

# THE DANCHMEN'S WARCHIEF'S WAR ON VARMINTS

WHERE CALIFORNIA'S CATTLE,  
SHEEP AND POULTRY ARE  
RAISED. EVERY OWNER MUST  
KNOW THE HABITS AND SIGNS  
OF MOUNTAIN LIONS, COYOTES  
AND BOB CATS, AND JOIN WITH  
HIS GUN AND TRAINED DOGS IN  
THE DETERMINED SLAUGHTER



IN THE RAINY COUNTRY THE DOGS ARE TRAINED FROM EARLIEST PUPPYHOOD

By Marion Pearson

DISTURBANCE was in the air. A stone rolling noisily downhill was sufficient to send the band of sheep scurrying across the road, where they huddled together under a dripping oak until the snapping of a twig sent them back again in a frenzy of fear.

One of his fellows, a fine big thoroughbred, was stretched rigid on the slope of the embankment with his head and shoulders pointing downhill.

A blinding mist had settled over the country after the heavy downpour of the night before, and had it not been for the panicky condition of the flock the sharp eyes of Jim Runyon would have missed the important message that lay almost at the feet of his horse.

With intent and expectant eyes, Runyon peered about until the carcass of the sheep caught his gaze. In a moment he was off his horse and stooping over the dead animal. To his experienced eye its position showed that it had met with a violent death. The body was still warm. There was no sign of wound or blood, but then the rain had been heavy enough to have washed away all trace of the latter.

Runyon drew his knife and made a long lengthwise slit in the throat of the sheep, and then he found what he expected. The sharp fangs of the stranger had gone straight through the jugular vein.

The stranger was a coyote. He was a giant among his fellows, and cunning and strong in proportion. Now in the fall, when he was paying his annual visit in the neighborhood, terror reigned among the sheep and wrath and despair among their owners. His presence meant a carnage of sheep and lambs. He had a mania for slaughter. For several weeks now he had led a career of rapine on the ranch, making the most audacious raids. So cunning was he that the most cleverly laid trap failed to attract him into its clutch.

It was his mad joy to herd the sheep for two weeks at a time before making a big killing. The instinct of the shepherd dog in him found expression in the midnight hours, when he would round up the drowsy sheep and drive them furiously up and down hill; now enveloping them in a hurricane of motion, and then dancing and barking in front of the hand and goading them to madness with sudden rushes.

As the first streak of dawn showed on the horizon he would make a final rush and scatter the sheep in every direction. Then creeping slyly up to one of them, with a sudden spring he would seize it by the throat with such force that the animal would turn a complete somersault, invariably landing with its head and shoulders lying down hill. The killing was done in a second, and then the coyote, true to the habits of his kind, would tear open the body of the victim between the shoulders and feast on the heart and lungs. No other part of the carcass would he

touch. Should the selection for his meal be a lamb, then the tender stomach was laid bare and the curdled milk within lapped up.

Night after night during the long winter this coyote spent his time in herding sheep, not always the same band nor in the same locality. At the end of two weeks, usually after a heavy rain, the frenzy to destroy came upon him, and then he was a whirlwind of fury, killing one after another until 10, 20, 30 sheep were added to his score.

This morning, as Jim Runyon was satisfying himself of the presence of the stranger on his ranch, he knew that he was not the only sheepman that day in Mendocino county who was making a wild guess as to the number of sheep that had been sacrificed the night before to satisfy the hunger and blood thirst of the varmints that infest the county. The stranger was the only one of the many coyotes that made his living during the winter by killing sheep. He was particularly feared on account of his ferocity and mad desire to kill.

He was called the stranger because he had dropped suddenly upon the sheep ranches in Mendocino county two years ago. None of the ranchmen in any of the surrounding counties had ever suffered from his raids. His presence on a ranch always marked an unusual number of sheep found dead within a short radius just after a storm, with no wound on the carcass save the bite that cut into the jugular vein.

It was this Jim knew it was time to be up and doing—to get together the dogs for the final tracking down of this menace to his flock. For, in common with all sheepmen in northern California, the dogs formed an important factor of his ranch life.

At the bottom of a long ridge of chemical flanked hills the dogs plunged into the thicket, crashing through the pathless underbrush, reaching the crest while as yet the men were skirting the base looking for a space clear enough to follow. The baying of the dogs grew fainter and fainter, until all sound from them had ceased. They had gone beyond hearing.

At the top of the divide the men dismounted and strained every nerve to catch any sound that would give them a clue of the way the dogs had gone. The horses knew what was going on. They, too, stood in a listening attitude, with ears forward. A blast from Runyon's horn brought no answering cry. Twenty minutes went by, when a vagrant breeze wandering up the hill brought a faint baying from some distance to the north.

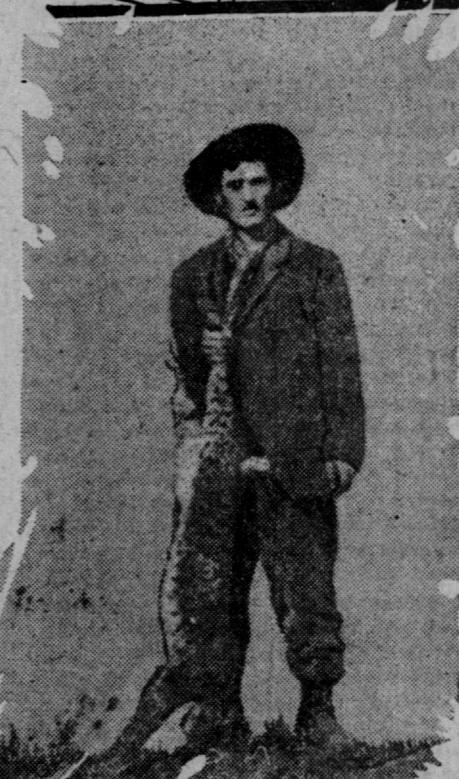
There was no path leading down the thicket woods directly, but Runyon, trusting to his well-trained instinct, picked his way through the undergrowth, followed by the men, until they approached a point where the slope terminated in diverging canyons. The baying came from the ravine to the left, and from there it led the men out into the open country. Then came the roughest kind of rough riding, up on the highlands and down into deep



MENDOCINO RANCHERS OUT TO STOP THE RAIDS OF A MOUNTAIN LION



Skin of a Cattle Killing Mountain-Lion



A BOB-CAT KILLED AFTER MANY KILLINGS

READY TO TAKE UP THE COYOTE'S TRAIL



In these northern counties of California the broken country makes the herding of sheep under the watchful eyes of dog and shepherd an impossibility. The ground is cut with gullies, brush and boulders, so that every step must have the men on their toes to brown in order to get a living.

Under these conditions the sheepmen must resort to other means than shepherd and collie to protect their flocks from the wild animals, whose lust for blood and taste for the choicest beef and mutton cause such damage. Panthers, coyotes and bobcats are among the "varmints" most common in these counties. Each one has its own peculiar method of killing.

The panther selects its victim, usually the largest "buck"—the range name for ram—it can find, drives it into a gulch, worrying it along by pulling out with its claws at every few yards tufts of wool from the animal's back, and then the great beast leaps on its prey, biting it through the back of the neck and crushing in the head. He often kills as many as eight or ten bucks before finding one to his taste for meat. When his hunger is appeased, he begins what remains of the carcass, and returns to the place to lie in wait for another.

On the Lassen plateau the sheepman and his flock. In Mendocino county a bounty of \$5 is offered for every coyote killed within its limits.

In addition to this the owners of sheep tax themselves in proportion to the size of their flocks and add the amount to the bounty, running up to prize up to over \$30. As a consequence the shepherds are more in Mendocino county who give all of their time to hunting, and their dogs, traps and guns have done much to reduce the ranks of these varmints.

A coyote usually has a certain range of country which is home to him, and outside of this he rarely strays.

His haunts are in some rocky ridge, the cracks of which extend to unknown distances. From here he comes forth at night and lies in wait for the rich land about him. In summer the coyote does little or no killing of sheep, as there are plenty of squirrels about to satisfy his hunger, but when the first note of winter comes the game becomes very scarce, and then the raids on sheep begin. He never kills during a storm, but waits for a lull in the downpour, or else after it is completely over.

For years the most unceasing warfare has been carried on in the north against these varmints. Every ranch has its collection of steel traps and pads of horsehair, and when the dry months, when the lack of moisture on the ground makes trailing by the dogs an impossibility. In

try, true to his strongest instinct, never fails to register when in the vicinity of one of these bairns. This is his method of spreading the news, and any shephers visiting the vicinity will be aware who has been there before him, whence he came and which way he is going.

While this registration serves as a protection to the coyote, it also proves to be his undoing, for the foxhound, red to be his natural enemy, has learned also to read the news at these "bairns" and to follow him in getting out in pursuit of his prey.

It is because of this fine nose that the foxhound has been selected by the sheepmen to aid them in tracking down the coyote. One of these dogs, when he is well trained, can take sniff of the morning air and get from it news of every animal that has been abroad in every direction during the night. With his nose to the ground he can tell just what living creature has crossed his path within some hours before—whether it be a man, deer, coyote, bear or panther. He knows just which scent he must follow in order to please his master. He knows that to trail a deer is a most disgraceful procedure, and no good, save foxhunting, ever causes himself to be found in the company of any foolish young puppy who, through ignorance or strong headiness, is silly enough to take up such a track.

Should he be attracted by the barking of such a puppy into the vicinity of the crime he immediately becomes wild and rampant and retreats as far as he can, as he is well known not only to avoid that locality to worry the sheepmen.

Of these beasts of prey the coyote is the most hated and despised. All his cleverness, cunning, williness, strength, agility and speed, even the splendid fight he puts up when brought to bay, is nothing but pure "cussedness" in the mind of the master. A particularly pertinacious foxhound has been known to keep a huge wildcat tred for three days in the hope that his master would finally come up.

The advent of a litter of puppies in the corral, particularly if they be of untaught pedigree, is looked upon as an important event in ranch life, and while they are playing and romping, days, the most careful

shepherds are being laid for their training, so that they will not prove to be a smirch on the family escutcheon.

When a puppy is old enough he is taken out on the chase with the other dogs, one of which, a particularly saucious hound, is selected as his tutor. To this one he is coupled, continuing so throughout the chase. Should the master be one of the smaller varmints, such as a wildcat, the puppy is given his first chance to run alone. When the quarry is treed by the older hounds it is shot in the leg, or otherwise slightly wounded—just enough to give it only half a chance to escape after it drops to the ground. The young dog is then uncoupled and, of course, has the time of his life in following the cat.

This part of the training is gone through again and again until he can be trusted to keep his head from start to finish. When that time comes he takes his place among the other dogs and all the world of the hunt his merits and demerits are discussed by the men of the ranch and his reputation spreads from one end of the county to the other.