

## LIVE STOCK.

### The Killers.

The manager of the Miljee Lake rode slowly across the plains. The barley-grass reached to his horse's girth. Far as the eye could see the rich pasture land stretched away between him and the river, dotted here and there with narrow-leaved box trees and shady wilgas. On his right hand towered the dark scrub-covered shoulder of the Black Range, a rocky ridge which fenced the western side of the property.

After several seasons of severe drought a welcome rain had fallen on the sheep country, and the squatters of the Lachlan river were enjoying a period of fatness. The river, so long a mere chain of water-holes, was running from bank to bank. The tanks and dams were full, fat horses fed in the horse-paddock; prime bullocks walked half-hidden in the lushness of the lignum swamps; and sheep, strong and fit for market, rustled everywhere through the long grass, where but a year before, the weak, emaciated stragglers of the flock had trailed dispiritedly over the burnt-up barren plains.

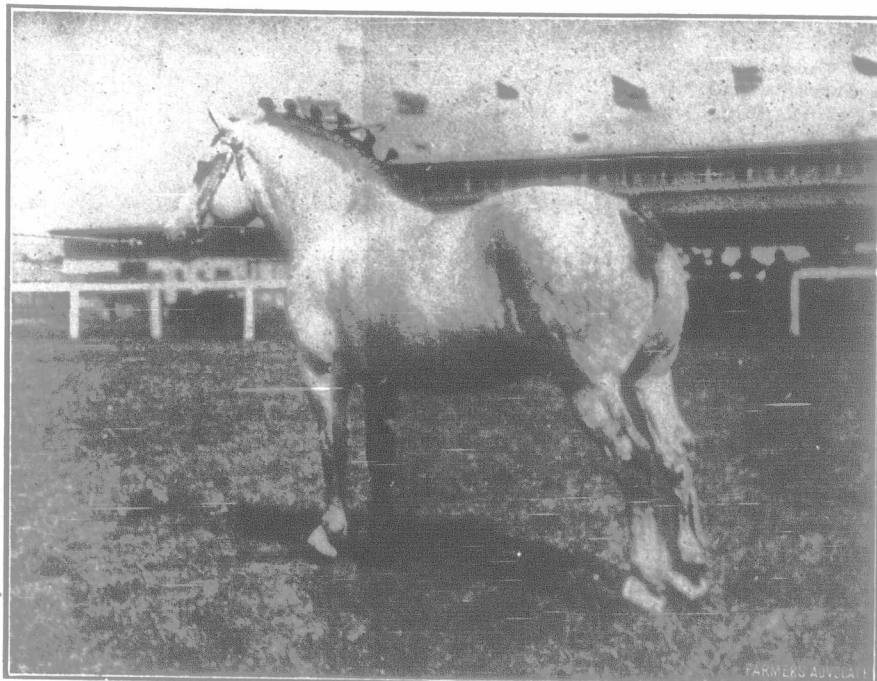
Dalrymple reined his horse on the bank of the Nine Mile Dam and surveyed with contentment the waving richness of his kingdom. Below him lay the broad sheet of silver water, on a spot where his eye had long been accustomed to seeing an attenuated and muddy pool, lined with the forms of dead and dying sheep. Beyond it stretched a great sea of grass. Even the forbidding line of the range seemed softened in the lushness of its surroundings. The scrub took on a richer, deeper green, and the tall timber at the foot of the rocks looked less gloomy than usual. Nature seemed dumbly to rejoice in the sunlight, in the scented glamor of the bush morning, in the wealth of water and grass.

The manager rode slowly on across the flat at the foot of the range. Here the grass was shorter than elsewhere, for it was a favorite feeding-ground of the sheep. In little flocks they ran swiftly to right and left at the sound of the horse's hoofs—big, strong, full-fed wethers, leaping and bucking in wanton play as they raced after one another, with not a weak one or a lag-lard in their ranks. The manager watched them with pride and satisfaction written plainly on his bronzed and care-lined face. By many weary days and sleepless nights he had come through the long drought to win his reward at last. He had saved by infinite care and skilful management fully a hundred sheep to every ten of his less fortunate neighbors, and now prices had reached the highest, and with five thousand prime wethers such as these, he could within a month place such a cheque on the credit side of his ledger as would make up for all his disappointment in previous years. As he turned his horse homeward across the river frontage his mind was made up. Early the next morning he would have the musters out, gather the wethers in this Nine Mile paddock, draft off two thousand of the best, and put them on the road to market at once. Touching Brownlock lightly with the spur, he whistled to his dogs and cantered briskly home to the station.

Over the shoulder of the Black Range the sun went down like a blood-red waggon wheel. In the weird silence that seemed to deepen and intensify with the dying of the day a startled wallaby spluttered down through the rocks and disappeared hastily among the sapling trees which stood dark and thick upon the slope of the range. Not without reason was his ungainly haste. Along a narrow path—beaten by the wild things of the woods—came three shadowy, gliding wraiths. In the gathering darkness the dreaded killers were abroad for blood. In front trotted a huge yellow dog. No larger dingo had ever been seen or heard of in the western bush than he. Men who had found his tracks upon the plains said they were the tracks of no ordinary wild dog, but rather of some huge wolf or strange hybrid beyond their ken. Those who had occasionally caught a glimpse of him in the distance as he glided ghostly through the bushes, said that he was bigger than a yearling calf, and like a lion in the height of his golden mane and the massive depth of his shoulders. Following him was a low-set, lithe, black bitch, moving with a stealthy cat-like tread, following carefully every movement of her light-hued leader. The third of the trio was a dark-red dog of medium size, with twitching, irresolute ears, that rose and fell nervously at every movement of a leaf in the soft evening air. From the plain below came the bleating of a sheep. The yellow leader paused in his stride with one fore-paw uplifted. The black bitch close at his heels threw up her head. The red dog stood trembling.

Wheeling to the right the leader dropped down through the rocks, closely followed by his companions, and in a few moments the three killers

stood on the open plain almost hidden in a bunch of high green tussock grass. Before them in an open glade a little mob of sheep fed slowly. The crop-crop-crop of their teeth in the grass was the only sound that broke the evening stillness. The yellow dog with lolling tongue and starting eyes watched them, snake-like, from his hiding place. Behind him the black bitch cowered, with only a tremor of her flanks to show her intense excitement. The red dog lay close to the ground, nervous, watchful, submissive to the authority of his leader.



A 1913 Champion Percheron Mare in the Canadian West.

A fat wether, in the course of his feeding, came close past the crouching three. Up went the yellow paw, and the red light kindled in the killer's eyes. With a swift, sudden leap he was over the grass tussocks and among the frightened sheep, and at his heels were the red dog and the black bitch. The wethers scattered in every direction, mad with fear, and after them sprang the killers. The great yellow dog dashed alongside his chosen victim, and after playing with it for a moment or two plunged his sharp teeth into its shoulder. The wether reeled, staggered, and

his side ran the yellow dingo with head averted as though merely playing a pleasant game, shouldering the terrified creature as though with kindly interest. Suddenly his head swung round and one downward slash opened the shoulder from neck to knee, and the red blood oozed and dripped. The sheep fell on its knees, and immediately the broad, yellow head was buried deep in the quivering flesh.

One after another the frightened, helpless things were caught and pulled down, worried, and left in throbbing, tortured heaps upon the ground.

The yellow dog was everywhere, devilish, blood-mad, maiming, and slaying. Where his companions crippled one sheep he crippled three.

For nearly an hour the cruel game went on, and when at last, breathless and weary, with lolling tongues and reddened jaws, the slaying brutes turned aside surfeited, four sheep lay quite dead upon the plain, and nineteen more stood fearfully torn and bitten, with dull eyes and drooping heads, with shoulders bare and gaping flanks, a pitiful monument to the awful industry of their savage destroyers. For a few minutes the dingos lay panting in the grass. Then the black bitch stole out from her cover and burying her face in the side of one of the dead sheep, tore out a bunch of bloody entrails and mouthed it foully in

her horrid jaws. The yellow dog sat up on his haunches, watching, with one paw raised. Behind him the red dog lay prone, trying to draw a thorn from his fore-foot.

Before the killers lay the richness of their feast, but for some reason or other they seemed unwilling to eat. Even the bitch was soon satisfied and crept back to her comrades shyly as though ashamed of her hunger.

At last the yellow dog rose slowly, and, looking large and terrible in the dim light, trotted back towards the range, followed by his companions.

In the gathering darkness the three slipped away into the pines and clambered up over the face of the rocks. But to-night no cosy den or sheltering scrub could keep them in the neighborhood of their kill; holding straight forward over the top of the range they trotted in single file down through the bushes on the further side and out into the open country on the western boundary. Slipping easily through the five-wire fence they broke into a long, loping canter, and faded away into the darkness. Hour after hour they travelled on, tireless and determined. Once they stopped at a dam and drank, laving their red and foamy lips in the cool water. Once the yellow dog stopped; when the moon arose, and sitting up, gave a long-drawn wolf howl, that struck weirdly on the ears of a bushman, camped on the lonely main road four miles away.

Just as dawn broke in the east the dingos gained their objective—another high and rocky range, full of dark, impenetrable scrub, and deep and hidden caves. Here all three of them crept under a flat rock, and, curling up together, nose to tail, slept the sleep of weariness till long after the sun was in mid-heaven.

There was a merry mounting in the dawn at Miljee Lake. The horses, fat and lusty from the blue-grass, humped their backs playfully as the cold girths nipped them. The men were in good spirits, for mustering is a good season, is pleas-



A Clydesdale Filly Foal Five Weeks Old.

went down; but the yellow dog took no further notice of it, and singled out another victim. The red dog caught a sheep and stood over it, tearing savagely at its flank; blood and foam dripped from his open jaws; the lust of killing shone in his wicked eyes. The black bitch was playing round the sheep in circles, chasing them, snapping at them, herding them like a trained sheep dog when they tried to break away. A heavy wether came rushing and stumbling across the glade; at