



SARA WARE BASSETT

THE STORY OF
WOOL

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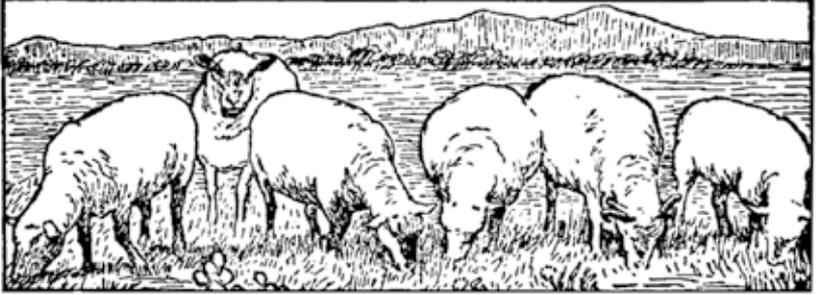
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by

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PLEASE NOTE

These books were written about 100 years ago and show the way people talked, thought, and acted back then. They tell the story of how resources like cotton, lumber, leather, and gold were developed—a process that depended on the hard work of many people. Sometimes the work was done by those who made the profits, and other times it was done by people who were not free, including enslaved individuals.

We know that some parts of these stories include ideas that we now understand to be hurtful and unfair. Our aim in republishing these books is not to support those old views but to share our history so we can all learn from it. By looking at the past, including its mistakes, we hope to learn important lessons that will help us create a kinder and fairer future.

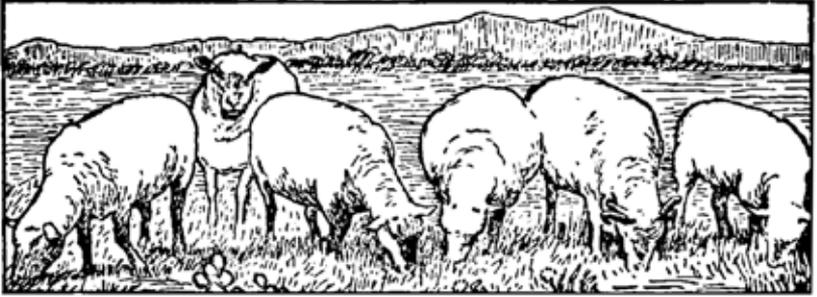
We invite you to read these stories with an awareness of their time and to think about how far we have come—and how much work there is still to do.

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"HAVE OUR SHEEP ALWAYS BEEN DIPPED?"



CHAPTER I

A MYSTERIOUS TELEGRAM



DONALD Clark glanced up from his Latin grammar and watched his father as he tore open the envelope of a telegram and ran his eye over its contents. Evidently the message was puzzling. Again Mr. Clark read it. Donald wondered what it could be. All the afternoon the yellow envelope had been on the table, and more than once his mind had wandered from the lessons he was preparing to speculate on the possible tidings wrapped up in that sealed packet. Not that a telegram was an unheard-of event in the family. No, his father received many; most of them, however, went to the Boston office, and the boy could not imagine what this one was doing at their Cambridge home.

The moment his father entered the house Donald handed him the envelope and Mr. Clark quickly stripped it open; yet even though it now lay spread out before him the mystery it contained appeared to be unsolved. It was seldom that Donald asked questions, nevertheless he found himself wondering and wondering what it was that had brought that odd little wrinkle into his father's forehead. Donald understood that

wrinkle; he had seen it many times and knew it never came unless some question arose to which it was difficult to frame an answer. As his father and he had lived alone together ever since he could remember they had grown to know each other very well, and had become the best of friends. It therefore followed that when one worried, both worried.

As the boy looked on, his father glanced up suddenly and caught sight of the anxiety mirrored in his face. The man smiled kindly.

"I can find no answer to this riddle, Don," he said. "Listen! Perhaps you can help me. A few days ago I received word from Crescent Ranch that Johnson, our manager, had been thrown from his horse while out on the range and so badly hurt that he will never again be able to continue his work with us. They have taken him to the hospital at Glen City. The letter came from Tom Thornton, the head herder at the ranch. Thornton assured me that everything was going well, and that there was not the slightest need for me to come to Idaho."

Donald listened.

"Well, to-day I received this telegram. It is neither from Johnson nor Thornton. It reads:

"You would do well to visit Crescent Ranch,' and it is signed—'Sandy McCulloch.'"

"Who is Sandy McCulloch?" asked Donald.

"That's the puzzle! I do not know. I never heard of any such person in my life—not that I remember. Evidently, though, he knows enough about me to know that I own that sheep ranch, and to think that I ought to go out there and see it. I do not understand it at all. What do you make of it, son?"

Donald thought carefully.

“Do you suppose anything is wrong on the ranch?”

“No, indeed! Thornton wrote particularly that everything was all right. He was Johnson’s assistant, and he ought to know. Besides, he has been with us a long time, and is thoroughly familiar with every part of the work.”

“Maybe it’s a joke,” ventured Donald.

“It would be a stupid sort of joke to get me from Boston to Idaho on a wild-goose chase. No, there is no joke about this,” went on Mr. Clark, rising and pacing the floor. “Sandy McCulloch is real, and he has some real reason for wanting me to go to Crescent Ranch. I think I shall take his advice and go.”

Donald was astounded. His father never left home.

“And the office?”

“Uncle Harold will have to do double duty while I am gone.”

“And—and—I?” inquired the boy hesitatingly.

Idaho seemed very far away—quite at the other end of the world.

“You? Oh, you’ll have to go along too! I shall need you.”

Donald drew a long breath.

“Let me see,” continued his father, “this is the end of March, isn’t it? Your spring term is about over. I happen to know you are well up in your work, for I met Mr. Hurlbert, the high school principal, only yesterday. I am sure that if you fall behind by going on this trip you will study all the harder to make up the work when you get back, won’t you?”

“Yes, sir!” was the emphatic promise.

“You see I’ve no idea how long I shall be detained out West,

therefore I have no mind to leave you here. You might be ill. Besides, I should miss you, Don."

"I'd much rather go with you, father."

A quick light of pleasure flashed in the father's eyes.

"Then that's settled," he exclaimed decisively. "Now I'll tell you what I mean to do. I am not going to wire Crescent Ranch that we are coming. Instead we will drop down and surprise them. It won't take long to see how things are running, and even if it proves that everything is all right I shall not begrudge the trip, for I have felt for some time that I ought to go. Clark & Sons have owned that ranch for thirty years, and yet I have never been near it. It certainly is time I went."

"How did it happen you never did go, father?"

"Well, during your grandfather's life an old Scotchman managed the ranch and attended to shipping the wool. As we had nothing to do but to sell it, we did not bother much about the place, for we had perfect confidence in Old Angus, the manager. After your grandfather died, Uncle Harold and I had all we could do to attend to the business here. It grew so rapidly that it was about as much as two young fellows like ourselves could handle. We always meant to go out—one of us—but we never did. Then our faithful Scotchman died. We felt lost, I can tell you! He had had all the management of Crescent for twenty years and was one of the finest men in the world. He might have lived until now, perhaps, had he not been caught on the range in a blizzard while struggling to get a flock of sheep out of the storm and thereby lost his life."

Mr. Clark paused a moment.

"After him came Johnson. He has done his work well, so

far as we know; but now he is out of the running too and we shall have to get some one else."

"Whom are you going to get?"

"I haven't the most remote idea. You see, Don, I know next to nothing about managing a ranch. I stay here in Boston and simply sell wool. This end of the business I know thoroughly, but the other end is Greek to me."

Donald laughed. He was just beginning Greek.

"I am glad you don't know about a ranch, father," he exclaimed.

"Why?"

"Oh, because you seem to know almost everything else, and it is fun to find something you don't know."

There was admiration in the boy's words.

His father shook his head and there was a shadow of sadness in his smile as he replied:

"I know very little, Donald boy. The older I grow the less I know, too. You will feel that way when you are my age. Now here is a chance for us to learn something together. Let's go to Idaho and find out all we can about sheep-raising."

Within the next few days the plans for the journey were completed.

As one article after another was purchased and packed the trip unfolded into a most alluring pilgrimage. They must take their riding togs, for Uncle Harold reminded them that they would probably be in the saddle much of the time; their camping kit must go also; above all they must carry good revolvers and rifles. Donald's heart beat high. He and his father had always ridden a great deal together; it was their favorite sport. Now they were to have whole days of

it. And added to this pleasure was the crowning glory of both a rifle and a revolver!

All this fairy-land of the future had come about through Sandy McCulloch!

Who was this wonderful Sandy? And why had he telegraphed?

Sandy McCulloch! The very name breathed a charm. Donald repeated it to himself constantly. He dreamed dreams and wove adventures about this mysterious Scotchman. He knew he should like Sandy. Who could help it? His name was enough.

In the meantime the days of preparation flew by. Donald's spring examinations were passed with honors—a fact which his father declared proved that he had taken his work in earnest and that he deserved an outing. Mr. Clark laughingly ventured the hope that he should be able to leave his business affairs in equally good condition.

"You have set quite a pace for me, Don! I am not sure whether I can take honors at the office or not. I have done the best I could, however, to put things into Uncle Harold's hands so to cause him as little trouble as possible."

Donald tried not to become impatient while these arrangements were being made.

At last dawned that clear April morning when the East was left behind and the journey to the West—that unknown land—was begun. Donald had never been West. The vastness of the country, the newness of the scenery surprised and delighted him. Geography had never seemed so real before. No longer were the various states pink, green, or purple splotches on the map; they were real living places with people, sunshine, and fresh air.

"I had no idea America was so big!" he gasped to his father.

"It's the finest country in the world, Don! Be proud and thankful that you are an American. No other land does so much for her people. Be humble, too. Never let a chance go by to do your part in helping the country that does so much for you."

They were standing in the glassed-in rear of the train, and as Mr. Clark spoke he pointed to vast tracts of forest land that sped past them.

"I am afraid I can't do anything for a great country like this, father," said Donald, a little quiver in his voice.

"There is one thing we can all do—that is be good citizens. Every law we have was made for the good of our people. In so far as you keep these laws you will be aiding in building up a more perfect America. Bear your share in that work—do not be a hindrance, Don."

"I'll try, father," was the boy's grave reply.

To help in the progress of such a land as this! More than once Donald thought of his father's words as the train threaded its way along the banks of mighty rivers, rolled through great woodlands, or skirted cities which throbbed with the life of mighty industries.

And all this vast-reaching land was his country—his!

On every hand there were wonders!

As the express thundered along he poured out question after question.

Why did people go way to Idaho to raise sheep? Why didn't his father raise his sheep in the East? Certainly there was room enough, plenty of room, that was much nearer than Idaho. How did sheep get into the mountains of Idaho anyway?

Mr. Clark ducked his head under the torrent of queries.

“You will drown me with questions!” he exclaimed laughing. “Well, I shall do my best to answer you. New Mexico was the first sheep center in our country. Herds were originally brought from Spain, and these flocks worked their way up from Mexico through New Mexico and California; here the hills supplied the coolness necessary to animals with such thick coats, and furnished them at the same time with plentiful grass for food. During the day the herds grazed, and at night they were driven into corrals of cedar built by the shepherds. These sheep were mostly Merinos, a variety raised in Spain. Afterward, in 1853, a man named William W. Hollister brought three hundred ewes across our continent to the West. Think what a journey it must have been!”

“Wasn’t the railroad built?”

“No. Neither were there any bridges. There were rivers to swim and mountains to climb; furthermore there was many a search for water-holes, because Mr. Hollister was not well enough acquainted with the country to know where to find water for himself and the herd.”

“I should not think a sheep would have lived through such a journey!” cried Donald.

“Many of them did, however,” answered his father, “and that is how our western sheep-raising industry began. Now it is one of the great occupations of our land, and soon you and I are to know more about it.”

“And about Sandy McCulloch, too, I hope,” put in the boy.

“I hope so; only remember—not a word of that telegram to any one at the ranch. We shall get into Glen City this noon if our train is on time and we must trust to luck in

getting to Crescent Ranch. It is fifteen miles from the station, up in the foot-hills of the Rockies.”

“The—the—you don’t mean the Rocky Mountains!” gasped Donald, his eyes very wide open.

“Certainly. Have you forgotten your geography?”

“Of course I know that a spur of the Rocky Mountains does run diagonally across Idaho; but somehow I never thought of really being in the Rocky Mountains!”

Mr. Clark enjoyed the outburst.

“To be where there are bears and bob-cats and——”

“Maybe, after all, you would rather have stayed at home and finished out your school year.”

“I rather guess not!” was the lad’s emphatic reply.

So impatient was he to see the marvels of this magic land that the last few hours of the journey seemed unending.

But they did end.

Toward noon the heavy train pulled into Glen City and they bundled out on to the platform. They were the only passengers, but there was a great deal of freight—boxes, barrels, and cases of provisions. As they stood hesitating as to what they had better do, a tall, bony young fellow approached the station agent and called with a decided suggestion of the Highlander in his accent:

“I dinna see those kegs of lime for Crescent Ranch, Mitchell.”

“They’re here. You will find them at the end of the platform. Come, and I’ll help you pile them on your wagon.”

Mr. Clark turned to the Scotchman.

“Are you going to Crescent Ranch?”

“Aye, I be, sir.”

“Can you take my son and me along?”

The Scotchman studied him carefully.

“Have you business at the ranch?” he asked, looking keenly into the eyes of the speaker.

Mr. Clark met his gaze good-naturedly.

“We might possibly have,” he answered. “At any rate we want to go up there. My name is Clark and I come from Boston.”

“Clark, did you say, sir?”

“Yes.”

The stolid stare of the Scotchman did not waver.

“Mayhap you’re the owner, sir.”

“Yes, I am.”

A gleam of something very like satisfaction passed over the tanned features of the young man. Then his face settled back into its wonted calmness.

“It’s welcome you are, sir,” he said heartily. “I dinna think there’ll be trouble about taking you and your son to Crescent.”

He wheeled and led the way to a wagon, where he piled up some sacks of grain for his guests to sit upon. Then he lifted in their luggage and the freight for which he had come, and gathered the lines over the backs of his horses.

As the wagon toiled up the long, low hills Mr. Clark began asking questions about the ranch—he asked many questions concerning the country and the flocks. To all of these he received terse answers.

Presently the Scotchman turned.

“It’s little you be knowin’ of sheepin’, sir.”

The remark was made with so much simplicity that it could not have been mistaken for rudeness.

“Very little.”

“Keep it to yourself, man,” was the laconic advice the Highlander tossed over his shoulder as he transferred his attention to his horses.

Mr. Clark bit his lip to hide a smile.

“What is your name, my lad?” he asked suddenly.

“Sandy McCulloch, sir,” was the quiet answer.

Donald waited, listening eagerly to every turn of the conversation that followed, but to his astonishment neither his father nor Sandy McCulloch spoke one word regarding the mysterious telegram.

It was nightfall when the wagon that had brought them turned into a muddy drive and stopped before a bare looking house situated in a meadow, and surrounded by a number of vast barns and sheep-pens. Out of this house came a broad-shouldered, bronzed man who stood on the steps, waiting their approach. He wore trousers of sheepskin, a soiled flannel shirt, and round his neck—knotted in the back—was a red handkerchief. Donald noticed that into his belt of Mexican leather was tucked a revolver. He stared at the strangers inquiringly.

Mr. Clark jumped out as soon as the wagon stopped, and extended his hand.

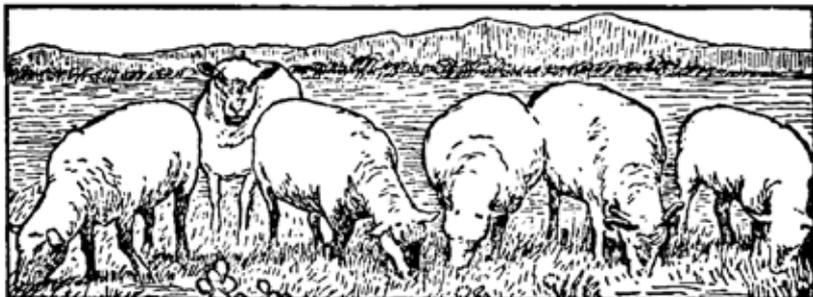
“I do not know your name,” he said pleasantly, “but mine is Clark. My son Donald and I have come from Boston to see the ranch.”

The man sprang forward.

“I’m Tom Thornton, sir. What a pleasure to have a visit from you! Such an unexpected visit, too.”

He slapped Mr. Clark heartily on the shoulder and took Donald’s hand in a tight grip.

But though he talked loudly, and laughed a great deal while carrying in their luggage, for some reason Donald felt certain that really Tom Thornton was not glad to see them at all.



CHAPTER II

WHO SANDY WAS



THE next morning both Donald and his father were astir early.

There was nothing to keep them within the great chilly house, and everything to lure them into the sunshine. The sky was without a cloud, and into its blueness stretched distant ranges of hazy mountains at whose feet nestled lower hills covered with faint green. Near at hand patches of meadow were toned to grayish white by grazing bands of sheep. On the still air came the flat, metallic note of herd-bells, and the bleating of numberless unseen flocks within the pens and barns.

What a novel scene it was!

The newcomers found their way to a sheltered corner where they could look out before them into the vastness.

It was all so strange, so interesting!

Somewhere in the ravine below they could catch the rushing music of a stream which wove itself in and out a maze of rolling hills and was lost at last in the shadows of the green valleys.

As they stood silent and drank in the beauty about them, an angry voice broke the stillness.

It came from the interior of the barn near which they were standing.

"I tell you what, Tom Thornton, I'm with Sandy McCulloch. The sheep always were washed after shearing in Old Angus's day, and in Johnson's as well. That is how Crescent Ranch came to have the good name it now holds. There were no scabby sheep here to infect the rest of the herd."

"What's that to you, Jack Owen? You are here to mind the boss, ain't you? What's the use of our working like beavers for ten days to dip the flock if we don't have to? Dipping is a dirty, tiresome job. You are not in for making work for yourself, are you?"

"The flocks will be ruined!"

"What do you care—they are not your sheep."

"Well, I have been on this ranch a long time, Thornton, and I can't help caring what becomes of 'em. I take the same pride in the place Sandy does. We have won a reputation here for doing things the way they ought to be done—for minding the laws—for having clean, healthy stock. Sandy says he shall dip his herd, anyway."

"Bother Sandy! He's talked to you men until he's got you all upset. You would have been with me if he had kept his mouth shut. But no matter what he says I am running this ranch at present. I mean to run it in the future, too. If you're wise you will do as I tell you."

"Mr. Clark may have something to say about the dipping."

"Don't you fret," sneered Thornton. "I sounded him last night. He's a tenderfoot. I don't believe he knows a thing about sheeping."

Mr. Clark drew Donald into the sun-flooded field before he spoke.

Then, after a thoughtful silence he turned:

“Well, Don?”

“I wouldn’t have that Thornton here another day, father!” broke out the boy hotly.

“Slowly, son, slowly! We must be sure about Thornton before we condemn him. He has been ten years on the ranch; more than that, we are without a manager, and we have none in view. Remember ‘he stumbles who runs fast.’ Take time, Don, take time.”

Donald flushed.

“I know it is the best way, but I was so angry to hear him talking that way about you.”

“Loyalty is a fine trait, Don.” Mr. Clark laid his hand affectionately on his son’s shoulder. “I like to see you loyal. But in this matter we must move slowly.”

“What about this dipping, father? What is it?”

“Something about washing the sheep. I do not clearly understand it myself.”

“Shall you have it done?”

“What do you say?”

“Of course I do not know anything about it,” Donald replied modestly, “but somehow I feel as if Sandy and the men are right.”

“I think so too.”

“Couldn’t I ask Sandy what it is, father?”

“I am thinking of asking him myself, Don, if I get a good chance.”

The chance came unexpectedly, for at that very moment

Sandy McCulloch came out of one of the sheep-pens and crossed the walk to the central barn.

“What are you up to to-day, Sandy?” called Mr. Clark.

“I am going to dip my flock, sir, down in the south meadow.”

“I am glad of that, for it will give us a chance to see it done,” observed Mr. Clark. Then lowering his voice he asked: “Why do you dip the sheep, Sandy?”

“Are you asking because you want to know?” inquired Sandy with the directness which characterized everything he said.

“Yes. Both Donald and I wish to learn.”

“Well, sir, it is this way. After the shearing is over and the fleece removed, the coat of the sheep is light and therefore easily dried. We then take the flocks and run them through a bath of lime and sulphur. Some shepherds prefer a coal-tar dip. Whatever the dip is made of, the purpose is the same. It is to kill the parasites on the sheep and cure any diseases of the eyes. If sheep are not dipped they get the ‘scab.’ Some bit of a creature gets under their skin and burrows until it makes the sheep sick. Often, too, the wool will peel off in great patches. One sheep will take it from another, until by and by the whole herd is infected.”

Mr. Clark nodded.

“I never mean to let a sickly sheep go on the range,” continued Sandy. “I try to flax round and find out what is the matter with him so I can cure him. We don’t want our herd spoiling the feeding grounds and the water-holes and giving their diseases to all the flocks that graze after them. If we are let graze on the range the least we can do is to be decent about it—that’s the way I look at it.”

"Have our sheep always been dipped?"

"Aye, sir, that they have—dipped every spring after shearing; then we clipped their feet before they started for the range. Sheep, you know, walk on two toes, and if their feet are not trimmed they get sore from traveling so much. I suppose nature intended sheep to climb over the rocks and wear their hoofs down that way. They have a queer foot. Did you know that there is a little oily gland between the toes to make the hoof moist, and keep it from cracking?"

"No, I guess neither Donald nor I knew that, did we, Donald? Now about this dipping—do you thoroughly understand how it is done, Sandy?"

"I do that, sir."

Donald wondered why his father was so thoughtful.

"How long have you been at Crescent Ranch, Sandy?" asked Mr. Clark at last.

"Ever since I was a lad of fifteen, sir."

"That must be about ten years!"

"Fourteen."

A new thought came to Mr. Clark.

"Why, then you must have known Old Angus," he exclaimed.

"I did, sir."

"He was a fine old man, they tell me."

"He was."

"I never saw him—I wish I had. It was a great loss to the ranch and to all of us when he went."

"It was indeed."

"You must remember him well, Sandy."

Throwing back his head with a gesture of pride, Sandy confronted Mr. Clark.

“I do, sir,” he replied simply. “He was my father.”

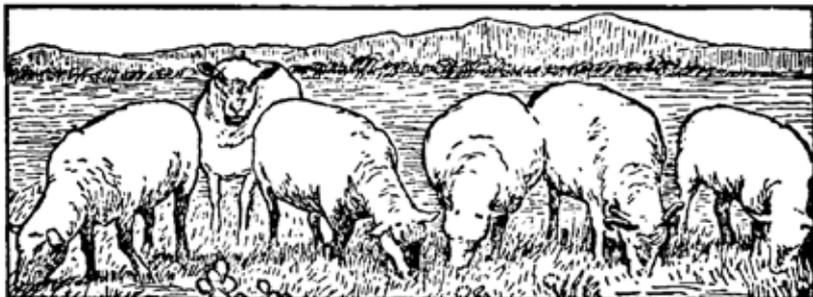
Mr. Clark and Donald stared.

“Why didn’t you tell me that in the first place?” cried Donald’s father, stepping forward eagerly and seizing the hand of the young ranchman.

“I thought mayhap you knew it. If not—why prate about it? It’s on my own feet I must stand and not on my father’s. If I am of any use you will find it out fast enough, father or no father; if I’m not ‘twere best you found that out as well.”

“Independent as your forebears, Sandy!” laughed Mr. Clark.

“I be a McCulloch, sir!” was all Sandy said.



CHAPTER III

THE DIPPING



IT was a great surprise to Tom Thornton when Mr. Clark informed him that he wanted the men to start in dipping the sheep as soon as they could get ready.

"I suppose, Thornton, you have everything in readiness for the work," continued the owner casually.

Thornton did not hesitate.

"Yes, indeed, sir. We can start right in to-day if you wish. It is for you to say. But really, Mr. Clark, the flock hardly needs it. Our sheep are in prime condition."

"That's all the more reason for keeping them so, Thornton," was the smiling reply.

"Of course that is true, sir. Very well. We will go ahead. I think I shall have time to give the orders, although I have got to be in Glen City about ten days shipping the clip."

"What?"

"Shipping the wool, sir."

"Oh, yes."

"I can start the work before I go."

"I don't think you need bother, Thornton," remarked Mr. Clark slowly. "You go on down to Glen City and finish up your business there."

"But somebody must see to the dipping if you really want it done."

"I'll attend to it."

"You!"

"Why not?"

"Why—why—nothing, sir. I beg your pardon. Only I thought you might be too tired after your trip."

"Oh, no. I am not tired at all."

Thornton eyed him.

Even Donald was astonished.

Mr. Clark did not seem to be at all disturbed by the embarrassing stillness, but went on shaving down a stick he was whittling.

"I do not mean to manage the dipping myself," he explained at last. "I shall let Sandy McCulloch take charge of it."

"Sandy McCulloch! Why, sir, that boy could never do it in the world! He is a good lad—well enough in his way—but not very smart. Not at all like his father."

"Well, if he has no ability I shall soon find it out. I mean to try him, anyway."

"Oh, you can try him if you like, but I know the fellow better than you do. You are foolish to turn any big work over to him. He can't handle it."

"I intend to give him the chance."

Thornton's annoyance began to get beyond his control.

"Very well. It is not my business," he snapped as he left the room.