

LEAVES OF GRASS

HALF-WAY through South-land I began to feel confused. I was not tired physically, but I was seeing so many new things every day which were at the same time old things

LIVING WITH SHEEP

that I wanted time to think about them. So I welcomed an opportunity that happily came to me of retreating into a tussock valley out of sight of the road and spending some days there among the cattle and sheep. Shepherds visited me once or twice, and a colony of stilts as often as I even looked in the direction of the swamp in which they were breeding. But my constant companions were sheep.

The cattle might have been more companionable if I had been; but their

By "SUNDOWNER"

I think Whitman, if he had been a New Zealander, would not have wished to go and live with cows, but to loaf his days away among sheep. And I think they would have been hill sheep, ewes and lambs on tussocks, with creeks in the gullies, and outcrops of rock on the ridges. I think he would have found more there than a poet could easily absorb, especially if the faces had patches of olearia and manuka, and the flats clumps of matagouri. I am sure he would have spent hours just sitting on the tussocks and watching, counting the number of nibbles sheep make in a second, noting how soon they detect an approaching storm, how many hours in summer they spend lying in the shade, how often they get up and at once lie down again, how they will feed in the open quite unaffected by the sun, then



"COUNTING how often they get up and at once lie down again"

owners had asked me not to let them wander further down the valley than the patch of big matagouris in which I was camped, and that proved easy. All I had to do when they came too near was to rush suddenly out of cover, shout "umbalapa," and sool on an imaginary pack of dogs. As they were young cows with young calves, led by half a dozen growing steers, they would soon be half a mile away; and after three days of this they did not come near at all.

The sheep on the other hand accepted me calmly, and when the sun was hottest even settled in with me under the matagouri bushes. As they were run sheep mustered at most four times a year, I was surprised that my presence gave them so little concern. Even when I went to the creek to bathe, a walk of some distance without clothes, they did no more than move a little out of my way, and they usually returned again if I had driven them from a sweet patch of grazing.

decide instantaneously that it is too hot and run for the shadow of a bush or a bank. I can see him taking in all these things for hours, with the burble of the creek and that blend of scents given off by tussock, meadowsweet, matagouri, Maori onions, swamp-grass, and swamp-mud, taking it all in and wanting nothing else till the sun dropped over the hill, the sheep climbed up to the ridges and camping benches, and as he watched them going over the skyline he saw suddenly that the stars were out.

But these were hill sheep; and the life of a hill sheep is so much fuller than the life of a sheep sharing a treeless paddock with hundreds of others that they have not much more than their voices in common.

BECAUSE the Mataura river was in flood when I reached Gore, and the Waikaia when I reached Riversdale, I spent a night at Waipounamu before

(continued on next page)



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