click, click of the shears, and sometimes the sigh of a pocket whetstone as the shearer sharpened his weapons; but occasionally it seemed as if all the dogs of the dale had gone mad; such barking! such fun! For some sheep, after being let free from the shearing-bench, and feeling his unwonted light-

ness of body, had gone off on a scamper, and must needs be brought back to the pen to wait for sauving or salving and *straking* or marking.

The gravity of the whole business struck one. It was solemn work of a very solemn order. At least, so the men astride of the clipping benches seemed to feel. I daresay they were right to be solemn, for I know that a "Herdwick" can kick and struggle with much spirit till he is mastered. The shears are sharp and very near the surface, and no man cares to wound his neighbor's sheep. But, in addition, these men were friends from a "lang time sen," and one clipping bench was filled to day by a new man; "T'auld un hed gone down. It was aw in course o' natur," said my friend, "so you cannot complain, but it natterly teks heart o' yan for aw that to see old nebbors and good nebbors neah mair at clipping time; and it meks one think to onesel' that it's mebbe last time fer sune on us an' aw."

But if there was a kind of dignified solemnity in the air as far as the clippers went, there was plenty of sparkle and life amongst the youngsters. It seemed to be their privilege to catch the sheep as they were called for and hug them to the shearers' benches. They would hear the cry: "Bring us anudder—a good un this time, my lad!" and the boy dashed into the flock, and while the dogs barked with excitement, seized and dragged them willy nilly to their fate. . . .

The light began to go for all that long after glow of Cumberland clipping-nights, and still the shears clicked away, till the girl came out with a summons to supper, and the work of the day was over.

"A reet down good supper it was, an' aw," said one of the shearers after, and he spoke but the honest truth. It was the women-bodies turn to show what they could do to crown the clipping with success, and they certainly managed to make all the hungry shearers feel that a farm supper-table would be a very poor thing if it were not for the women kind.

There was a bit o' fiddling after supper, and a deal o' good shepherds' crack, and the following famous Herdwick shepherd's song was sung by John Birkett to an old-fashioned countryside tune. It was a song all seemed to know, and had been sung time out of mind at all the clippings under Helvellyn. How they made the rafters ring with the chorus:

THE SHEEP SHEARING SONG.

"Now our sheep-shearing's over, surround the gay hoard,
With our hearts full of pleasure and glee!
And while we partake of this plentiful hoard,
Who so blithe and so happy as we?
From that staple, the wool, all our consequence springs,
The wool-sack is next to the throne,
It a freedom secures both to peasants and kings
Which in no other country is known.

Chorus—It guards us awake, it protects us asleep,
Night and day then thank heaven that gave us the sheep.
(Repeat.)

"When bleak piercing winter comes on with a frown,
Frost and snow clogging hedge, ditch, and sile,
Annoying alike both the squire and the clown,
Wrapt in wool we look round us and smile.
Could we sing of its praises from evening till morn,
'Twould our gratitude only increase,
From the dying old man to the infant new-born,
We are all kept alive by its fleece.

Chorus—The hour with the truth a fair pace it can keep,
When in warmest expressions we speak of the sheep.
(Repeat.)

"No words are sufficient, whate'er can be said,
To speak out its uses aloud;
It never forsakes us—nay, after we're dead
It furnishes even our shroud.
Nay, more! for the sheep, while it ranges our fields,
Our wants and our comfort supplies;
Faithful still to the last, to the butcher it yields,
For our nourishment daily it dies.

Chorus—Thus living or dead we its benefits reap,
Then, ye sheep-shearers, sing your true friends the poor
sheep."
(Repeat.)