

When September month begins to wane and cooler days are ushered in, the drovers begin to assemble together their fatted herds, and the roads leading to Chicago are suddenly alive with bellowing droves. We will select one herd from the many that we see in tardy movement around us, and watch its progress through the various stages until it is rolled on to the dock transformed into "Extra Mess Beef." We have alighted, then, upon a drove of some 300 head, raised, we will suppose, in La Salle County, and contracted, some time past, to the Messrs. Hough, at the rate of five dollars per hundred weight for the beef—the offal being given in. By much whooping and chasing, the mounted drovers have brought the bewildered herd to the strong brick wall that encloses the yard; the wide gate is swung open, the cattle thrust in, and there suffered to remain a while to collect their wandering senses.

The following morning their slaughter commences. Half a dozen noisy fellows, with poles in their hands, present themselves in the yard, and detaching about fifty from the herd, drive them into a closer yard. This is a narrow inclosure separated from the main yard by a gate, and communicating by means of sliding doors with four close pens, where the animals are ultimately roped for the slaughter. Having driven their cattle into the smaller yard, the men continue their pursuit, and further detail four or five of the slithering brutes into each of the four close pens. A door is now withdrawn from within, a powerful negro presents himself, and lassoes one of the cattle; two men then haul upon the windlass, and in spite of the most violent bovine resistance, they draw the struggling wretch down to the bull-ring. There is some peculiar dread of the negro, which renders the dangerous process of roping a work of comparative ease to him. But at the other extreme pen, four white men are attempting the same task, and it is absolutely unsafe for them to show themselves within reach of the animal's horns. The ax is applied, and the animal is blooded. To each pen there is a bed, as it is called—that is, a place to dress the bullock, and one is now lying prostrate upon each of the four beds.

Now the butchers take the cattle in hand; for these we have been witnessing at work are only laborers. These butchers are a select corps—each an Achilles in his peaceful way.—Accustomed to this wholesale mode of slaughter, where time is economized to the utmost, they have acquired a dexterity and a breadth of cut that would astonish some of our Fulton Market worthies. The cattle are poised on their backs, (pitched is the technical term,) and three butchers fall to work upon each. One man flays the head and decapitates the animal, and one strips each side; the haunches are then cut asunder, and the bullock is raised to his "first hoist." It is a treat to see these fellows work. They are great braggadocios, and numerous pints of whiskey are pending between the rival bands upon the number of cattle each can respectfully put up. Their work is of a repulsive character, but they evidently like it.

"The hand of little employment hath a daintier sense."

and Providence has wisely designed that, whatever his occupation, a man shall find a pleasure in it. They are working against time; very little talk is indulged in, and the fast workman keeps the less skillful traveling, in order to maintain pace with them. There is no drinking except of beer—and then at a clandestine hour, when the master's eye is turned—and the work goes on with excellent decorum.

The first hoist is worked off, and the animal is again raised until he is landed upon the balks. These are two parallel beams with polished surfaces, running longitudinally through the building. Two laborers swing the suspended carcass back out of the way of the beds, and the butchers follow it up to finish dressing it, while the negro and his white satellites prepare another bullock for each vacant bed. This process is repeated until the day's work is achieved, and 150 carcasses are suspended by their heels to stiffen until the following morning.

The next stage is in the cutting-room, which is on a level with the slaughter-house, and only separated from it by the forest of the sides of beef which intervene. Here the beef is weighed, cut, cured and barreled. Immense vats are sunk on each side the building, each capable of holding twenty carcasses of beef; and the pumps and machinery for the supply and withdrawal of the brine are fitted up underneath the building. When the day's work begins, a force of men, armed with knife and saw, make an attack upon the stiffened beef and reduce it into quarters as rapidly as they can ply their instruments. When cut down each carcass is weighed—the owner being generally present—and the beef is deposited upon two immense racks. The demolition of the quarters then begins. There are two qualities of mess beef—the extra and the prime. The extra is composed of the select cattle—the heaviest and the choicest—and it is reduced to component pieces with the knife and saw. It